DAYBREAK

UNIT 10

Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Esther

- ☐ Ezekiel 1:1-28
- ☐ Ezekiel 2:1—3:3
- ☐ Ezekiel 3:4-27
- ☐ Ezekiel 4:1—5:4
- ☐ Ezekiel 5:5-17
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- ☐ Daniel 12:4-13
- ☐ Habakkuk 1:1-11
- ☐ Habakkuk 1:12—2:20
- ☐ Habakkuk 3:1-19
- ☐ Obadiah 1:1-21
- ☐ Esther 1:1-22
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- ☐ Esther 4:1-17
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- ☐ Esther 7:1—8:2
- ☐ Esther 8:3-17
- ☐ Esther 9:1-16
- ☐ Esther 9:17—10:3

Daybreak is a personal Bible study continuum for the high school and adult levels. Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. A companion series of Sunday school lessons, titled Discovery, is also available. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Daybreak is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.

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DAYBREAK

Section Introduction

Overview for Ezekiel

Purpose: The Book of Ezekiel was written to pronounce judgment on both Judah and surrounding nations, and to provide hope for the future Messianic Kingdom and Israel.

Author: Ezekiel, whose name means "God strengthens," was a priest of Judah living in exile in Babylonia. Some Bible scholars suggest that the reference in the book's first verse to "the thirtieth year" alluded to the thirty years that had passed since Josiah's restoration of the Temple in 623 B.C. Other scholars believe this was Ezekiel's age when God called him into service. Nothing is known of Ezekiel's family except that he had a wife and his father was named Buzi.

In 597 B.C., Ezekiel was among the second group of Judeans taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon. (The first group of captives was carried away in 605 B.C. and included Daniel.) A third and final group would be taken in 586 B.C. In the fifth year of Ezekiel's exile, he was called by God to be a prophet, and he served in that role for more than twenty years. There is no record that he ever returned to Jerusalem. Jewish tradition holds that Ezekiel was put to death by his own people because of his preaching.

Time Period Covered: Ezekiel's prophecies are dated between 593 and 571 B.C.

Date Written: Approximately 571 B.C.

History: Ezekiel lived in a time when crisis and upheaval characterized the Mediterranean region. Although Assyria had dominated the area for over 125 years, its power was in decline, and in 612 B.C., Babylon conquered Assyria and became the major superpower.

The Babylonians invaded Judah in 605 B.C. Judah initially was a vassal state, and maintained a semblance of independence by paying a substantial tribute to Babylon. However, King Jehoiakim discontinued payments, and in retaliation, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar sent an army against Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Ezekiel, along with some ten thousand of the most prominent men of the country, were among those carried into exile at that time. The conquest that led to Ezekiel's captivity is described in 2 Kings 24:12-16.

In 586 B.C., following the final revolt, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, and Judah ceased to exist as an independent nation. Many of the remaining people were taken captive to Babylon, some fled to Egypt, and others stayed behind in the decimated land. The Israelites who stayed in their homeland struggled to survive, but most of those in Babylon had a degree of freedom. While some were enslaved or imprisoned, many were allowed to settle and live as they pleased in their new country. Ezekiel was among that number.

Setting: The Chebar River, where Ezekiel received his prophetic commission, is thought by most Bible scholars to be a canal of the Euphrates River located southeast of Babylon near the city of Nippur in present day Iraq. It possibly was a place of prayer for the exiles. The Book of Ezekiel references this river eight times.

According to Ezekiel 3:15, the prophet's home was located in Tel-Abib, where a great number of the exiles lived; some of his prophecies were given from that location (for example, Ezekiel 8:1). He was married until the death of his wife, recorded in Ezekiel 24:18. The fact that elders of the people came to consult with him indicates that he was respected within the community of exiles (see Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

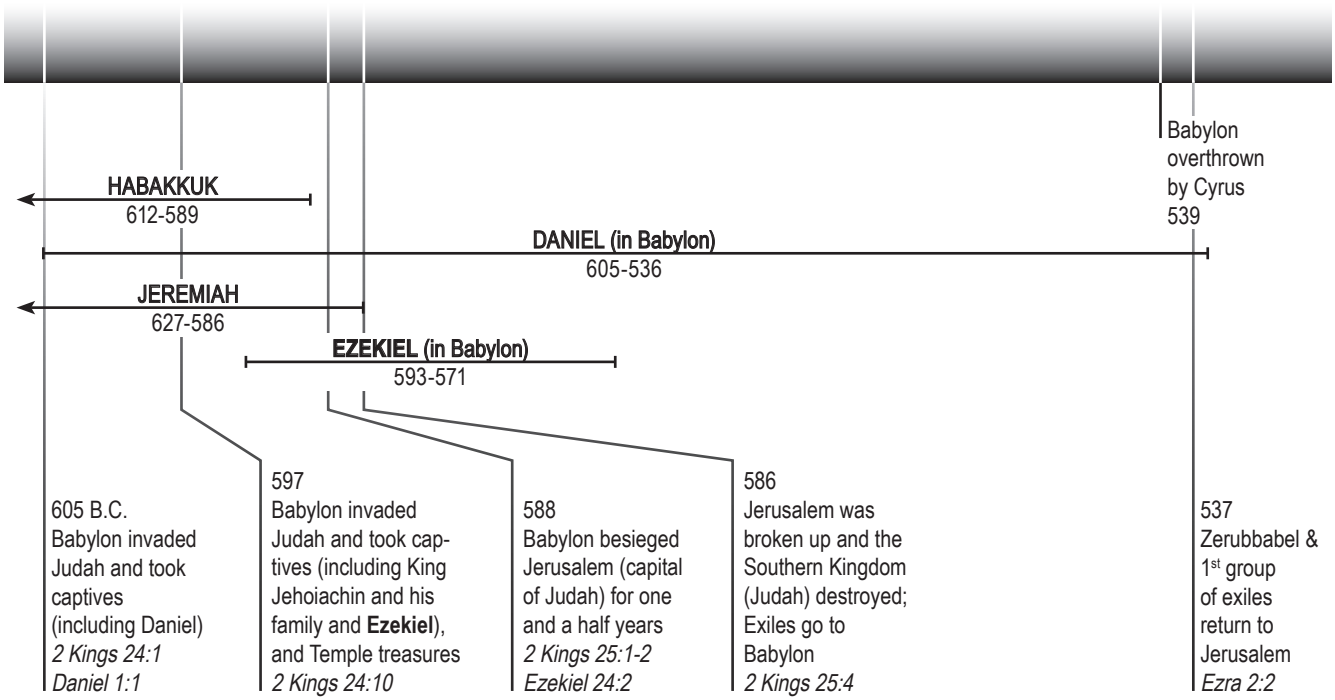
Unique Characteristics: Unlike other prophetic books, the Book of Ezekiel unfolds in chronological order, beginning with the prophet's call to prophetical ministry. Many of the subsequent visions and events he related are precisely dated. The prophet's messages are characterized by allegories, symbolic actions, and apocalyptic imagery (vivid symbolic pictures or revelations concerning the end times).

Though the subject matter varies throughout the book, its content is stylistically consistent. Ezekiel often made his points by using contrasts and the hammering effect of frequent repetition. He also employed parables as illustrations; five are included in this book.

Summary: The Book of Ezekiel contains forty-eight chapters, and has four main sections. The first section, chapters 1-3, focuses on the call of the prophet. The second section, chapters 4-24, pronounces judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, and was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem. Section three, including chapters 25-32, is a series of messages of judgment against seven foreign nations. In the final section, chapters 33-39 begin after the fall of Jerusalem and focus on Israel's restoration, and chapters 40-48 deal primarily with a new Temple and a restored Israel in the end times.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. The call of the prophet (1:1—3:27)
   A. The identification of the prophet (1:1-3)
   B. The vision of the prophet (1:4-28)
   C. The commission of the prophet (2:1—3:3)
   D. The instruction of the prophet (3:4-27)
II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem (4:1—24:27)
   A. The prediction of Jerusalem's overthrow (4:1-7:27)
   B. The transgression and fall of Jerusalem (8:1—11:25)
   C. The cause of Judah's destruction (12:1—19:14)
   D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel (20:1—24:14)
   E. The signs of Israel's judgment (24:15-27)
III. The condemnation of the nations (25:1—32:32)
   A. The condemnation of Ammon (25:1-7)
   B. The condemnation of Moab (25:8-11)
   C. The condemnation of Edom (25:12-14)
   D. The condemnation of Philistia (25:15-17)
   E. The condemnation of Tyre (26:1—28:19)
   F. The condemnation of Sidon (28:20-26)
   G. The condemnation of Egypt (29:1—32:32)
IV. The consolation of Israel (33:1—48:35)
   A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration (33:1—39:29)
   B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom (40:1—48:35)

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 1:1-28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." (Ezekiel 1:26)

What is the most beautiful sight you have ever seen? Take a moment to consider, and then try to describe its beauty. Do your words capture the awe you felt when you saw it?

Several years ago, my cousin and I became lost as we were hiking and realized we would have to climb a mountain to find our trail. Cold and tired after our full-day trek, we decided to rest a while before going on. We managed to sleep for a couple of hours by huddling together and covering ourselves with branches to stay warm, and then resumed our climb. Around midnight, we ascended above the timberline, and spread out before us was possibly the most beautiful sight I have ever seen.

A full moon sat on the horizon, and from our vantage point, it appeared to be below us. It cast beams of light across the valley that lay at our feet and on the mountains surrounding us. Blanketing the valley was a fluffy cloud. In the distance, moonlight reflected off the snow on great peaks that were partially shrouded in deep purple shadows. It was breathtaking!

My efforts to paint with words the beauty I saw that night fall far short. I am sure that is how Ezekiel felt when he tried to describe the vision he saw of God's power and majesty, as recorded in our text today. Still, a glimmer of the awe he must have experienced comes through.

Ezekiel saw a whirlwind with a great cloud and fire in the midst of it. He saw four living creatures with wings, who were guided by the Spirit of God. He saw wheels within wheels that were the color of gems and were also guided by the Spirit. Above all these things, he saw the likeness of a throne. Our key verse relates that the throne had the "likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." This suggests that Ezekiel did not see a face and a form that he could have drawn, but rather a blazing brightness with a human shape. Without doubt, words must have failed him as he tried to portray the details. What he was witnessing simply defied description!

It is awe-inspiring to consider the sheer magnificence and splendor of Ezekiel's vision. His attempt at a description should kindle overwhelming honor and respect for God in our hearts. Though we likely will never see a scene like Ezekiel saw while we live on this earth, God can and will make Himself real to each one of us. The same God who gave that amazing revelation to Ezekiel so long ago loves *us*! His love for us caused Him to send His Son to die for us so that we can forever be a part of His family.

Have you experienced the transforming power of God in your life? He has the ability to heal the sick, give hope to the hopeless, and transform a sinful soul. Words cannot adequately express what He is able to do, but you can experience Him for yourself.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 describes the place, manner, and purpose of Ezekiel's call, and provides a summary of his first vision. God's purpose in revealing His glory to Ezekiel was twofold. First, it would provide the prophet with spiritual strength to impart God's judgments and prophecies. Secondly, it would give the prophet a vivid understanding of the magnificence of God's glory and His great holiness, which would be in sharp contrast to how far from God the rebellion and disobedience of the Children of Israel had taken them.

In verse 1, the phrase "the heavens were opened" indicates that Ezekiel began to see visions of God's glory—things not revealed to others. Ezekiel stated the precise date that this occurred: it was in the thirtieth year, the fourth month, and the fifth day of the month. Some Bible scholars suggest that the "thirty years" were a reference to Ezekiel's age when God called him into service. Alternatively, it may refer to the thirty years that had passed since Josiah's restoration of the Temple in 623 B.C. The Chebar River, where the revelation occurred, probably was *nar Kabari* (Great Canal), a canal that emptied into the Euphrates River. This was the largest canal in a man-made system that watered the plain and made possible the transport of grain and other produce to the capital.

Beginning with verse 4, Ezekiel first described a fierce wind coming from the north, the direction from which the Babylonian army would come against Jerusalem. A "great cloud" and the "fire infolding itself" were symbols of God's presence, and the amber-colored radiating brightness was an expression of the glory of God.

The four living creatures described in verses 5-14 were identified as cherubim in Ezekiel 10:8-15. These bearers and guardians of God's glory had feet like divided hoofs that were the color of polished brass. From Ezekiel's description, it seems that each

cherub's head had four different faces looking in four directions. Each cherub had wings on each of its four sides—two that were lifted and spread, and two that covered its body. These wings allowed the cherubim to move as one unit in any direction at lightning speed, not needing to turn. Bright fire moved from within the midst of the wings; these flashes of lightning were a visible manifestation of the Spirit that directed them.

Verses 15-21 further describe how these cherubim moved. Each cherub had two wheels at its base, one within the other at right angles. These four spherical wheels appeared very tall to Ezekiel and were full of eyes; Bible scholars suggest they were emblematic of God's omnipresence and omniscience. In verses 20 and 21, the words "spirit" and "living creature" both refer to the Holy Spirit. The wheels' movements were directed by the Spirit from the midst of the fire, which in turn directed the movement of the cherubim.

Verses 22-28 describe what Ezekiel saw of God's glory and the surrounding environment. The "terrible crystal" of verse 22 probably refers to prisms of light refracted through crystal, the area above the cherubim being like a rainbow in coloration. Above the wings of the cherubim was something resembling a sapphire throne and above that, a form with the appearance of a man. Ezekiel's response to this vision was one of overwhelming awe—he fell on his face before God's glory.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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I. The call of the prophet
  A. The identification of the prophet (1:1-3)
  B. The vision of the prophet (1:4-28)
    1. The four living creatures (1:4-14)
      a. Their description (1:4-11)
      b. Their actions (1:12-14)
    2. The four wheels (1:15-21)
      a. Their description (1:15-18)
      b. Their actions (1:19-21)
    3. The expanse (1:22-25)
      a. The description (1:22-23)
      b. The action (1:24-25)
    4. The form of a man (1:26-28)
      a. The appearance of God's glory (1:26-27)
      b. The action of Ezekiel (1:28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 12, what did the cherubim do?

2. What attitude is represented by Ezekiel's action described in verse 28?

3. How might a glimpse of the glory of God impact our Christian walks?

CONCLUSION

God's power and glory is beyond human description, but it can be personally experienced by each one of us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 2:1 through 3:3

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said to me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." (Ezekiel 3:2-3)

During my second grade year, I was enrolled in a small private school. When our teacher had kidney failure and was unable to continue teaching, an experienced substitute teacher stepped into the role. This woman was known for being able to get amazing results from a classroom of young children.

One method she used was to reward children who followed her directions carefully and cheerfully. Toward the end of the day, during the hot afternoon hours, she would call the obedient and well-behaved students to wait at the door of the classroom. After disappearing for a few moments, she would return with a selection of orange, grape, and cherry-flavored popsicles, and hand one to each child. What an inducement to stellar behavior! I worked hard to follow directions so I could be a part of that group. I clearly remember standing there in the hall, eating an icy cold popsicle and fully enjoying the sweet rewards of obedience!

In today's text, God gave Ezekiel an important assignment: he was to take a message to the rebellious house of Israel. He was also warned not to be like them—in other words, he was to be obedient to God, even though the people would not heed his message. The Spirit of God empowered and prepared him to fulfill this task. Then Ezekiel saw a hand stretched out holding a scroll that had writing on both sides—a message of the coming judgments of God upon His rebellious people.

Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll, an instruction that must have seemed very difficult and unpleasant. Yet, in obedience to God's command, he did so. Our focus verse relates, "Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." The prophet's ingestion of the entire scroll indicated his willingness to accept the responsibility of speaking God's whole message to the people. While the ministry he was about to undertake would be difficult, he was in perfect accord with the purpose of God and found delight in doing His will.

Sometimes God calls us to do something that seems challenging, unpleasant, or maybe even impossible in our own strength. However, we must not let our personal feelings get in the way of accomplishing what God calls us to do. If we trust and obey the Lord, He will make even difficult tasks for Him sweet and rewarding!

BACKGROUND

While chapter 1 gave something of a preface to Ezekiel's call, chapters 2 and 3 describe the call itself.

Previously, Ezekiel had fallen prostrate with his face to the ground when he saw the glory of God (see Ezekiel 1:28). In verse 1 of today's text, the voice of the One seated on the throne told Ezekiel to stand to hear God's message and receive his call.

God addressed Ezekiel by the term "son of man" more than ninety times in this book. Although the New Testament uses the same phrase, there it relates to Christ and always appears with the article *the* preceding it—"the Son of Man." Here, the term emphasizes Ezekiel's humanity, identifying him in contrast to the cherubim, and alluding to his earthly service as God's spokesperson to those in captivity.

Those to whom Ezekiel was sent were described in verses 3-6 as rebellious. Though prior prophets referred to the Northern Kingdom as "Israel," Ezekiel frequently addressed the nations of Israel and Judah as a whole, not recognizing manmade borders but only God's called people. In verse 3, the term "nation" typically was used in reference to heathen Gentiles. As used here in reference to Israel and Judah, it highlighted the chosen people's rejection of God and their persistent disobedience. The "children" referred to the current generation. Just as the "fathers" (ancestors) had transgressed, the children were continuing to do so.

The direction given in verse 4 indicated that Ezekiel was to speak God's words rather than his own. The phrase "Lord GOD" is *Adonai Jehovah*; it is used 217 times in Ezekiel, but seldom elsewhere. With the use of this unique title, God reminded Ezekiel that He was the sovereign Lord over all the earth, not only of Israel.

Verse 5 reveals why Ezekiel's prophetic statements were dated so clearly. When the exiles in Babylon received news from Jerusalem of events there, they would know, even in their rebellion, that God had given them a sure warning. The term "rebellious house" is used thirteen times in this book and is a play on words, replacing "house of Israel," indicating that the people were no longer of Israel but of rebellion. In the face of the people's hard-hearted refusal to listen, God warned Ezekiel in verse 6 that

he would endure persistent opposition and painful words — the people's rejection would hurt like thorns, briars, and scorpions — but he was not to despair. Rather, he was to declare boldly the exact prophecies and judgments of God, nothing more and nothing less.

In verses 8-10 and the first three verses of chapter 3, Ezekiel's obedience was challenged. God commanded him to eat the "roll of a book" to show by his actions his acceptance of every word of God. The eating of the scroll symbolized fully ingesting and possessing God's message. The scroll was covered front and back with written lamentations, mourning, and woe. Despite its contents, the scroll tasted sweet to Ezekiel because the coming judgments of God were righteous, deserved, and merciful.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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I. The call of the prophet
   C. The commission of the prophet (2:1 — 3:3)
      1. The prophet's initiation (2:1-8)
      2. The prophet's inspiration (2:9 — 3:3)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. When did the Spirit enter Ezekiel?

2. According to Ezekiel 2:9, what was in the hand God sent to Ezekiel, and what might that object be compared to today?

3. Are there parts of God's Word and His calling upon your life that you have not yet fully "ingested"? What actions can you take to do so?

CONCLUSION

As we take in the Word of God and follow it carefully, determining to do whatever it commands us no matter how difficult, we will experience the sweet, fulfilling rewards of obedience.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 3:4-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." (Ezekiel 3:8-9)

My dad's father was a fearless man. When it came to doing what was right, he would confront any situation without backing down. Dad loved to tell the following account about my grandfather's courage.

My grandparents had just moved to a new town with plans to start a church there, and my grandfather would frequently tell people about Jesus as he went about town. However, his efforts met with opposition. Some men in the town decided they didn't like this new preacher, and they made up their minds to drive him away. First, they ordered him to take his family and go elsewhere. When he refused and said he was going to stay and preach the Gospel, they gave him an ultimatum. On a certain day at a certain time, he needed to be gone. If he was not, they were going to take him outside of town and "tar and feather" him—a painful and humiliating form of public punishment that people used as a means of revenge.

My dad, who was just a young boy at the time, remembers the day the men had said they would come and get his father. My grandparents were on their knees in the living room praying for deliverance, but Dad kept running to the window to see if anyone was coming. Finally, a truck pulled up and two men got out. Dad watched as they walked through the front yard and up onto the porch. Then suddenly, without even knocking, they just turned around and walked back to the truck. They got in, drove away, and never came back.

My grandfather was willing to face pain and humiliation that day for the sake of preaching the Gospel. His courage came from knowing that he was on the Lord's side, and it was a lesson my father never forgot.

In today's focus verses, God told Ezekiel that He had made the prophet's face and forehead "strong" to enable him to stand against the rebellious children of Israel. He was to be a watchman who would warn of the coming judgment of God. Ezekiel knew the people would not listen or heed the warnings that he gave, but he was faithful in fulfilling God's assignment.

God has not changed. He still will make His children strong today and enable them to stand for the faith against any force of evil. May the Lord give us the courage to always boldly uphold the truth!

BACKGROUND

Having committed himself to obeying God's call, in this concluding portion of chapter 3, Ezekiel received further details regarding his commission and responsibility.

Ezekiel was told to deliver the words and judgments of God to his own people, rather than to those he could not speak with or understand. He was forewarned that strangers would have shown respect by listening, but his own people would not. The word "people" in verse 6 is plural, while the "house of Israel" in the next verse is singular. This indicated that Ezekiel's warning was to individuals, while God's coming judgment was against the nation of Israel. The statement, "As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead," in verse 9 meant that Ezekiel's determination to deliver God's message would be greater than the people's stubbornness to resist it.

Verses 12-15 describe the conclusion of Ezekiel's vision of the Lord and the living creatures. God's Spirit transported him to those he was to witness to, and as he went, he heard the great rushing sound of the cherubim wings and chariot wheels. He felt bitter with righteous indignation, but he also felt the strength of God urgently driving him. Once he was with the captives in Tel-Abib, he spent seven days stunned by the amazing vision and call of God upon his life. This was the customary period of mourning for the dead and indicated that Ezekiel was mourning for the spiritually dead.

In verses 16-21, Ezekiel's responsibilities were explained to him through his appointment as a watchman. The word translated "watchman" is *tsaphah*, and describes one who watches from a height for the purpose of warning, rather than an individual responsible for guarding or shepherding (*shamar*). Ezekiel's calling was to warn of the coming judgment against unrighteousness, not to teach righteousness. The importance of each person's individual accountability before God was a key part of his message. For years God had called after the nation and they had resisted; now He was calling individuals to repentance.

In verses 22-27, Ezekiel was led to the plain for final instructions. There he saw the glory of the Lord as he had seen by the River Chebar. The command in verse 24 to go and remain in his house signified the

shutting up of the Jews still in Jerusalem during the siege of the city. Being in his home made it necessary for the exiled leaders and elders of Israel to come to him, symbolizing their need to approach God because He would no longer come to them.

God warned Ezekiel that he would lose his physical capacity to speak to correct the people's errors. He would only be able to relay God's words of judgment, and that only when directed by God. He was further instructed not to plead for the people to listen.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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I. The call of the prophet
  D. The instruction of the prophet (3:4-27)
    1. The prophet's preparation (3:4-11)
      a. The obstinacy of the people (3:4-7)
      b. The character of the prophet (3:8-11)
    2. The prophet's journey (3:12-15)
    3. The prophet's ministry (3:16-21)
      a. To the wicked (3:16-19)
      b. To the righteous (3:20-21)
    4. The prophet's instructions (3:22-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the reason that the house of Israel would not listen to Ezekiel?

2. What could the job of a watchman compare to in our day?

3. Ezekiel was sent to his own countrymen. Jesus said He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Who are you sent to, and how can you fulfill that commission even if you face opposition?

CONCLUSION

With the Lord on our side, we never need to fear. God can give us the strength and determination to take a stand for what is right!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 4:1 through 5:4

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem: and lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about." (Ezekiel 4:1-2)

Symbolic action is not a novel concept to us; it is both familiar and pervasive in our culture. We understand that when the referee at a football game throws down a yellow flag, he is indicating an infraction of the rules has occurred. When a military veteran places his hand over his heart while reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, we know he is proclaiming his commitment to flag and country. On a more juvenile level, when a seven-year-old girl scowls ferociously and sticks out her tongue at a bully on the playground, we have no problem grasping that she is expressing disgust. In each of these examples, the individual is communicating through symbolic actions rather than words.

In today's text, the prophet Ezekiel's actions were also symbolic in nature. These unique activities were not undertaken casually or impulsively. They were difficult steps of obedience to God, who commanded them as a message to His people.

First, Ezekiel was told to depict Jerusalem on a tile, showing it as though it were under siege by an enemy. He was to lie next to his object lesson in the sight of the people for a portion of 430 days to represent the number of years of God's punishment on Israel and then Judah.

Next, God instructed Ezekiel to make bread from specific ingredients. Since bread was usually made from wheat alone, the use of coarser materials implied that grain of every kind would be extremely scarce during the coming siege, and people would use whatever materials were available to make their bread. The meager amount of daily food and water Ezekiel was to consume in sight of the people illustrated that the resulting famine would allow very limited portions of food and drink for each individual.

In verses 1-4 of chapter 5, the prophet was commanded to shave his head and beard and then dispose of the hair in a variety of specific ways. This was to illustrate how the people caught in the attack on Jerusalem would perish or be dispersed.

The purpose of all these symbolic acts was to impress upon the people that as a consequence of their continued disobedience, God's judgment was certain and would be severe. God was showing them that their sins would bring them to the most extreme deprivation and shame.

Ezekiel's symbolic actions were "pictures without words" for the instruction of the faithless and unbelieving people around him. In our world today, those around us are also predominantly unbelievers. What kind of pictures without words would God have us present to them? What are some ways we can demonstrate our commitment to God? While our actions likely will not be as dramatic or unique as those of Ezekiel, they can still have an impact on the unbelievers around us.

BACKGROUND

Today's text describes God's instructions to Ezekiel regarding a four-part action sermon he was to dramatize before the people. In verses 1-3, Ezekiel was told to act out the siege itself. He was to take a clay tablet and draw on it a likeness of Jerusalem. Around this, he was to build recognizable military apparatuses. The "iron pan" in verse 3 was a flat griddle that stood upright, creating a barrier between Ezekiel and the model, denoting the people's separation from God. The phrase "set thy face against it" signified God's wrath that was directed toward Jerusalem for the people's disobedience, as had been forewarned in Leviticus 26:14-39.

With this model in front of him, Ezekiel was to lay on his side for a portion of 430 consecutive days as an illustration of God's judgment. The time spent on his left side pertained to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (Though previously taken into captivity by the Assyrians, Israel was included in this portrayal of judgment because God saw Israel and Judah as one nation.) Israel's 390 days represented the years "of their iniquity" (verse 5) from Jeroboam's establishing of idolatry in 975 B.C. to the soon-coming fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The 40 days Ezekiel was to spend on his right side represented the years of God's warning to Judah, beginning with Jeremiah's ministry. Ezekiel's bare arm outstretched towards the model (verse 7) typified warriors' arms being unencumbered by robes for ease of movement during battle.

Verses 9-17 describe Ezekiel's portrayal of the famine that would overtake the city. He was instructed to eat only small amounts of coarse bread, baked in a very crude and disagreeable way. The strange mixture of fine and coarse grains and legumes stored in one vessel portrayed both scarcity and the indiscriminate

nature of the coming disaster: all classes of people would suffer. During each of the first 390 days, the prophet was to measure out a portion of meal (about eleven ounces), form it into a disc, and cook it over a small fire for rationed eating throughout the day. He was also to limit himself to approximately twenty ounces of drinking water per day. Originally, his fire was to be fueled by human dung, but when Ezekiel was grieved by the ritual uncleanliness of this, God allowed him to use cow dung. His measuring, preparing, and eating was to be done in front of the people, so that they would see the prophecy. The "staff" in verse 16 refers to the supply of bread, which God would "break" or cut off.

In chapter 5, verses 1-4, Ezekiel's hair represented the people of Judah; the knife represented Nebuchadnezzar; and the balances, God's precise and exacting judgments. These verses relate that immediately following the 430 days spent on his sides, Ezekiel was to shave off and weigh his hair and beard and divide it into three portions. The first portion was to be burned on the clay tablet that served as a model of Jerusalem, representing those who would die during the siege. The second portion was to be chopped up around the model using the knife. This depicted the people who would be killed by the sword in and around the city during the attack. The third portion pointed to those who would be taken to foreign lands as captives. The few hairs tucked into Ezekiel's garment symbolized the few Jews who would be left behind by Nebuchadnezzar; the hairs drawn from them and thrown into the fire indicated those who would again disobey God and flee to Egypt for security.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  A. The prediction of Jerusalem's overthrow
    1. The symbolic actions against Jerusalem
      a. The symbols presented (4:1—5:4)
        (1) The symbol of the brick tile (4:1-3)
        (2) The symbol of the prophet's position (4:4-8)
        (3) The symbol of famine (4:9-17)
        (4) The symbol of shaved head and divided hair (5:1-4)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was Ezekiel instructed to draw on a tile and construct around it?

2. Why do you think God chose symbolic actions to communicate the coming judgment?

3. Based on verse 13, the people of Judah seemed to have enjoyed defiling themselves in pagan worship and sinful behaviors while still observing the Levitical laws of ceremonial cleanliness. How might people of our day dabble in sinful behaviors while still participating in forms of worship?

CONCLUSION

Our actions as Christians may not get as much attention as those of Ezekiel, but they can still have an impact on the unbelievers around us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 5:5-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by." (Ezekiel 5:14)

Recently I was chatting with a new acquaintance about our shared interest in cooking. Since she was familiar with the native dishes of several Asian cultures, I inquired about her nationality and asked where she had gained her culinary expertise. What I learned was both sad and inspirational.

She told me she was born in Cambodia in the late 1960s. Though her family was well off and owned a great deal of property, all of it was swept away when the Khmer Rouge came into power in 1975. That regime's reign of terror from 1975-1979 ultimately caused the death of more than two million Cambodians. The beautiful and fertile region where my acquaintance lived was laid waste, and whole families died from execution, starvation, disease, and overwork. Her family escaped from the Khmer Rouge when she was ten years old, but she had to live in refugee camps over the border in Thailand until she was nineteen. At last, she and a few other family members were able to immigrate to the United States, where she worked for a time in several Asian restaurants. That's where she developed her talents as a superb cook! Ultimately, she married and was able to build a whole new life for herself and her family in what she views with gratitude as the "beautiful land of opportunity."

Listening to her tell of the destruction caused by the Khmer Rouge in her homeland made me think of the terrible devastation Ezekiel prophesied of in today's text that was soon to occur in his native land.

People around the world view what happened in Cambodia with horror, and no doubt that was how Ezekiel felt as he relayed God's message about the coming destruction of his homeland. The Israelites were a privileged people, but privilege involves responsibility and accountability. God's intention was for Israel to be a witness and testimony to the heathen nations around them. Instead, the nation had gone even further into idolatrous practices than their evil neighbors.

Because of their great sin, God decreed judgment. If the people had lived in obedience to the covenant God had established with them, He would have taught the surrounding nations through the blessings bestowed upon Israel. Because God's chosen people had broken their covenant with Him, He would teach the surrounding nations through the judgment that would come upon Israel.

God's purposes will always be fulfilled. What is His purpose for you? Are you living in obedience to His Word? The judgment recorded in today's text can be a warning and a reminder to us to be careful to yield to His plan and strive to please and honor Him in every aspect of our lives.

BACKGROUND

In this portion of Ezekiel 5, verses 5-11 explain the meaning of Ezekiel's action sermon which began in chapter 4. Verses 12-17 tell the nature of God's anger and coming judgment.

In verses 5-11, God told Ezekiel why such severe judgment would come upon Jerusalem, and reinforced its certainty. Jerusalem was His city, and He had placed it in the middle of the nations, central to routes between the ancient kingdoms of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia. More importantly, Israel had always been at the center of God's plan and work in the world. However, Jerusalem (identified as "she" in verse 6), had rejected God and become even more rebellious than its pagan neighbors. God's chosen people had rejected Him in both worship and governance, preferring their neighbors' gods and practices, but without assuming any of those nations' civil or moral restraints. Neighboring countries had seen Israel's rejection of God, and they were soon to witness Jerusalem's punishment.

The phrase "I am against thee" appears thirteen times in Ezekiel, and in verse 8, it was a warning that God's coming judgment would exceed what had ever been seen before. God had warned in Deuteronomy 28:53-57 that when the people continued in flagrant disobedience to Him, the cannibalism mentioned in verse 10 would be the result. Verse 11 relates that because the people had defiled God's sanctuary by bringing pagan worship into God's holy place, He would "diminish" them.

Verses 12-17 explain how this diminishing would occur: it would take place in the proportion of thirds suggested by Ezekiel's prophetic actions with his hair (see Ezekiel 5:2). One third of the city's population would die from fatal diseases and famine, one third would be killed by the sword, and one third would be scattered. Since Israel had followed the pagans in child sacrifice, they would consume their own children.

God's righteous wrath is expressed in verse 13 by the repeated personal possessive "my" in the phrases "mine anger," "my fury," and "my zeal." The phrase

"shall know" is repeated fifty-nine times in the Book of Ezekiel—"ye" shall know, "they" shall know, and "the heathen" shall know. God's people had defamed His holiness in diverse ways, and His righteous nature required punishment to the same level. The judgment against Israel and Israel's subsequent restoration would be a testimony to God's righteousness. The repetition of "I the LORD have spoken it" in verses 13, 15, and 17 emphasized God's irrevocable commitment to this judgment.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  A. The prediction of Jerusalem's overthrow
    1. The symbolic actions against Jerusalem
      b. The symbols explained (5:5-17)
        (1) The cause of judgment (5:5-7)
        (2) The surety of judgment (5:8-11)
        (3) The description of judgment (5:12-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did God say in verse 11 that He would have no pity upon His people?

2. In verse 5, why do you think God specifically identified Jerusalem as the place where judgment would fall?

3. Our text indicates that Israel had experienced more of the blessing of God and had been exposed to more of the light of God than had the surrounding nations. What are some steps we can take to make sure we respond in the right manner to the light we have received?

CONCLUSION

God's purposes will always be fulfilled. When God's judgment came upon Israel, it would fulfill God's purpose of teaching His righteousness to the surrounding nations.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 6:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 6:7)

My father was a mechanic and his father was a carpenter, so as I was growing up, there nearly always was a project happening around our house that involved building or repairing. Often I was right there trying to "help," though I certainly had a lot to learn. Unfortunately, I ended up learning some of those lessons the hard way because I took the instructions lightly or even totally ignored them.

One such incident that stands out in my mind was when my father showed me how to hold a nail to avoid hitting my thumb with the hammer. He corrected my failure to follow his instruction a few times, but ultimately it took me hitting my thumb with considerable force — and the resulting pain and tears — before I learned that lesson.

Another simple task learned the hard way was the importance of tightening bolts on a vehicle engine cautiously. My father had warned me repeatedly not to tighten certain ones too much or they would break off. However, I thought a little tighter would always be better, so I ignored his instruction. The result was just as he predicted. That time, I also learned by experience that the process of drilling, tapping, and removing a broken bolt should be approached with great care.

My father was quick to comfort me when I hit my thumb with the hammer, and he patiently helped me remove broken bolts. However, the look on his face told me he wished I had just listened and learned the easy way!

Today's text reminds us that if we will not listen and heed instruction from God, there will be consequences, and those consequences will not be pleasant. The Lord had given His chosen people instructions regarding how they were to live. When they rejected His commandments and turned to idolatry, He repeatedly warned them and urged them to repent. Tragically, Israel ignored the words of God's messengers and continued in their own wicked and idolatrous ways.

Our focus verse records the result: Israel was about to suffer the disastrous consequences of disobedience. This entire chapter details how and why Israel would be punished. Because of their rebellious behavior, only a few people would escape the sword, famine, and pestilence that would devastate their land.

We too will experience disastrous results if we ignore God's warnings and fail to repent. The results will be much more serious than a swollen thumb or difficulty in removing a few bolts. Continuing in sin will have eternal consequences! However, God's mercy is still extended today. May we learn from the failure of Israel, and choose the easy way to learn rather than the hard way.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, God pronounced judgment upon the high places throughout the land of Israel (verses 1-7). In verses 8-10, He promised that a remnant of the Jewish people would be spared and would truly reform. He also instructed Ezekiel to emphatically declare the desolation that would occur across the whole nation (verses 11-14).

"And the word of the LORD came unto me" in verse 1 indicated the start of a new prophecy that was received by Ezekiel sometime after his action-sermon of the previous chapters was completed. Ezekiel was to "set his face" (the face being representative of the whole), by turning in the direction of Israel and prophesying against those outside of Jerusalem.

The "mountains" and "high places" in verses 2 and 3 refer to the centers of idol worship. Heathen altars typically were erected higher than the ground around them, and were primarily built on mountains and hilltops. Josiah had destroyed these places of pagan idolatry thirty-six years earlier, but they had been rebuilt and were again in use. The phrase "I will bring a sword" in verse 3 identified Nebuchadnezzar's coming army as God's means of judgment against those who worshipped at such places. They would meet violent death there at the very locations where they had fled for security, and their bodies would be thrown down in front of the idols they had worshipped. The cities and dwellings of these worshippers would be destroyed along with all the labor of their hands.

In the midst of God's warning of nationwide slaughter, Ezekiel was to remind the people of God's grace. The word *remnant* in verse 8 literally means "a portion preserved." The largest portion of those spared from Nebuchadnezzar's destruction would be taken to Babylon as captives. God's statement in verse 9 that He was "broken" meant that His patience was exhausted, while "whorish heart" referenced Israel's spiritual adultery that sprang from a perverse inner spirit. Their desires (*"*eyes*"*) were still for sinful satisfaction, lusting after their false gods.

Ezekiel related that some individuals who would be scattered from Israel into exile would remember the holiness of God. According to verse 10, they would understand that God's warnings in the Law and by the prophets had not been meaningless, and that sin had brought about their calamity. They would detest the sins they had committed and would be restored to God, fulfilling His corrective purpose in sending judgment.

Verses 11-14 summarize the rightness and severity of God's judgment. Ezekiel's actions in verse 11 demonstrated God's grief and frustration. The phrase, "Thus will I accomplish my fury upon them" in verse 12 could be understood as, "This is how I will repair the damage they have done to my name." Verse 13 is a summary of verses 6-7: in the place where the idolaters had prostrated themselves and offered sweet-smelling incense to idols, they themselves would become the offering. "Stretch out my hand" in verse 14 reinforced that the coming judgment was from God; Nebuchadnezzar was only His tool.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  A. The prediction of Jerusalem's overthrow
    2. The judgments upon the mountains (6:1-14)
      a. The fate of the high places (6:1-7)
      b. The sparing of a remnant (6:8-10)
      c. The desolation of the land (6:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Verses 3 and 6 describe several locations where God's judgment would fall. In these verses, what place did Ezekiel cry out against twice?

2. What do you think God's ultimate purpose was in sending judgment upon Israel as prophesied by Ezekiel?

3. What are some steps we can take to avoid making the mistake Israel did in ignoring God's instructions and warnings?

CONCLUSION

May God help us to pay careful attention to His instructions and to obey Him in every aspect of our lives.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 7:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 7:3-4)

"The end" is a concept that can bring joy, excitement . . . and possibly relief! For example, completing a lengthy or difficult project brings a rush of satisfaction and accomplishment. A waiting family rejoices when they get the welcome announcement, "The operation is over, and everything went well!" After completing mountains of paperwork and dealing with miles of red tape, adoptive parents mark the end of waiting and joyfully head to the airport to meet their new son or daughter. And consider the end of a war. What nationwide jubilation results when the announcement is made, "The war has ended!"

In all of these cases, the end is positive and good. However, in our focus verses, the end that was coming upon Israel was just the opposite. Ezekiel prophesied of a dreadful and devastating time when God's judgment would be poured out upon the people for their abominations. The phrase "now is the end come upon thee" gives a sense of the urgency of this message. Israel would have no further chance to escape the consequences of their disobedience. Their disintegration as a nation was inevitable, and it would be a fearful and frightening time. Through the prophet, God pronounced that He would give them according to what they deserved so that they would "know that I am the LORD." While a remnant would be spared—individuals like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jeremiah who chose to stay true to the living God—the coming desolation would spread to the four corners of the land.

We see a similar situation in our world today. All around us are signs that the end is very near, and God has given ample warnings in His Word. Tragically, as in Ezekiel's day, many people are unprepared. They continue on in their sins, going about their lives as though circumstances will never change.

However, while destruction is imminent for this world, there is still hope on a personal level. God in His mercy is yet extending grace and giving souls an opportunity to return to Him. The door is still open! A better ending—an eternally blessed ending—is possible for those who will turn to God even now in repentance and faith.

BACKGROUND

This chapter is another of Ezekiel's prophetic discourses, this one similar to the message given in chapter 6. Verses 1-4 describe God's wrath, verses 5-13 disclose the imminence and inescapability of the coming judgment, and verses 14-27 describe the shame and horror that would come to the people and the fact that no source of help would be found.

The term "four corners of the land" in verse 2 indicates this was a message of doom to all of Israel. This included Jerusalem though it had not yet been destroyed; Judah, which had not yet been completely conquered; and the Northern Kingdom already taken captive.

In verse 3, "the end" alludes to both the end of God's patience and the imminent end of the nation. The judgment of God was based upon Israel's sinful choices, the evil the people had practiced, and the unrighteousness they had committed against God's name. The statement "thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee" meant the people would constantly be reminded of their iniquities. The refrain of verses 3-4 is repeated in verses 8-9.

"*Watcheth*" in verse 6 means "has awakened or dawned" and portrays something that has been fully stirred to action. In verse 7, the Hebrew word translated *morning* literally means "circle," and was sometimes translated as *fate*. The Israelites had come full circle to face the consequences of their rebellion against God. He would no longer look upon them with mercy or pity, indicated by the statement "mine eye shall not spare" in verses 4 and 9.

In verses 10-21, Ezekiel used word pictures five times to impart God's message. The first two of those show that because of the people's persistent presumption on God's grace, retribution was unavoidable. Some commentators suggest verses 10-11 refer to Nebuchadnezzar as the blossomed rod that would execute God's judgment against Israel's sinful pride; rather than the rod itself being deemed wicked, the rod's "violence" would punish the wickedness of the people.

Verses 12-13 allude to the Year of Jubilee that was held every fiftieth year. By God's instruction, at that time property was returned to the original owner. When the Babylonians approached, however, both buyers and sellers would have reason to mourn. The buyer would not rejoice in the property purchased

because it would be of no use to him. The seller would mourn that he could not reclaim his property, because the Year of Jubilee would be cancelled. All buying and selling would lose their significance in the face of the total disaster to come.

The last three word pictures show that neither the people's strength nor their riches would save them, and that shame and horror would be upon all. Verses 14-15 allude to the futility of the cities' watchmen, since there would be no Israelite army available to respond. People outside the cities would die in battle; those inside would perish from famine and pestilence. Verses 16-18 indicate the coming distress of the few who would escape. Hiding in the mountains, as subdued as doves and with knees weak from fear, they would take on the attire and behaviors of deep mourning. Even the wealth of the rich would provide no security and would be discarded as garbage.

"His ornament" in verse 20 refers to the Temple, a place God had ordained for exaltation but that was being used for idolatrous worship. Since the Israelites had defiled the Temple, God would "set it far" from them. He would let the heathen have it, looking aside as they violated and emptied even the very Holy of Holies (the "secret place" of verse 22).

Ancient prisoners were linked with chains as they were transported, and the command in verse 23 to prepare such chains was an indication that they would be needed. "Bloody crimes" referred to murderous judicial decisions, perhaps the ritualized killing of children.

According to verse 25, the Israelites would try to negotiate peace with Nebuchadnezzar's army but would not succeed. Disaster would follow disaster, yet none of their typical advisors would be able to help. Ultimately, the miseries and desolation caused by the Chaldeans would be as universal and complete as the Israelites' sins had been.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  A. The prediction of Jerusalem's overthrow
    3. The dirge over Judah's doom (7:1-27)
      a. The wrath of the Lord (7:1-4)
      b. The imminence of the judgment (7:5-9)
      c. The inescapability of the judgment (7:10-13)
      d. The horrors of the judgment (7:14-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why was an end coming upon the "four corners of the land" (verse 2)?

2. Why do you think the people would "cast their silver in the streets" (verse 19)?

3. How can we alert people today to get ready for the imminent coming of the Lord?

CONCLUSION

Those who are unsaved must call upon God today for mercy and be ready for the Lord's return. That is the end we look forward to with great joy—the end of our life here on earth and the beginning of an eternity in Heaven with the Lord.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 8:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth." (Ezekiel 8:12)

Have you ever played hide and seek with a young child? Most little children assume that if they can't see you, then you are also unable to see them! Sometimes, they will close their eyes and say loudly, "You can't see me!" Other times, they think they are well hidden because they are covered up—perhaps hiding under a bedspread or behind a curtain—though their outline is clearly visible! If they know you are near, they often will start to giggle or laugh, which makes their hiding place even more obvious.

We serve a God who sees everything we do, whether we think it is covered or not. Jeremiah, one of Ezekiel's contemporaries, spoke for God saying, "Mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17). Repeatedly, the Word of God reminds us that God sees and knows all things.

This is wonderful news to the person who is living to please God. It is comforting to know that God sees and cares! It would be foolish to try to hide from the One who created us and knows all about us. However, sin in the heart will cause individuals to try to cover up or hide their wrongdoings. Some believe that if they deny God's existence, they will not be accountable for their sins. Others excuse or justify their wrong behavior. No matter what method is used to try to conceal sin, God still sees it and calls the soul who is hiding from Him, mercifully offering forgiveness through the Blood of Jesus.

In Ezekiel's day, the leaders of Israel had convinced themselves that God did not see their evil, and they carried on their idolatrous activities as if everything were all right. However, God saw what they did in secret, and He revealed their evil deeds to the prophet. Although individuals could still repent, the time for national salvation was past. God was about to pour out His judgment upon the nation.

Today, God's door of mercy is still open for those who will come to Him in true repentance. Rather than continuing to cover sin, how much better it is to admit guilt and obtain God's forgiveness while mercy is still available!

BACKGROUND

This chapter records a vision in which God identified the depth of Israel's iniquity by showing Ezekiel abominations that were taking place in the Temple in Jerusalem. These included the image of jealousy in the Temple in verses 5-6, and the worship of creeping things and beasts by the city leaders in verses 7-13. Ezekiel was also shown the weeping of idolatrous women over the pagan god Tammuz (verses 14-15) and the worship of the sun by the priests (verses 16-18).

According to the date given in verse 1, this vision took place fourteen months after Ezekiel's first vision and near the end of his 430 days action-sermon. Ezekiel had remained in his home during that time; and the elders of Judah, the leaders of the exiles in Babylon, had come to him there. As he sat with these elders, he saw the same form (viewed by Bible scholars as the pre-incarnate Christ) that he had seen in his first vision (see Ezekiel 1:27).

The Divine Being took Ezekiel by a lock of hair and brought him to Jerusalem. The fact that this was a spiritual rather than physical transporting is inferred by the statement that he was "brought in the visions of God" to the city. Though Ezekiel was transported in spirit, what God showed him was not figurative but rather represented the coming reality.

Ezekiel found himself at the northern gate of the inner court. There, where worshippers were supposed to bring their sacrifices to the Lord, Ezekiel saw an idol identified as the "image of jealousy"—identified in that manner because it provoked God to jealousy. In verse 3, inclusion of the word "the" in the phrase "*the* image of jealousy" seems to indicate this was a specific idol Ezekiel's hearers would recognize. Some Bible scholars suggest that perhaps the image set up by Manasseh and his son Amon, which was later removed by Josiah, had been moved back. In spite of the wickedness around him, however, Ezekiel saw that God's Shekinah glory was still in the Temple (verse 4), an evidence of God's grace. However, God was being driven away by "great abominations" referenced in verse 6.

In verses 7-13, Ezekiel learned that the community leaders of Jerusalem were worshipping all manner of ceremonially unclean animals. Their worship was hidden, but Ezekiel was led to where it was taking place. In the rooms built around the court wall, he saw a cavity in the wall and uncovered a door. He entered a room where the walls were covered with

images of creeping things and beasts, and seventy elders—the "ancients of the house of Israel"—were worshipping them with censers of incense. In verse 11, one of these leaders was named: Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan. Shaphan had been a leader in Josiah's reformation and one of his sons was a supporter of Jeremiah. Clearly, Jaazaniah was a rebel from a worthy family. The elders engaging in this abomination were considered wise by the people, but their assertion in verse 12 that the Lord did not see them was false.

Verses 14-15 record that in the outer court, Ezekiel saw women mourning for Tammuz, a Babylonian god most commonly known today by his Greek name, Adonis.

In verses 16-18, Ezekiel was taken into the inner court of the priest. There he saw the twenty-four priestly service divisions (established in 1 Chronicles 24), as well as their leader, the high priest, worshipping the rising sun. Since these service divisions represented the whole land, the fact that twenty-five men were engaged in this idolatrous worship indicated how widespread this pagan practice had become.

In the phrase "they put the branch to their nose" (verse 17), the word "branch" is a euphemism for Asherah, the Babylonian goddess, mother of Tammuz, who was represented by a branch or groomed tree. This was a vulgar gesture blatantly flaunting their idolatrous worship.

Verse 18 establishes once more the set resolve of God's judgment. Though opportunity for individual repentance remained, the time for national conversion was past.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  B. The transgression and fall of Jerusalem
    1. The vision of abominations in the Temple (8:1-18)
      a. The introduction (8:1-4)
      b. The image of jealousy (8:5-6)
      c. The idolatry of the elders (8:7-13)
      d. The worship of Tammuz (8:14-15)
      e. The worship of the sun (8:16-17)
      f. The wrath of the Lord (8:18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Where were the abominations Ezekiel saw in the vision being committed?

2. Why do you think the elders of the house of Israel said "the LORD does not see us"?

3. How does this passage in Ezekiel serve as a warning for the people of God today?

CONCLUSION

The day is coming when God will bring to light the things that are hidden in darkness. As we allow God to search our hearts, we will have confidence before Him and will never need to hide.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 9:1-11

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." (Ezekiel 9:4)

Even in the midst of great calamity, God sees those who want to follow Him, and He is well able to work on their behalf. During World War II, Jim Williams was one who experienced God's preservation. Although Jim had not been raised to know about salvation, while in his early twenties he attended a church service and responded to the truth he heard. God saved his soul and changed his life.

Later, he was inducted into the United States Army and assigned to the Medical Corps of the Third Division. On November 8, 1942, his unit went to Casablanca, Morocco. He said, "Shortly after midnight, we landed between two enemy forts and then descended from our troopship on rope ladders into landing crafts. Powerful shore lights from both forts were turned on us and soon the night was ablaze with tracer bullets, artillery shells, and bombs. I remember the Lord assuring me that He would see me through and I would return home again.

"In the next eighteen months we made amphibious landings in Italy. When you see death all around you, it is a great feeling to know the Lord is with you. I can't tell you the many times my life was spared during those eventful days. In 110 days in Anzio, Italy, we were bombed 288 times and under continual artillery fire. Land mines were everywhere. One evening, while we were going to pick up some wounded men on the battlefield, a large artillery shell burst close to our ambulance. A piece of the shell came through my helmet, entered my neck, and almost severed the main nerve. I was in a hospital for a while and then back to the front."

Eventually it was time for Jim to return to the United States. He said, "I will never forget when our ship came into Newport News, Virginia. It was nighttime and when we came in sight of the blaze of lights on shore, what a shout went up! It was a hospital ship and many were seriously wounded, but we were happy to be home again." Day by day, God had spared his life, and Jim ultimately arrived safely home.

In our text today, God gave Ezekiel a vision of a man with a writer's inkhorn, and this man was instructed to put a mark on those who were righteous. This identification was to preserve them from the coming destruction.

While God often intervenes and preserves a person in times of danger, even more importantly, He offers spiritual protection. He has promised eternal life for those who call upon Him for salvation and then continue to trust and obey Him. We want to be among those who, like the men referenced in our focus verse, "sigh and that cry" because of the evil abounding in the world. At the same time, we can keep our eyes on God and believe that one day, He will deliver us from all the problems on this earth and take us to Heaven.

BACKGROUND

In chapter 9, Ezekiel's vision that began in chapter 8 continued, and he was shown that the abominations previously described would be judged and the idolaters killed. In response to God's cry, six heavenly beings appeared in his vision, each carrying a weapon designed for destruction. They entered by the north gate, indicating the direction from which God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonian army would come. They reported for duty at the brazen altar—the place where fire symbolized God's holiness and the blood sacrifice portrayed His grace—indicating the coming destruction would propitiate (or placate) God's wrath.

Ezekiel observed that the Shekinah glory of God had left its place in the Holy of Holies (the "cherub" of verse 3 representing the Ark of the Covenant as a whole) and was at the threshold of the Temple. There, God commanded the man with the inkhorn to place a mark of protection on those who mourned over the abominations taking place. This indicated that in the slaughter to come, God's mercy would spare the righteous. In verse 4, the identification of the city of Jerusalem as the scene of judgment addressed the prevailing belief that God would never judge or allow destruction of His "holy city."

Orders were given to the heavenly beings for the immediate execution of those not marked as righteous, with judgment beginning at the Temple. Since the Temple and its courts had already been defiled by the people's abominations, they were instructed to disregard the defilement caused by the bodies of those they slew.

In verse 8, Ezekiel cried out for God's mercy, fearing that the coming judgment on unrighteousness would bring an end to the Jewish nation. The word "residue" implies that those who had already

experienced great calamity would be worn down to dust. The people's attitude indicated they were consciously aware, in the midst of their rebellion and disregard, of Jehovah's righteousness. In verse 11, the man with the inkhorn reported that he had completed his task.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  B. The transgression and fall of Jerusalem
    2. The vision of the slain by divine avengers (9:1-11)
      a. The summons of the executioners (9:1-2)
      b. The command to mark and destroy (9:3-7)
      c. The consternation of the prophet (9:8-10)
      d. The completion of the task (9:11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Where was "the glory of God" in this portion of Ezekiel's vision?

2. How should our reactions today compare with Ezekiel's when he saw the judgment that was ahead?

3. What might be some indicators that we are sighing and crying over the sinfulness of the world today?

CONCLUSION

God places His mark of protection upon the righteous. We want to be among that number!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 10:1-22

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel." (Ezekiel 10:9-10)

As I read the description in our text of the amazing wheels the prophet Ezekiel saw in his vision, I thought of the most unusual wheel I have ever seen. In 2014, a group of us flew to Kawasaki, Japan, to attend our church's fiftieth anniversary celebration. Looking out the airplane window during our final descent over Tokyo Bay, we noticed a strange structure below us: a long bridge that started on the far side of the bay and ended in the middle of a tiny island. As the plane passed overhead, we wondered where the many cars traveling across the bridge went.

We learned the answer a few days later when we visited the island: the cars go into an underground tunnel! The long bridge is the above-ground part of the Tokyo Bay Aqua Line, a four-lane highway connecting Kawasaki with Kisarazu City. At the island, the highway goes into a nearly six-mile-long tunnel that lies underneath Tokyo Bay—the fourth longest underwater tunnel in the world.

The building that takes up most of the manmade island has restaurants, kiosks, exhibits, and areas on the fourth and fifth floors that offer spectacular views of the Tokyo waterfront. However, the most memorable sight for us that afternoon was what looked at first like an enormous, round piece of abstract art. More than 1,200 cutter bits of ultra-hard alloy studded the sphere's surface, which was 14.4 meters in diameter. Signs posted nearby identified it as the drill bit of one of eight tunnel-boring machines that carved out the underwater tunnel. You can be sure we all posed for pictures underneath the "teeth" of that gigantic wheel-like cutter head!

As fascinating as that gigantic wheel was, the wheel in the midst of a wheel that Ezekiel saw must have been far more awesome. After all, it was designed by God himself! Each wheel seemingly was two wheels in one, with one set inside the other at right angles, enabling the whole wheel assembly to move instantly in any direction without having to turn. There was close coordination between the wheels and the living creatures (cherubim), which guided the motions. Together, the wheels and cherubim could represent characteristics of God's divine nature: the mobility of the wheels inferring His omnipresence and constant activity, and the elevated position relating to His omniscience.

No matter how we interpret the symbolism of Ezekiel's vision, without question it displayed the majesty and glory of God. Although Ezekiel and the people of Judah were living in exile in Babylon, this no doubt was a vivid reminder to them that God was still on His throne, working, moving, and in full control of every situation.

The lesson for us today is that God still moves in the affairs of individuals and nations to fulfill His own unseen plan. In the wonderful variety of God's dealings with human beings, there is perfect harmony. He is always working, always aware, never wrong, and never late in fulfilling His divine purpose. What a comfort that is to those whose trust is in Him!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 10, the vision of chapters 8-9 is continued. Ezekiel saw again much of what he had seen in the vision described in chapter 1, although additional details are given. In this chapter, he identified the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1:5-14 as cherubim. Once again, he saw the likeness of a throne and a firmament above it, and the moving wheels within wheels that carried God's glory. Ezekiel also saw coals scattered over the city and the glory of God departing from the Temple.

The instructions in verse 2 were for the "man clothed with linen" who had marked the faithful few in Jerusalem to scoop up coals into the hollow of his cupped hands. The scattering of the coals represented God's judgment falling upon Jerusalem. The city would suffer from famine and disease before ultimately being entirely burned by Nebuchadnezzar's army.

Verses 3-5 are parenthetical, relating what Ezekiel saw before the man in linen went to the cherubim to collect the coals. The cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the Temple, but it was on the move, pausing as it was about to leave the Temple. In the ancient Hebrew, the "right side" (verse 3) would be the direction of the right hand when facing east. Thus, the glory of God was on the south side of the "house"—the Temple—opposite to where the abominations were being committed.

In verses 7-8, one of the cherubs reached into the fire between the four cherubim to gather the coals

requested by the man clothed in linen, and Ezekiel observed that the cherub had a hand at the end of his wing.

Verses 9-22 provide details regarding the cherubim, the wheels, the "spirit of the living creature" that directed them, and the operation of the whole as the transporter of God's glory. In verse 13, the four wheels were identified by the Hebrew word *ophan*, derived from a root word meaning "to revolve." In the cry "O wheel," the word *galgal* is used, meaning "whirl" and referring to the whole wheel mechanism. The general impression conveyed is that of constant activity and motion, and free movement with no chaos or disorder.

Verse 14 describes the four faces of the cherubim as being those of a cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle. It is not known why Ezekiel used the word *cherub* to denote the face associated earlier with the *ox* (see Ezekiel 1:10). That cherub reached for the coals with his face turned in the direction of Ezekiel.

The "living creature" of verse 15 refers to the life within the chariot as a whole—the living cherubim as well as the living Spirit directing the movement of the wheels. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord move even further from the Holy of Holies, to the eastern gate of the Temple compound. "Stood" in verses 18 and 19 indicates waiting with an attitude of steadfastness and constancy.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  B. The transgression and fall of Jerusalem
    3. The vision of the coals of fire (10:1-22)
      a. The instruction to the man clothed in linen (10:1-2)
      b. The movement of God's glory to the threshold (10:3-5)
      c. The action of the cherub (10:6-8)
      d. The description of the cherubim (10:9-17)
      e. The movement of God's glory to the east gate (10:18-19)
      f. The identification of the cherubim (10:20-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, what did the man clothed with linen take from between the wheels?

2. Why do you think the glory of the Lord is described as moving from place to place in this chapter?

3. In this portion of Ezekiel, God communicated with the prophet through a vision. What are some ways God communicates with us today?

CONCLUSION

Ezekiel's vision was an indicator of God's majesty and power, and a reminder to us that He was and is constantly aware and involved in the affairs of this world.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 11:1-25

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And ye shall know that I am the LORD: for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you." (Ezekiel 11:12)

"Don't do this — you're too little," my brother warned me just before he jumped from the bed of our dad's pickup truck onto the gravel driveway below. I do not remember exactly how old we were at the time, but I must have been about four or five, and he is just nineteen months older than I am. What I do remember quite clearly is the defiance that sprang up in my young heart. How dare he tell me that I was too little to do something he was doing! He wasn't *that* much bigger than me! And so I jumped.

Sadly, my brother was right: I *was* too little to make that leap. Down I went, landing on my face rather than my feet, and knocking out one of my two front teeth long before it was ready to come loose on its own. My defiance of my brother's warning brought me a lot of blood and tears that day and an extra-long season of toothless photos in following months! Thankfully, it was only a "baby tooth" and there was the expectation that eventually a permanent tooth would fill the gap.

The situation in today's text was, of course, much more serious than an impulsive childhood action. The people of Israel and then Judah had been warned repeatedly that they were to follow God's statutes rather than behave in the manner of the heathen nations surrounding them. Then they were warned repeatedly that if they did not repent of their wickedness, judgment was coming. Stubbornly, they had refused to listen, and God declared through Ezekiel in our focus verse that they would *know* He was the Lord — they would face the consequences of their defiance. And yet, along with the message of wrath, God also gave Ezekiel a message of comfort and of physical and spiritual restoration for His people.

God offers the same to us today. It is in our best interest to heed the warnings that God gives us through His Word, His ministers, and concerned brothers and sisters in the Gospel. However, if we have refused to listen and are facing consequences for our defiance, God still offers restoration, if we will repent and turn to Him.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem's coming judgment ended, and the prophet was instructed to relay two messages. The first was a pronouncement of wrath and judgment against those who were insisting that Jerusalem was safe, despite prophecies to the contrary (verses 5-12). The second gave hope for the future of Israel, even as the glory of God left the Temple (verses 14-21).

Ezekiel was transported in the spirit to an area in the outer court of the Temple, where he saw a group of twenty-five men near the eastern entrance. Two of these men were specifically named: Jaazaniah, son of Azur (not the Jaazaniah of chapter 8, who was the son of Shaphan), and Pelatiah. These twenty-five men were "princes of the people" who had been giving evil counsel to the leaders. They may have been those who advised Zedekiah to disregard Jeremiah's warnings. They were defiantly confident that they would be safe in Jerusalem despite what prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had told them.

In verses 4-5, God told Ezekiel to prophesy against these lying advisors. The imagery of the large cooking cauldron in verse 7 related to the people's assumption that the walls of Jerusalem would protect them. Ezekiel turned their claim of confidence into a prediction of doom. They would not be protected by the caldron; rather, they would be consumed there by God's judgment. Though not everyone would perish in Jerusalem, those who remained would be taken from the city for execution or scattered into exile. God's judgment would extend beyond Jerusalem to the borders of Israel.

In Ezekiel's vision, he saw Pelatiah die, no doubt under the promised judgments of God. Pelatiah may have been the leader of those who scorned the prophecies of coming judgment. His death was a foretaste of what awaited the rest of those Ezekiel had warned. Ezekiel was stunned by God's judgment, and he cried out to the Lord, asking if any would remain.

God comforted Ezekiel and instructed him to relay another message to the Babylonian captives (verses 14-21). The Babylonian conquest would not be the end of Israel, as it had been for several other nations and peoples. The prevailing belief was that the exiles had been rejected by God and that the land now belonged to those remaining in Judah. However, God promised to sustain and shelter the exiles. "Little sanctuary" in verse 16 implied

safety for "a little while." God was promising that during their absence from their land and earthly Temple, He would be their Sanctuary. God's commitment to regather the people and restore the land was a restatement of a promise previously made (see Deuteronomy 30:3). In verse 18, God personalized this promise of restoration to the Babylonian exiles, and promised that when they did return, they would no longer pursue idolatry.

Verses 19-20 go beyond the restoration of the exiles as a nation to a spiritual restoration of the hearts of the people, but this is yet to come. The "stony heart" of verse 19 refers to a heart that is unnaturally hardened, and a "heart of flesh" means one that has been reawakened.

Ezekiel saw the glory of God leave the city and depart to the Mount of Olives. Then the vision left and Ezekiel was back in Chaldea with the elders of Judah, where he related what he had seen in the vision and all God's prophecies concerning Jerusalem.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  B. The transgression and fall of Jerusalem
    4. The vision of the destruction and restoration of the city (11:1-25)
      a. The condemnation of the leaders (11:1-12)
        (1) Ezekiel's departure to the leaders (11:1)
        (2) Ezekiel's instruction to prophesy (11:2-4)
        (3) Ezekiel's warning of judgment (11:5-12)
      b. The consternation of the prophet (11:13)
      c. The restoration of the nation (11:14-21)
      d. The departure of God's glory (11:22-23)
      e. The transportation of the prophet (11:24-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 16, what promise did God give the exiles through Ezekiel?

2. What does verse 19 mean when it says God will "put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh"? What testimonies have you heard that show this is possible?

3. Verse 5 says, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." What steps can we take to ensure that what preoccupies our thoughts is pleasing to God?

CONCLUSION

We want to heed God's warnings, and if we have not already done so, experience the restoration He offers!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 12:1-20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight." (Ezekiel 12:7)

My youth camp counselor told our cabin group of fifth-graders that for the next few minutes, each of us would take a turn silently acting out a Bible account or character, and the others would guess what or who we had portrayed. When my turn came, I chose one of my favorite accounts: the Gospel coming to the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts chapter 10. First, I got down on my knees with my hands together to show Cornelius in prayer. Then I moved to another spot and stood with my arms out to illustrate the angel appearing to him. Next, I went to the other side of the room and, while kneeling in a praying position, drew an invisible cloud above my head to symbolize Peter's vision. I continued with a step-by-step portrayal of the whole account.

Though I'm not a particularly dramatic person and my shyness made me nervous about performing in front of people, I thought I had done fairly well. Yet, every one of my peers responded in exactly the same way: a blank stare of utter bewilderment! No one even attempted a guess, and when I told them the answer, they didn't seem to have even a vague recollection of that account. It seems I had learned that particular Bible story at home rather than at Sunday school. Of course, it probably wasn't the best account to dramatize, since the number of characters involved would make it tricky for any one person to act out.
It certainly was a challenge for a rather reserved fifth-grader!

The first visual illustration Ezekiel acted out in this chapter was much more conducive to a single actor. God instructed him to hastily pack during the day as if he were going into exile, and then dig a hole in the wall of his house and escape through it once it was dark. However, it seems Ezekiel's audience was nearly as befuddled as my young friends were, so God also gave the prophet a detailed explanation to convey. Later in the text, Ezekiel was given a further dramatization and explanation to communicate: he was to shake and tremble as he ate to show the terrible fear the people would experience during the upcoming siege of Jerusalem.

Why would God instruct Ezekiel to deliver His messages in such a visual manner? A portion of verse 3 in our text indicates the answer: "It may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house." That is a cautionary word for us today. God can speak to us in a number of ways. In whatever manner His communication comes, we don't want to be "rebellious" people that the Lord must take drastic measures to reach. We want to consider carefully every message God has for us and be obedient to His instructions. Like Ezekiel in our focus verse, we want to be able to say, "I did so as I was commanded."

BACKGROUND

After the conclusion of the vision recorded in chapters 8-11, chapter 12 begins another section of Ezekiel's prophetic work. In this text, Ezekiel was still at home as he prophesied and acted out Zedekiah's upcoming flight from Jerusalem (verses 1-16), and demonstrated what the final days of the city's siege would be like (verses 17-20).

In verse 2, the "rebellious house" alluded directly to the exiles among whom Ezekiel was living. His dramatizations and messages had made no impression upon them. Because of their unchanged hearts, God gave Ezekiel instructions for yet another visual illustration to be acted out in front of the people.

"Stuff for removing" in verse 3 referred to what a person would take into exile when hastily preparing without prior notice, and items that could be easily carried when traveling rapidly. The items were to be packed during the day, in the presence of the elders. Verses 4-12 reveal how King Zedekiah would flee Jerusalem. Ezekiel was to start his dramatization at evening by creating a hole in what likely was an exterior wall of his home's courtyard. He was to leave his home through that hole under cover of darkness.

When the elders questioned the meaning of his actions, the prophecy was explained (verses 8-16). In verse 10, the "prince in Jerusalem" referred to King Zedekiah. Ezekiel's actions showed that Zedekiah would sneak from the city during the night hours. (The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in 2 Kings 25:4 and Jeremiah 39:4.) He would depart by a lower gate between two city walls, as indicated by Ezekiel's hole in the wall. The covered face indicated Zedekiah's disguise as he tried to escape. Ezekiel's inability to see the ground represented Zedekiah's never again seeing the land of Israel, because upon his capture by Nebuchadnezzar, his eyes would be put out.

Zedekiah's helpers and advisors who tried to escape with him would be scattered. The word *scatter* in the phrase "I shall scatter them among the nations"

in verse 15 is translated elsewhere as *winnow*. Except when literally referring to grain, the word generally alludes to God's extreme judgment. The "few" who remained in the land would be spared so that they would testify confirming the fulfillment of God's prophecy.

In verses 17-20, Ezekiel's eating and drinking with quaking, trembling, and carefulness foreshadowed the famine, scarcity of water, and deep fear that would exist in the city during the siege.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    1. The signs of Judah's condemnation (12:1-20)
      a. The sign of the prophet's baggage (12:1-16)
        (1) The instruction of the prophet (12:1-6)
        (2) The action of the prophet (12:7)
        (3) The lesson from the prophet (12:8-16)
      b. The sign of the prophet's trembling (12:17-20)
        (1) The instruction of the prophet (12:17-18)
        (2) The lesson from the prophet (12:19-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, what was Ezekiel supposed to "cover" as he exited his house, and why?

2. Why do you think God instructed Ezekiel to deliver "action sermons" rather than just verbal ones?

3. Think of a time when you have seen a visual illustration of a spiritual principle. How did the object lesson help emphasize the concept or make it more memorable?

CONCLUSION

We want to pay careful attention to the Biblical lessons we are given, and then be willing and obedient to follow them.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 12:21 through 13:23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 13:7-8)

You may have heard the saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!" While trickery and duplicity have been around since the fall of man, advances in digital communication have multiplied the ways perpetrators of fraud can target us. Perhaps answering a knock at the door subjected you to the lengthy speech of a door-to-door solicitor. Maybe you received an email plea from someone claiming to be the surviving spouse of a wealthy foreign official, or a phone call from an individual supposedly representing the federal government or your bank. Whatever the approach, the person likely wanted money, account numbers, and/or personal information from you in exchange for something—maybe a monetary windfall, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, or inside knowledge about a bargain no one would want to miss. However, just because proposals appear to be legitimate does not mean they are! In nearly every case, the gain promised is nothing but fantasy—an outcome that has no chance of coming to fruition.

In our text today, the false prophets of Ezekiel's day promised an outcome for the people of Jerusalem that would never come to fruition because God had ordained otherwise. While these prophets claimed to speak in the name of the Lord, their pronouncements were deceitful and were not made innocently. According to our key verse, their words were a "lying" divination—they were purposely misleading the people.

The message of the counterfeit prophets was filled with optimism. In essence, they were saying, "Yes, the Babylonians are coming, but don't despair! God will deliver us!" Their words offered a vain hope because the people were continuing in sin and the nation was on the brink of destruction. However, the people chose to believe this duplicity because it was what they wanted to hear.

God commanded Ezekiel to speak out against the lying prophets and declare that their phony assurances were like erecting a defective wall and whitewashing it to make it look good. Such an unsafe structure was doomed to collapse when God's storm of judgment, which would arrive at the hands of the Babylonian invaders, swept over them.

Ezekiel's warning in our focus verses applies to deceivers of our day as well. God never changes. He abhors lies and dishonesty, and He will judge those who teach falsely in His name. He will also judge those who accept false teachings that seem pleasing while rejecting the truth God sets before them.

At times, God's truth may hurt. For example, it may cause us pain to think of the judgment that is coming against those who do not believe. Still, we must always hold fast to the truth. That is the only real place of security.

BACKGROUND

"The word of the LORD came unto me" in Ezekiel 12:21 indicates the beginning of a new message, which continues through chapter 13. In verses 21-28 of chapter 12, God revealed that judgment on Jerusalem and the land of Judah was imminent. There was such apathy among the people regarding God's warnings that a proverbial saying had arisen stating that revelations would come to nothing. However, God proclaimed through Ezekiel, "In your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it" (verse 25). Inevitable judgment was coming. Chapter 13 pronounces judgment against the false prophets. Because they spoke against God's warnings, they would be damned, both male (verses 1-16) and female (verses 17-23).

The counterfeit prophets had declared what would appeal to the people and what they themselves wanted to be true, using God's name to claim their sayings were divine. In chapter 13 verse 4, Ezekiel compared them to "foxes in the deserts"—scavengers who lived off the fear of the people and did nothing to improve Israel's condition.

Verses 8-16 relate God's verdict against these false prophets. God would no longer consider them part of His chosen people. According to verse 9, their names would no longer be "written in the writing of the house of Israel." The "wall" in verse 10 referred to the weak moral structure of the people who had separated themselves from God. The "untempered morter" daubed on it represented the false hope the prophets gave to the people. This inadequate structure would wash entirely away in the coming violent "storm," which represented the armies of Babylon.

Verses 17-23 were addressed to the false prophetesses who were using occult practices forbidden to the people of Israel. The word translated *pillows* in

verse 18 also means "covering" and referred to wristbands and full-length veils believed to have protective properties. *Hunt* meant "to lure for the purpose of ensnaring." Like the false prophets, these women were preying on the fears of the people and peddling false security in the face of God's coming judgment. They profaned God's righteousness and distorted His judgments for the payment of a simple handful of barley. They falsely foretold disaster to the righteous, but redemption and life to the ungodly.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    2. Messages of Judah's condemnation
      a. The message against despising prophecy (12:21-28)
        (1) The certainty of judgment (12:21-25)
        (2) The imminence of judgment (12:26-28)
      b. The message against false prophets (13:1-23)
        (1) The judgment of false prophets (13:1-16)
          (a) Their character (13:1-7)
          (b) Their condemnation (13:8-16)
        (2) The judgment of false prophetesses (13:17-23)
          (a) Their lies (13:17-19)
          (b) Their condemnation (13:20-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Ezekiel 12:27, when did the people assert that the vision of Ezekiel would take place?

2. Why do you think the false prophets persisted in telling the people a message of optimism and hope?

3. What are some ways we can discern whether religious teachings in our day are true or false?

CONCLUSION

God hated the work of the false prophets and decreed that they would be judged and destroyed. The lesson for us is that we must always seek for God's truth and adhere to it faithfully in order to avoid the condemnation of God.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 14:1-23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols." (Ezekiel 14:4)

Sometimes things are not what they seem to be. A good example of this is the peanut, which is not actually a nut. It is a legume and is in the same family as beans, lentils, and peas. Another example is the banana tree. Would you be surprised to find out that it is not really a tree? Botanists tell us it actually is a large herb that is distantly related to ginger. A third example is the cucumber. Most people think of the cucumber as a vegetable, but it is, in reality, a fruit in the cucurbit family and is related to watermelons.

People can appear different from what they really are as well. There was a time in my life when I wanted everyone to believe I was a Christian. However, God was not first in my life. My heart loved the things of the world more than the things of God. I was a hypocrite, putting on a false appearance of outward virtue. I am so thankful that God brought me to the place that I sought Him for mercy. He forgave me and made me His child, and from then on, there was no more pretending. What I appeared to be was what I was!

Our focus verse is about the elders of Israel who were not what they represented themselves to be. They supposedly came to inquire of God's prophet for advice, but in reality, they were worshipping idols in their hearts. They made regular visits to the Temple where they brought sacrifices to God, but they were not sincere. However, no matter how they appeared on the outside, God knew their hearts. Through Ezekiel, God said that He would punish these deceitful elders by giving them over to their idolatry. Because they were determined to follow false gods, that was the punishment they deserved.

God still knows the hearts of every individual, and each person is responsible for his or her own relationship with God. As Christians, we must always be careful to maintain our allegiance to God and keep Him first in our lives, not allowing anything to weaken or replace our devotion to Him. When we do that, His blessing will remain upon our lives.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the leaders of the exiles came to Ezekiel as if to hear some message from him, and in response, Ezekiel instructed them to repent of their idolatry (verses 1-11). While nothing would save the nation from God's judgments, a few people possibly would survive. When those few arrived in Babylon, the exiles already there would come to understand that God's judgment was well deserved and would be comforted by the understanding of God's justice (verses 12-23).

Previously, Ezekiel had spoken against the idolatrous and rebellious leaders in Judah and Jerusalem. In today's text, God instructed him to condemn the leaders who were with him in exile, and revealed to Ezekiel the secret idolatry of the leaders' hearts even before they spoke. The phrase "setteth up" in verse 4 denoted an exaltation above all else. While these leaders had portrayed an outward allegiance to God, they had taken idols into their hearts and esteemed them so highly that the idols had become a "stumbling block of . . . iniquity" to them, governing their lives and causing them to disobey God's dictates. God's summary of the false prophets' behavior was collective, but He would respond to each man according to the abundance of that man's own sins.

In verses 6-11, God directed the elders to repent and turn from their idolatries. The "prophet" mentioned in verse 7 was not a reference to Ezekiel specifically, but to prophets in general. When the elders hypocritically inquired of any prophet — whether real or false — concerning God, God would answer their question with fury and wrath in judgment. The phrase in verse 9, "I the LORD have deceived that prophet," was a Hebrew idiom indicating that God allowed the false prophets to be misled as a punishment for their own deception of God's people. Such individuals would experience God's judgment along with those who had sought their advice. Although these judgments were severe, the purpose was to teach Israel to never again go into idolatry.

Some Bible scholars view verses 12-21 as a reply to a question in the elders' minds: Would not God spare Jerusalem because of the prayers or lives of the righteous people who remained? However, the four judgments in these verses had been established in the Law as punishments for disobedience (see Leviticus 26). Famine, ravaging wild animals, war, and disease would be the response for "trespassing grievously" (verse 13). For each judgment, God repeated

that even if righteous Noah, Daniel, and Job were in Jerusalem, His judgment against the city would not be withheld, though the righteousness of these men would protect them individually.

Verse 22 indicates that a remnant would escape the city alive for the purpose of their witness. When they would join the exiles in Babylon and tell of the disease, deprivation, starvation, cannibalism, violence of war, and desolation of the land, the elders and people there would recognize the judgments pronounced in Leviticus 26. Their spirits would be broken, and they would acknowledge the justice of God's judgment and be "comforted."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    2. Messages of Judah's condemnation
      c. The message against the elders (14:1-23)
        (1) The inquiry of the elders (14:1-11)
          (a) The inquiry and response (14:1-5)
          (b) The instruction to repent (14:6-11)
        2) Judgment unavertable through prayer (14:12-23)
          (a) The principle illustrated (14:12-20)
          (b) The principle applied (14:21-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What three righteous men are mentioned in this chapter?

2. Why did God say the righteousness of these three men would not avail for others? Can we get to Heaven on someone else's righteousness?

3. How can we prevent something becoming like an idol to us?

CONCLUSION

God wants us to be true and faithful worshippers of Him. When God is first in our lives, we can be assured of His blessing upon us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 15:1-8

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Ezekiel 15:6)

Some years ago, an elderly gardener friend of mine gave me a gift of a trumpet vine after I admired the shiny green foliage and clusters of trumpet-shaped peach flowers on the plant in his yard. I am far from being a skilled gardener and am not hesitant about admitting that. So when my friend first offered the plant, I demurred, declaring that I had vast experience in turning the healthiest of plants into dry twigs in a matter of weeks. However, he pressed the baby plant upon me, insisting that trumpet vines were exceptionally hardy, resistant to disease, could tolerate hot or dry conditions, and provided a beautiful and fast-growing covering for fences or trellises.

That last comment was what persuaded me. I had a bare spot on the fence in my backyard that desperately needed something green growing up it. So I succumbed to his friendly pressure and accepted the vine.

That was about seven or eight years ago . . . and there is still a bare spot on that fence in the backyard. Oh, I planted the trumpet vine. The brown woody stem is still visible next to the fence as proof. Not only that, but I watered the vine, fertilized it, and watched over it. I may have even talked to it! However, my efforts were to no avail. While the vine has produced a few wimpy leaves and straggly tendrils every year, it has never had a single flower. As a fence covering, it has proved to be totally worthless.

Today's text made me think of that trumpet vine. Many times in the Scriptures, God used the vine as an illustration of Israel. In today's text, God's chosen people were compared to a useless vine that would soon be consumed by fire because nothing could be constructed from it—not a table, a tool, or even a peg. A vine would never be planted for the purpose of obtaining wood; it is without value unless it bears fruit. God had planted Israel to bring forth fruit to His glory, but the people had failed to do so. Like a dried up branch, the nation was suitable only for burning, and the devouring "flames" of the Babylonian armies would soon overcome the city of Jerusalem.

In spite of the approaching judgment and the perilous political situation in Jerusalem, the prevailing message from the false prophets was, "God won't judge us; we are His chosen people—His special vine. There is no reason to fear, because God will deliver us." God wanted Ezekiel to destroy this false sense of confidence. Ezekiel had foretold the desolation of Jerusalem many times, but the picture of a useless vine in today's text reinforced not only that judgment would come, but that the judgment was completely deserved.

Jerusalem had been positioned by God as a choice planting; He had given it unusual blessings and opportunities. If it had produced fruit suitable to its character as a holy city, it would have been to the glory of God. However, the chosen city had failed in this purpose. Thus, Jerusalem was as deserving of destruction as the dead branches of a vine were deserving of being cut off and thrown into the fire.

Ezekiel's pronouncement to Jerusalem is a warning for us as well. Man was created for the purpose of yielding precious "fruit" for the honor and glory of God. Those who do not fulfill that purpose—who neglect God and ignore their responsibility toward Him—are set for destruction like the worthless vine in today's text. For those who fail to repent, judgment is certain. Thankfully, by the grace of God, that does not need to be true of us. As we yield our lives to God and follow His instructions and plans for our lives, we will bear spiritual fruit, and our lives will bring glory to Him.

BACKGROUND

To reconcile Ezekiel as well as his hearers to the rightness of God's coming judgment, in this short chapter, God used the example of an unfruitful vine to illustrate Israel's disobedience.

In Scripture, God's people of Israel are frequently likened to a grapevine (for example, see Isaiah 5). When Ezekiel relayed God's words picturing a useless vine, the elders of Israel would have known immediately that the allegory was about them. This message dismissed Israel's false claims to security based on their being the privileged people of God—His choice vine.

The question asked in verse 2 in essence was, "How can the wood of a grapevine be better than the branch of any other tree among the trees of the forest?" The wood was not durable enough to make anything useful, not even a peg for a wall hanger (verse 3).

In verse 4, the branch that was burned on both ends and in the middle represented the condition of Israel. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been overthrown and taken into captivity, much of the Southern Kingdom of Judah existed as a tribute nation under Babylon, and the city of Jerusalem itself soon would be

overthrown. Like the partially burned piece of grapevine, the people would emerge from one calamity only to be destroyed by another. Verse 5 points out that the fruitless grapevine which was of little use before it was burned would have even less value after it was burned. Like a partially burned branch snatched from burning flames, Jerusalem had been previously spared from destruction and the "fire" of judgment. However, this time it would be completely consumed (verses 6-8).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    3. Parables of Judah's condemnation
      a. The parable of the vine (15:1-8)
        (1) The parable stated (15:1-5)
        (2) The parable explained (15:6-8)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 5, what do you think God meant when He said the vine was "meet for no work"?

2. Why did God say He would make the land desolate (verse 8)?

3. What are some indicators of a productive and fruit-bearing Christian life?

CONCLUSION

Just as God had a purpose for Israel, He has a purpose for each one of us. Are we fulfilling that purpose? Today's text warns of the result of failing to do so.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 16:1-34

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born." (Ezekiel 16:4-5)

Several years ago, I heard about a pastor and his wife in South Korea who have been taking care of abandoned babies since 2009, saving the lives of over 1,500 newborns and adopting nineteen of them.

Their story began in 1987 when Pastor Jong-rak Lee and his wife, Chun-ja, became parents to a disabled son. Eun-man was born with cerebral palsy and a cyst on his left cheek that cut off blood flow to his brain, causing permanent damage. Though bedridden his entire life (he passed away in 2019), Eun-man was instrumental in inspiring a mission that has saved the lives of many babies.

"Through Eun-man, I learned about the dignity of a valuable life," Pastor Lee said. Concerned about the problem of child abandonment, especially of children with disabilities, he decided to do all he could to rescue and care for these babies just as he cared for his own son. One day, he saw a news article describing a baby box for abandoned infants in the Czech Republic. Lee immediately copied the idea and installed a hinged hatch in the wall of his home bearing the words, "Jesus loves you." The hatch opens to a small heated and blanket-lined area where babies can be safely placed. The snug box is also accessible from inside the home. When the hatch is opened from the outside, a bell rings inside, and the pastor or one of the staff members who now assists him immediately goes to receive the baby.

The Lee home also serves as their church, and now as an orphanage named Jusarang, meaning "God's Love." In 2014, the couple's life-saving work was the subject of an award-winning documentary entitled "The Drop Box." In the documentary, Lee tells about one little girl he and his wife loved dearly. Baby Hannah was born to a fourteen-year-old mother who drank and did drugs while pregnant. As a result, the infant had irreversible brain damage and doctors thought she would die almost immediately, but she lived for six years in the Lees' care. When Hannah passed away, the couple was heartbroken. Lee vowed then that he would never turn away any child with disabilities, promising God, "I will die for these children."

Pastor Lee's love for abandoned children could be paralleled to God's love for Israel. In our focus verses, Ezekiel was instructed by God to compare the people of Jerusalem to an abandoned baby. The people's chance for survival as a nation in Egypt was as slight as that of a baby forsaken by his or her mother. However, God nurtured and protected them from annihilation, and provided for their every need.

Sadly, our text continues by giving a shocking description of how Judah had turned away from God and gone into idolatry, in spite of the unusual blessings God had given them and the covenant relationship He had entered into with the people. Instead of appreciating their privileges, their wickedness and apostasy was so great that Ezekiel was led by God to compare it to fornication, prostitution, and adultery of the most vile nature.

As individuals under the new covenant, we have been blessed with even more through Jesus Christ than the people of Ezekiel's day had under the old covenant. Every aspect of God's provision for His people back then—washing, anointing, clothing, teaching, providing, adorning, and so forth—is provided for us in greater measure. How should we respond to God's amazing gifts to us? Let us learn a lesson from the failure of Israel, and guard against being faithless and unbelieving. We want to treasure our position and privileges in Christ. We are more than merely accepted and forgiven, we are beloved! We are the sons and daughters of God! In devotion and appreciation to Him, let us determine that by His help and grace, we will remain faithful.

BACKGROUND

This text is one of the strongest denunciations of Israel's sin found in the entire Bible. In it, Jerusalem was likened to a cast-off infant who was taken up and raised by God (verses 1-7). When grown, the baby was united with God in spiritual marriage (verses 8-14) but was unfaithful (verses 15-34).

Though addressed to Jerusalem, the message included Judah and the whole of Israel. The first part of the allegory portrays God taking Israel to Himself. In verse 3, "birth" speaks to origin and "nativity" to identified family. When Israel came into the Promised Land in the days of Joshua, the territory was occupied by Canaanite tribes such as the Amorites and the Hittites. God said that Israel had closer kinship

with these pagan tribesmen — the most ungodly of the Canaanite tribes — than with God. In her newborn state, Israel was abandoned so completely that the umbilical cord was not even cut. She was left unclean and was not dried with the traditional rubbing with salt — a practice that signified dedication to God. In verse 5, the phrase "none eye pitied thee" indicates that all other nations were against her from the beginning. The phrase "cast out in the open field" refers to a method of infanticide, especially of female infants. The repeated reference to blood in verse 6 highlights God's willingness to overlook that which repelled Him in order to nurture and save the abandoned child. "Multiply" in verse 7 refers to the growth experienced by Israel under the nurturing care of God.

Verses 8-14 portray God's covenant with Israel, using the analogy of marriage to show His relationship to the nation. (This was the covenant made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:7-8.) The abandoned baby had grown into a young woman, but she was still needy. God gave her protection and provision in the marriage union, represented by the spreading of the skirt and covering of nakedness in verse 8. Israel was fully redeemed from her past bondage in Egypt and was united in a covenantal relationship with God, indicated by the words "and thou becamest mine." Verse 9 illustrates that as a bride prepares herself for her wedding by washing, moisturizing, and perfuming herself, so the Lord cleansed Israel from impurities and anointed her for their union.

The costly clothing and jewelry mentioned in verses 10-13 represent God's giving Israel all resources and capabilities for His glory. "Fine flour" is a figurative way of saying that God had richly provided for Israel's every need. The allegory ends in verse 13 with the phrase, "Thou didst prosper into a kingdom," meaning that Israel had obtained royal sovereignty. Verse 14 indicates that the fame of Israel had spread among the nations ("heathen") because of God's adorning with both physical blessings and His presence and glory.

In verses 15-22, Israel was condemned for behaving like a harlot, and verses 23-34 compare her actions to prostitution and adultery. God's statements to Ezekiel were harsh and explicit, underscoring His abhorrence of idolatry. Israel had given to the idols of pagan nations all that she had received from God in the marriage covenant — her costly apparel, her gold and silver, her delicacies, and even her children.

"Eminent place" and "in every street" in verse 24 allude to the fact that places of spiritual fornication and adultery were commonly available at street corners and crossroads. Verses 26-29 reveal that increased idolatry and illicit relationships with multiple pagan nations accelerated Israel's political and religious apostasy. "Diminished thine ordinary food" in verse 27 refers to the removal of God's blessing of provision even for basic needs, such as food. In spite of all she had received, Israel's heart languished with unmet desire. "Hire" in verse 31 refers specifically to payment for illicit sexual services. The implication was that while common prostitutes gave themselves up for fees, Israel was prostituting herself and was actually using her bridal gifts to pay her clients.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    3. Parables of Judah's condemnation
      b. The parable of Israel's unfaithfulness
        (1) The origin and state of Israel (16:1-5)
        (2) The compassion of the Lord (16:6-7)
        (3) The marriage to the Lord (16:8-14)
        (4) The adultery of Israel (16:15-34)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What do you think the ornamentations described in verses 10-13 represented?

2. What specific sin did God condemn Israel for in verse 21?

3. What can we do to be certain we keep a faithful commitment to God?

CONCLUSION

Let us learn from the failure of Israel and treasure our privileges as the children of God.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 16:35-63

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy." (Ezekiel 16:37-38)

Political leaders often view international coalitions, in which nations pledge mutual protection and support, as a source of strength. The oldest military alliance in existence today, the agreement to maintain "perpetual friendship" between the United Kingdom and Portugal, was established in 1373. To date, the two nations have never fought against each other in a military campaign.

However, alliances do not always ensure peace and safety, nor are they always in the best interests of a nation. In his Farewell Address of 1796, George Washington warned his fellow countrymen in the United States that they should not "entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition." He went on to caution, "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, . . . a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government."[1]

While the pros and cons of strategic alliances between nations could be debated at length, one truth is strikingly clear when we read today's text: coalitions should never be formed when doing so defies the commandment or will of God.

History and experience should have taught Judah the importance of heeding God's prophets, who had repeatedly warned against forming alliances with the heathen nations around them. However, not only had God's people aligned themselves militarily with those nations, but they had forsaken God and begun worshipping the pagan idols of their allies. And the problem went far deeper than mere actions; even the hearts of the people had become proud and dissatisfied with their covenant God.

As a result, judgment was about to fall, and Ezekiel announced that it would come at the hands of Judah's "lovers"—the very nations with whom she had forged alliances. At God's direction, the prophet went on to graphically portray the people of Judah as an adulterous wife who was clearly deserving of retribution. The prophet showed Jerusalem the depth of her degradation by comparing her with her "sisters" of Sodom and Samaria. Ezekiel indicated that Judah was worse than either of these cities, so like them, she would be utterly ruined.

The judgment coming upon Judah would be so horrific that the people would feel there was no more hope for them. However, in the closing verses of today's text, God promised that Judah's terrible punishment would not last forever—the day would come when His judgment would end.

That promise is yet to be fulfilled, but it *will* come to pass. God is a God of mercy. Just as the prophesied judgment fell upon Jerusalem and Judah, one day God will establish a new and everlasting covenant with His people when Israel repents of her great sin. We can be assured that will occur, because God is ever faithful and true to His Word! And just as He will pardon Israel, He will still pardon any individual who will turn to Him in true repentance.

BACKGROUND

In verses 35-52 of chapter 16, judgment was prophesied against Israel's abominations described in the first part of the chapter. Because of her shameful behavior, God decreed that He would humble and humiliate her. The adornments she had paraded before the nations would be stripped away, and all would see what she was without God. The chapter concludes in verses 53-63 with another promise of God's final restoration of Israel.

In verses 35-43, Ezekiel relayed that the nations Jerusalem had loved and emulated would implement God's judgment against her. Jerusalem is allegorized throughout this passage as a woman. "All thy lovers" in verse 37 referred to her neighboring countries, courted as political allies and whose gods Jerusalem had adopted, while the "hated" were Israel's traditional enemies—the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. All these nations had positioned themselves to occupy the land of Judah even as Nebuchadnezzar was taking captives and leaving the land nearly vacant.

The punishments announced in verses 38-42 correspond to the punishments prescribed by Mosaic Law for adultery, child sacrifice, and murder. The stripping away of clothes and jewels in verse 39 characterized a betrayed husband removing marriage gifts. Verse 40 refers to the punishment for adultery. In verse 41, the burning of houses and all their goods

was the punishment decreed upon idolatrous cities; the "many women" was an allusion to neighboring city-states.

The judgment of God would bring an end to Israel's gross idolatry. A devastated Jerusalem would no longer commit adultery with idols, nor use the blessings of God as prostitute fees. As a result, God's reputation of righteousness would be recovered and His fury against Israel's ungodliness would abate.

In verses 44-52, Jerusalem was compared unfavorably to Samaria and Sodom. These cities had also despised their "husbands" and "children"—they too had grown weary of the gods of their fathers and had introduced the worship of new gods. The words *elder* and *younger* in verse 46 also mean "greater" and "smaller," and allude to Samaria to the north and Sodom to the south. "Her daughters" refers to satellite cities and villages within Sodom's jurisdiction. In verse 47, Ezekiel told Jerusalem, in essence, "Not only did you walk in their abominable ways, but in just a short period of time, you surpassed their corruption in everything you did!" Because Jerusalem had knowledge of God that Sodom had not possessed, Sodom's transgressions—great as they were—were less than Jerusalem's. "Hast justified" in verses 51-52 means that the flagrant sins of Jerusalem made Samaria and Sodom appear righteous by comparison.

Despite the certainty of the coming judgment, God promised He would not forget His covenant with Israel. Verses 53-63 are a promise of eventual restoration for Jerusalem and her sister nations. "Bring again their captivity" in verse 53 refers to a return of God's blessings, also mentioned in verse 55. In that day at the end of the age, Israel will be ashamed of her great sin and God will restore His covenant with her.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    3. Parables of Judah's condemnation
      b. The parable of Israel's unfaithfulness
        (5) The judgment of the Lord (16:35-43)
        (6) The extreme degradation of Israel (16:44-52)
        (7) The restoration of Sodom and Samaria (16:53-59)
        (8) The restoration of Israel (16:60-63)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are three of the judgments against Judah mentioned in verses 40-41?

2. What do you think was signified by God's pronouncement in verse 42 that "I will make my fury toward thee to rest"?

3. The text concludes in verses 60-63 with a message of hope. What impact do these verses have on us today?

CONCLUSION

God pronounced judgment upon Judah because she had broken her covenant with Him and turned to other nations for help. However, in His great mercy, He promised that one day Judah would be restored and He would establish an everlasting covenant with His people.

NOTES

1. George Washington, "Washington's Farewell Address 1796," *The Avalon Project*, accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.avalon.law.yale.edu.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 17:1-24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; A great eagle with great wings, long-winged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar." (Ezekiel 17:2-3)

Today's technology makes it possible for people around the world to enjoy many distant sights through webcams. On one such cam, viewers can observe an eagle nest near Decorah, Iowa, and learn a great deal about this fierce and fascinating bird by watching activities in and around the nest.

The eagles nesting in Iowa are bald eagles, one species among many large birds of prey that make up the Accipitridae family; hawks, kites, and vultures are also in this group. Bald eagles boast a wingspan of up to eight feet, making them among the biggest birds on earth. Due to their size and power, these predators are at the top of the avian food chain, sometimes feeding on animals as large as monkeys and sloths. Their amazing eyesight allows them to detect prey up to two miles away, and their hunting method involves surprising and overwhelming their next meal on the ground or the surface of the water.

In today's text, Ezekiel was told to give an allegory concerning eagles to the house of Israel. The imagery would have been a familiar one to the people as the eagle was used as a symbol of war and imperial power by many ancient civilizations, including the Egyptians, Hittites, and Babylonians. Given the eagle's intense glare, killer claws, and impressive wingspan, it is not surprising that it was widely regarded as the "king of birds," similar to the lion's designation as the "king of beasts." While a lion typically represented a kingdom, however, the eagle symbolized a whole empire. Roman legions going into battle carried standards with eagles at the top, and that eagle symbolized the legion's heart and soul. To "lose the eagle" meant the end of the legion, at least until the eagle emblem could be recaptured.

Ezekiel's prophetic allegory was to be both a riddle (in which a deeper meaning underlies the figurative form), and a parable (in which the illustration teaches a spiritual truth). The two eagles in the allegory represented two world superpowers: Babylon and Egypt. Ezekiel explained that God would bring severe judgment on King Zedekiah because he had not honored the covenant he had made with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Despite whatever assurances the Egyptian Pharaoh gave to Zedekiah, he and his armies would be of no help at all to Judah against the Babylonians. That alliance had been prohibited by God, and as a result, Zedekiah's fate was sealed and Judah would be conquered completely.

However, Ezekiel's prophecy ended in hope. In the concluding verses of our text, God promised that He was not finished with Israel. After the failure of the two great "eagles" to establish the nation of Israel under their powerful supervision, God promised that one day He himself would plant the nation "in the mountain of the height of Israel." There it would grow and thrive, offering protection to all nations.

We know that day is coming during the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Then, all who come to the Messiah will find peace and safety. That wonderful hope, first expressed to the captive people of Judah, can be ours as well!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 17, God once again referred to the kingdom and tribe of Judah as the house of Israel as a whole. While the previous chapter had focused on the nation's spiritual and moral failure, in chapter 17 the prophet addressed her political folly. Ezekiel presented a prophetic parable (verses 1-10) and explained it (verses 11-21). He also prophesied the restoration of the Davidic line through the coming Kingdom of Christ (verses 22-24).

Ezekiel's "riddle" was a prophetic warning relayed through symbolism. The "great eagle" was Nebuchadnezzar, pictured as a mighty bird of prey. "Great wings" symbolized Babylon's extensive reach throughout the land. "Divers colours" referenced the diversity of people, languages, and cultures that made up the Babylonian empire. "Lebanon" referred to Jerusalem, where the royal palace was richly decorated with Lebanese cedar wood. The "highest branch of the cedar" in verse 3 was a reference to Jehoiachin, a descendant of the royal house of David who had reigned briefly in Judah but had already been taken into Babylonian captivity. The "land of traffick" and "city of merchants" of verse 4 symbolized Babylon. "The seed of the land" referred to Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed or "planted" as puppet king of Judah in Jehoiachin's place. God's intention was that the vine (Israel) would flourish under the protection of Babylon. The phrases "of low stature" and "turned toward" in verse 6 referred to Israel's subjection to and dependency on Nebuchadnezzar.

The second eagle, described in verse 7, also had large wings, depicting another powerful empire. This bird represented Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt. The vine preferred the second eagle, so its roots and branches began to grow in that direction. In verse 9, the question "Shall it prosper?" was rhetorical and referred to Zedekiah's breaking of his oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, when he began plotting with Egypt. The second question, "Shall he not pull up the roots thereof?" referred to Nebuchadnezzar's dethroning Zedekiah.

In verse 12, the king who was taken to Babylon was Jehoiachin, who had been carried captive to Babylon with his princes several years earlier. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin's paternal uncle Zedekiah from Jehoiachin's family ("the king's seed") and set him up as king of Judah in Jehoiachin's place. Zedekiah swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and initially served him.

According to verse 14, God's purpose, which had been revealed to Zedekiah by Jeremiah, was to humble Judah and to preserve the people through their subjection to Babylon (see Jeremiah 32:1-5, 37). However, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar's rule and, therefore, against God's rule. He conspired with Egypt to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar, but Egypt broke the agreement and did not come to defend Jerusalem. "Given his hand" in verse 18 referred to making a sworn covenant. In verse 19, the Lord referenced "mine oath" because Nebuchadnezzar required Zedekiah to swear in the name of Jehovah; similarly, He alluded to "my covenant" because Israel's subjection to Babylon was His decreed will, as Zedekiah was aware.

Although Zedekiah would forfeit his sovereignty because of his breach of faith, God would not let the line of David be forever destroyed. Verses 22-24 are widely considered to prophesy the earthly establishment of the Messiah. The use of "I" emphasizes that God alone will fulfill this prophecy, rather than working through an intermediary such as Nebuchadnezzar. The "high cedar" of verse 22 is a reference to the royal house of David, and the tender twig that Jehovah breaks off and plants is the Messiah himself. The high and eminent mountain is Jerusalem where the Messiah will reign, and His Kingdom will become a shelter for all who come to Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    3. Parables of Judah's condemnation
      b. The parable of Israel's unfaithfulness
        (5) The judgment of the Lord (16:35-43)
        (6) The extreme degradation of Israel (16:44-52)
        (7) The restoration of Sodom and Samaria (16:53-59)
        (8) The restoration of Israel (16:60-63)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 3-4, what did the first great eagle in Ezekiel's prophecy take?

2. What do you think the withering of the plant by the east wind signified (verse 10)?

3. In what ways does the prophecy of the Messiah, the tender twig that will one day be planted upon the mountain of the height of Israel, impact our lives?

CONCLUSION

Though the Children of Israel failed God and looked to other nations for help, God will fulfill His promise to establish a kingdom under the Messiah that will grow and become a shelter for all who come to Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 18:1-32

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." (Ezekiel 18:21)

God is looking for people who will repent of their sins and turn their hearts toward Him. Miguel, one of our pastors in the Philippines, experienced this personally. He was brought up in a religious home where they had many prayer books, but the Bible was not one of them. He never heard the Word of God preached in its fullness. After attending college and doing on-the-job training, he took a position as a merchant mariner with the National Shipping Agency of the Philippines.

He testifies, "Life on the sea was boring at times, and I had much time to think. One day, I wondered if I was worthy to meet the Lord if something were to happen to me on the ship. But even though I worried about my eternal fate, I continued sinning. I drank much wine, and when we went ashore, I went to bars and nightclubs. Filthy words came out of my mouth, and my mind was full of sinful thoughts. Once, when I was drunk, I opened a Bible and my eyes fell on words about drunkenness. I was really convicted for my wrongdoings and could not forget what I had read.

"One day, after my watch was over, I could feel in my heart that the Holy Spirit was speaking to me. I locked the door of my room and took down a book about the new birth. I read about when Jesus told Nicodemus, 'Ye must be born again,' and words about repentance and forgiveness of sins.

"Then I prayed with all my heart. It seemed as if I saw Jesus on the Cross with the Blood coming down from His hands and feet. I hid my face in my pillow, and tears flowed down my cheeks as I told the Lord I was not worthy of Him. I felt full of the darkness of sin, but then I heard a Voice saying, 'My Blood was shed for the forgiveness of your sins.' I cried like a little boy and asked God to forgive me. When I reached out in faith and believed that He had done so, peace and joy came into my heart. In a moment, I knew I was saved through His precious Blood that was shed on Calvary for me.

"From the time God saved me, He kept me living a Christian life on the vessels I sailed on. The temptations were really great because a seaman's life takes him away from home, loved ones, and church. But day by day, God made it possible for me to overcome these temptations and live a victorious life for Him."

Miguel did exactly what today's focus verse addresses—he turned from his sins. And the change God made in his heart has lasted through the years. Since he retired from being a ship's officer, he has been serving God in his homeland.

Still today, God extends the invitation for pardon to those who will turn from their sins and seek Him. This gives hope for anyone who needs forgiveness from God.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, Ezekiel corrected a misconception regarding individual responsibility by refuting a proverbial saying. By divine inspiration, he made it clear that each person would be judged according to his own sins; there was neither inherited judgment nor reward. The wicked individual would die, no matter how righteous his parents and no matter if he himself had once been good. Conversely, God promised life to the righteous man, no matter how wicked his parents, and even if he himself had once been sinful. These judgments proved God's righteous fairness and were intended to incite sincere individual repentance.

The proverb cited in verse 2 and also quoted in Jeremiah 31:29-30 was a common saying that the current generation would be punished for their forefathers' offences. Believing this allowed the people to excuse their own sins in light of their fathers' failures. Ezekiel made it clear that descendants would not be punished for the sins of their ancestors and that they were responsible if they perpetuated their ancestors' sins.

The righteous acts listed in verses 5-9 included duties to God under the Law and moral obligations to one's fellowman that were in addition to the Law. The phrase "eaten upon the mountains" in verse 6 implies participating in an idolatrous feast.

In verses 10-13, the prophet explained that the righteousness of a father does not protect an unrighteous son from judgment. The phrase "if he beget a son" in verse 10 should be understood as "now suppose the righteous man has a son." The subsequent list of sins are not hypothetical and are individually segregated, indicating that even one of these sins was sufficient to condemn the unrighteous son.

Verses 14-20 outline the opposite scenario. The son with an unrighteous father who refrains from committing his father's sins will live, but the father will be judged for his own sins. "The soul that

sinneth, it shall die" in verse 20 repeats a key theme of this passage, and concludes the correcting of this common proverbial saying, restating that each individual carries the consequences of his own actions.

Verses 21-29 present a clear refuting of the false doctrine of eternal security. Verses 21-22 indicate that a wicked person can turn from his sinful ways and become righteous. Sins repented of and turned away from will not be remembered against the one who has been made righteous. The rhetorical question in verse 23 is emphatically answered in verse 32; it makes clear that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Verse 24 asserts that just as past sins will not be remembered against the righteous, when an individual turns away from righteousness and back to sin, his former righteous acts will not be remembered and he will be judged for his iniquity. "Equal" in verse 25 denotes a balanced weight or measure, demonstrating that God's behavior toward man is just and impartial. In verses 26-29, the prophet reiterates these principles regarding the results of righteousness and unrighteousness.

Verses 30-32 contain a final appeal for individual repentance. The plea of verse 31 points back to the promise previously given in Ezekiel 11:19 of a new spirit and a changed heart.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    4. Instruction concerning individual responsibility (18:1-32)
      a. The principle stated (18:1-4)
      b. The principle illustrated (18:5-20)
      c. The necessity of repentance (18:21-29)
      d. The exhortation to repentance (18:30-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What does God promise to a person who is "just" (verse 9)?

2. What are some of the dangers of blaming one's own wrongs on others?

3. In verse 31 Ezekiel said, "Make you a new heart." Since we cannot change our hearts, how does this come about?

CONCLUSION

God is still calling sinners to repentance. For anyone who needs the Lord, today is the day to turn to Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 19:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, And say, What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions." (Ezekiel 19:1-2)

When I was in sixth grade, my creative writing class did a unit on figurative language. I learned that an allegory is a narrative in which a character, place, or event is used to teach a lesson about life, or to deliver a broader message about actual issues and occurrences.

One example we studied was the children's book titled *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss. In it, a boy learns how an imaginary creature, the Lorax, lived in a beautiful valley filled with Truffula trees until a Thneed factory took over and killed all the trees. Written in the late 1960s at the beginning of the environmental movement, the book picturesquely expressed Dr. Seuss' view on pollution, anti-consumerism, and the impact on society when natural resources are wasted.

It was interesting to review some of my favorite books and identify those that were allegorical or symbolic in nature. Many see *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis as a religious allegory. In it, Aslan the lion represents Christ, and the White Witch represents evil. *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan is another famous spiritual allegory. It tells the story of a man's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, representative of a Christian's journey to Heaven.

Ezekiel used more symbolism and allegory than any other Old Testament prophet, but the viewpoints he expressed were not his own. They were divinely given messages from God. In today's text, there is a dual allegory, in which the lioness and the vine symbolize the nation of Israel. These allegories are presented as "lamentations"—songs of mourning for the royal leadership during Judah's final tragic days.

In the prophet's account of two lions, the lioness represented Israel or Jerusalem in the community of nations. Her whelps, or cubs, were the princes mentioned in verse 1—the final kings of Judah. Though the lioness mother had attempted to raise strong offspring, Ezekiel's lamentation revealed that her enemies would prevail and the cubs would be taken captive. In this brief allegory, the prophet made it clear that because these two kings of Judah had ignored God's commandments, He would cut them down after brief reigns.

Next, Ezekiel depicted Judah as a great vine that was destroyed in various ways: it was plucked up and cast down (representing armed conflict), dried up by an eastern wind (siege warfare and famine), stripped of fruit (death, attrition), consumed by fire (conquered), and transplanted (exiled). The complete collapse and end of the nation was soon to come.

Ezekiel's task was to shatter illusions of safety with his hard-hitting words of doom. God's coming judgment was certain, and these vivid word pictures were another effort to arrest the attention of the exiles in Babylon and make it impossible for them to ignore what was coming.

How tragic it is when a person's wrong choices prevent him from becoming what he could have been! That was the case with the rulers of Israel, and Ezekiel lamented how these rulers had forfeited their potential. Their resulting destruction should be a warning to us. Let us think soberly and clearly about where our choices are leading us, and do our best to ensure that our decisions align with God's desire for our lives.

BACKGROUND

In this chapter, Ezekiel mourned for the House of David's pending ruin and exile from the land. A lamentation, referenced in verse 1, was a type of poem sung at funerals that recognized the life and behaviors of the deceased. Delivered through similitudes, Ezekiel's poem provided justification for God's coming judgment against Judea and Jerusalem, and was a finale to the preceding prophecies.

Lions were a prominent icon of that era, and in verses 1-9, the prophet used a lioness to symbolize the nation of Judah. The lions that she laid down among were the surrounding Gentile nations. The first cub, mentioned in verses 3-4, likely was a reference to Jehoahaz, Josiah's youngest son, who was taken prisoner to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho. In verse 5, the phrase "When she saw that she had waited" implies the waiting was in vain. This may refer to a period during which the people anticipated Jehoahaz would return from Egypt, but he did not.

Scholars indicate the second cub in verses 5-9 is more difficult to identify. Several kings followed Jehoahaz—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. It is possible that the second cub represents all these kings, illustrating how they lost their authority and power to Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 10 is the beginning of another simile, in which Ezekiel used the figure of a vine to represent Judah; the phrase "in thy blood" denotes a bloodline

or ancestry. Together with the reference to "waters," this indicates Israel's fruitful and privileged state in the past; this was particularly true during the reigns of David and Solomon. From this "mother," there arose powerful native kings, which were exalted beyond what the size or wealth of the country justified. The phrase "appeared in her height" in verse 11 indicates the nation's ascendancy was observable from afar. However, the nation's end would come when the "rods" (rulers) would be plucked up, broken, withered, and consumed by fire. The people were transplanted into the "wilderness"—to places outside of Israel's borders where Jewish life could not thrive. Verse 14 states that a fire went out from her own rods, indicating that the royal house itself, ending with Zedekiah, brought this destruction upon the nation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  C. The cause of Judah's destruction
    5. The lamentation of Ezekiel (19:1-14)
      a. For the princes (19:1-9)
        (1) For Jehoahaz in Egypt (19:1-4)
        (2) For Jehoiachin in Babylon (19:5-9)
      b. For the land (19:10-14)
        (1) The reign of Zedekiah (19:10-11)
        (2) The ruin of Zedekiah (19:12-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who and what was Ezekiel lamenting in this chapter?

2. What is implied by the description in verse 7?

3. Verse 10 specifies that Israel had been "planted by the waters." In what ways could that be said of you, and what responsibility does it indicate?

CONCLUSION

Ezekiel's allegories mourned the fact that there would be no escape from the coming judgment. They challenge us to be sure our choices align with God's will and purpose for our lives.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 20:1-29

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out." (Ezekiel 20:14)

Some years ago, I had a discussion with one of our children concerning the word "reputation." The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines *reputation* as "the overall quality or character as seen or judged by people in general; recognition by other people of some characteristic or ability; a place in public esteem or regard." Our child had behaved in a way that had hurt his good reputation, and was suffering the consequences in various ways. My reminder to him included a practical definition that I have used on occasion, "A reputation is simply a series of choices and consequences. If you want a different reputation, you must make different choices, and you must do so over a period of time long enough to change others' perception of you." Thankfully, our child saw the reasoning behind that statement and began to make different choices, including the all-important choice to repent and follow the Lord.

Today's text brings out that when God could find no basis in the people of Israel for extending to them His mercy and grace, He did so for His reputation—for His own name's sake. All of God's dealings with Israel occurred before the eyes of the surrounding nations. Israel was to be the agent through whom all nations would come to know that He was the true God, but Israel had failed in this. Since God's divine reputation depended on the fate and welfare of His people, He had continued to be merciful to Israel so that His great name would not be profaned.

This portion of chapter 20 offers insight into two contrasting reputations, which Ezekiel reviewed for the elders of Israel. The first was that of God the Creator, who had chosen Israel over the other nations, delivering them from Egyptian enslavement, giving them a pattern for righteous living, providing them with a flourishing new land, and offering them His rest. The second reputation was that of the people of Israel. Their choices incurred a far different reputation. They chose rebellion and rampant idolatry, refusing to follow God's pattern for living and despising God's justice, righteousness, and rest.

Still, God had remained faithful, choosing to work not because of Israel's reputation but because of His own. Though He had sent judgment for disobedience, He also offered mercy for the repentant. His discipline in their wilderness experience had been a way of teaching Israel of His great holiness and love for them.

We also have reputations, and they will be based upon our choices and the consistency of those choices over time. As we read of Israel's failure to honor God, and how they forfeited their blessings and opportunity to be a witness to surrounding nations, let us take care to follow God in obedience. We want our lives to be a credit to God's name, so that those who are observing our choices and actions can see the reflection of God in us.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 20-23 are a message in which God rehearsed His past dealings with Israel to impress upon Ezekiel that His judgments regarding Israel were fair and righteous. Delivery of this message occurred seven years after the beginning of Ezekiel's Babylonian exile, just over two years after he began prophesying.

In chapter 20, the elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord since they looked to Ezekiel as their intermediary. However, God refused to take any questions from them. In verse 4, God's question to Ezekiel, "Wilt thou judge . . . ?" was asking, in effect, "Are you going to plead for them?" What the elders came to inquire about is not recorded, but clearly Ezekiel was not to plead their case when God had already judged the people for their apostasy.

In verses 5-9, at God's direction, Ezekiel responded to the elders by recounting Israel's sins of the past, pointing first to their rebellion in Egypt. The phrase "lifted up mine hand" appears three times in verses 5 and 6. It originated from the ancient custom of lifting the right hand in supplication and appeal. As a plea for God's witness, it became a figure of speech meaning, "I swear." In these verses, it refers to God's sworn covenant with Israel to bring them into the "land flowing with milk and honey"—the promise originally given to Abraham and his covenant descendants. While enslaved in Egypt, Israel refused to forsake the idols of that heathen nation. Verse 9 indicates that God did not refrain from destroying the Children of Israel because of their merits but because doing so would have polluted His reputation in the eyes of the watching pagan nations.

According to verses 10-17, the generation delivered out of Egypt also was rebellious toward God. Though God had given them statutes to live by in order to separate Israel to Himself as a holy people, they continued to despise His commandments. The

"sabbaths" mentioned in verses 12 and 16 were the set feast days God had established for the people, including observance of the seventh day as a sabbath day of rest. While the keeping of these observances would not have made the people holy, doing so would have caused the watching nations to understand that God had a consecrated people. When the Israelites broke their covenant and disobeyed God's instructions, God determined to punish them. For the sake of His name (referenced in verses 9, 14, and 22) and His reputation to the Gentiles as a God of mercy, He refrained from destroying them. Instead, He determined that the disobedient generation would not enter the Promised Land.

The next generation received God's instructions and entered into a covenant with Him in the wilderness, but according to verses 18-29, they too were rebellious. Again, God refrained from general punishment for the sake of His reputation, but restated His prior judgment—that He would disperse disobedient Israel among the Gentile nations (see Deuteronomy 28:64). The word *gave* in verse 25 means "permitted or allowed," so verses 25-26 mean that God gave the people over to their delusions because they had rejected God's goodness and indulged their baser instincts, including sacrificing their firstborn children in pagan rituals.

In spite of this history of terrible failure, the people who entered and were currently living in the Promised Land had continued to practice idolatry "unto this day" (verse 29). This was especially appalling because it occurred within the land God had given them.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    1. The review of God's past dealings
      a. The inquiry of the elders (20:1-4)
      b. The rebellion in Egypt (20:5-9)
      c. The rebellion in the wilderness (20:10-17)
      d. The rebellion of the second generation (20:18-26)
      e. The rebellion in Canaan (20:27-29)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 7, what were the Israelites instructed to turn from?

2. In verses 9, 14, and 22, God protected His own reputation by not destroying Israel. Why do you think He did this?

3. What choices can we make that will protect our reputations as Christians?

CONCLUSION

God is honored when the choices we make and the reputation we earn reflect our commitment to Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 20:30-44

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you." (Ezekiel 20:31)

Our eight-year-old granddaughter comes to our home every weekday morning for homeschooling, and recently she has developed quite a fascination with figurative language. Together, we've come up with mental pictures of metaphors and similes, identified examples of personification, and laughed over clever puns and silly idioms. Recently, we took our first look at examples of rhetorical questions.

A rhetorical question is asked in order to make a point rather than obtain an answer. For example, if an exasperated person asks, "How many times do I have to tell you not to eat my dessert?" the questioner does not really want to know the number of times the directive must be repeated. Rather, the goal is to express frustration with the dessert thief's behavior—and ideally, change it!

In today's text, the elders in Babylon came to seek a word from God through Ezekiel. The prophet responded with the rhetorical question recorded in our focus verse, and then immediately answered the question himself. Through Ezekiel's words, God made it clear that He owed no special revelation to such a disobedient people. If the people of Israel wanted to hear God's voice and receive His guidance, they needed to obey what He had already revealed. Ezekiel's words seem to express surprise that those who had followed the rebellion of their ancestors and continued in sin would still expect to receive fresh revelations from God.

Ezekiel's blunt question helps us frame a Biblical perspective regarding how God will eventually judge evildoers in today's world. Would the God who refused the hypocritical worship of the people of Ezekiel's day overlook hypocrisy in contemporary society? Would a just God punish idolatry back then, but ignore it in those today who put their idols of money, power, and pleasure ahead of Him?

The answer to those two rhetorical questions is simple: of course not! God's nature and His requirements for a pure, holy people are eternal. They have not changed, nor will they ever change. If we want answers from God and His guidance in our lives, we must follow the instructions He has given us in His Word and walk in the path already revealed.

BACKGROUND

Today's text continues God's message to Ezekiel, in which He rehearsed His past dealings with Israel to impress upon Ezekiel that His judgments regarding Israel were fair and righteous. This message came seven years after the beginning of Ezekiel's exile in Babylon, and just over two years after Ezekiel began prophesying. In this portion of chapter 20, Ezekiel linked their forefathers' rebellion to that of the current generation (verses 30-32) and relayed a prophetic snapshot of Israel's end (verses 33-44).

The rhetorical questions in verses 30 and 31 challenged the elders visiting Ezekiel to acknowledge the historical and ongoing evidence of Israel's idolatry. The current generation was emulating the disobedience of their forefathers and perverting their worship, so when they sought answers from God, they were denied.

In verses 33-36, Ezekiel foretold God's plan for Israel's final purification. The descriptive phrases "mighty hand" and "stretched out arm" in verse 33 are frequently used in reference to God's mighty, liberating works for the Children of Israel. However, here they speak of the force with which God will again move to bring Israel to Himself. The plurality of "people" and "countries" in verse 34 indicates that the promised gathering and restoration was not a reference to deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, but a future gathering. Mirroring their former journey from Egypt to Canaan, this final gathering-in will occur through a wilderness experience. At that time, God will prove to Israel His love and faithfulness, and will "plead" His case (or settle His controversy) with Israel.

In verses 37-44, God promised a future restoration of the repentant. A shepherd had his sheep "pass under the rod" (verse 37) as they entered the sheepfold so he could inspect their condition and count them. A transition from one state to another is implied—in Israel's case, from a state of rebellion into the "bond" (or discipline) of the covenant. Through repentance, Israel would be purified, and those still rebellious would be destroyed, being taken out of the land of their shelter but not brought into Israel. Verse 39 imparts a powerful call to repentance, allowing the defiant to choose what they wished, but with clear delineations of what God would not accept.

The "holy mountain" referred to in verse 40 is Mount Moriah, which is also referred to in Scripture

as Mount Zion, and today, as the Temple Mount. Some Bible scholars suggest the phrase "all the house of Israel" in verse 40 refers to a united Israel and Judah. However, God typically does not differentiate between the two nations but sees only one Israel. Based on verse 41, that phrase more likely refers to the repentant who will be allowed to enter the land. These repentant ones become a "sweet savour"—an acceptable, sweet smelling sacrifice to God.

God's holiness will be confirmed before the nations of the world when all see how He brings Israel to repentance. Upon Israel's renewed obedience to their original covenant, God will fulfill His promise to them and they will fully possess the Promised Land. "There" in verse 43 refers to a place of spiritual restoration as well as occupancy of the Land.

In the phrase "there shall ye remember your ways" (verse 43), the word translated *remember* is the Hebrew word *zakar*. The meaning goes beyond simply recalling; it means "to acknowledge, take account of, or accept responsibility for." The "ways" that Israel will remember and loathe will not only be the sins of the current generation, but those that occurred throughout Israel's rebellious history, including their rejection of Christ as their Messiah.

God's great mercy is revealed by the fact that He had not entirely cut off Israel at any point, although their works deserved such judgment. Rather, He worked with them to bring them into full obedience—for His glory and the testimony of His works.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    1. The review of God's past dealings
      f. The rebellion in Ezekiel's day (20:30-32)
    2. The preview of God's future dealings (20:33-44)
      a. The regathering and purging (20:33-39)
      b. The restoration and repentance (20:40-44)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 39, what did God say the house of Israel should no longer do?

2. What evidence of Israel's restoration do you see in verse 43, and what Bible doctrine does this point to?

3. What are some steps we can take to ensure that we do not drift into placing something ahead of God in our lives?

CONCLUSION

If we desire God's help and guidance, we must be careful to obey the instructions He has given us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 20:45 through 21:32

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein." (Ezekiel 20:47)

Smoke billowed across the swamp toward our house. Though I was just ten years old at the time, I remember wondering who could be burning on such a hot July day—the temperature had already hit 105 degrees. My dad saw the smoke too, and a worried look crossed his face as the wind picked up and the smell of burning wood hit our noses. We owned twenty aces of property across the swamp where the smoke was shooting up. Could there be a fire on our property?

Dad leaped into action. Dashing toward his pickup truck, he almost flew into the driver's seat. I was right on his heels, and jumped into the back bed of the truck. As my dad raced along the back road that bordered our property, rocks and dust flew up behind us. I could tell from his driving that he was alarmed. Then we saw the flames. They were spreading rapidly from tree to tree, devouring the dry tinder before our eyes. Branches crackled and fell to the ground with a sound like fireworks, the sparks igniting the grass and brush. A dry wind was spreading the fire faster and faster. Without question, this was a massive, out-of-control fire.

For a moment, my dad and I gazed at the flaming inferno almost in shock. Then quickly, he turned the truck around and sped to the neighbors' to call the fire department. Thirty-two fire stations sent trucks to fight that fire, and it seemed like an eternity before they were able to subdue the flames. Nine fire trucks stayed with the smoldering fire through the night to watch for hot spots. One even parked below our house to make sure the sparks did not start another fire if they blew across the swamp. Many years later, I can still see and hear those crackling flames as I think back to that day.

In today's text, the prophet Ezekiel was told how God's judgment would fall on the people of Judah like a blazing fire that would devour everyone in its path. When the Babylonian army descended on Jerusalem, no one would be spared suffering. While the fire I experienced as a child eventually was extinguished, the fire of God's judgment would not be quenched because the Lord himself would kindle it. The Babylonian army would ultimately devour the city and its people because they had not listened to God nor kept His commandments.

The fire described in today's text reminds us that the day is coming when the world will experience the fiery judgment of God. There is comfort in knowing that when judgment falls, the righteous will be spared and escape the wrath that is to come. May God help us all to learn from the consequences that befell Judah, and make preparation now to avoid that terrible time.

BACKGROUND

Today's text continues God's message recorded in chapters 20-23, which emphasized that His judgments against Israel were fair and righteous. In this portion, Ezekiel used two symbols to represent God's soon-coming judgment and the destruction that would fall upon Jerusalem and Judah as a whole: a fire (Ezekiel 20:45-49) and a sword (Ezekiel 21:1-32).

Beginning with verse 45 of chapter 20, God told the prophet to "set thy face"—a charge to speak God's message with bold authority. Judah and Jerusalem, located "toward the south" (verse 46), were represented as a forest ready to be burned; Jerusalem was as full of people as the forest is full of trees. The coming "fire" of judgment would be kindled by God himself. According to verse 47, it would move quickly and indiscriminately, and would burn both the "green tree" and the "dry tree," indicating that everyone in the land would suffer from the devastation caused by the Chaldean invaders. In the final verse of chapter 20, Ezekiel expressed frustration that he was perceived as speaking in parables (or riddles), and as a result, the people refused to listen.

In chapter 21, God responded by giving a fuller explanation for the previous prophecy. Ezekiel was to address the people in Judah (called "land of Israel" in verse 3) and Jerusalem as if they were present before him; this clearly identifies the "south field" and "forest" mentioned in the previous chapter. "My sword" in verse 3 speaks of God turning His wrath upon Israel through Nebuchadnezzar's army, dispelling the false security of those who presumed they would be safe because they lived in the land of promise.

Ezekiel was to depict the horrors of the coming judgment with deep sighing, in groans that would express bitter anguish coming from his innermost being (see verse 6). When the people heard that the armies of Babylon had arrived, they would be completely overwhelmed—their hearts would melt, hands

would be feeble, spirits would faint, and knees would be weak as water.

Beginning with verse 8, the balance of the chapter has symmetry and cadence that would have carried emphasis and poignancy for the original hearers. Verses 8-13 give details of the coming sword, and its effect is described in verses 14-17. The Lord had given control of the sword of His judgment to Nebuchadnezzar, and both princes and common people would reap destruction. Verses 9-11 and 28 refer to the sword being "furbished" or polished, "that it may glitter." This seems to indicate that the public nature of this destruction was to be a warning and a demonstration of God's justice.

In verse 12, Ezekiel was instructed to strike his thigh; this was a cultural expression of grief, alarm, and horror. The striking of hands together in verse 14 was a signal for an action to commence. The strength of the sword was to be "doubled," indicating that judgment would be expanded, causing those in the city to lose all courage to prepare a defense. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar (identified in verse 9) was given complete liberty to slay wherever he chose.

Nebuchadnezzar's sword would destroy Jerusalem and then the Ammonites. Ezekiel was directed to prepare a sketch of two roads leading away from Babylon together. The roads were to diverge, and there he was to mark signs to Jerusalem and to Rabbath (representing Ammon). This illustrated that Nebuchadnezzar's army would pause to decide which nation to attack first, and he would choose by using fortune-telling practices — selecting at random one arrow from two marked with the cities' names, consulting a pagan image, and examining the health of a sacrificed animal's liver. Verse 22 indicates the choice fell upon Jerusalem, and describes the methods of assault used against the city.

Verses 23-27 indicate that Nebuchadnezzar's coming would remind Zedekiah and the leaders of their betrayal of their "sworn oaths" (see 2 Chronicles 36:13). Although they had pledged allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, they had then conspired with Egypt, making new and contradictory oaths. For that iniquity, they would be delivered into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, and all the emblems of the priesthood and royalty would be removed from Jerusalem.

Because of the Ammonites' perpetual scorn of God's chosen people, they would be punished with complete extermination (verses 28-32). No trace of them would be left behind and there would be no restoration.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    3. The summary of God's present dealings
      a. The symbols of Israel's judgment (20:45—21:32)
        (1) The symbol of the forest fire (20:45-49)
        (2) The symbol of the sword (21:1-32)
          (a) The sword drawn (21:1-5)
          (b) The sword prepared (21:6-17)
          (c) The sword used (21:18-32)
            [1] Against Jerusalem (21:18-27)
            [2] Against Ammon (21:28-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why do you think God used the symbol of a forest fire when telling of Israel's soon-coming judgment?

2. In Ezekiel 20:49, what did Ezekiel tell God that the people said of him?

3. What steps do we need to take to avoid the destruction that will come as God's judgment upon the wickedness of this world?

CONCLUSION

If we follow the Lord's commandments, we will be able to escape the judgment that will come and destroy this world.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 22:1-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30)

Screech! Thump! Looking out our front window, my husband and I saw a car had come around the corner too quickly, hit the curb, bounced up onto the sidewalk across the street, and slammed into our neighbors' arborvitae hedge. Surprisingly, the vehicle was still operational and could be driven away. However, there was a gaping hole in the hedge, and it was years before the branches grew back enough to cover that empty spot. Since the hedge was there to provide a protective barrier, the gap in it defeated its purpose.

Today's text describes a spiritual gap, and one that was of far greater consequence than a hole in a physical hedge. God enumerated for Ezekiel the sins of the Children of Israel. Their civic and religious leaders—their princes, priests, and prophets—had spurned Him and His commandments, and the people themselves had sorely transgressed His Law. Amid all this corruption and rebellion, God looked for someone who would bring strength, stability, and security to Israel. He looked for someone who would intercede for the nation—one who would, through prayer, stand in the gap left by those who had failed God, and whose prayers would hold back God's judgment. Tragically, He found no one.

In our time also, God is looking for those who will purpose to step into the gap, and be a strong and prayerful witness in an ungodly world. He is looking for people who will determine to live for Him in schools and workplaces. One veteran in our church used to tell about a young man on the job whose life condemned his, and it was that testimony that eventually led him to a church meeting where he was saved. Another man tells how his secretary's refusal to lie for him was a witness that ultimately led to his salvation.

God is looking for mothers who will say, "I'll step into the gap. I will take time to read the Bible and pray with my children. I will make sure they know about God, and do all that I can to help them live for Him." An elderly man who was not serving God when he was young says that he is glad his mother kept on praying. Her prayers ruined many "good times" he expected to have while following sinful pursuits, but those prayers paid off when he was saved. Now he says, "Where would I be today if she hadn't stood for God?"

God is looking for fathers who will stand for Him, even if it means personal sacrifice. Years ago, a young father who owned a small farm in Eastern Washington heard the Gospel message through some Apostolic Faith people who visited his town. Within two weeks, he sold his farm and all his equipment at a loss, and moved his family across the state so he could raise his son and two daughters in a church where the whole Word of God was taught. As a result, four generations of his descendants have followed him in serving the Lord.

God is looking for grandparents who will stand in the gap by praying for and with their grandchildren. One young mother in our congregation relates that she lived with her Christian grandmother for about a year after her parents divorced, and every morning and evening, they would read the Bible and pray together. She says, "I purposed in my heart that if I could be even a portion of what Grandma was for God, He would be pleased with me."

Our examples and commitments matter! Whatever our roles in life, God has a place in His spiritual hedge for us. Will we purpose to fill it? Each of us has the opportunity to stand in a spiritual gap and be a strong and prayerful witness for Him.

BACKGROUND

Today's text continues God's message in chapters 20-23, which emphasized that His judgments against Israel were fair and righteous. In this portion of the message, God explained why Jerusalem's judgment would come (verses 1-16), how it would come (verses 17-22), and who would be judged (verses 23-31). These are three separate oracles, each starting with the phrase, "And the word of the LORD came unto me . . ."

In the first oracle, recorded in verses 1-16, God inspired Ezekiel to enumerate the sins of Jerusalem, which God referred to as "the bloody city" (verse 2). The many crimes committed there showed disregard for human life. Beginning with verse 6, wicked leaders who had abused their power and put innocent people to death received a specific rebuke. They had dishonored parents and treated vulnerable members of society with contempt. The "stranger" (meaning travelers) had suffered extortion and fraud at their hands. Furthermore, they had disdained sacred objects and memorial celebrations (referred to as "sabbaths" in verse 8). Malicious charges and false testimony had been given with intent to murder.

In verse 9, the phrase "eat upon the mountains" refers to sacrificing and partaking in idolatrous feasts that included lewd sexual rituals and even incest. The final sin the leaders of Israel were condemned for was extortion committed against their own community.

In verse 13, God called for the punishment to start by smiting with His hand, a gesture indicating scorn and rebuke. He pledged to oppose these corrupt leaders of Jerusalem and purge away their uncleanness. Since they had forfeited the right to dwell in the land by their own sinful conduct, they would be dispersed (verse 15).

In the second oracle, beginning at verse 17, God compared the coming punishment to the refining of metal. The people of Israel had once been regarded as God's precious possession. However, because of their sin and rebellion, God now regarded them as dross—the worthless impurities that come from the refining of metal. Verse 19 tells that the refining furnace would be in "the midst of Jerusalem." Because Nebuchadnezzar practiced a scorched-earth policy as he marched toward Jerusalem, the people from throughout the countryside would flee to the walled city. In this manner, God would "gather" the people for a purifying process that would take place there. However, there was a glimmer of hope in this severe judgment. Just as the refining of silver or other precious metals is done to purify, God's purpose was purification rather than irrevocable destruction.

Since all in the kingdom had contributed to the national guilt, the third oracle brought out that all in the land would suffer punishment. The guilty parties were noted. The false prophets of Israel had worked together in a conspiracy, taking from the people instead of serving them. They were responsible for the multiplication of widows in the land because the men had gone out to battle against the will of the Lord. The priests had disregarded God's instruction to differentiate between the holy and the unholy, and had ignored desecrations, ultimately blurring the people's perception of moral distinctions. Jerusalem's princes were unjust in their judiciary and civic duties, having destroyed lives for profit. The false prophets whitewashed the seriousness of the situation with lying words, which were characterized as "untempered morter" in verse 28. Even the "people of the land" had participated in this universal corruption. The defilement was so widespread that no one could be found who would cause the Lord to reconsider His judgment.

Verses 30-31 indicate the importance of intercessory prayer. The sins of Jerusalem had become so prevalent that when God sought for one among them who would intercede for the sinful city, none could be found. Thus, He would move forward with His judgment upon the people. This reveals that even the prayers of one intercessor can bring a reprieve from God's judgment against sin.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    3. The summary of God's present dealings
      b. The message of Israel's judgment (22:1-31)
        (1) The cause of judgment (22:1-12)
        (2) The declaration of judgment (22:13-22)
        (3) The object of judgment (22:23-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What reaction did God say the neighboring countries would have regarding Israel (verse 4)?

2. Why do you think God values intercession so highly?

3. How might you be able to stand in the gap for God today?

CONCLUSION

God is looking for people today who will stand in the gap and pray that His judgment will be held back. Will we do it?

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 23:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: . . . And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah." (Ezekiel 23:2, 4)

Siblings can have an impact on one another, whether for good or for bad. A lady named Mary relates that when she and her younger sister were children, they visited various churches. In grade school, she asked one of her teachers who was a Christian what church he attended. He gave her a tract and told her the location of an Apostolic Faith Church in the area. She and her sister began attending services there, and before long her sister had prayed and received the experiences of salvation, sanctification, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet Mary was content to merely attend church, and she neglected to seek God.

When Mary's sister was eighteen years old, she was struck by a car and suffered a severe brain injury. While she was hospitalized, Mary stayed with her, and many people prayed for her. Some came to visit, including the school teacher who had given them the invitation to church.

During one of the teacher's visits, he told Mary that her sister's condition was actually better than Mary's because the sister was saved and ready to meet God, and Mary was not. That comment really impacted Mary because the injury had left her sister with almost no ability to function. God used the teacher's words to draw Mary's heart, and by her sister's hospital bed, she prayed, confessing her sins and asking the Lord to be merciful to her. God made a change in Mary that was the turning point in her life.

Her sister passed away shortly after. That was a very sad time for Mary, but she came to understand that her sister had everything she needed from God, and was ready to go to Heaven. Mary learned a great lesson from her younger sister's example.

In today's text, God compared the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Jerusalem) to sisters, and described how Judah followed in the sinful steps of Israel. He said that Judah should have learned from Israel's example that God would punish rebellion and idolatry, but she failed to do so. What a contrast to individuals like Mary who learned a spiritually beneficial lesson from watching her sibling!

People often learn by example and are influenced by those around them. We want to learn lessons from others, whether they be siblings or associates, because it is much easier to learn by observation than by painful experience. In addition, we want others to be able to benefit from seeing our lives. People are watching each of us. The prayer of our hearts should be that they will be inspired to follow God by what they see in us.

BACKGROUND

This portion of chapter 23 is the first part of the conclusion of God's message to Ezekiel that began in chapter 20, which presents reasons for God's judgment upon Israel. The sins of the capital cities of Samaria (representing the Northern Kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (representing all of the Southern Kingdom of Judah) are described—specifically, their alliances with heathen nations such as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. In verses 1-4, Samaria and Judah are characterized as adulterous sisters, referred to as Aholah (Samaria) and Aholibah (Jerusalem representing Judah). The harlotries of Samaria are described in verses 5-10, and those of Judah in verses 11-21. The coarse language of this chapter reflects God's repugnance at their spiritual adulteries.

The sisters' names were allegorical. *Aholah* means "her own tabernacle" and refers to Samaria creating its own worship center. *Aholibah* means "my tabernacle [is] in her," as Jerusalem held the sanctuary of the Lord. God's assertion in verse 4 that "they were mine" is a reference to the solemn covenant He had entered into with the people. However, even during their slavery in Egypt, the people had begun practicing idolatry and spiritual fornication (called "whoredoms" in verse 3).

Verses 5-10 record the spiritual harlotry of Samaria (Aholah). Desiring the strength of the Assyrian army, Samaria disdained God's protection and made political alliances with the Assyrians, referred to as her "lovers" in verse 5. Political agreements of that region were often expressed in terms of an intimate relationship, and such a relationship required the adoption of the ally's deities in joint worship. Samaria willingly prostituted herself in this manner, adding the full scope of Assyrian idolatry to the earlier idolatry she had practiced in Egypt (see Ezekiel 20:6-8). Since Samaria had forsaken His protection, God ordained that her punishment would come from the Assyrians, the very power with which she was infatuated. What had started as a relationship

of mutual consent ended with Samaria's conquest and captivity by Assyria.

Verses 11-21 reveal that instead of learning from the consequences that had befallen Samaria, Judah (Aholibah) committed even greater fornications. Judah also made political alliances with the Assyrians, and became enamored with Assyria's gods and heathen practices (see 2 Kings 16:7-15). Judah was as adulterous as Israel, and her sins ultimately took her even further into idolatry.

Next, the splendor of Chaldea enticed Judah to betrayal. The "men portrayed upon the wall" in verse 14 were likely bas-relief depictions of war scenes and triumphal processions, such as those found by archaeologists in excavations at Calah, Dur-Sharrukin, and Nineveh. Judah wanted to align herself with such an impressive ally, and so again betrayed her covenant with God by sending ambassadors to establish further political alliances.

Judah's behavior revealed her willingness to compromise with and pander to her allies, but it also displayed her vulnerabilities (referred to as "nakedness" in verse 18). While desiring power and position, she ended up experiencing degradation and invasion—though still without repentance. Her rampant sin disgusted God, who disassociated Himself from Judah, just as He had from Israel.

Instead of returning to the Lord for protection and leadership, Judah increased her political and religious philandering. Next, she looked to Egypt, the other power of that day, for security and advancement, forming impure connections with that nation in a repeat of her past behaviors. The word "paramours" in verse 20 refers to Judah's supposed allies—Assyria, Chaldea, Babylon, and Egypt. The portrayal is of Judah lusting after partnerships that were beyond her ability to control or direct.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    3. The summary of God's present dealings
      c. The parables of Israel's judgment
        (1) The parable of the two sisters
          (a) The identification of the sisters (23:1-4)
          (b) The harlotries of Aholah with Assyria (23:5-10)
          (c) The harlotries of Aholibah (23:11-21)
            [1] With Assyria (23:11-13)
            [2] With Babylon (23:14-18)
            [3] With Egypt (23:19-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was God's attitude toward Israel and Judah at this time (verse 18)?

2. What can we do to prevent ourselves from being drawn away as Israel and Judah were?

3. What are some beneficial lessons you have learned by the example of others?

CONCLUSION

Are we learning from those around us? And what kind of example are we to our siblings, other family members, and our associates? God will help us if we do our best.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 23:22-49

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thus saith the Lord God; Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much. Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria." (Ezekiel 23:32-33)

In today's focus verses, the "cup" refers to the judgments of God that would come upon Judah because of her persistent refusal to heed the warnings God had given her. Furthermore, she had seen the punishment poured out on the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and yet had continued in her sin. She had chosen to drink from the cup of sin, and thus would have to drink from the cup of God's judgment.

When Rose Cummings was just a little girl, her mother helped her begin to drink of the cup of sin. She later testified, "I was born in England, and from the time I was just a tiny tot, my mother took me to the saloon. When I was old enough to reach the bar, we stood at it together and drank. She was an infidel and used to say, 'All the Hell we get, we get right here on earth, and when we die, we die like a dog.' Because of this, I did not believe in Hell and decided I was going to have a good time—to enjoy whatever money and liquor could bring. Instead, I found misery and remorse.

"One day when I was drunk on the street, I was picked up and put in a patrol wagon. I was told I would go to jail if I did not get off the streets permanently, so I went into a reformatory for six months. It did not do me any good. The minute I got out and had a little money, I went right back into sin.

"Eventually I traveled five thousand miles from England to Portland, Oregon, and thought I could turn over a new leaf, but I became worse. I married a man who owned a saloon, when I had already had four husbands in England. For the next six years, I was hardly ever sober. Eventually, my body broke down and I could not do a day's work.

"One day when I was forty years old, I was handed an Apostolic Faith paper. In it, I read about a drunken woman who was saved. I said, 'If God gave her a chance, surely He will give me one.' In a sick and miserable condition, I went to an Apostolic Faith meeting. My lungs were diseased from the life of sin, and I could scarcely talk. The people there prayed for me and God marvelously healed me. I said, 'O God, if You can heal my body, You can save my soul!' I went to the altar of prayer, but the mountains of sin seemed too high. God showed me how I had wronged others. I thought He could never forgive me for the things I had done, but when I finished praying an honest prayer, He spoke peace to my soul. He saved me and instantly delivered me from alcohol.

"I wrote to my eighty-year-old mother in England about what God had done for me and sent her an Apostolic Faith paper. After reading it, she repented of her sins and God saved her, too. For thirty-three years, I have proved there is power in the Blood of Jesus. God restored my health and strength. I used to go to bed in fear and dread, but now I lie down in peace and rest. In the morning I wake up and praise God."

After drinking deeply of the cup of sin, Rose made a good choice and repented. By seeking and experiencing God's mercy, she avoided the cup of His judgment. Each of us must choose whether or not we will follow God. How blessed it is to decide to do so!

BACKGROUND

This portion of chapter 23 concludes God's message to Ezekiel that began in chapter 20, and presents reasons for God's judgment upon Israel. The characterization of the capital cities of Samaria (representing all the Northern Kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (representing all of the Southern Kingdom of Judah) as adulterous sisters is continued, with Aholah being the name given to Samaria, and Aholibah to Jerusalem. Verses 22-35 reveal that because Aholibah had followed her sister Aholah's example of adulterous idolatries, she also would receive the harlot's punishment. A further description of the nations' transgressions is given in verses 36-44, and judgment is pronounced on both nations in verses 45-49.

According to verses 22-23, Aholibah's "lovers"—the heathen nations with whom Judah had forged alliances—were the mighty Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Babylonians. With them were the tribal mercenary forces of Pekod, Shoa, and Koa. Judah thought she controlled these relationships, but when her lovers exercised the upper hand, she hated her role of subjection. The phrase "I will set judgment before them" in verse 24 means that God was going to delegate His judgment to these former allies who would judge according to their standards of justice. Thus, the judgment prophesied against Judah was reflective of both the Mosaic Law (regarding adultery and murder), and the civil laws of that region (regarding adultery and political treaty betrayal).

In addition to breaking her covenant with God, Judah had also broken her covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. This would fuel Nebuchadnezzar's anger and he would seek revenge. Removing the nose and ears, noted in verse 25, was a common punishment for unfaithful wives and also false political allies, as both had broken an agreement of fidelity. The "clothes" and "jewels" of verse 26 refer to the riches and glory that God himself had given Judah, and stripping an unfaithful wife of such bridal gifts was common punishment. Verse 27 indicates that the harshness of Nebuchadnezzar's God-allowed judgment would cure Judah forever of idolatry.

The "cup" mentioned in verses 31-34 symbolizes destiny and frequently portrayes judgment. Because Jerusalem's behavior mirrored Samaria's, her punishment would be the same. The large size of her allegorical cup would cause ridicule and scorn, and consuming its contents would make the recipient reel and tremble with astonishment as if drunken. Aholibah would drink fully of the cup of judgment, to the very last drop.

God's message had been delivered primarily in a symbolic way to this point, using the figure of sexual immorality to illustrate the nation's unfaithfulness to Him. Beginning with verse 36, God instructed Ezekiel to speak directly and literally about the sins of Israel and Judah. Although Israel had been judged more than a century earlier, the specific sins of both sisters are emphasized in verses 36-44. Both nations had been unfaithful to their covenant with God (by committing spiritual adultery) and to their own communities (by practicing violence under the cover of the Law).

Verse 39 indicates that the Israelites had even sacrificed their own children to idols. According to Exodus 34:20, the firstborn in Israel belonged to the Lord, but these had been consumed by fire in the people's worship of pagan gods.

The people made a mockery of worship by going directly from these pagan practices to the Lord's holy Temple, even on Sabbaths and days of prescribed feasts. The phrase "a voice of a multitude" in verse 42 seems to indicate the setting was an idolatrous festival where a base and riotous multitude gathered and performed religious rites.

Verses 45-49 are the conclusion of Ezekiel's message. Although the Assyrians and Chaldeans were evil and ungodly, they are referred to in verse 45 as "righteous men" because God used them to bring about His righteous judgment. The sisters' punishment was what was required by Mosaic Law for adulteresses and murderers — death by stoning, sword, and fire. Israel and Judah paid the full penalty for their apostasy, but their conquest and exile was more than punishment. Verse 49 reveals that the ultimate purpose was to reveal God in His righteous judgments, and that they would know that He was the true God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    3. The summary of God's present dealings
      c. The parables of Israel's judgment
        (1) The parable of the two sisters
          (d) The judgment upon Aholibah (23:22-35)
          (e) The transgressions of the sisters (23:36-44)
          (f) The judgment on the sisters (23:45-49)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What armament would Judah's enemies use (verse 24)?

2. What could Judah have done differently if she had learned from her sister, the Northern Kingdom?

3. What indicators in our lives will reveal whether we will ultimately be judged or rewarded by God?

CONCLUSION

How we live each day will determine the contents of the cup we will eventually drink — whether judgment or reward from God. Today we want our lives to be in full accordance with God's instructions.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 24:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." (Ezekiel 24:13)

My daughter's goldfish, Ozzy, lives in a tank next to the kitchen sink where his normal behavior is to begin each day by coming to the top of the water and swimming around in circles. A few weeks ago, I looked at the small aquarium and saw that some scum was developing and the water was a bit murky. It was time for tank cleaning! Carefully scooping Ozzy into a bowl, I thoroughly washed the tank and its accessories with soap. To make sure they were completely purged of all impurities, I used scalding hot water and threw in some bleach for good measure. When the job was complete, I returned Ozzy to a sparkling clean tank.

Regrettably, I must not have rinsed away all the bleach, because within a day, we started noticing that Ozzy wasn't himself. Instead of swimming around at the top of the tank, he stayed near the bottom and hardly moved. Though I rewashed the tank, it appeared to be too late. A few days later, I sadly told my daughter that it looked like Ozzy was dying.

In today's text, we read of a purging that would be far more significant than the cleaning of a goldfish bowl. This purging would be devastating! The Lord announced through Ezekiel that because of Judah's "filthiness," judgment was coming to Jerusalem. God had wanted to purge the hearts of His people, but they had refused Him. So God declared that He would purify the city through complete destruction.

We can learn a lesson from this account. Someday, God will purge the earth of all sin and evil, and this judgment will come as a great destruction to all its inhabitants. But there is hope! We do not have to be affected by the destruction. We are living in a time when God is offering redemption that will save a repentant sinner from the judgment to come. We can live with the assurance that we will not be left to the destruction of the final judgement.

For Ozzy, there was a happy ending. My children were ecstatic the next day when he was swimming around again, back to normal. Our lives can also have a happy ending. We can avoid the destructive purging that will take place when God destroys the evil in this world. We can be with the Lord, eternally safe in Heaven. Let us not make the mistake that the people in Jerusalem made, but be ready to escape the destruction.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 24 records Ezekiel's final prophecy before Jerusalem's fall. This message was given two years and five months after the message of chapters 20-23.

According to verses 1-2, on the very day that Nebuchadnezzar began his siege against Jerusalem, God revealed the event to Ezekiel, who was over six hundred miles away in Babylon. Ezekiel was commanded to record the date so that when the news reached the exiles, the prophet's accuracy would be proven. Ezekiel's portrayal of the siege was spoken as a parable (verses 3-5), and the parable's explanation was given in the form of a poem (verses 6-13). In the parable, the pot with the pieces of meat and bones represented Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The fire represented the imminent judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the delivery of the parable, the repetition of the instruction to "set on" the pot denoted the commencing of God's irrevocable judgment. The visual image of a large caldron echoed the words of Zedekiah's wicked counselors in Jerusalem, who falsely pictured themselves as select meat within the safety of a caldron (see Ezekiel 11:3). Every cut of the meat, both the choice and the common, was to be put into the caldron along with the bones. Then it was to be cooked in the pot until it burned away; though the people thought they were safe in the "pot," it would actually be the place of their destruction.

The parable's explanation was twofold. The first explanation (verses 6-8) spoke of judgment against the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "Scum," literally meaning rust, symbolized the corrosion and corruption of the city. "Bring it out piece by piece" indicated that all of Jerusalem's population would be either killed or removed by Nebuchadnezzar's army. This punishment would be universal and indiscriminate, rather than by a "lot"—a system of random selection. The violent murders committed there had not been repented of, so Ezekiel pictured this as shed blood that had been left uncovered, and thus cried out for vengeance and retribution.

The second explanation (verses 9-13) spoke of judgment against the city of Jerusalem, which, as God's holy city, needed to be purged of wickedness. Through the prophet, God declared that He himself would make Jerusalem as a great pyre, or a burning pile for cremating the dead. "Consume" in verse 10 meant to cook the meat and bones until they were completely burned up. Then the brass caldron itself was to

be melted down and poured out, signifying that all of Jerusalem's impurities would be consumed in the judgment coming upon her.

The description of this judgment concludes with a restatement of its certainty in verse 14. The Lord had surrendered Jerusalem and its inhabitants to their earned judgment, which would be meted out by the Chaldeans.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  D. The revelation of God's dealings with Israel
    3. The summary of God's present dealings
      c. The parables of Israel's judgment
        (2) The parable of the caldron (24:1-14)
          (a) The setting (24:1-2)
          (b) The parable (24:3-5)
          (c) The interpretation (24:6-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 9, what does God say He will make great?

2. What are two things that verse 14 indicates about the judgment of God?

3. What are some ways God has purged things in your life that He was not pleased with?

CONCLUSION

Let us take care to ensure that our lives stay clean before God, that we may enjoy His blessings and avoid the purging judgment to come upon this world.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 24:15-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" (Ezekiel 24:19)

Today's text describes an extremely challenging time in Ezekiel's life. God told him that his wife—the desire of his eyes—would die suddenly. She did so that very night. When Ezekiel, in obedience to God's instructions, responded in an unusual manner, the people wondered why he was not following the normal mourning customs. They asked the question recorded in our focus verse, and this gave Ezekiel an open door to relay God's message to the people.

At times, God may allow challenging circumstances in our lives to bring about an opportunity for us to witness for Him. An elderly lady name Sylvia experienced that when she collapsed one day and was taken to the hospital. It was found that she had pneumonia in both lungs, and she spent five days in intensive care. A couple of times during that five days, her husband was told that she might not live.

However, God undertook. Sylvia improved and was moved to a regular hospital room. There she whispered to the Lord, "I'd love to share my testimony, but I'm not very good at getting started." God heard that prayer and over the next five days, she had the opportunity to give her testimony to twelve different people. She said, "Being married for seventy years gave me a real opening. And when I told them I had been a Christian for seventy-three years, that was another opening."

A woman who shared Sylvia's room confessed that she had an awful temper and didn't know what to do about it, although Sylvia had not said a word to this woman about the Lord. In response, Sylvia said, "The only thing that I can think of is that you need God to help you." Then she shared her testimony and her husband's also. The woman was discharged the next day, and as she walked by Sylvia's bed, she said, "I could hug you." Sylvia's testimony clearly had made an impact. God had used difficult circumstances to provide an opportunity to witness for Him.

If you are facing a challenging situation today, perhaps God is giving you an opening to share the Gospel or to encourage someone. We want to keep our hearts open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit so we can use any opportunities that come our way. In verse 24, God said Ezekiel was a sign to the people, and that when the prophesies were fulfilled, the people would "know that I am the Lord GOD." What a blessing it is when God uses our difficulties to help people learn about Him!

BACKGROUND

Immediately after God gave Ezekiel the parable about Jerusalem's siege, recorded in the first part of chapter 24, God announced that the prophet's wife would die suddenly (verses 15-19). Ezekiel was not to mourn or weep for her, indicating how the exiles in Babylon were to bear the news of the city's fall and Temple's destruction (verses 20-24). The final verses of the chapter, verses 25-27, are personal instructions to Ezekiel.

"The desire of thine eyes" in verse 16 refers to the prophet's beloved wife, and "stroke" denotes a sudden death. In order to portray to the exiles that they needed to accept God's judgment of Judah without dissent, Ezekiel was to control all external appearances of mourning for his wife, though the phrase "forbear to cry" in verse 17 indicates that he would have inner groanings and sighs. Ezekiel was to take actions that were the opposite of all Jewish and ancient Near East mourning rituals. Instead of uncovering his head ("tire" being a turban or headdress), he was to cover it. Instead of going barefoot, he was to keep his shoes on, and instead of covering his face with a mourning veil, the lower part of his face ("lips") was to remain uncovered. He was to eat none of the food brought by the community to comfort him.

According to verse 18, the message that his wife would die was given Ezekiel at the same time he received from God the parable that Jerusalem was under siege. He spoke the parable and its explanation in the morning, and his wife died that evening. On the subsequent morning, following God's command, he showed no grief.

When the people asked Ezekiel the meaning of his actions, he gave them God's next message, found in verses 21-24. Israel had placed her confidence for security in the Temple, but just as Ezekiel's wife had died suddenly, so the sanctuary would be destroyed suddenly. God's declaration in verse 21, "Behold, I will profane my sanctuary…," denotes removing honor and making the building ruined or unsuitable. The magnitude of the Temple's loss in the eyes of the nation is reflected by the clauses "the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes [referring here to the sanctuary], and that which your soul pitieth [or yearned for]." The phrase "your sons and your daughters whom ye have left" refers to the exiles'

relatives left behind in Jerusalem. When the exiles in Babylon received news that the prophecy had been fulfilled—that Jerusalem had fallen and the Temple burned—they were to conduct themselves in the same way that Ezekiel had, with no outburst, mourning, or protestations. This may have been because the Israelites had no right to mourn a divine judgment that was so fully deserved.

God gave additional information that was for Ezekiel only in verses 25-27. The "day" alluded to in verse 25 was not that of Jerusalem's fall or the Temple's destruction, but rather the day that the news would arrive in Babylon. On that day, Ezekiel would be liberated from God's instruction to speak only God-directed messages (see Ezekiel 3:26). "Be no more dumb" most likely denotes becoming unbound to the obligation to speak to the exiles, rather than recovering from an inability to talk. This was fulfilled in Ezekiel 33:21-22. (His next assignment from God would be a series of prophecies against foreign nations.)

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem
  E. The signs of Israel's judgment (24:15-27)
    1. The sign of the death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-24)
      a. The death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-18)
      b. The meaning of the sign (24:19-24)
    2. The sign of the prophet's silence (24:25-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How was Ezekiel going to hear of the fall of Jerusalem (verses 25-26)?

2. What are some ways that God reveals Himself to people today?

3. Why might our testimonies have greater impact when we have difficult situations in our lives?

CONCLUSION

When we face challenging circumstances, we want to remind ourselves to keep our hearts in tune with God. He might be opening a door for us to share the Gospel.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 25:1-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"For thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart with all thy despite against the land of Israel; Behold, therefore I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 25:6-7)

The Greek poet Hesiod, who lived around 700 B.C., wrote in one of his works, "A bad neighbor is as great a plague as a good one is a great blessing."[1] Over the centuries, this ancient saying has proved true on both a personal and a national level.

Since my husband and I moved into our current home a few years ago, we have been blessed with good neighbors from different ethnic backgrounds, careers, and stages of life. A young Asian couple and their cute toddler son live a few houses down, and a multi-generational Afghan/Pakistani family around the corner. An EMT and volunteer fireman, and his wife who works at a crisis center, are directly across from us. Next to them is a bachelor who is a great cook and rents out a guesthouse in his backyard, and to his right are an elderly retired couple. Down the block is a young schoolteacher who is part Native American and owns what may be the world's most adorable puppy.

We've shared contact information and many conversations with these neighbors—along with tools, gardening tips, babysitting, block parties, and grocery store runs. We watch out for each other's children and lend a hand with maintenance projects when needed. We have found that being surrounded by helpful and caring people brings a comforting sense of camaraderie and security in the neighborhood.

On a national level, good relationships with neighboring nations can also bring security, as well as economic and cultural benefits. However, during the time of Ezekiel, the people of Judah did not have that blessing. The nations surrounding them were proud, aggressive, and hostile—and God took note. According to the oracles delivered by the prophet, these neighboring nations were to be judged because of their actions and attitudes toward God's people. Today's text records four of Ezekiel's oracles: the divine proclamations of retribution against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. Our key verses record God's condemnation of the Ammonites, who had rejoiced over Judah's fall.

These nations may not have realized that the recent overthrow of Judah by Babylon was not merely a judgment upon the Jews; it was also a warning to them. Although God had focused first on the sins of His people, He would not ignore the pagan nations who lived around them. He would judge those nations for their sins, just as He had Judah.

This portion of text conveys a timeless Biblical truth: God is a God of justice. Our actions and attitudes toward our "neighbors"—those in physical proximity to us or within our circle of influence—will not go unnoticed. God is aware of how we treat others, and He will judge righteously. Let's be sure that we show others unfailing compassion, kindness, and respect.

BACKGROUND

This chapter begins a section (chapters 25-32) in which Ezekiel pronounced judgments against seven nations that were neighbors to Israel. In verse 2, the phrase "set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them" might more literally be rendered "set thy face *toward* the Ammonites and prophesy against them," implying a confrontational posture. Ammon was a tribal state located east of the Jordan River. Rabbah, mentioned in verse 5, was the nation's preeminent city and is the site of modern-day Amman, Jordan.

Seir, referenced in verse 8, is a high mountain range south of the Dead Sea that frequently is used in Scripture as a representation of the Edomites. Here, the coupling of Seir with Moab may be because the Edomites were in subjection to the Moabites at that time. Their sin, like that of the Ammonites, was that they rejoiced in the fall of Jerusalem (compare verse 3 with verse 8). Eventually both Moabites and Ammonites were conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.[2] The three cities mentioned in verse 9 were in the area of southern Syria known as "the Belka" that is renowned for its fine pastureland. It is a portion of the ancient land of Gilead.

The Edomites resided in the area east-southeast of the Dead Sea. As descendants of Esau, they were closely related to Israel and were given a degree of deference by Moses (see Deuteronomy 23:7-8). However, judgment was pronounced against them because Edom was vengeful toward God's people, Israel. Forms of the word "vengeance" occur four times in verses 12-14 of the Hebrew text; this multiple

usage reflects the high emotion portrayed in this passage. Teman was the northern frontier district of Edom, and Dedan was the southern frontier.

The Philistines resided in the southern coastal area of Israel. Again, the word "vengeance" is mentioned repeatedly in the judgment pronounced against this nation (verses 15-17). "Furious rebukes" (blazing anger) is another indication of the passion behind this condemnation. "Cherethims" (elsewhere called Cherethites) were Philistine mercenary soldiers who guarded King David. Here, Cherethims may merely be an alternative name for the Philistines. This could refer to their land of origin, which is thought to be Crete.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
- A. The condemnation of Ammon (25:1-7)
  - 1. The first cause (25:1-3)
  - 2. The first course (25:4-5)
  - 3. The second cause (25:6)
  - 4. The second course (25:7)
- B. The condemnation of Moab (25:8-11)
  - 1. The cause (25:8)
  - 2. The course (25:9-11)
- C. The condemnation of Edom (25:12-14)
  - 1. The cause (25:12)
  - 2. The course (25:13-14)
- D. The condemnation of Philistia (25:15-17)
  - 1. The cause (25:15)
  - 2. The course (25:16-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 3 and 6, what had the Ammonites done that incurred God's judgment?

2. In verse 13, Teman was the northernmost city in Edom, and Dedan was the southernmost. What do you think is implied by the fact that these two cities were named in the judgment against Edom?

3. What are some steps we can take to be "neighborly," especially in a society that is ethnically, culturally, or economically diverse?

CONCLUSION

We want to make every effort to be good and godly neighbors to those around us in order to influence them toward Christ.

NOTES

1. Hesiod, and Hugh G. Evelyn-White. 1914. *Works and Days.* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
2. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jew*s, trans. William Whiston (London: William Whiston, 1737), X.9.7

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 26:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water." (Ezekiel 26:11-12)

In May of 1919, Adelaide Travis, an American Red Cross worker serving on the Western Front during World War I, wrote home from France, "We went to the front a week ago today: to Montdidiers, Amiens, Albert, Lens, Arras, St. Quentin, and back through the Forest of Compaigne. There is no use in my trying to describe the destruction and desolation up there. No description, picture, or amount of imagination would give you any idea of it. I was awfully shocked and after seeing it all I marvel that any of them are alive to tell what they have been through. It was just a tiny part of the British front that we saw but it has made a lasting impression on me that will last as long as I live."[1]

Adelaide's letter is one of hundreds of letters, photographs, and artifacts displayed in the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. Many American soldiers who took part in the defense of Europe during the "Great War" gave similar descriptions. They told of devastation on an unfathomable scale—bombed cities, villages so obliterated that only rubble remained, vast cemeteries, and huge swaths of landscape that looked like an uninhabited planet.

The descriptions of war-ravaged Europe during World War I sound similar to the devastation of the city of Tyrus (Tyre) prophesied by Ezekiel in today's text. Our key verses relate that when God sent judgment, Tyre's fortresses would be broken down, her people slain, her riches plundered, and the homes within her walls destroyed. What a graphic picture of "destruction and desolation"!

The main sins of Tyre were pride and materialism. Its people were self-sufficient and intent upon obtaining riches and all the pleasures and benefits those riches could supply. Scripture does not record that Tyre dealt dishonestly or aggressively with Judah. However, when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, Tyre rejoiced in the fate that had befallen her competitor because it enhanced her control over commerce in the eastern Mediterranean.

In response, Ezekiel's oracle against Tyre foretold that God would one day judge and punish this proud city and she would be demolished. Like other Ezekiel oracles, this one offered reassurance to Israel that God controls the destinies of the world's nations. Israel's foes would eventually be abased and Israel restored to greatness in God's plan.

It is good to remember that Scripture tells us all nations and people will one day be humbled before God, and only the righteous will enjoy His eternal blessings. The judgment that fell upon Tyre should both warn and encourage all who fear God.

BACKGROUND

This chapter of Ezekiel continues the section that began in chapter 25, which proclaims judgment on seven nations around Judah. The focus of Ezekiel 26:1 through 28:19 is on Tyre.

Tyrus (referred to as "Tyre" in other places in the Bible) was the principal city of Phoenicia, and was located about thirty-five miles north of Carmel in what is now Lebanon. The city was built in two sections, with one part on the mainland and the other on a rocky island about a half mile away. This position made it a major commercial hub. Tyre competed with Judah for the lucrative trade of the region, with Tyre dominating the sea trade and Judah controlling the caravan routes at the time of Ezekiel's prophecy.

The "eleventh year" mentioned in verse 1 refers to the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah, which was the year in which Jerusalem fell. Most Bible scholars feel these prophecies regarding Tyre were given shortly after the fall of Jerusalem because they reveal Tyre's joy at the fall of their trade competitor.

Nations coming up against Tyre "as the sea causeth his waves to come up" (verse 3) would have been vivid imagery to the inhabitants of this seaport city, who were familiar with the destructive power of ocean waves. Just as waves are repetitive and unending, so would nations continue to war against Tyre over a span of time, including Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, and others. Since Tyre was a seemingly impregnable city, with a history of 2,300 years as a formidable fortress and walls up to 150 feet high, the proclamation that it would experience the ruin described in verses 4-5 must have seemed incomprehensible to those who heard it. "Daughters . . . in the field" (verse 6) refers to villages in the area that would suffer destruction similar to that of Tyre.

Verses 8-14 depict a progressing battle, with outlying villages defeated first. Ezekiel prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would then "cast a mount" (erect a siege mound) to overthrow the city. "Engines of war" refer to battering rams used to breach the city's walls; these were moved into place by the incoming army. These verses describe the carnage and chaos that would ensue as the army entered the city, and fighting that would move from street to street and from dwelling to dwelling. Verse 14 summarizes by giving a word-picture of destruction so complete that even the soil is stripped away, leaving bare rock only suitable as a place for mending nets. In fulfillment of verse 21, history records that ancient Tyre was indeed so completely annihilated that its exact location is uncertain. Although the area remained vacant for some time, eventually a city arose near the same site.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  E. The condemnation of Tyre
    1. The cause (26:1-2)
    2. The promise (26:3-6)
    3. The course (26:7-21)
      a. The destruction of Nebuchadnezzar (26:7-14)
      b. The lament of the princes (26:15-18)
      c. The totality of desolation (26:19-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 7, who would lead the avenging force that would overthrow Tyre, and who would accompany him?

2. In verse 3, God compared the nations that would come up against Tyre to the waves of the sea. What characteristics of waves make this such an apt simile?

3. What lessons can we learn from the judgment pronounced against Tyre?

CONCLUSION

Like the proud city of Tyre, one day all ungodly nations and individuals will be judged by God. Let us prepare now to escape that fate!

NOTES

1. "Devastated Lands," *The National WWI Museum and Memorial*, accessed November 10, 2023, http://theworldwar.org/explore/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/devastated-lands.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 27:1-36

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And say unto Tyrus, O thou that art situate at the entry of the sea, which art a merchant of the people for many isles, Thus saith the Lord God; O Tyrus, thou hast said, I am of perfect beauty." (Ezekiel 27:3)

The birthday of one of my best friends was approaching, and her cousin was planning a big celebration. This cousin knew my friend loved cherry cheesecake, so she asked me to make three of them for the occasion. I happily agreed.

Producing them took time. I shopped for supplies, prepared the crusts, and then mixed the filling ingredients. After the filling set up in the crusts, I meticulously placed cherries on top of each cheesecake in precise rows. The finished cheesecakes looked like they had come right off the cover of a cooking magazine! I was proud of the results of my efforts, and knew my friend would be delighted.

That evening I carefully loaded the cheesecakes into a big box so they would not slide around in the car on the way to the party. Upon arrival, I found a parking spot close to the walkway up to the porch, removed the cheesecakes from the box, and nudged the car door closed. It was dark, but the lights from inside the house shone brightly through the windows as I slowly moved along the walkway to the house. Glancing down at my cheesecakes, I once again felt a surge of pride that they had turned out so well.

Then disaster struck! I noticed some pipes in a small pile by the side of the path and carefully stepped around them, but there was a wire sticking up from the pile that I didn't see. It caught on my dress and abruptly halted my forward movement. In a moment, the cheesecakes flew out of my hands and landed upside down in front of me. While they were in containers and escaped being covered with dirt, my masterpieces were a scrambled mess! I could do nothing but take them into the party as they were. My friend and the guests were kind and insisted that the cheesecakes *tasted* wonderful anyway, but the satisfaction I had felt in my creations was completely gone.

Today's text relates the sad result of a different kind of pride. There is nothing wrong with feeling gratification about a job well done—the type of pride I had in my beautiful cheesecakes—but the pride of Tyre was a feeling of invincibility and a glorifying of human achievement in defiance of God. That was wrong, and as a result, Ezekiel prophesied that Tyre would be destroyed.

Our focus verse records that Tyre was a beautiful city. Historians tell us that the architecture was intricate, the land a paradise to the eyes, and the city enjoyed much wealth because it was a main seaport for the Middle East. Ships from all over brought their treasures to sell and trade there. The people of Tyre were proud of their city's beauty, wealth, and culture, but all of it was soon to be destroyed because of pride—ruined like a mighty ship smashed apart at sea, with all its treasures and merchandise swallowed up in the dark waters. The mourning and lamentation of the loss of this magnificent city would be very great.

My cheesecakes were ruined in appearance, but I was the only one who mourned them. However, the mourning for Tyre would be widespread because that city was to be destroyed and never restored. Its pride and ungodliness brought judgment and total devastation.

The Bible tells us that God hates pride. Let's be very careful not to fall into the same prideful self-exaltation that caused Tyre's downfall!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 27 of Ezekiel continues the proclamation of judgment on Tyre recorded in Ezekiel 26:1 through 28:19. In the first two verses of this chapter, God instructed Ezekiel to make a lament for this great commercial city. In verses 3-11, Tyre is compared to a beautiful merchant ship. Three aspects of the ship's magnificence are highlighted: her superior construction (verses 4–6), her impressive decoration (verse 7), and her skilled mariners (verses 8–11). Verses 12-25 are a literal description of Tyre as a renowned commercial center, and include a list of the wares she traded. The remainder of the chapter, verses 26-36, portray the wrecking of a mighty ship.

For centuries, Tyre had been the principal city of Phoenicia. It was a major trade hub on the Mediterranean coast because of its natural harbor; it was situated partially on the mainland and partially on a nearby island. Due to the availability of natural resources and the presence of skilled craftsmen, a ship-building industry thrived there that was renowned throughout the region. Artisans of Tyre passed down knowledge of techniques and proper usage of the available raw materials to succeeding generations. The local population also provided a supply of mariners proficient in navigational skills.

Verse 13 records that "the persons of men" were part of the city's commerce, an allusion to the active slave trade of Tyre.

The lengthy list of goods traded and transported by the ships of Tyre provides remarkable insight into the trade and commerce of the ancient world. The geographical extent of Tyre's commercial ventures is highlighted in the middle section of this chapter, which catalogues locations throughout the Middle East where Tyre engaged in trade. Arvad (mentioned in verse 8) was the northernmost port city on the Phoenician coast. Zidon, another nearby city, is often coupled with Tyre in the Bible. Numerous other places are named as well.

The Hebrew word translated "mariners" in verse 8 is rendered "rowers" in verse 26 because it implies being propelled forward. The Hebrew root word for "pilot" in verses 8, 27, 28, and 29 alludes to one who handles ropes on a sailing ship. This creates a contrast in which the technical skills and expertise by which Tyre rose on the world stage (described in verses 1-25) would utterly fail to forestall her destruction (recorded in verses 26-36), making Tyre's downfall truly lamentable.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  E. The condemnation of Tyre
    4. The lamentation on Tyre's fall (27:1-36)
      a. The glory of Tyre (27:1-11)
      b. The influence of Tyre (27:12-25)
      c. The desolation of Tyre (27:26-36)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 17, what had been the relationship between Tyre and Judah?

2. How could the downfall and destruction of Tyre have been avoided?

3. How can we ensure that the type of pride God hates does not come into our lives?

CONCLUSION

We learn from the destruction of Tyre that a prideful, self-sufficient spirit will bring God's judgment. Let's take care to ensure that pride never creeps into our lives.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 28:1-19

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee." (Ezekiel 28:17)

Excess and *moderation* are words that can describe two different modes of living. The word *excess* is defined as "an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable; undue or immoderate indulgence." *Moderation*, on the other hand, reflects avoidance of such extremes and a policy of "enough is enough." As parents of teenagers, we sometimes wrestled with helping the young adults in our household understand the value of moderation in a variety of areas.

For example, one of our children concluded that his high school classmates were more affluent than we were, based upon the vehicles owned by their families. He declared that we were "poor" because the car we drove was of lesser value than the ones they drove. We assured him that God had provided very well for us, and that our vehicle fit in our budget, met our needs satisfactorily, and provided us with a reliable method of getting around. Why should we spend many thousands of dollars more to drive a status symbol? Today, we smile inwardly as we observe our children, who are now adults, passing on the same principles of moderate living to their children.

The prince of Tyre did not exemplify moderation. He had advantages beyond most people in the world of his time, and had a very high opinion of himself to go along with those advantages. In today's text, we read that his heart was "lifted up." He arrogantly considered himself as a god and assumed that he had become wealthy by his own wisdom and understanding. Rather than applying principles of humility and moderation to his life and kingdom, he thought of himself as wiser than Daniel, and gathered gold and silver into his treasuries. He chose to live in excess, pridefully elevating himself and his position to the level of a god.

It is noteworthy that God did not condemn the prince of Tyre for his riches. His own wisdom had brought him wealth, but that led to vanity and self-importance, and this inordinate pride drew God's judgment.

Whatever our monetary resources, material possessions, or position in life, we must never allow pride or excess to rule us. Instead, we want to exemplify humility and moderation, understanding that everything we have comes from the hand of God. Our desire should be to elevate and honor Him, not ourselves!

BACKGROUND

Today's text concludes the proclamation of judgment on Tyre that is recorded in Ezekiel 26:1 through 28:19; this portion is directed at "the prince of Tyrus" or "the king of Tyrus." (In the Book of Ezekiel, "prince" and" king" are used interchangeably, as indicated in verses 2 and 12 of this chapter.) Many historians, including the Jewish historian Josephus, have identified this man as Ithobaal III. Ithobaal's Hebrew name was Ethbaal, which means "with Baal"—he was one of numerous rulers of Tyre whose names referred to Baal, their god of weather and fertility. Josephus wrote that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years, with at least seven of those years occurring during the reign of Ithobaal.[1] The fact that he survived the siege undoubtedly added to his feelings of superiority and invulnerability that brought God's condemnation.

Verses 1-10 of chapter 28 focus on the ruler's sin of pride. The prince said of himself, "I am a god" (verse 2) and gloried in his supposed wisdom and greatness. Because he had an exalted opinion of himself and thought he was invincible, judgment was proclaimed against him. This judgment would come at the hand of strangers from "the terrible of the nations" (verse 7) who would destroy the beauty and splendor of Tyre. The "pit" in verse 8 is the standard Old Testament term indicating the place where lost souls go after death.

In verses 11-19, the lamentation shifts from a description of the pride that resulted in judgment on the prince of Tyre to a lament that contains many allusions to the sin in the Garden of Eden. Bible scholars interpret these verses in a variety of ways. Some feel that a figurative parallel is being drawn in these verses between the pride and overthrow of Ithobaal to the pride and fall of Satan from Heaven. Others propose that the highly figurative language in these verses was based on a paradise story of that era. Still others see it as a literal description of the fall of Satan.

However this passage is interpreted, the key point is that the lament contains a stern warning against pride. As a priest, Ezekiel must have recoiled at the audacity of a king elevating himself to god-like status when he was a created being like everyone else.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  E. The condemnation of Tyre
    5. The fall of the prince of Tyre (28:1-10)
      a. The cause (28:1-5)
      b. The course (28:6-10)
    6. The lament for the king of Tyre (28:11-19)
      a. His past position (28:11-15)
      b. His punishment (28:16-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, what Biblical figure did the prince of Tyre consider himself wiser than?

2. The lament for the prince uses highly figurative language to describe his "rise and fall." How could he have avoided such a terrible result?

3. How can we avoid succumbing to excess and pride?

CONCLUSION

Let us ask God to reveal and remove any hint of pride and desire for excess from our hearts, and help us cultivate godly humility and moderation.

NOTES

1. Josephus Flavius and William Whiston. 1860. *Flavius Josephus against Apion.* Philadelphia: D. McKay.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 28:20 through 29:21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God." (Ezekiel 28:25-26)

Hope is vital to life. God had given Ezekiel many stern messages of impending judgment for the Hebrew people and their enemies. However, today's focus verses extended a ray of hope: God said He would eventually restore Israel. This must have been a welcome message to both Ezekiel and those who were heeding the messages he gave.

Centuries after Ezekiel's time, Ethel Bell experienced the necessity of hope. She and her husband had been missionaries to Africa, but he had died in a bus accident while they were on furlough in the United States. Ethel, accompanied by their two children, went back to Africa but then had to flee the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) because of World War II. They were able to obtain passage on a small American freighter that would take them to safety.

As the ship neared Trinidad, it was hit by two enemy torpedoes and sank within two minutes. The lifeboats were destroyed, but survivors pulled each other onto four rafts. Ethel and her daughter and son, two orphaned missionary children, and fourteen others were crowded onto one raft. Over the next twenty days as they drifted on the ocean, there were many opportunities to lose hope.

Ethel had morning and evening devotions with the children, and some of the shipmen began to appreciate her trust in God as all of them suffered. There was little room for movement, and before long, ulcers developed on their feet and legs from the seawater in the raft. Emergency rations had been secured to the sides of the raft in barrels, so small amounts of food and water were portioned out. After a week of drifting, they sighted an airplane, but the raft was not noticed.

A week later an airplane crew did spot them, and dropped some provisions. Rescue seemed imminent! However, though the survivors saw a ship the next day, no one on board spotted them. By that time, their water supply was nearly gone. In many ways, the situation seemed hopeless.

One of the men asked Ethel to pray. With swollen, cracked lips and her tongue so enlarged it was hard to talk, she prayed, "Our Heavenly Father, if it is Thy will that we should survive to be rescued from this raft, please turn the clouds in our direction and send us the rain we need. We thank Thee. In Jesus' name. Amen." A small cloud drifted toward them and grew larger and dark. Then torrents of rain poured down. When the two water kegs were almost full, the rain stopped and the cloud disappeared. Hope revived!

More days passed before a convoy came near. Those on the raft were thrilled when one ship headed toward them, until they realized those on the ship were shooting at them, having mistaken them for an enemy U-boat. Hope changed to despair. The survivors frantically waved a piece of cloth, and as the ship came nearer, the crew realized they were not enemies. Their ultimate rescue brought joy beyond description for everyone on the raft.[1]

The hope that Ethel Bell placed in God was not a vain hope. *No* true hope in God is in vain! We may not be drifting on a raft or hearing messages of judgment like those in Ezekiel's day, but we may face situations that seem hopeless. We can be encouraged by the accounts of faith like Ethel's and the promise extended to Israel by God. He never fails those who trust Him!

BACKGROUND

Today's text covers God's judgment on Zidon (verses 20-23 of Ezekiel 28), a message of hope for Israel (verses 24-26), and the beginning of the longest judgment message by Ezekiel, which was directed to Egypt (chapter 29).

Zidon was a harbor town located about twenty miles north of Tyre on the Phoenician coast. Based on its proximity and connection to Tyre, some scholars feel these verses should be considered an extension of the judgment pronounced upon that city. *Zidon* means "fishing town" or "fishery," and the city was a center of maritime activity. Worship of the goddess Ashtoreth took place in Zidon, and Israel's King Solomon had been compromised by this influence. (See 2 Kings 23:13 and 1 Kings 11:1, 4.)

In Ezekiel's day, Zidon was a lesser city than Tyre, though previously it had been more dominant. The Assyrian king Sennacherib had sought to restore the city to its former glory, but it had been completely destroyed by his son Esarhaddon around 678 B.C. At the time of this prophecy, it had been rebuilt to some

degree. Unlike Tyre, which battled Nebuchadnezzar for many years, history records that Zidon fully submitted to his rule without protracted war. The sin of Zidon is not named, but verse 24 indicates it may have included contempt for Israel.

In verses 24-26 of chapter 28, the prophet moved away briefly from his messages of judgment against other nations to offer a word of hope for Israel: a day would come when they would no longer be oppressed by their neighbors. In addition, they would be restored to the land that He had given to their ancestor Jacob, and would dwell there in safety.

Verse 1 of chapter 29 likely places the judgment pronounced on Egypt during the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, in 586 B.C. Egypt is metaphorically portrayed as a "dragon" (crocodile) lurking in the channel of the Nile river and its tributaries. The crocodile, an apex predator in Egypt, was their national emblem and was routinely worshipped as a god. Reference to "a staff of reed" in verse 6 points to the failure of Egypt to come to Israel's aid during the incursions by Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar. Though Egypt was powerful militarily, the nation had failed to rescue Israel, so their strength was compared to a building foundation made of straw.

Verse 10 describes the extent of God's judgment upon Egypt as being from "the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia." Cush, the land south of Israel, is translated as "Ethiopia" in some Bible versions. The word translated as "tower" is Migdol, a location in the northeast corner of Egypt. Thus, this phrase could be read "from Migdol to Syene to the border of Cush," indicating the destruction would be from one end of Egypt to the other.

In verses 13-16, God promised mercy and a measure of restoration to Egypt. He would bring back the captives of Egypt, even though they would be the humblest of kingdoms, never reaching their previous heights of influence. This is the only instance in the Book of Ezekiel where the prophet alluded to the restoration of a nation other than Israel.

The prophecy in verses 17-19, in which Ezekiel told of Nebuchadnezzar's failure to benefit from his lengthy siege of Tyre, occurred long after the prophesy given earlier in this chapter and is the last of the dated prophecies by Ezekiel. It was given sixteen years after the conquest of Jerusalem. It was placed here to indicate whom God would use as His instrument to bring judgment upon Egypt.

The final verse of chapter 29 reiterates the truth that the restoration of Israel would be accomplished by God alone, as a witness to His exclusive relationship with Israel.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
- F. The condemnation of Sidon (28:20-26)
  - 1. The judgment on Sidon (28:20-23)
  - 2. The restoration of Israel (28:24-26)
- G. The condemnation of Egypt
  - 1. The destruction and restoration of Egypt (29:1-16)
    - a. The destruction of Egypt (29:1-12)
    - b. The restoration of Egypt (29:13-16)
  - 2. The invasion of Egypt (29:17-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 3, to what did God compare Egypt?

2. Why did God choose to restore the exiled Egyptians after their forty-year captivity?

3. In what difficult circumstances has God given you hope?

CONCLUSION

When circumstances seem dark and the enemy tempts us to give up hope, we can look to God and His promises. He will not fail those who fully trust Him.

NOTES

1. Robert W. Bell and D. Bruce Lockerbie, *In Peril on the Sea: A Personal Remembrance,* (Doubleday, 1984).

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 30:1-26

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Howl ye, Woe worth the day! For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen." (Ezekiel 30:2-3)

God had given Ezekiel a message of judgment against Egypt and her allies. Our focus verses declared that a day of terrible punishment was near. "Woe worth the day!" could be translated, "Alas for the day!" Those hearing Ezekiel's message should have heeded his warnings.

In contrast to the many who ignored or rejected Ezekiel's prophesy, Dan, a man in our congregation, eventually responded to the warnings he had heard as a child. He testifies: "My parents were saved in the early 1950s, and there was a lot of talk around our house about the Lord coming back and the Rapture. One evening after supper when I was eight or nine years old, I rode down the street on my bicycle and visited some neighbors. When I came back home, my parents weren't there. I thought about how concerned my mom and dad were about being ready for Jesus to come, and I started getting really scared. What if He had come? I thought, *Lord, what am I going to do?*

"Then I saw one of the neighbors who suggested my parents might be at the new house they were having built up the street. When I went up there, I found my mom and dad, and was so relieved that the Lord hadn't come. Yet even though I had been scared, it wasn't enough to cause me to pray to be saved.

"A few years later when I was a teenager, the young people of our church in Portland, Oregon, were experiencing spiritual revival and people were turning to God. My buddies and I would sit on the back row of the audience and then walk out after the services. It seems I was just stubborn.

"During the Vietnam War, I joined the Air Force and went to a technical school in Illinois. Although I would not normally attend services at a camp meeting, that year I was homesick and heard some people from Portland would be at the church camp meeting in the Midwest. I got some time off and went. There God spoke to my heart and drew me to an altar of prayer. He saved my soul and made a change in my life."

In our day, God has also warned of pending judgment against the ungodly. His Word gives indicators that signal the return of Jesus to rapture His people from this world. That event will be followed by a time of trouble on earth such as the world has never seen, so heeding those Biblical warnings is vital. We want to be prepared for the day the Rapture of the Church takes place!

BACKGROUND

This chapter continues the forceful description of judgment pronounced upon Egypt that began in the previous chapter. The "day of the LORD," or "time of the heathen" (verse 3), was described in lamentable terms, with extreme sadness because of the destruction the people had brought upon themselves by elevating their gods and kings above the Lord.

Verse 5 indicates that neighboring states would be part of the coming judgment. These allies would be unable to prevail against the Babylonian forces. In verse 6, the phrase "from the tower of Syene" revealed the breadth of the destruction in Egypt. This phrase was similar to the Hebrew idiom "from Dan to Beersheba" that is used several times in Scripture. It was an indication that no place from one end of the country to the other would escape judgment.

Among the locations named in this chapter were the following:

- Lydia – thought to be Lud (Genesis 10:13), which was adjacent to Egypt on the northeast
- Chub – in the area of modern-day Libya
- Noph – Memphis, located in part of modern-day greater Cairo
- No – Alexandria

In verse 12, the phrase "I will make the rivers dry" was a further indication of the severity of the coming judgment, which would spare no one. Most of this region had very low rainfall. The Nile River, which the Egyptians deified, was the life-sustaining center of their culture. Without access to its water supply, they likely could not continue as a dominant culture. In fact, if the Nile and its tributaries were to disappear, the survival of life of any kind in the region would be nearly impossible.

Verses 13-19 are a pronouncement of judgment on the regions and cities of Egypt. Beginning with Noph, a specific list is given of many Egyptian cities that would experience His judgment.

The Pharaoh mentioned in verse 21 is thought by many commentators to be Pharaoh Hophra, who ruled over Egypt from 589 to 570 B.C. The flexed arm was a common Egyptian symbol for a Pharaoh's strength, so the metaphorical "broken arm" of Pharaoh in verses 21-22 represented Egypt's rapid decline as a world power. After their defeat by the Babylonians at the

decisive Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., Egypt tried in vain to recapture its former regional dominance. However, the assault of the powerful Babylonian forces along with Egypt's own internal struggles led to her downfall as prophesied by Ezekiel. Pharaoh Hophra was unable to save Jerusalem and King Zedekiah from the final siege by the Babylonians. In 570 B.C., Pharaoh Hophra was deposed by one of his generals, and he was killed in a failed attempt to recapture his throne in 567 B.C.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  G. The condemnation of Egypt
    3. The description of judgment (30:1-26)
      a. The description of the Day of the Lord (30:1-5)
      b. The destruction of Egypt (30:6-19)
      c. The dispersion of the Egyptians (30:20-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did God say would be the result of the judgment upon Egypt and her allies (verse 8)?

2. What does this chapter indicate about God's attitude toward the power and pride of people and nations?

3. Many societies today ignore God and His commandments. How can we keep that influence from pulling us away from God?

CONCLUSION

Each of us chooses how we will respond to the warnings in God's Word. Heeding them is vital for our eternal destiny!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 31:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth." (Ezekiel 31:5)

A huge tree inspires awe. The desire to capture and preserve the memory of its majesty may prompt a photo, but an image cannot do justice to its magnitude. Standing at the base and looking up causes wonder . . . and perhaps some dizziness.

For example, there is a cedar tree in Northern Idaho that is more than 3,000 years old. It began growing a millennium before Jesus was born! It is 177 feet tall and 18 feet in diameter, and is fed by a small stream.

Another huge tree, the "Cheewhat Giant" on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, is a Western Red Cedar that is 182 feet tall and has a 20-foot diameter. This tree was discovered in 1988 in a national park reserve.

On the Olympic Peninsula of Western Washington, the Quinault "Big Cedar Tree" was a landmark for generations. It stood 174 feet tall, was over 19 feet in diameter, and had lived 1,000 years. It was estimated to contain 15,300 cubic feet of wood. In July 2016, this monumental tree fell due to natural causes, and the tourist trail to it has been decommissioned.

Although such massive old trees are amazing, they are not eternal. Time and nature's forces will eventually cause them to fall.

In today's text, God instructed Ezekiel to direct a message toward Egypt, a distinguished nation at the time. Assyria had also once been a world power. The Lord compared Assyria to a massive cedar tree that had risen above all the other trees, yet it was cut down because of pride. Similarly, God said Egypt would also fall.

Thousands of years have passed since Ezekiel's declaration, but God does not change. He continues to hate the type of pride that the Egyptians and Assyrians were judged for—a self-exalting, arrogant feeling of superiority—and He will bring judgment for it in His own time and way. If we are battling pride today, we can open our hearts to the Lord and ask Him to help us have a humble mind and heart. This can only come about with a God-given perspective that is a result of yielding to Him. It is the attitude we want to have!

BACKGROUND

The message of judgment against Egypt in chapter 31 was delivered as a parable about a great cedar. The cedar trees of Lebanon were symbols of power and longevity, so God used the cedar tree metaphorically. Judah was to see that the fall of the cedar, representing Assyria, was a warning or example of what would happen to proud Egypt. This prophecy was specifically dated, being delivered only about one month before the final fall of Jerusalem.

Egypt had begun its rise to prominence around 3000 B.C., when tribal people from the lower Nile region united with an emerging regional government from the upper Nile. By the time of Ezekiel's prophecy, the Great Sphinx of Egypt had existed for nearly two thousand years and the dynasty of the Pharaohs for perhaps one thousand years longer. However, beginning in verse 2, God revealed to Ezekiel that the Pharaohs' rule was nearing an end.

The Assyrian empire was the largest of its time. For much of its history, its capital city was Nineveh. Worship of Ashur, the national god, and Ishtar, the goddess of war, was promoted. Three innovations aided Assyria's rise to dominance: 1) Military service became compulsory; 2) Tiglathpilezer III initiated the policy of maintaining a standing army; and 3) Conquered people were often resettled in other parts of the empire, depriving them of their homeland. The first Biblical mention of Assyria is Genesis 2:14.

The Lebanon cedar, mentioned in verse 3, is referred to over one hundred times in the Bible. These stately trees were the tallest, most massive living things in the region, and renowned for their natural beauty. They could exceed one hundred feet in height, eighty feet of branch spread, and live for over two thousand years. Phoenicians, Israelites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans all used the timber, which was known for its longevity and structural strength. At God's direction, Ezekiel spoke of the cedar's greatness and influence, using the destruction of this magnificent tree as a metaphor to instruct Pharaoh and all "his multitude" (verse 2).

Verses 8-11 and 16-18 tie Pharaoh's pride to the sin in the Garden of Eden. Those versed in the Torah would have readily seen the connection. The destruction of the cedar presented Ezekiel's hearers with a recognizable representation of God's hatred of pride and the judgment it would bring. As in Eden, pride was condemned, and final judgment of the mighty Egyptian empire was rendered.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  G. The condemnation of Egypt
    4. The comparison of Egypt and Assyria (31:1-18)
      a. The tree presented: Assyria (31:1-9)
      b. The tree destroyed (31:10-14)
      c. The descent to Sheol (31:15-17)
      d. The application to Egypt (31:18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What and who benefitted from the great tree in this illustration (verse 6)?

2. What do you think would have happened to anyone who listened to this warning and turned humbly to God?

3. God was pronouncing judgment because Egypt, like Assyria, had "lifted up" themselves. How can we be certain we maintain a humble attitude before God?

CONCLUSION

Next time you see a massive tree, use it as a reminder of the illustration God gave Ezekiel. Take a moment to thank God for the tree's beauty and ask Him to keep your heart in the right attitude toward Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 32:1-16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 32:7-8)

On August 21, 2017, a total solar eclipse, dubbed the "Great American Eclipse" by the media, was visible in the United States from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts. Since this was the first time since June 8, 1918, that a solar eclipse had been observable across the whole nation, the event generated a great deal of excitement. Old and young alike gathered to watch outside of homes and businesses, on rooftops and mountaintops, on sandy beaches and in open fields. Parties and celebrations were set up in the eclipse path, and hotels near good viewing locations were booked months in advance. Many people left their homes and traveled hundreds of miles just to get a glimpse of the phenomenon that takes place when the moon passes between the sun and the earth. According to news reports, a number of marriage proposals were made during the event, and at least one wedding took place in tandem with the darkening sky!

Our family joined in the nationwide anticipation. On the morning of August 21, three generations of us gathered on the sidewalk in front of our daughter's home, arranged our folding chairs to face the sun, and laid out an array of snacks. After donning eclipse glasses that we had been assured would protect our eyes, we watched and waited. Shortly after 9:00 a.m., a thin line of shadow began to darken the edge of the sun. As the shadow slowly expanded across the sun's surface, the houses and yards in the neighborhood, brightly illuminated just moments before, gradually descended into dusk-like dimness. What an unusual experience! It was definitely a day to remember.

In our key verses, the prophet Ezekiel described a time of darkness coming upon Egypt that would also be a day to remember. That darkness, however, would not only cover the sun, but also the moon and "all the bright lights of heaven." It would not be a time of excited celebration, but of judgment! These verses were part of an oracle lamenting the Pharaoh of Egypt, and describing what would happen to him and his nation by the hand of Almighty God.

This prophecy was delivered more than a year after the fall of Jerusalem, when any hope Judah might have had for help from Egypt was past. At the time, Pharaoh and his kingdom were mighty forces in the world, second only to Babylon. Perhaps the conquered people of Judah wondered whether God would be faithful to punish Egypt and the other heathen nations as He had declared. Conversely, having witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and Judah, Egypt may have begun to gloat in pride over her own survival and supposed power. However, God had ordained that the proud nation would be humbled, and in today's text, their doom was pronounced by the words of God himself.

The divine sentence upon Egypt reminds us that all nations and individuals who resist God will one day face His judgment. As we consider the One who placed the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament and presides over the nations of the world, let us be sure that we have made our peace with Him and will not have to face His judgment someday!

BACKGROUND

This chapter is a lament for Egypt given about a year and nine months after the prophecy that began in Ezekiel 31:1. A lamentation was an expression of anguish and extreme sorrow. At times, these were set to music, and sometimes they were chanted. Wailing, mourning, weeping, and moaning all would have been accompanying expressions of grief. "How is this possible?" is a question the lament inferred. In this portion of text, verses 1-10 portray Pharaoh and Egypt as a monster being slain, and verses 11-16 reveal that the destruction will come by "the sword of the king of Babylon," Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 2 infers that in God's eyes, Pharaoh was only a "young lion" or "whale" (or crocodile) who mucked up the water and created problems. While Egypt was still a significant force with the ability to influence and trouble other nations, God revealed in verses 3-8 that He would disgrace the sea creature by capturing him in a net and dragging him to land, where he would become food for birds and beasts.

According to verses 9-16, the nations around Egypt would fear when they observed Pharaoh's destruction. Seemingly, they would come to the realization that if God's judgment could come to mighty Egypt, they could experience it as well. As a result, they would take up a lament for Egypt.

History proves that God's prophecy against Egypt was fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar warred against Egypt, and a further destruction took place in 525 B.C. when the Persians, who had previously conquered Babylon, defeated Pharaoh in a decisive victory. The

Greek historian Herodotus wrote of the defeat that the Egyptians were routed, the Pharaoh was taken captive, and the Persian leader made himself Pharaoh.[1] This took place less than sixty-five years after Ezekiel's prophecy and brought an end to Egypt's twenty-sixth dynasty.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations
  G. The condemnation of Egypt
    5. The lamentation over Egypt (32:1-16)
      a. The destruction of the monster (32:1-10)
      b. The devastation of the Lord (32:11-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What two animals did Ezekiel compare the Pharaoh of Egypt to in verse 2? What does this tell us about Pharaoh?

2. Why do you think God had Ezekiel deliver oracles against foreign nations?

3. Why is the assurance that God is in control of world events and powers such an encouragement for us as believers?

CONCLUSION

While man may attribute the rise and fall of a nation to its leaders, God alone controls the future. Let's be sure we have aligned ourselves with Him!

NOTES

1. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 3.10-15.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 32:17-32

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit."
(Ezekiel 32:18)

A few weeks ago, as I was standing on the sidewalk in front of our house chatting with one of our neighbors, a dreadful wail split the quiet afternoon. It began as a shriek, and quickly crescendoed to a sustained, ear-piercing howl that momentarily froze us to the spot where we were standing. Then we both dashed toward the sound, expecting to find that some sort of terrible injury or calamity had occurred. We found a seven-year-old child clutching her foot while she screamed, mouth wide open and tears pouring down her flushed cheeks. In a dash between two houses, she had tripped on a loose piece of wire fencing and seemingly was convinced that the injury she had sustained must be life-threatening!

While another child ran to summon a nurse who lives nearby, my neighbor and I half carried the wailing child to the nearest porch. The screams continued as we gently pried loose the little fingers that were tightly wrapped around her injured foot. Yes, there was a minuscule scratch and a tiny bit of blood. However, after the nurse arrived, washed the hurt toe, and applied some disinfectant and a bandaid, the wailing and the tears subsided and our little patient was ready to rejoin the other neighborhood kids in their play.

In our focus verse, Ezekiel was instructed to "wail" for the people of Egypt—and this lament was of a far more serious nature than our loud but rather short-lived neighborhood drama. In poetic style, and at God's direction, Ezekiel described how Egypt would join other once-mighty nations in receiving God's judgment. They had refused to honor God and follow His instructions, choosing instead to worship whoever and whatever they wished, and judgment would be the result.

Egypt had been given an opportunity to serve God and chose not to. The nation had already witnessed both the benevolence and judgment of God (see Genesis 41:25 and Exodus 11:1), and was currently watching God's judgment unfold upon the nation of Judah. She should have understood that rebellion against God always brings consequences. However, she heedlessly persisted in her rejection of God, and thus would pay the price—a price so dreadful that Ezekiel was commanded to wail and lament her fate.

Today's text reminds us that history is filled with the rise and fall of great nations as well as great individuals. There are different outcomes for people who choose to serve God than for those who choose to ignore God and His provision for eternal life. Let's purpose to make the right choices and avoid the lamentable judgment that befell the once-great nation of Egypt!

BACKGROUND

This portion of chapter 32 continues the lament for Egypt that began with a comparison of Pharaoh to a "whale" (crocodile) being slain. This judgment would come through Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and the nations around Egypt would fear when they observed Pharaoh's destruction.

Egypt's destiny was to go to the "pit," or Sheol, the location of lost souls after they received final judgment. Once in that place, there was no way of release and no further opportunity for mercy.

In verse 19 the question was asked, "Whom dost thou pass [surpass] in beauty?" By Ezekiel's day, a multitude of Pharaohs lay in plush burial chambers in ornate stone coffins in the "Valley of the Kings." No expense had been spared in embalming them, honoring them, and laying them to rest. Yet here the word of the Lord questioned their beauty after judgment was carried out. In death, those rich burial trappings would signify nothing; they were of no value.

The references in this passage to the "uncircumcised" relate to Egypt's choice to remain apart from God's will. Circumcision was given to Abram as a symbol of the covenant in which God instructed him to walk in holiness (see Genesis 17:1-14). Exodus 12:48 establishes that "strangers" (those who were not Jews) could participate in the covenant through circumcision, signifying that the call to holiness was universal. The command to separate oneself and be made holy was for any who would worship the Lord acceptably, so the "uncircumcision" of the Egyptians caused them to suffer eternal condemnation. At God's direction, Ezekiel pictured Egypt as "the strong among the mighty" in hell (verse 21), signifying that Egypt would join the other mighty nations named in this chapter (Elam, Meshech, Tubal, Edom, and Zidon) in disgrace and damnation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The condemnation of the nations

G. The condemnation of Egypt
   6. The descent of Egypt to the nether world (32:17-30)
      a. The descent of Egypt (32:17-21)
      b. The presence of other nations (32:22-30)
   7. The consolation of the Pharaoh (32:31-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did God say would happen to the people of Egypt? (verse 32)

2. Why do you think Egypt in particular was so strongly judged by God?

3. What are some actions we can take to illustrate the benefits of following God?

CONCLUSION

The fate of Egypt stands as a reminder of how important it is to decide to serve God with all of our hearts. We will never be sorry for making that choice.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 33:1-33

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance." (Ezekiel 33:24)

A sense of security is important for people of every age and era, but it is imperative not to depend upon an unreliable source for that security. For example, when our second daughter was a toddler, she had a favorite pink blanket with a silky edge that went everywhere with her. She *needed* that blanket to feel safe! So it accompanied her outside to the sandbox, downstairs to the basement, and on road trips in the car. It wrapped her dollies, became a sling for her stuffed animals and other toys, and occasionally served as a bib or a washcloth.

As you can imagine, that blanket became more and more shabby as the months went by. The pink color faded to dingy grey from countless washings, and the silky edge gradually disintegrated. Eventually that once-pretty blanket was literally a rag, and admittedly, a source of embarrassment to her parents! For months, I tried to convince our daughter that it was time to "give" her blanket away, but even the promise of a new blanket just like it did not persuade her. In her mind, that pink blanket had protected her from monsters in the closet and boogeymen under the bed! At her young age, she simply could not imagine getting along without it.

As adults, we may be amused by the objects that give our children a sense of security, knowing that those objects offer no protection whatsoever. However, we must be careful not to depend upon something in our own lives that can be just as ineffectual as a safeguard.

In today's text, the remnant in Judah thought they were safe because they were descendants of Abraham. By some strange logic, they reasoned that since God had given Abraham the land when he was alone, the land was even more assuredly theirs because of their increased population. However, these few who had evaded death and exile were not godly, covenant-keeping individuals. They did not observe the Mosaic Law, they did not worship the true God, and they were violent. So God instructed Ezekiel to ask them, "Shall ye possess the land?" He repeated that question twice to emphasize that they would *not* possess the land; they were comforting themselves with a false security by assuming their ancestry was some sort of guarantee. God's promise to restore Israel and Jerusalem would be accomplished in time, but not through ungodly people like those identified in our focus verse.

In our world today, many people depend on things for security that are no more adequate than a ragged blanket or a venerable ancestor. Some depend upon their bank accounts, their investments, or their jobs. Others lean on their government, their nation's military might, or their own supposed "preparedness" for emergencies. Some assume education or personal determination will be enough to guarantee success in life.

God's Word teaches that there is only one real source of security, and that is God himself. If our trust is anchored in Him and we remain obedient, He will keep us throughout time and into eternity!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 33 begins a seven-chapter section that continues through chapter 39, in which the primary focus of the prophetic messages shifts from prophecies directed toward foreign nations to a focus on Israel and its future restoration. This chapter covers Ezekiel's appointment as watchman (verses 1-9), an emphasis on personal responsibility (verses 10-20), and news of the fall of Jerusalem and God's messages to the surviving remnant (verses 21-33).

It was common practice in Ezekiel's time for leaders of a walled city to appoint watchmen to scan the surrounding terrain. A faithful watchman would be actively and continually inspecting the horizon for any sign of potential danger. From an elevated vantage point, often atop the wall surrounding the city, this sentry would be on the lookout for incoming armies or an approaching messenger. A watchman's promptness in sounding an alarm was usually the first line of defense for the city, and the people's survival depended on him. Ignoring a potential danger could result in disastrous consequences and even the death of citizens in the event of an attack.

In verses 3-6, the instrument used to sound the alarm was a shofar, which is typically translated in the King James Version as "trumpet." This instrument was different from the assembly trumpets provided by Moses. Those were made from hammered silver, while the shofar was fashioned from a ram's horn. The root word in Hebrew indicates something comely or attractive, suggesting that the sound of the shofar was welcome. An animal horn in Scripture is frequently a symbol of strength, so the sounding of

the shofar brought to mind the Lord's strength and care for His people. While it could be a warning, it was also blown when a king arrived or to herald other good news. It would have been unthinkable to hear this trumpet sound and simply ignore it.

Verses 11-20 establish the power of true repentance, God's willingness to forgive a multitude of sins, the need for restitution as evidence of repentance, and that an act of sin destroys any history of righteousness. Verse 11 indicates that the message Ezekiel was to proclaim to Israel was a positive one and included a call to repentance. The Jewish understanding of repentance—the practice of regretting sin, determining not to repeat it, and seeking forgiveness for it—was prominent in the Torah, so the prophet's listeners were familiar with it. Though all Ezekiel's fellow Jews shared to some degree in the national judgment for sin, verse 19 held a promise that the *individual* who repented would live.

According to verses 21-23, news of the fall of Jerusalem arrived in Babylon shortly after Ezekiel's warning was delivered. Many scholars place that event at about 586 B.C. and it possibly took several months for the news to reach Ezekiel.

Mention of those dwelling in the "wastes" (verses 24 and 27) and repeated references to desolation make it clear that Ezekiel's warning was directed to those who still resided in the recently conquered city. The Lord called on them to cease from their abominable behaviors and turn to Him. Their claim of being God's people and heirs of the promises to Abraham did not benefit them because of their hypocrisy, which is described in poetic terms in verses 31-33.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    1. The ministry of the prophet (33:1-33)
      a. The function of a watchman (33:1-9)
      b. The message of the watchman (33:10-20)
      c. The fall of Jerusalem (33:21-29)
      d. The fact of the people's hypocrisy (33:30-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What warning was given in verses 4-5 to those who heard the sound of the trumpet?

2. How would you explain the Biblical principle alluded to in verse 15?

3. What are some steps we can take to ensure that our security is built upon God rather than upon temporal circumstances or possessions?

CONCLUSION

The only sure refuge in life is in God. Throughout Scripture, He calls us to turn away from our inadequate sources of temporal security and embrace a true and lasting refuge in a relationship with Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 34:1-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock." (Ezekiel 34:2-3)

The Bible often characterizes spiritual leaders as shepherds—a visual image that suggests watchful care, concern, and compassion. In our text today, Ezekiel condemned the unfaithful shepherds of Israel who were providing for themselves while neglecting duties toward their flock. They had failed to strengthen, heal, and bind up the "sheep" they were responsible to care for, putting their own needs and wants ahead of service to others.

John Eliot was a spiritual shepherd whose life offers a dramatic contrast to the failure of the religious leaders of Ezekiel's day. In 1631, Eliot left England, the land of his birth, as a young Puritan pastor. He settled in Boston, Massachusetts, for a year, and then established a church a few miles away in Roxbury, where he served faithfully for fifty-eight years.

From the beginning of his ministry, Eliot developed an excellent relationship with the Native Americans in the area, carrying on evangelistic work among them while maintaining his duties for the Roxbury congregation. In fact, his work among the tribes became so well known that many historians refer to him as "the Apostle of the American Indians." He spent twelve years studying the Algonquian language through the assistance of a young Native American he took into his home, and began preaching in that language by the late 1640s. Eventually he became so fluent that he published a grammar book and translated the Bible into Algonquian; it was the first Bible printed in North America.

Eliot established towns for tribal converts in areas where they could preserve their own culture and live by their own laws. He trained many native evangelists, and ultimately they carried out much of the missionary outreach in the surrounding territory. However, Eliot himself did a great deal of itinerant preaching. Leaving his comfortable home on a regular basis, Eliot served simultaneously as a pastor, missionary, husband, and father, as well as teacher and medical doctor in the tribal villages. He traveled countless miles on foot and horseback, taxing his strength to the utmost, sometimes drenched by rain, in order to bring the Gospel to the native people. At one point he wrote in a letter, "I have not been dry night nor day from the third day of the week to the sixth, but have travelled from place to place in that condition; and at night I pull off my boots, wring my stockings, and on with them again, and so continue. The rivers also were raised, so as that we were wet in riding through. But God steps in and helps me. I have considered the exhortation of Paul to his son Timothy, 'Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.'"[1]

While preaching the Gospel was Eliot's primary goal, he also helped in other ways. He brought cases to court to battle for Native American property rights, fought against the selling of indigenous people into slavery, petitioned government authorities to secure lands and streams for the use of the tribes, and established schools for children and adults in their villages. In spite of a war that eventually caused many of the native tribal groups to leave the area, Eliot refused to be discouraged, and continued to minister to wandering bands of indigenous people until his death. What a wonderful example of what it means to be a faithful spiritual shepherd!

Whether we are in a position of spiritual leadership or not, there is a lesson here for us. The faithless shepherds of Ezekiel's day remind us that we must all guard against getting so caught up in our own needs and activities that we neglect our responsibilities toward others. Simple acts of caring make a difference, no matter what our role. God has always shown compassion to His children, and He expects His children to reach out to others with that same spirit.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 34 presents a contrast between the behavior of Israel's unfaithful shepherds (alluding here to the civil and spiritual leaders of Israel) and the behavior of a good shepherd. The relationship between a shepherd and his sheep was one of care and dependence. In Israel at that time, shepherds did not drive their sheep; they led them. The sheep grew to recognize the voice of their shepherd and could distinguish it from other voices, so they knew whom to follow. A shepherd's life was one of self-sacrifice and deprivation, and at times, he risked his personal safety at the hands of marauders or the teeth and claws of wild animals in order to protect his flock.

The chapter begins with the statement, "And the word of the LORD came unto me . . ." Twenty-six chapters in Ezekiel open with that declaration. When

the word "LORD" appears in all uppercase letters in the King James Version, it indicates the Hebrew proper name transliterated as "YHWH," the consonants in God's proper name. Because the Jews considered this name to be extremely sacred, they did not pronounce it, so the vowels were left out. This highly personalized designation was an expression of God's will and self—not only of His holiness, righteousness, and sense of justice, but also of His mercy and grace. This was part of each message Ezekiel was instructed to communicate to Israel.

Verses 2-6 outline the offences of the shepherds of Israel. They were accused of many things, including their failure to feed the Lord's flocks, though ensuring that they themselves were well fed and clothed. They had neglected the sick and infirm, failed to search for the lost, and allowed the sheep to become prey.

In verses 7-10, God condemned in strong terms the shepherds of Israel for not acting faithfully to protect His flock. Instead, they had behaved like animals, and were making themselves rich at the expense of the sheep. The detailed and emphatic terms used to describe their actions indicate that their failure was a personal affront to a loving God.

In verses 11-22, God promised that He himself would do all that the unfaithful shepherds had failed to do—seek and find the scattered sheep, provide food and shelter, and bind up and heal the injured.

Through Ezekiel, God promised that one day He would provide a faithful shepherd, called "David" in verses 23-24, for His sheep. Jewish sources believe this referred to a prince of the lineage of David. Others see it as a reference to the Millennial Reign of Christ. It certainly referred to the traits David displayed both as a shepherd and as a leader—characteristics that were reflective of God's love for and faithfulness to His flock.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    2. The ministry of Israel's shepherds (34:1-31)
      a. The false shepherds of Israel (34:1-10)
        (1) Their practice (34:1-6)
        (2) Their punishment (34:7-10)
      b. The true shepherd of Israel (34:11-31)
        (1) The gathering of the sheep (34:11-16)
        (2) The protecting of the sheep (34:17-22)
        (3) The governing of the sheep (34:23-24)
        (4) The provision of peace for the sheep (34:25-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What failures of the shepherds did Ezekiel enumerate in verse 4?

2. How would you summarize the promises of God to His people found in verse 16?

3. Consider those in your life toward whom you have a responsibility. What are some steps you can take to make sure you discharge that responsibility in a faithful manner?

CONCLUSION

Whatever our role in the service of God, we want to always put others first and make sure we fulfill our responsibilities faithfully.

NOTES

1. Andrew Thomson, *Great Missionaries: A Series of Biographies*, (London, England: T. Nelson and Sons, 1862), pg.27.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 35:1-15

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Son of man, set thy face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it, and say unto it, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 35:2-4)

As a child, one of my favorite books on our family bookcase was a big orange volume titled *Complete Book of Marvels* by Richard Halliburton. The vivid descriptions of this American adventurer and author transported me to fascinating places around the world. One of my most frequently read chapters was about Petra.

Petra was an ancient city, the ruins of which are located in the middle of a mountainous wilderness south of the Dead Sea in southwestern Jordan. Halliburton related, "A traveler looking for Petra would not have found it unless he knew the country well, for the chief gateway was just a crack in the mountain wall. This crack led into a sunless canyon, a thousand feet deep, and this canyon led into the city. . . . so narrow was the canyon-corridor that four men could block it against four thousand. Petra became a huge fortified storehouse where dazzling piles of stolen gold and pearls and silk were guarded by the citizens. With so much wealth and power in their hands, the people of Petra were able to conquer all the neighboring nations."[1]

While the Bible does not mention Petra by name, scholars believe Petra (meaning "rock") was the Greek name for Sela, the fortress city of the Edomites in the mountainous region of Seir. (In Hebrew, *sela* also means "rock.") Perhaps Edom's arrogance, alluded to both in today's text and in the prophecy of Obadiah, was based at least partially on her supposedly impregnable location.

This chapter gives a prophetic picture of divine justice. In our focus verses, Ezekiel foretold God's destruction of Mount Seir because of the Edomites' perpetual hatred of Israel, their looting of Jerusalem, and their desire to possess the lands of Israel and Judah. That prophecy clearly has been fulfilled: Edom declined steadily under the Babylonians, and then under Persian, Greek, and Roman domination. The Edomites' former mountain stronghold is now merely an archeological site and tourist attraction.

The judgment upon Edom is a reminder that while God has glorious plans for those who honor Him, the day will come when God will no longer show mercy or longsuffering to the wicked. Like the Edomites of long ago, those who reject God and treat His people with hostility will be judged and punished. Thankfully, mercy's door is still open and there is time yet to repent.

As believers, we look forward with anticipation to the day when our Lord and Savior will return and set up His Kingdom. He will rule in peace over all the nations of the earth, and every knee shall bow before Him, the King of the ages. As we view the oppression and strife that exists in the world around us, what a wonderful hope that is!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 35 begins a discourse that continues through verse 15 of the following chapter. It concerns the restoration promised by God to Israel, and was directed to the exiles in Babylon.

In contrast to what God promised to do for Israel, a prophecy was put forth beginning in verse 2 to foretell the destruction of Mount Seir. While Seir refers to the mountain range that begins south of the Dead Sea and extends nearly to the Gulf of Aqaba, in this text, Mount Seir was representative of all Idumea (or Edom), a people with a history of persecuting Israel. The prophesied destruction would come first by Nebucchadnezzar, then by the Jews after their return from captivity. It is accurate to term the chapter a "judgment" against Idumea because their sins were specified and the sentence pronounced. However, that sentence had not yet been carried out, giving them time for repentance that would lead to mercy.

In verse 6, repetition of the word "blood" may be an allusion to the fact that Edomites were descendants of Esau, who despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob. They "hated blood" (their brother, Israel), and thus Israel would pursue (chase and defeat) them. Some commentators suggest that the references to blood may also point to the covenant of circumcision and/or the sacrificial system the Jews observed under Moses.

In verse 13, when the Lord said, "I have heard," the implication was that He was carefully and actively listening when the Edomites boasted; He was not a casual hearer. Verses 14 and 15 describe the utter desolation that would result from the judgment on Edom. Not only would its cities be

abandoned and the area become a geographical wasteland, but the people would be utterly abandoned by the Lord, that all would see His righteous judgment and His name would be glorified.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    3. The devastation of Edom (35:1-15)
      a. The declaration of judgment (35:1-4)
      b. The determinant of judgment (35:5)
      c. The description of judgment (35:6-9)
      d. The determinant of judgment (35:10-15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What two reasons did God give in verse 5 for His judgment?

2. What Biblical principle seems to be implied in verse 11?

3. In verse 13, God asserted that He heard the Edomites' words of boasting against Him. What lesson does this imply for us?

CONCLUSION

Just as Edom's longstanding hostility against God's people resulted in judgment, all nations who oppose Israel and the people of God will one day be judged.

NOTES

1. Halliburton, Richard, *Complete Book of Marvels*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), pgs. 97, 100.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 36:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come. For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded." (Ezekiel 36:8-10)

On May 18, 1980, after weeks of seismic and volcanic activity, a 5.1 earthquake caused Mount Saint Helens in the State of Washington to erupt in a cataclysmic explosion and the entire north face of the mountain to collapse. Gas and ash shot up into a sixteen-mile-high column, and winds carried the ash hundreds of miles into eleven U.S. states. The lava, hot ash, and stone that blasted laterally from the side of the mountain leveled four billion board feet of timber in a few moments of time, and mudflows and floods caused by ice melt swept across a huge area. Parks, buildings, bridges, and roads were destroyed, and fifty-seven people lost their lives.

On Pumice Plain, north of the eruption crater, nothing survived. The vegetation in other areas around the blast soon began to recover, but it was two years before the first plant was found on Pumice Plain. That plant was a prairie lupine, a purple-blue wildflower that can take nitrogen from the air rather than getting it from the soil. The lupine attracted insects and trapped blowing leaves and debris, and as the organic material died and decomposed, it began to enrich the soil. Gophers tunneled underground and mixed the nutrients into the earth, and other plants began to grow, including Indian paintbrush, which attracts elk. Elk hooves broke the crust on the ground and mixed more nutrients into the soil, and their droppings deposited the seeds of other plants. Today, much of Pumice Plain is covered by grasses, flowering plants, and willows.

What occurred on Pumice Plain is an object lesson illustrating how recovery can come after desolation. Just as restoration occurs in a devastated and ruined landscape, God can restore a devastated nation or a ruined individual. In today's text, God extended hope to the Israelites by promising a future renewal, though at the time of this prophecy, their situation was grim.

God's message of hope through Ezekiel offers assurance and comfort to us as well. No matter how devastated and ruined a life may look, there is hope in God. He can take situations that look impossible and turn them around. In fact, based on verse 11 of our text, we understand that He can make them better than they were at the beginning! Pumice Plain and all of nature around us is a reminder of God's power and His desire to make something beautiful out of what appears to be hopeless.

Today if you are facing an "impossible" situation or praying for someone who seems far from the Lord, take hope. Consider the prairie lupine, and remember that nothing is too hard for God!

BACKGROUND

Today's text continues the discourse that began in the preceding chapter concerning the restoration promised by God to Israel. While this portion was also directed to the exiles in Babylon, there is a change in tone in this chapter from the previous one. There, the prophecy was against Mount Seir (Idumea or Edom). Here, in verses 1-21 of chapter 36, the prophecy was to the "mountains of Israel" (representing the whole of Israel), and reveals God's faithfulness and affection toward His people. Though Israel was the key nation in God's plan for the ages, her apostasy had to be judged and punished. However, God was not done with Israel. At this point in the nation's history, God began to reveal His plan for her in His Millennial Kingdom.

Ezekiel's ministry took place during a time of God's judgment through the subjugation of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. During these years, rival nations (including the Edomites) took advantage of the military vulnerability of Israel to occupy important locations on the high ground (mountains) from which they raided surrounding territory. "Aha," voiced by Israel's foes in verse 2, is an expression of joy mixed with contempt. This attitude provoked God's "jealousy" for Israel in verse 5, showing the ardor, zeal, and passion He felt for His people.

The degree to which Israel had been demolished makes the restoration described in verses 8-15 all the more remarkable. Ezekiel foretold that the dispersed people of Israel would one day be regathered. The "fruit" prophesied in verse 8 will be the result of the Lord himself turning toward His people and taking their side, and of the tilling and sowing that He will perform (verse 9).

The root word for "bereave" as used in verses 12, 13, and 14 is the opposite of "fruitful." It is often

used in Scripture in connection with the death of children, and is indicative of great emotion resulting from tragic loss. Its usage here indicates that God was promising to personally intervene and end Israel's tragic losses.

Verses 20-21 indicate how Israel's behavior had defiled her inheritance and profaned the Lord's name. The third commandment taught the Jewish people to be extremely careful about using God's name, to the extent that they refrained from saying His name aloud for fear they would bring reproach to it. During Ezekiel's time, it is likely that only the high priest on the Day of Atonement could say the sacred name of the Lord, and then only under certain circumstances. However, in spite of this outward regard for God's name, they had defiled His name by their actions. As a result, they had been judged. God's intention was for Israel to be a testimony of God's power to the surrounding nations. Instead, those nations were questioning God's power because Israel had "gone forth out of his land"—her neighbors had overrun her and carried away her people.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    4. The restoration of Israel
      a. The judgment of the nations (36:1-7)
      b. The growth of Israel (36:8-15)
      c. The judgment of Israel (36:16-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did God have pity upon His people (verse 21)?

2. Perhaps God's promises seemed farfetched to the Israelites while they were in the middle of experiencing His judgment. What might have caused them to believe what Ezekiel said?

3. How have you seen God bring restoration in a life or a situation?

CONCLUSION

God is the greatest Restorer. He can turn around any situation and help with every need.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 36:22-38

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by." (Ezekiel 36:33-34)

The playground at the park was alive with laughter as the sun shone down on children on swings, slides, and an aboveground tunnel. As a local resident, I felt a sense of pride as I strolled along the paved walkways that threaded between towering fir trees and beautifully maintained bushes. How different the area looked on this lovely day compared to its appearance the previous winter when a severe ice and windstorm had ravaged our area! By the time the last of the ice had melted back then, many of the trees in this park had been damaged by the weight of the ice, and others had been completely uprooted. The whole park had been littered with debris and broken branches.

Then one day, about a month after the storm, I noticed dozens of cars and trucks on the street alongside the park. A number of warmly clothed individuals were busily sawing up branches, loading trucks with debris, and hauling away rubble. They continued cutting, cleaning, and replanting for several days, despite the poor weather. Now, as I walk through the restored park, I marvel at the change.

In our text today, God explained His plan to restore Israel after that nation failed Him and profaned His holy Name. As a result of their rejection of Him, the people had been scattered among the heathen. However, God looked with compassion upon them, and in our focus verses, He promised a future regathering of Israel. He assured the people that one day the desolation caused by sin would be reversed, and the land would be tilled and made fruitful again.

This account provides a lesson for us as well. The ruin and destruction in the park, and the desolate and waste condition of Israel, are similar to the condition of people's hearts before they come to the Lord seeking forgiveness. They are full of the "debris" of dashed dreams and sinful habits. The "ice and snow" of the world has left them cold and broken. But when the Lord saves them, in an instant of time, He removes the brokenness and rubble left by sin, and the change is apparent right away. The new life God gives is beautiful and clean; sin has been removed and all things have become new.

Only God can bring about this initial transformation in a life. However, as believers we can encourage and nurture the subsequent spiritual growth process. Like the residents of our city who offered their time and efforts to aid in the restoration of our neighborhood park, God is looking for laborers in the Gospel. He needs people who are willing to support, encourage, and teach new believers. This task may not always be easy and we will probably grow weary at times. However, our efforts will be rewarded when we see individuals who were once ruined by sin grow and become mature and thriving Christians.

BACKGROUND

This portion of Ezekiel 36 continues the theme of restoration that began in chapter 35. It was God's plan to reveal His name (representing His character and nature) to the world through the Jewish people. He provided for, protected, and led them. No other nation had the privileges or the knowledge of God that Israel had. However, Israel had profaned God's name to the heathen nations around them, and as a result, those nations questioned whether Israel's God could really be the one true God.

Verse 22 reveals the manner in which God would vindicate His name to the heathen. The Hebrew word translated "heathen" is frequently rendered "nations," and is a plural word meaning all nations and peoples other than Israel. To prove His power to the nations around Israel, God promised to gather the Israelite people from the nations into which they had been dispersed, bring them back to their own land, and reestablish them as a nation.

In addition to promising restoration, God promised to cleanse Israel of her corruption. In verse 25, to "sprinkle clean water upon you" was a reference to the purification ceremony for priests and Levites (see Numbers 8:7). Since Ezekiel was a priest, he would have been very familiar with the principle of cleansing.

God also promised to renew Israel spiritually. The statement in verse 26 that "a new heart also will I give you" indicates the people would be given new desires and a new will to serve God. The promise in the following verse that "I will put my spirit within you" marked a change from the external obedience that was previously required, to an internal desire to be pleasing to God.

Along with the promised spiritual restoration, Ezekiel also foretold a physical restoration of the land of Israel. Verses 33-38 describe the transformation

of what was called "waste and desolate" to "become like the garden of Eden." This restoration would be seen by all nations, and as a result, all would know the power of God to restore.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    4. The restoration of Israel
      d. The purification of Israel (36:22-38)
        (1) The vindication of the Lord's name (36:22-24)
        (2) The redemption of Israel (36:25-32)
        (3) The restoration of the land (36:33-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did God condemn the people for in verse 23? How did they do this?

2. What do you think was meant by God's promise in verse 26 to take away the stony heart and give the people a heart of flesh?

3. What are some evidences of restoration that were apparent in your life when God transformed you through His divine power?

CONCLUSION

God's power to renew and restore what was once broken and desolate is truly amazing.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 37:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest." (Ezekiel 37:3)

Recently I came across an old photo showing an ancient Native American burial site located on Memaloose Island in the Columbia River, east of Hood River, Oregon. The site was literally covered with dry bones. The photo had been taken during construction of the Bonneville Dam, before the bones were carefully removed and interred elsewhere. I learned from subsequent research that the name *Memaloose* is derived from the Chinook Indian word *memalust*, which means "to die." In the 1800s, the Indian tribes of the Columbia River did not bury their dead. Instead, they wrapped the bodies in mats or furs and placed them in the woods, on rocky points, or on islands like Memaloose.

The Corps of Discovery, under the command of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, went by the island on October 29, 1805, in their quest to reach the Pacific Ocean. On their homeward journey, the explorers visited the island and Lewis noted in his diary, "Thirteen sepulchers on this rock which stands near the center of the river and has a surface of about two acres above high water mark." They named the spot Sepulcher Island.[1]

Seeing the historical photo of the dry bones on Memaloose Island helped me visualize the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel saw — and to consider just how impossible it would be in the natural for those bones to come alive again. Only God could cause that to happen!

The dry bones in Ezekiel's vision represented the scattered Israelites in captivity, and the vision took place at a time when hope for the restoration of Israel was almost nonexistent. Historically, an initial fulfillment of this prophecy occurred when Israel was restored after seventy years in Babylonian captivity. A further fulfillment took place much later, when Israel was re-established as a nation in 1948 after nearly two thousand years of dispersion.

Notice that Ezekiel's vision was in two parts: first, the dry bones came together and the sinews and flesh were restored, though the slain were still dead. Then God breathed into them the breath of life and they became a living, vibrant army. This reminds us that God is not yet done with Israel. Today, the nation exists and enjoys remarkable military and economic strength. Spiritually speaking, however, the nation as a whole is still "dead in trespasses and sin." However, we know the day will come when those who are left of God's chosen people will truly accept their Messiah.

We can also apply this vision of restoration to ourselves. If we have strayed away from God and are dead spiritually, there is hope. If we turn wholeheartedly to Him, He will restore us as He did the dry bones. Even if we are serving the Lord, we may feel there is a lack of progress in our spiritual walk and that we need revival. Is that possible? Taking Ezekiel 37:3-5 as a promise, the answer is a definite yes! As we reach out to God in faith and are quick to do whatever He lays on our hearts, He will breathe new life into us. Let us claim this promise today!

BACKGROUND

Ezekiel's account in this chapter, which illustrates the promise of restoration described in the previous chapters, is one of six Ezekiel narratives containing the phrase, "The hand of the Lord was upon me," or similar language. On each occasion, these words signaled that the Lord's personal appearance, action, or intervention was imminent.

The location of the "open valley" full of dry bones referenced in verse 2 is not given; it was "open" in that it was not hid from view or shaded from the heat of the sun. In addition, the bones were unburied and thus fully exposed on the surface of the ground. Perhaps because of that as well as the passage of time, they were thoroughly dried out: no tissue, sinew, or hair remained. According to verse 11, the bones were those of Israelites who had been slain. Since the Law and Jewish culture were meticulous regarding treatment of dead bodies, this sight likely was disturbing to Ezekiel. However, he did not speak until the Lord asked him a question.

The word "noise" in verse 7 can also be translated as "voice," so the sound Ezekiel heard may not have been that of bones coming together but rather the voice of the Lord prompting the resurrection of the slain. Since these bones were not in graves, this voice-prompted raising of the dead, along with the "open your graves" references in verses 12 and 13, foreshadows a future resurrection that would apply to "the whole house of Israel."

When the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, the prophet was only responsible for accurately communicating the word of the Lord. He was not responsible for the assembly of the bones, organizing

the army, or clean-up of the valley. The Lord himself gathered together an "exceeding great army" from the dry bones. Verse 14 indicates that when the Lord placed this army back in their own land, they would be a witness to all people that He had done the work.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    5. The regathering of the nation
      a. The illustration of the dry bones (37:1-10)
      b. The explanation of the dry bones (37:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 7, what happened when Ezekiel first began prophesying to the dry bones?

2. What do you think is implied in verse 13 by the statement that the Jewish people "shall know that I am the LORD" when God brings them up out of their graves?

3. What are some ways we can prepare our hearts for revival?

CONCLUSION

Ezekiel's message to the dry bones brought hope and encouragement for the people of Israel. It helps us understand that God can bring life even to those who seem hopelessly dead in trespasses and sin.

NOTES

1. Meriwether Lewis, April 15, 1806 entry in *The Journals of Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gary Moulton (Lincoln:NE:University of Nebraska Press/ University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, 2005), http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-04-15.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 37:15-28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." (Ezekiel 37:22)

In 2019, the world marked the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Recently I read the account of a man who took part in that historic event, which precipitated the reuniting of East and West Germany.

Achim Merlo recounted, "As a German youngster, I became invested in the idea of contributing to unify the country. . . . At a certain point, I decided to leave home and move to Berlin to take part in the protests, which were happening in the western part. My grandmother had served as a frontline nurse during the war, in what was then a very different Berlin. She was particularly proud of the idea of a reunification of Germany, so she blessed my journey. I took with me a hammer and a big screwdriver from home that I used as a chisel to break chips out of the wall in the following days. With thousands of other young people gathering there in Berlin, I became what was nicknamed at the time a *Mauerspechte*—a wall woodpecker."[1]

Merlo explained that people on both sides of the wall had longed for freedom and unity. Political changes in Eastern Europe and civil unrest in Germany had put pressure on the East German government to loosen regulations for travel to West Germany. On November 9, 1989, an East German official mistakenly announced that the government would permit travel across the border, "effective immediately." The intent was for would-be travelers to apply for exit visas, but the announcement was interpreted as a decision to open the Berlin Wall that very evening.

When huge crowds gathered and demanded entrance into West Berlin, the border guards let them through. That weekend, more than two million people from East Berlin flooded into West Berlin to join in a celebration that was, according to one journalist, "the greatest street party in the history of the world." People used hammers and picks to knock away chunks of the wall, and then cranes and bulldozers began pulling down section after section. After the demolishing of the wall, the final barrier to reunification was removed when a treaty went into effect on October 3, 1990, and East and West Germany became one nation again.

In today's text, the prophet Ezekiel foretold another day of national reunification. At God's instruction, he took two sticks representing the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah). Though the two nations had been separated for many years and unification seemed an impossibility, Ezekiel was instructed to join the two sticks together in his hand. The meaning was clear: one day the nation that had been divided since the time of Rehoboam would be reunified—they would be one people who would have a single king.

Our God is still in the unification business—not only of nations, but of individuals. Just as God offered hope to Israel and Judah, He offers hope today to individuals who are separated from Him by sin. He is still in the business of bringing peace and uniting individuals with Himself.

It does not matter how long people have been in a sinful condition. It does not matter if their situation looks hopeless to others. If they will turn to God in repentance and faith, they can have an assurance that God has touched their hearts and restored what seemed irrevocably destroyed. And if they stay true to Him, that assurance will carry them through every hard place and trial until they are united with Him for all eternity.

BACKGROUND

By the time of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, recorded in the first part of chapter 37, the nation of Israel had been divided for nearly 350 years. Jerusalem had fallen and the Temple was destroyed, seemingly indicating the end of the nation. However, in this second part of chapter 37, God commanded Ezekiel to give an object lesson illustrating the restoration of the nation in the future.

Through the symbolic joining together of two sticks, God promised not only the restoration of the Southern Kingdom that had recently fallen, but the reunification of the whole nation in their promised land, with a faithful king, and the Lord himself in the sanctuary as the center of their worship. He told Ezekiel that this would be a witness to all nations that He is God. Furthermore, He gave the assurance that the people would never again be driven from the land, and that His sanctuary would "be in the midst of them for evermore" (verse 28).

At God's instruction, Ezekiel took two sticks, writing *Judah* on one of the sticks, and on the other

Ephraim, representing Israel. (The tribe of Ephraim was the largest tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and several times in the Old Testament, the Northern Kingdom was referred to as Ephraim.) The prophet was instructed to join the two sticks together to "make them one stick" in his hand (verse 19), symbolizing the reuniting of the two kingdoms.

In verse 25, a key provision God promised for restored Israel was the leadership of "my servant David." Rather than the literal return of King David, this is commonly understood to be a Biblical example of typology—the presenting of a person and/or event as a "type" or foreshadowing of a future person or event. This was a familiar pattern in Jewish thought of that era. The Greeks of that day would observe events and ask, "Why?" Jews, on the other hand, would more likely wonder, "What pattern does this fit?" or "Where have I seen this before?" So the recipients of Ezekiel's message would have understood that when God promised, "My servant David shall be their prince for ever," David was merely a type or shadow of the coming Prince. Another common rabbinic view has been that this ruler will be a descendant of David.

The covenant of peace that God promised in verse 26 was in stark contrast to what Israel had endured for centuries. *Shalom*, the word translated *peace*, indicated not only the absence of conflict, but also alluded to tranquility, safety, well-being, health, contentment, success, comfort, and wholeness. Given Israel's history and their overthrow in Ezekiel's era, this was a magnificent offer, and one that no doubt brought hope to the prophet's listeners.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    5. The regathering of the nation
      c. The point of the two sticks (37:15-28)
        (1) The reunion of Judah and Israel (37:15-23)
        (2) The restoration of the Davidic throne (37:24-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 19, how was Ezekiel to respond when the people asked him the meaning of the two sticks in his hand?

2. What do you think was the significance of God promising that the "sanctuary" and the "tabernacle" would be restored in the midst of the people forevermore?

3. How would you explain God's restorative power to an unbeliever?

CONCLUSION

Just as God promised to reunite and restore the nation of Israel, He promises to restore sinners if they will turn to Him in repentance.

NOTES

1. Yasmine Hung, "1989 in World History: An Interview," *The Graduate Press* (November 9, 2019), https://www.thegraduatepress.org/2019/11/09/1989-a-retrospective.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 38:1-16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them." (Ezekiel 38:7)

Warnings from a variety of sources have a role in contemporary society. For example, here in the United States, the National Weather Service uses the words "advisory," "watch," and "warning" to alert citizens about potentially dangerous weather such as hurricanes, tidal waves, and floods. Understanding these terms and knowing how to react can be a lifesaver. Our Department of State issues travel advisories that alert individuals planning trips abroad about unsafe conditions in other countries. The United States Food and Drug Administration cautions consumers about unapproved and misbranded products. The United Nations issues warnings regarding natural hazards such as pest invasions, diseases, and environmental issues.

Military warnings—both heeded and unheeded—have often changed the course of history. Perhaps one of the most famous warnings in United States history is the legendary ride of Paul Revere to alert American patriots just prior to the Revolutionary War that the British troops were on the move. That warning was immortalized by the poem entitled "Paul Revere's Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It begins,

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five:
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

While the warning of Paul Revere and his fellow patriots impacted the history of the United States, today's text includes a warning about a war at the end of time that will impact the entire world. And this warning was issued by God himself!

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, God revealed that in the last days, Gog and Magog will wage war against Israel while that nation is enjoying security in their own land. Bible scholars have varying opinions regarding the identity of Gog and Magog, but they clearly represent a coalition of evil powers that will come from the north and align themselves against Israel. Ezekiel 38:4 indicates that they will be drawn by God and will serve His purpose. They will come against Israel like a "storm"—a great oppressive power that will cover the land. However, the evil intent of Gog and Magog will ultimately be thwarted decisively and completely.

While the end time events prophesied by Ezekiel may seem shrouded in mystery to us, they are not hypothetical. We can be certain that they will occur! The battle of Gog and Magog, when the nations representing Satan come to war against God and His people, will be a very real event. While we may not understand every detail, knowing how to respond to this information can be a lifesaver spiritually. We can purpose in our hearts to be alert and aware of the indicators all around us that the time is near. We want to make sure we are prepared—that our peace is made with God and we are on the Lord's side!

BACKGROUND

Ezekiel 38 and 39 are a prophecy against a confederacy of nations that will attack Israel in the end time with the purpose of destroying the Jewish people. This massive force will be led by Gog, the leader and commanding general, who is described in verses 2-3 of chapter 38 as the "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal."

The nations that will invade from the north are identified as Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Togarmah, all of which are descendants of Japheth (see Genesis 10). Ethiopia (Cush) and Libya (Phut) are listed as invaders from the south and are descendants of Ham. Persia, coming from the east, generally is thought to have descended from Shem. All these nations will be drawn into a coordinated attack on Israel. Sheba (an area near Yemen), Dedan (northern Saudi Arabia), and Tarshish (on the Iberian peninsula) will also join in the coalition of forces invading Israel. Scholars link the Biblical names to a variety of nations, but the key point is that a combined force from many nations around Israel will participate in the attack.

After announcing in verse 3 that He will oppose Gog, God told how He will use the evil coalition of powers. The phrase "put hooks into thy jaws" (verse 4) describes the forceful way that herdsmen of Ezekiel's day compelled livestock to follow their masters. Although Gog will choose to attack Israel of his own free will, and the coalition will be drawn into the battle by their own hatred, God will use their evil plans for His purpose: "that the heathen may know me" (verse 16).

Verses 8 and 11 make clear that this prophecy applies to a time after Israel has been fully restored to its land. The "latter" years could also be translated as "end" or "after-part," placing the invasion and conflict near the end of time. "After many days" substantiates

that Israel will not only be fully restored to its land when this battle occurs, but will have enjoyed security in their land for a considerable amount of time. The fact that the people have been "dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" is a further indicator that they will have enjoyed an era of safety.

Verse 13 indicates that the great trading centers of Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish will protest against Gog's usurping of their position as world trade leaders, but will then join the confederacy. This is an indication that avarice will be a motivating factor for this massive end-of-days attack against Israel.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    6. The destruction of Gog
      a. The invasion (38:1-16)
        (1) The identity of the invaders (38:1-6)
        (2) The preparation for the invasion (38:7-9)
        (3) The purpose of the invasion (38:10-13)
        (4) The description of the invasion (38:14-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What are five of the nations that will come against Israel?

2. The text shows that Israel will have been dwelling safely when the surrounding nations invade. How do you think the Jewish people will feel as the armies begin to assemble?

3. How can we prepare for the events of the end times?

CONCLUSION

By faith we know God's Word will be fulfilled concerning the Jewish people, and by faith we can trust Him to help us be what He wants us to be until that day.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 38:17 through 39:16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel." (Ezekiel 39:7)

In many societies around the world, honoring the family name is of great importance and a required duty. The clans of Scotland, which date back to the twelfth century, are one example. Traditionally, clan members were expected to uphold the honor of the clan name by behavior that would win the approval of the clan chief.

Recently a conflict over use of a particular Scottish name made the news. The *Chicago Tribune* carried a story about a "call to arms" issued by Lord Godfrey James Macdonald, head of the Scottish clan that includes all spellings of that name.[1] Lord Macdonald was seeking support for a fellow Scot who was being threatened with legal action by the hamburger chain McDonald's because she had named her small sandwich shop outside of London McMunchies. Representatives of the burger chain asserted that "Mc" was a registered trademark of the company and that the shop owner's use of those letters was illegal because it might cause the public to think the shop was a part of the McDonald's corporation.

One of the supporters of the shop owner, also a MacDonald, wrote to the hamburger chain informing the company that its action was "an insult to millions of Scots." He then met with Lord Macdonald, and they set up an association named "Guardians of the Clan Macdonald." Its stated purpose was to uphold the honor and dignity of the clan name, as well as give moral support to the sandwich shop owner.

Though the fierce protectiveness of the Macdonald clan regarding their name might seem somewhat humorous to us, there is one Name that we *must* regard with utmost respect and honor: the name of God. While names are esteemed for many reasons, only His name is holy.

In Jewish tradition, a name is not merely an arbitrary designation or a random combination of sounds; it conveys the nature and essence of the one named. Thus, to honor the name of God is to reverence His character and indicate that He is regarded with absolute devotion and loving admiration.

Through the ages of time, God has defended His name to individuals, kings, and nations. Today's text tells of a time when He will defend His name to the nations of the world that will gather to fight against Israel. God's chosen people have polluted His name, but according to our focus verse, when He makes His holy name known in their midst, both Israel and all those who have opposed that nation will know He is the one true God.

Until that day comes, we too have a responsibility toward the name of God. It should have a position of honor and unique significance in our minds and hearts. We should never take His name lightly, but always uphold and reverence it in word and deed.

BACKGROUND

This portion of text from Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 continues the prophecy against a confederacy of nations that will attack Israel in the end time, and reveals the manner in which God's honor will be vindicated.

Verse 17 of chapter 38 begins with the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord GOD," emphasizing that this message was from God rather than Ezekiel. Ezekiel himself likely did not understand fully the scope of what he was saying, nor how the words his fellow prophets had spoken "in old time" harmonized with his narrative. This verse indicates that he was not personally forecasting the future; he was merely relating what God said.

Verses 18-19 indicate that when the nations gather against Israel, it will draw God's profound anger. The words "my fury shall come up in my face" are particularly emphatic in describing His ire when enemy armies set foot in Israel. As a result of His wrath, the Lord will personally intervene to defeat the armies of Gog and Magog. There is no mention of Israel fighting back, but only of God fighting for Israel through the elements He created—a mighty earthquake, hailstones, fire and brimstone, overflowing rain—and an enemy fighting against itself. These are all echoes of past events in the Bible, but will be greater in magnitude and scope than ever before as the Lord defeats the enemies of His people in this battle.

The first sixteen verses of chapter 39 continue the description of the utter destruction of Gog and Magog—an annihilation so terrible that only a small remnant of their army will survive. Verses 9-12 indicate that all their weaponry will be destroyed. The fact that it will take seven years to burn the weapons signifies the totality of the Lord's victory and the completion of His plan to vindicate His name. The seven months needed to bury the dead reinforce the finality of the victory.

According to verse 11, Gog and the accompanying forces will be buried in Israel. Early Bible commentators translated "east of the sea" as "the east sea," in reference to what we know as the Sea of Galilee. The Valley of Hamon-gog is thought to be slightly to its east. Commentator Adam Clarke agrees with this location.

Verses 13-16 pertain to the burial of the dead and reflect adherence to Levitical guidelines in the disposal of dead bodies, in keeping with Jewish cultural/religious norms. The phrase "cleanse the land" is further indication of the importance of purity, which will motivate Israel to treat even their worst enemies with respect in this disposing of the remains of the dead.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    6. The destruction of Gog
      b. The destruction
        (1) A great earthquake (38:17-20)
        (2) God's judgement (38:21-23)
        (3) Gog's army defeated (39:1-8)
        (4) The removal of Gog (39:9-16)
          (a) The weapons burned (39:9-10)
          (b) The dead buried (39:11-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Ezekiel 39:9, how long will it take the Israelites to burn the weapons of their enemies?

2. When we consider God's ultimate plan for Israel, what should be our attitude toward that nation today?

3. What are some specific ways we can honor God and His name?

CONCLUSION

As we honor God's name today, He will help us live so our lives glorify Him.

NOTES

1. Ray Moseley and staff writer, "Brave Hearts Fight Big Mac Attack," *Chicago Tribune*, February 2, 1997, accessed Dec 17, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-02-02-9702020275-story.html.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 39:17-29

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God." (Ezekiel 39:29)

The amazing mercy of God is granted to both nations and individuals. Evidence of national mercy is found in our focus verse, where we read that God will one day pour out of His Spirit upon Israel again. On a personal level, we know that God repeatedly reaches out to those who have rejected Him.

Andy Haggren, a veteran of the Apostolic Faith work, was one who benefited from God's mercy many years ago. He had been saved when he was nineteen years old, but after awhile he lost that victory because he listened to the devil who planted doubts in his mind. For six years, Andy tried to find enjoyment in the ways of the world.

He testified, "One Saturday night I planned to go to a dance. Earlier I had been drinking [this was during the period of the Prohibition when alcohol consumption was illegal in the United States], so I stopped at a café for a cup of coffee. When I left there, I remember stepping into a taxicab. Then I knew nothing more until I found myself struggling to climb a slippery, moss-covered piling in the Willamette River. The shock of the cold water had revived me momentarily.

"I could not climb the piling, and it came to me that on the other side of the river, I could climb up the rocky bank. Without hesitation, I let go of the piling, intending to swim, but I blacked out again. I don't know how long I was in the water, but I heard a voice calling out of the dark, 'Grab the rope!' I couldn't see anyone, but I felt the rope fall into my hands.

"A tugboat that was heading up the river was playing its light from side to side, looking for submerged logs and other debris. They had seen me! After they had pulled me aboard, someone said: 'You are one lucky guy!' I knew it was more than luck. God had spared my life, and I thanked Him for it. I was put ashore, and someone paid my taxi fare home. Whoever had doped me—perhaps putting a pill in my coffee—had also taken all my money, my identification, and even the key for my room.

"How close to Hell I had been! That thought really frightened me. Yet I did not give my heart to the Lord. But early one morning, on my way home from a night of revelry, I just looked up into the starry heavens and sent up an SOS to God. It was not much of a prayer—only, 'God, help me!'—but God heard it. I believe He had been waiting for my cry for help.

"On a Sunday afternoon I went to visit my sisters who were just leaving for an afternoon church service. They told me to make myself at home, and I sat down and began to read an Apostolic Faith paper I found on the table.

"I shall never forget how the Spirit of God began talking to my heart again. I felt the call of God as I had never felt it through the years I had been away from Him. With tender cords of love He drew me to Himself, showing me He was willing to forgive all. He gave me courage to make another start for Heaven. By a chair I prayed, purposing that I was through with the old life. I meant to serve God, and He saved me.

"The next morning the devil was there to tempt me again, saying 'You aren't saved. A backslider cannot get saved that easily.' I listened and decided he was right; I had not yet learned to use the shield of faith. I went back to the poolroom, but I couldn't get interested in the game and soon left. As I walked block after block, the Lord reasoned with me, making Heaven and Hell very real. I had come to the crossroads of life. There was no more room for doubt. Now I knew that henceforth I would live for Jesus and believe His promises.

"God forgave my faltering. I had learned my lesson. Never through the forty-three years since that day have I turned back. It did not come about by my willpower. God gave me the grace. He changed my heart and gave me new desires.

"Words can never express the infinite love and mercy the Lord held out to this repentant sinner who had lost his way. My heart is filled with gratitude." Andy served God until he was called home to Heaven.

In today's focus verse, God promised through Ezekiel that someday He would restore Israel. In the years since Ezekiel's era, His chosen people have rejected Him many times. However, at the end of time, God will bring them to Himself again. In the meantime, God's mercy still is extended to individuals who turn to Him in repentance. His Spirit is looking and calling for souls to seek God and find the peace and happiness He offers.

BACKGROUND

Today's text, the last portion of Ezekiel 39, concludes the prophecy against a confederacy of nations that will attack Israel in the end time, and reveals the manner in which God's honor will be vindicated.

Verses 17-20 describe in graphic terms the final judgment and destruction of Gog and Magog. The description of "feathered fowl" and "beast of the field" feeding on the bodies and blood of the dead is an implied comparison to a typical feast of that era, to which all neighbors and visitors would be invited as a matter of etiquette. Those who worshipped idols often praised their idols at such gatherings, and ridiculed the gods of the vanquished. At the grotesque sacrificial feast described in verses 17-20, the bodies of unbelievers are eaten by unclean bird and beast scavengers as the Lord judges those who disparaged His name.

According to verses 21-24, the victory of God over Gog and the accompanying forces will remind Israel of the power of the God they serve. Both heathen nations and the house of Israel will come to understand that Israel was chastened because of her own iniquity, not because God was unable to deliver His people.

Verses 25-29 point to the final restoration of "the whole house of Israel" to the land originally promised them. There will no longer be a division between ten tribes and two tribes, but the nation will be whole and complete under a single leadership. Verse 29 reinforces the reality that this is a final restoration; Israel will never again be scattered among the nations.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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IV. The consolation of Israel
  A. Prophecies of Israel's restoration
    6. The destruction of Gog
      b. The destruction
        (5) The feast for the birds (39:17-20)
        (6) The revelation of God's glory (39:21-29)
          (a) The disclosure of God's glory (39:21-22)
          (b) The reason for Israel's captivity (39:23-24)
          (c) The restoration of Israel (39:25-29)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did God say He would "set my glory among the heathen" (verses 21-22)?

2. What are some of the ways God shows mercy to those who have rejected Him?

3. God said He is jealous of His name. What are some ways we can bring glory to His name today?

CONCLUSION

God's marvelous mercy is still extended. We can thank Him that He is seeking those who have turned away and calling them with His love.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 40:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel." (Ezekiel 40:4)

While visiting St. Louis, Missouri, as tourists, my wife and I went to see the Gateway Arch. At 630 feet tall—the height of a sixty-three story building—that sweeping curve of stainless steel is an imposing sight. When I learned how the arch was constructed, I was even more amazed. The base of the structure is two "legs" comprised of 142 equilateral triangles that curve upward until they meet in the middle. Think of what precision was required in the measurements and calculations! And consider how well-executed the construction had to be in order for the two sides to come perfectly together at the top of the arch! The feat was accomplished so expertly that when the two sides met, virtually no adjustment was needed. In addition, the whole construction project was done without any loss of life or even serious injury.

The view from inside the arch is breathtaking: one can see about thirty miles in all directions. We were also fascinated by what you see when you look up from directly below the center of the arch. From that vantage point, the base is so wide that neither leg is in your peripheral vision. You can only see the top of the arch, so it looks like a long cement building floating in the sky!

As remarkable as the St. Louis arch is, it pales by comparison to the handiwork of God. Imagine Ezekiel's awe when he saw a vision of a future Temple in restored Israel, designed and constructed by God Himself! The description recorded in today's text contains measurements and details of a massive structure in the Temple complex. It appeared to Ezekiel "as the frame of a city" because it was surrounded by massive walls, courts, towers, and gates, just as an ancient city would have been.

In our focus verse, Ezekiel's divine guide told the prophet to set his heart upon all he was shown. He was to pay close attention and carefully note every detail so he could declare the vision to his fellow exiles. The vision indicated that a time of restoration was coming—a time when faithful people would worship God in a magnificent place of worship in the land of Israel, and the blessings of God would flow freely.

What is the lesson for us in this amazing description? Like Ezekiel, we must set our hearts on all that God reveals to us. The Holy Spirit reaches out to each of us to reveal God's holiness, our sinfulness, and our need for His forgiveness. As we respond and receive salvation, and then continue to carefully acknowledge and obey God, we will be prepared to worship in the glorious Temple that Ezekiel saw.

BACKGROUND

Scholars view chapters 40-48 of Ezekiel in various ways.

- Some see them as a *literal prophecy* that the exiles of Ezekiel's era would one day be restored to their land and would rebuild the Temple.
- Others interpret these chapters as an *allegorical description* of the Christian Church and a reassurance that God will provide a different priesthood and worship system for His people than what they have previously known.
- Some see chapters 40-48 through an *apocalyptic perspective*, and believe that the images are primarily mythic in nature, and were connected to pagan ideas prevalent in the world of Ezekiel's day.
- Many see these chapters from a *dispensationalist viewpoint*: that this Temple is real, and will be built in the coming Millennial age. Ezekiel's Temple will memorialize God's work for Israel and the rich types and shadow examples that looked ahead to the perfect work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is the view taken by our church.

Chapter 40 continues the theme of Israel's future restoration that began in chapter 33. Chapters 40-42 focus on Ezekiel's vision of a rebuilt Temple. To Ezekiel, the Temple was a symbol of Israel's national identity, in that it represented access to God and salvation. Ezekiel had lived most of his life in exile, deprived of this access. His vision of restored Temple worship in Israel's post-exile future framed Israel's future redemption and restoration in a way that he could comprehend, and confirmed God's faithfulness to Israel.

In Ezekiel's vision, a divinely appointed guide led the prophet through the Temple complex. (While the word *temple* in Scripture sometimes refers to a roofed building that was the Lord's house, it more commonly refers to the whole area enclosed by walls, inside which God's people gathered to worship.) Precise

measurements were taken, and Ezekiel was told to record what he saw and declare it to the people of Israel.

Like many of Ezekiel's prophetic revelations and visions, this one is dated: it took place about 573 B.C., fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. If "beginning of the year" in verse 1 refers to the religious calendar, then the Passover was near. If it refers to the beginning of the civil calendar, then it coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles. Either way, the vision occurred during a pilgrimage season when the captives were unable to gather at Jerusalem to worship at the Temple as the Law mandated. As a member of the priesthood, Ezekiel would have been acutely aware of this, and Jerusalem and the Temple would have been in his daily thoughts.

Ezekiel's vantage point from the "very high mountain" gave him something like an aerial or a "plan view" as the man measured the Temple. The cubit is a unit of measure historically regarded as equal to the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and therefore does not have a precise length. Throughout history, each culture has had different lengths of cubits, and usually a short or common cubit and a long royal or sacred cubit. The cubit used in our text was most certainly a sacred cubit and according to one Hebrew source, this would have made the "reed" the man used about ten and a half feet long (slightly higher than regulation basketball hoop height).[1] In verse 5, the man began by measuring the perimeter wall around the Temple, and the height of it was one reed, and the width of it was one reed. Square chambers constructed along the wall on the north, south, and east sides were one reed square. This wall surrounded the entire Temple area.

Large gates for entrance and exit are described in detail, beginning at verse 6. These gates were located on three sides of the structure, and had guard chambers along each side. A worshipper would be required to pass through gates, climb stairs, and cross large courtyards in order to approach the actual Temple. There was no gate on the western side, the side closest to the Temple itself, so access to the Lord's immediate Presence was restricted.

According to verses 22 and 26, seven steps led upward from the outer courtyard to the inner court. This indicates that the inner court and the Temple itself were elevated, perhaps on some type of platform above the ground surrounding it. This second level had three gates on its inside border, corresponding to the three outer gates on the south, east, and north walls of the Temple complex. These six entryway structures or porticos were identical in size and layout. If a person were to enter the outer southern gate, he would go up seven steps into that portico, walk the length of it (about 87 feet) past three guard stations on each side, and into the main courtyard. He would then walk about 175 feet to the inner southern gate, up eight steps, and into the inner southern gate portico. Entry from the east and north sides was similar. The only purely decorative element described were palm trees on some of the walls.

A comparison of the measurements given for this future Temple to the ones that existed during the eras of Solomon, Ezra, and Herod indicates that Ezekiel was viewing a Temple that has not yet existed.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      a. Introduction (40:1-4)
      b. The measurement of the Temple
        (1) The courts of the Temple
          (a) The outer courts (40:5-27)
            [1] The wall (40:5)
            [2] The gates (40:6-27)
              [a] The east gate (40:6-16)
              [b] The chambers of the outer court (40:17-19)
              [c] The north gate (40:20-23)
              [d] The south gate (40:24-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, how long into the Babylonian captivity was this vision given?

2. Why do you think it was important for the people of Ezekiel's era to hear about a Temple that did not exist at that time?

3. What are some specific ways we can follow the instructions given to Ezekiel in our key verse, to "behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee"?

CONCLUSION

Some day we will worship in the Temple revealed to Ezekiel if we serve God faithfully in this life. What a glorious hope that is!

1. Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew English Tanakh*, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2000), pg. 1247.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 40:28-47

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the chamber whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok among the sons of Levi, which come near to the LORD to minister unto him." (Ezekiel 40:46)

Westminster Abbey in London, with its Gothic walls and one-hundred-foot ceilings, is an amazing church. History pervades its atmosphere. Constructed centuries ago, it is the burial place of over three thousand famous people, including seventeen monarchs. It has been the site of British coronations and the venue for sixteen royal weddings. Its carvings, stained glass windows, and historical artifacts are impressive, and its stellar acoustics prompt people to walk and speak quietly. The five-manual organ with ninety-four stops produces breathtaking sound, and frequent musical programs and daily worship services are held there. Visitors are always awed by what they see and hear.

In contrast, consider the description of another place of worship, this one at Pascani in the northeastern region of Romania where a faithful Christian named Vasile Budeanu holds cottage meetings. Recently two of our ministers reported, "We visited a two-room house where many services are held. The saints here desire to build a church, and have even completed a foundation next to the house. However, they have been unable to obtain the permits because the building is to be a church. We held a service in the house, and both rooms were packed. God's Spirit was strongly felt throughout as we enjoyed special music selections, exhortations from the Word, and a sweet time of prayer."

Every worship service is noted by God, whether it takes place in a gorgeous cathedral or a humble home. In today's text, God continued to reveal to Ezekiel the Temple that will house Israel's worship services in His Millennial Kingdom. From the details given in these verses, we see that the Lord is mindful of every architectural and furnishing detail for places of worship. However, He is far more interested in the condition of the hearts of the people who gather there.

God is looking for those who will prepare their hearts to "come near to the LORD" as the focus verse states. How can we do that? We must submit our thoughts, actions, and wills to His direction, and ask Him to search us and let us know if anything in our lives is displeasing to Him. Paying close attention to the checks of the Holy Spirit and promptly obeying is critical to our spiritual growth. Praising and thanking Him for who He is and what He has done for us will bring us increasingly closer to Him.

May our purpose today be to come near to the Lord. He is waiting and willing to receive us!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 40 continues the theme of Israel's future restoration, which began in chapter 33. Chapters 40-42 focus on Ezekiel's vision of a rebuilt Temple. In this vision, a divine guide led the prophet through the Temple complex. Precise measurements were taken, and Ezekiel was told to record what he saw and declare it to the people of Israel. Today's text describes the gateways to the inner court (verses 28-37), the chambers and implements for sacrifices (verses 38-46), and the altar (verse 47).

Only priests were allowed to come into the inner court, but because Ezekiel was a priest, he was allowed to enter. Verses 28-37 indicate that the inner court was a smaller version of the outer court. It had the same squared, horseshoe shape. However, it had a different purpose: it contained the workrooms used by the priests.

Verses 38-43 describe rooms where the sacrifices were prepared, and the implements used for processing offerings. These included small tables of hewn stone (about thirty inches square, and twenty inches high) for killing and dividing offerings. Moses had specifically been told not to make altars of "hewn stone" because the use of tools would pollute them (Exodus 20:25). Among the prophets, using hewn stone in something other than a building foundation was considered to be illustrative of pride (see Isaiah 9:9-10, Amos 5:11). This would seem to indicate that these tables for sacrifices were not actually to be used. Since animal sacrifices merely foreshadowed the future sacrifice of God's Son, the Lamb of God, these tables may be memorials that point back to the work of Jesus, much as the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper in our dispensation point back to and memorialize that event.

There were two of these tables on both the right and left, both inside and outside the entrances to the inner courtyard, so eight at each of the three gates. Neither the Tabernacle in the wilderness nor Solomon's Temple contained anything similar.

Verses 44-46 give details regarding chambers in the inner court for the singers and the priests. In verse 46, "the sons of Zadok, among the sons of Levi" are specified as the designated priests. Since the time of

Solomon's Temple, Zadokites had been mandated from among the Levites to make sacrifices, rather than other Levites who had been unfaithful. Their appointment was due to their faithfulness, rather than their ancestral lineage. This Temple was righteously staffed, in contrast to the past corruption of Israel's worship practices. (A further explanation of the Zadokites' appointment is given in Ezekiel 44:10-15.)

Verse 47 describes the large altar similar to the one to which burnt offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings were once brought. The placement of this altar mirrors its location in both the wilderness Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple; the sanctuary pattern was always consistent, though exact measurements of the altars differed. The restricted access (indicated by the walls and gates of the Temple complex) is illustrative of the fact that God's people must be pure—those corrupted by sin will be kept out.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      b. The measurement of the Temple
        (1) The courts of the Temple
          (b) The inner court (40:28-46)
            [1] The south gate (40:28-31)
            [2] The east gate (40:32-34)
            [3] The north gate (40:35-37)
            [4] The chambers for the burnt offering (40:38-43)
            [5] The chambers for the priests (40:44-46)
          (c) The altar (40:47)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who would use the chambers mentioned in verses 44-46?

2. Why do you think the details given to Ezekiel should have been an encouragement to the exiles in Babylon?

3. What are some blessings that come to those who draw near to the Lord?

CONCLUSION

God wants each of us to come near to Him and worship with our whole hearts. Will we do that today?

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 40:48 through 41:26

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"So he measured the length thereof, twenty cubits; and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple: and he said unto me, This is the most holy place." (Ezekiel 41:4)

Have you ever tried to describe something to a person who has no knowledge of what you are talking about? It is a challenging task! On a recent trip to India, I found it difficult to explain the food I was enjoying to my family back home in Grants Pass, Oregon. It would be simple to relate a list of ingredients to a gourmet who knew what each spice tasted like, but I could only make general comparisons to things I knew my family members would understand.

The first thing I noticed about Indian cuisine was that the food relied more on spices than on salt and sugar for taste. My next discovery was that each dish featured several layers of complimentary flavors. My first bite of one dish contained bell pepper, onion, and cilantro, reminding me of the Mexican food my family and I enjoy at a local restaurant. My second bite, from the same dish, contained whole pieces of clove and star anise, and the resulting flavor reminded me of some of the dishes at a Chinese restaurant. After several more mouthfuls, I realized that there were bits of chili pepper in each bite. Soon, rather than having only a warm mouth, I was warm all over! Though I did my best to explain the taste sensations I was experiencing, my food comparisons did a poor job of conveying to my family an accurate perception of what I was eating.

In our text for today, Ezekiel described something that his hearers would have had difficulty comprehending. A divinely appointed guide—the one who had previously shown Ezekiel the courtyard, walls, and chambers of the future Temple complex—took the prophet into the Millennial Temple itself. As the guide led the prophet through each area, precise measurements were made and recorded, for Ezekiel had been instructed to relay all that he saw to the "house of Israel."

The building in Ezekiel's vision was different from Solomon's Temple, and from the two later Temples in Israel's future—those built by Ezra and Herod. It was also unlike any place Ezekiel had visited on earth. The foundation was six cubits high. Great pillars and posts upheld the roof. The three stories of chamber storerooms surrounding the Temple building increased outward in size so that each level had a larger perimeter than the last. The upper levels were accessed by winding staircases. While Ezekiel faithfully recorded what he was shown, no doubt he felt overwhelmed with the task of describing such an amazing structure!

While we may not fully understand God's purpose for revealing this future Temple to Ezekiel in such detail, we can perceive some of what God was communicating through it. God desires fellowship with His people! In the Millennial Kingdom, there will be a place where those who have been united with Him through faith in the shed Blood of Jesus can come to worship. And the good news is, the Gospel is boundless—no one who comes to Christ in true repentance will be denied.

Some day in the future, God's promise in Ezekiel 37:27 to put His sanctuary among His people will be fulfilled. As we read of Ezekiel's vision and ponder what he saw, we will find that our desire to see that amazing place will continue to grow!

BACKGROUND

Having been told in Ezekiel 40:4 to "declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel," the prophet obediently continued to record all he was shown by his divine guide. While in some cases Biblical prophecy can be attributed to more than one timeframe, the details of Ezekiel's vision in this text seemingly picture the Temple that will exist in restored Israel during Christ's Millennial Reign. A comparison shows it to be different from Solomon's Temple (see 1 Kings 6-7) and also from the two Temples that were built after Ezekiel's era (Ezra's and Herod's Temples).

A description of the Temple itself begins in Ezekiel 40:48 and continues through chapter 42. Ezekiel 40:48 indicates that a set of steps went up to the porch (or vestibule) of the Temple. This was the third level of the structure that Ezekiel was shown, but much of what is covered in Ezekiel 41 was part of the inner court (second level).

When Ezekiel spoke of the "house," he was referring to the entire structure, including the Temple itself, its porch, and the side chambers. The word "house" in the original Hebrew has a wide variety of applications, but it refers to something that has been built. The word "temple" is used in reference to the areas in and around the Holy Place, and the "most holy place" (verse 4), which was also known as the Holy of Holies. This was the inner room whose height, length, and breadth were equal in measure, and which could only be approached by going through the Holy Place.

In verses 5-11 Ezekiel described a structure three stories high, with thirty storerooms on each floor, built around the perimeter of the Temple. He said it adjoined the Temple, but was not supported by it. A staircase wound around the stories, and each upward level increased in width.

The "separate place" mentioned in verse 12 refers to the chamber areas on the sides of the porch and Temple; only the priests were allowed to enter those areas.

The altar of wood that Ezekiel described in the Holy Place (verse 22) seems to have replaced the golden altar and table of shewbread of previous Temples. Nor did Ezekiel's description make any mention of the golden candlesticks that were in the Holy Place of the wilderness Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      b. The measurement of the Temple
        (2) The Temple itself (40:48—41:26)
          (a) The porch (40:48-49)
          (b) The Holy Place (41:1-2)
          (c) The Most Holy Place (41:3-4)
          (d) The side chambers (41:5-11)
          (e) The separate building (41:12-14)
          (f) The interior features (41:15-26)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Ezekiel 41:22, what was the only object housed inside the Holy Place in Ezekiel's vision?

2. Why do you think Ezekiel was given precise dimensions for the Temple design?

3. What can we learn from the intricacy and majesty of the Temple in Ezekiel's vision?

CONCLUSION

The detailed description of Ezekiel's Temple can help us visualize it. But more importantly, it can cause us to purpose to prepare to go there!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 42:1-20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place." (Ezekiel 42:20)

Our focus verse describes the outer wall that surrounded the entire Temple complex of Ezekiel's vision, separating the Temple and courtyard from the "profane" or common things outside the wall. Reading this reminded me that there is a difference between ordinary buildings—no matter how beautiful or well-constructed—and buildings that have been dedicated to God and set apart for His service.

Over the years of my career as a tradesman, one of my great privileges has been having a part in construction projects in our branch churches and the Portland headquarters church. I marvel how these sites—just common construction sites to casual observers—have become sacred places where God's Spirit dwells.

Of course, we know that His Spirit is not confined to a building. For example, think of the burning bush where Moses met God, the site on the Jordan River where John baptized Jesus, or the road to Jericho where Zacchaeus climbed down from the sycamore tree and met Jesus. While God's Spirit was present at each of those places, there is something special about a sanctuary built and dedicated as a dwelling place for Him.

Even during construction, surrounded by the sounds and sights that are a normal part of a job site, there is an expectation that God will come into the completed building and inhabit it with His Spirit. I have worked on church projects with unbelievers who shared in the anticipation of the building being completed and used for a godly purpose. They recognized that a church was a special place! In fact, once a man working on a secular construction site urged another worker to speed up, saying, "We're not building a church!" The implication was that a church would require extra care unnecessary in an ordinary building.

What makes a house of worship sacred? What sets it apart from surroundings that are "common," as the wall around Ezekiel's Temple did? That separation does not happen because of the materials used, or the people who build it, or because the location itself is significant for some reason. A house of God becomes sacred when it is dedicated and set apart for God and His use. It is different from other buildings! There is anticipation that God will come there and dwell with man. And when He does, God receives glory and praise. Souls are rescued from a lost eternity, spiritual victories are won, and God's blessings are experienced.

There are many houses in the world where famous people have lived or notable events have taken place. Some have been turned into shrines. Some become designated World Heritage sites or national treasures. But secular places, no matter how elaborate or famous, cannot compare with a structure that has been set apart for God.

A house of worship is a holy place. Let's be sure that we reverence God's sanctuary, because it is where the God of the universe comes to meet with us!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 42 concludes the description of the Temple complex that began in Ezekiel 40. In this chapter, Ezekiel's divinely appointed guide took him away from the Temple building and back to the outer court.

The two priests' chambers in the outer court are described in verses 1-14. These three-story structures were mirror images of each other, and were located between the outer and inner courts. Some of the architectural details recorded are difficult to visualize, so commentators differ as to the precise appearance of these buildings.

According to verses 13-14, the priests' chambers had two functions. They were where the priests would eat their portions of the offerings brought by the worshippers. Also, this was where they would change into their priestly garments, which were to be worn only when they were serving in the inner court; they could not profane consecrated garments by wearing them when mingling with people in the outer courtyard. As a priest, Ezekiel had been taught that there must be a separation between that which is profane and that which is holy. To maintain that separation in Ezekiel's Temple, priests could not directly pass from the outer court to the inner court, but would be required to go through a narrow passage at the east end of each chamber complex where they would change into their priestly garments before ministering.

In verses 15-20, Ezekiel's guide led him out through the east gate, where he proceeded to measure the outer perimeter of the Temple complex. The four sides of the complex were equal in length, making it a perfect square. Some versions of the Bible give the length of each side as "500 reeds," inferring that the

word *reed* alluded to the increment of measure used. However, other translations give the length as "500 cubits" per side (about 875 feet). Commentators are divided on what the actual interpretation should be, as there are good cases for both.

Regardless of exact measurements or architectural details, the familiar form of the Temple complex and the separation of the holy from the profane allowed for forms of worship that an observant priest like Ezekiel would have recognized.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      b. The measurement of the Temple
        (3) The chambers in the outer court (42:1-14)
        (4) The total Temple area (42:15-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on Ezekiel 42:13-14, what were the priests to wear when they entered into the Holy Place?

2. What do you think was indicated by the separation between the Temple complex and all that was outside its walls?

3. What are some ways we can model proper behavior in God's house to the next generation?

CONCLUSION

God is holy, and His house must be treated with honor and respect.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 43:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house." (Ezekiel 43:5)

How amazing it must have been for Ezekiel to witness the glory of the Lord filling the Temple! Reading this chapter made me think of another time the glory of God "filled the house" in a remarkable way: during a chapel service at youth camp in August of 1989. My life was changed forever by what I experienced that week.

It was my first Apostolic Faith youth camp and I was excited to be there, but not necessarily for spiritual reasons. I loved the organized activities, the competitive softball, and the energetic volleyball games. The delicious food and fun times with friends were also great. But unexpectedly to me, God descended on the campground that week and began to speak to my heart in a very real way during the cabin devotions and chapel services. The Lord used the camp theme song, "Behold, What Manner of Love," to convince me of how much my Heavenly Father loved me personally. Though I had been brought up in a Christian home and had attended many church services, I had never before experienced God's presence and love in such a gripping way as I did that week.

On the third night, as I stood in the doorway of the chapel after a service, one of the counselors invited me to pray. I accepted that invitation and knelt, and soon the Lord began to melt my heart. Several people gathered to pray with me, and after a time, their words became my prayer. That night the grace of God helped me pray a prayer of repentance and total surrender, and the Lord came into my heart and saved me from my sins. In an instant of time, He changed my life and my desires. As I continued to pray, God sanctified me, and then filled me with His precious Holy Spirit.

While I had a personal encounter with God that week, there was an impact on the other campers and staff as well. For many, the highlight of the week was the last service of camp, when the presence of the Lord descended in a mighty way and filled the chapel. In our text, Ezekiel observed the awesome glory of God return to the Temple in a visible form — in fact, God's holy presence was so overwhelming that it caused Ezekiel to fall on his face. While God's presence was not physically apparent during the final service of that youth camp, it was evident in the form of unspeakable joy and the infilling power of His Holy Spirit in people's hearts. Many who were present testified later that they had a life-changing experience with God that night. Today, there are a number of ministers and other workers in our organization who point back to that service as a time when their lives were forever changed.

Ezekiel's vision should inspire and challenge us. God is still willing to manifest Himself in powerful ways! Let us purpose to seek God and pray that He will once again fill us individually and corporately with the glory of the Lord.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 43 describes the return of God's glory to His house (verses 1-5), God's pronouncement to Ezekiel and Israel (verses 6-12), and the measurements and dedication of the altar (verses 13-27).

Ezekiel witnessed a vision of God's return by way of the eastern gate to dwell among His people. This was the same direction from which He had departed Jerusalem almost nineteen years earlier (see Ezekiel 11:22-23). Then Ezekiel was transported to the inner court, where he observed the glory of the Lord fill the Temple itself, much as it had done at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. Ezekiel had witnessed the glory of God twice before (in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10-11), and once again he was so overwhelmed that he fell on his face in reverence and awe.

Verses 6-12 record that the Voice of God spoke from the midst of the Temple, proclaiming that He had come back to the Temple to reign. God had given Israel laws and ordinances that were to shape their approach to the Lord, and the overarching principle was holiness. Though the people had previously defiled God's holy name, their sinful practices of the past would continue no more. God's habitation would be separate from anything profane or unclean.

God's first words, recorded in Ezekiel 43:7, highlight the differences between His laws and the laws of people. God's laws derive their authority from Him, and emphasize morality. The statement "neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcases of their kings in their high places" revealed how God viewed Israel's kings. The word "king(s)" is used twenty-six times in the Book of Ezekiel, and in all but three instances, there is a negative connotation. God did not want the rule or the burial places of ungodly kings to be objects of veneration, nor to be anywhere near His Temple. While there would be no dividing line between Jew and Gentile in Ezekiel's Temple,

there would be a clear dividing line between the holy and the profane.

Verses 10-12 reveal at least one of God's purposes for the detailed vision given Ezekiel: that Israel would see the restoring love and grace of God toward them, and consequently become "ashamed of their iniquities." Ezekiel was to tell the house of Israel that the pattern for the Temple structure had not changed, nor had the forms or ordinances of worship. These patterns and forms had been designed to teach Israel appropriate attitudes and priorities in their worship of the Lord. In verse 10, the word translated "pattern" occurs only twice in Scripture—here and in Ezekiel 28:12, where it indicates a measurement of "perfection." Ezekiel did not understand all he saw, but he observed a familiar pattern that emphasized holiness and a right relationship to God.

Verses 13-27 relate to the cleansing and consecration of the altar of burnt offering. As with all altars to the true God, this one points to the Cross of Christ and the Blood that Jesus shed as the Perfect Sacrifice. Some Bible scholars suggest that the worship implements and practices described here and in several subsequent chapters may have been fulfilled in the two earthly Temples of Israel that came after the time of Ezekiel—the ones built by Ezra and Herod. Other commentators feel these worship implements and practices memorialize God's plan of salvation as revealed to Israel through the ages, and look back to Jesus' work on the Cross much as our ordinance of the Lord's Supper does. Ezekiel could only describe what he saw, and since God views the whole span of earthly time, it may be that what the prophet observed was symbolic in nature.

The description of cleansing the altar would have been familiar to anyone conversant with Levitical requirements, as Ezekiel was. The fact that there is no description of priests making offerings for themselves suggests that they were already holy.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      c. The return of glory of God to the Temple (43:1-12)
        (1) The vision of the prophet (43:1-5)
        (2) The words to the prophet (43:6-9)
        (3) The commission of the prophet (43:10-12)
      d. The renewal of worship in the Temple
        (1) The description of the altar of burnt offerings (43:13-27)
          (a) The dimensions of the altar (43:13-17)
          (b) The dedication of the altar (43:18-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 2, how did Ezekiel describe the sound of God's voice?

2. Since the departure of God's glory had signaled the destruction of the city and Temple, what do you think the return of God's glory symbolizes?

3. The basic law of God's Temple was holiness. In what ways might a focus on God's holiness shape our actions and attitudes?

CONCLUSION

Experiencing a manifestation of the glory and power of God is an unforgettable experience!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 44:1-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." (Ezekiel 44:23)

Over the years, our family has had several tropical fish aquariums. Our children found the wide variety of fish shapes and colors intriguing, and we enjoyed the calming effect of watching the fish swim about in the tank. However, we learned that it takes a fair amount of work to properly maintain the tank environment and keep the fish healthy!

One of the most critical tasks was keeping the water and tank clean, and a number of steps were necessary to ensure that. The water had to be purified from any chemicals harmful to fish before the fish were added to the tank, so we installed a recirculation pump with filters: a sponge filter to remove impurities that could be seen, and a charcoal filter to remove impurities that could not be seen. We discovered that it is important to keep the chemical balance (pH) of the water correct for the particular species of fish. We carefully watched for signs of algae in the tank, and removed it whenever it appeared. When those steps were taken, we enjoyed an eye-catching scene of tranquility right in our living room. When the necessary steps were neglected, the results were cloudy water, algae growing on the tank walls, and eventually, dead fish. The difference between clean and unclean water was a life or death matter for the inhabitants of our tank!

In today's text, Ezekiel outlined regulations regarding the Temple in restored Israel, and requirements for those who would serve as priests in it. Our focus verse summarizes the priests' primary duty: to teach God's people "the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean."

Historically, God had intended that His people thrive in the land of promise as a separate and pure people. Before Judah's destruction, one of His accusations against the house of Israel was that they had failed to preserve the sanctity of the Temple (see Ezekiel 8). Such neglect would not be tolerated in the new Temple. God gave instructions for proper worship and explicit directions regarding how to keep worship pure. These instructions included both obvious things that could be seen, and the less obvious attitudes of the heart.

The importance of maintaining holiness and purity before God is no less vital in our day. In our personal lives, this begins with salvation from sin, which removes the stain and guilt of committed sins. Entire sanctification is a second, definite work of grace that will cleanse and purify our unseen motives and attitudes. This state of heart cleanliness is sustained by taking careful note of the difference between the "clean and unclean" in the world around us, and asking for God's help in avoiding any contaminating influences. Purity is not something that we can afford to overlook or neglect. It is a matter of spiritual life or death!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 44 outlines regulations for worship in the new Temple. The guidelines and restrictions primarily applied to four groups: the prince, strangers, Levites, and priests. Given directly by "the Lord GOD," these guidelines closely paralleled what Ezekiel had learned about worship from the Law of Moses, though in some cases, the new requirements were even more exacting.

The restriction on usage of the eastern gate was a command not covered in the Law. Because the Lord had entered the Temple from the east (see chapter 43), that ground was sacred, and the gate was to remain closed. Only the prince could enter the outer court from that direction.

"The prince," God's appointed leader mentioned in verse 3, is alluded to many times in Ezekiel's Temple vision. His actions correspond with historical functions of princes (tribal leaders or chieftains in Israel), as outlined in the instructions of Numbers 7. Bible scholars have differing views regarding the identity of the prince. Though not a king or a priest, he is a key figure in the restored Temple system of worship. His faithful discharge of duties is contrasted to the corrupt princes mentioned earlier in Ezekiel and in the history of Israel.[1] Because he offered a sin offering for himself (Ezekiel 45:22), had sons (Ezekiel 46:16), and was warned about corruption (Ezekiel 46:18), most commentators agree that he cannot be the Messiah, though he is a descendant of David.

The designation of "stranger" and the entry restriction in verse 9 was not based on ethnicity. Jewish historians define a "stranger" as "one whose deeds have become alienated from his Father in Heaven; this is an apostate who worships idols. They are the ones of 'uncircumcised heart.'"[2] God's holy sanctuary was a place set apart for worship; it was

not to be an object of tourism or casual curiosity. The people of Israel had been taught monotheism (belief in one God) since the time of Moses, but this concept was exceptional among the nations of that era. Few "strangers" would have embraced such a belief.

Temple duties were assigned to the tribe of Levi in verses 10-16. However, many of the Levites were prohibited from performing priestly duties because they had been unfaithful in the past. Verse 10 states that they had "gone away far from me, when Israel went astray," a reference to when Jeroboam set up alternative worship that divided Israel and turned the people from God (see 1 Kings 12). Since some of the Levites followed that apostasy, priestly duties in Ezekiel's Temple were assigned to the Zadokites, who had remained faithful to God.

The detailed instructions in verses 17-31 reinforced what Ezekiel knew from study of the Torah. Proximity to God required great care and reverence, and certain outward indicators of holiness were required. For example, verse 20 mandated that priests were not to shave their heads or have long hair, as such extremes would emulate the worship customs of surrounding heathen nations.[3] Requirements for priests were more strict than for other Israelites, as it was their duty to teach the people the difference between the holy and profane, and the clean and unclean.

The inheritance and provision for the priests described in verses 28-31 parallel those established by Moses under the Law. They were to have no land allotment as God Himself would be their inheritance, and the offerings brought by the people would be their food.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      d. The renewal of worship in the Temple
        (2) The requirements for the Temple ministers (44:1-31)
          (a) The regulations concerning the east gate (44:1-4)
          (b) The restriction of some from the Temple (44:5-14)
            [1] Strangers (44:5-9)
            [2] Certain Levites (44:10-14)
          (c) The regulations for the Zadokite priests (44:15-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Which gate was reserved for the prince's entry to the Temple compound?

2. Why do you think God gave specific requirements for the priests' appearance and deportment?

3. What are some practical ways we can learn "to discern between the unclean and the clean" today?

CONCLUSION

The principle of taking care to discern between the holy and profane is still an important one. It is vital for believers to maintain purity before the world in their walks with the Lord.

NOTES

1. See Ezekiel 7:27; 12:10; 21:25; 38:2, 3; 39:1
2. Rashi, "Rashi on Ezekiel," *Sefaria*, December 28, 2021, https://www.sefaria.org
3. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, Second edition, edited by J. H. Hertz (London: Soncino Press, 1960), 528.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 45:1-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"The holy portion of the land shall be for the priests the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto the LORD: and it shall be a place for their houses, and an holy place for the sanctuary." (Ezekiel 45:4)

For over one hundred years, a twelve-acre wooded plot of ground on Duke Street in Portland, Oregon, has been a place dedicated to God. In the Apostolic Faith organization, we refer to this piece of land as "the campground." Since the acreage was purchased in 1920, it has been the site of our annual international camp meetings—a place where God meets and communes with His people. First-time visitors often express a feeling of awe as they step through the gates, recognizing they are on holy ground.

In July of 2020, we celebrated the centennial anniversary of the campground. In the message at the anniversary service, we were reminded that over the years God has given spiritual victories to countless individuals there. For many, it is the place where God saved them and they found relief from the heavy load of sin they carried; they left the campground feeling joyful, forgiven, and with a new life in Christ. Others look back with gratitude to wonderful prayer meetings where God sanctified them, filled them with His Holy Spirit, or healed them.

For some members of our international church family, it was the dream of a lifetime to enter the large, domed tabernacle where services are held. Some saw pictures of the building and heard reports from friends or family who had attended a camp meeting, and then spent years planning, working, and saving to make the trip themselves. Still, they reported that nothing prepared them for the emotion that welled up in their hearts when they finally walked through the tabernacle doors into the sanctuary.

Others cannot remember the first time they came onto the campground or walked into the tabernacle. I am part of that group. My parents tell me I was just one week old when they brought me to my first camp meeting. I have attended several decades of camp meetings since then, but there is still a thrill in my heart when I walk into that building, because I now have many personal memories of precious times there.

In our text today, we read of the "holy portion of the land" that God said will one day be set aside for His sanctuary in Israel. Just as the land was divided when the Israelites entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, a land allotment will take place one day in restored Israel. Ezekiel described an area in the middle that will be divided into thirds. At the center of that area will be a special holy section, set apart for the Lord and containing the Temple itself.

We do not know exactly what the Temple grounds or the Temple will be like in restored Israel. However, much like the people who desire for years to visit the tabernacle on the Portland campground, we can *think* about what it will be like. We can long for the opportunity to go. We know God Himself will meet and commune with us there. And we can anticipate the joy that will well up in our hearts when we finally step into that sacred sanctuary!

BACKGROUND

The first verses of chapter 45 begin a description of how the land would be partitioned during Israel's future restoration in her geographical home. According to verses 1-8, in Ezekiel's vision the land at the center of the nation would be a holy district, with portions designated for the priest, the Levites, and the prince. (A description of how the remaining territory was to be distributed among the tribes is given in chapter 48.) In verses 9-17, details related to the offerings of the priests and prince in the future Temple are given.

The "oblation" mentioned in verse 1 refers to a gift to be used for sacred purposes—in this case, an offering of a portion of the land that the Lord had already deeded to Israel in Abraham's time. The phrase "divide by lot" simply means "to apportion." It does not imply that the division would be done by chance, but rather, that it would be divided as the Lord commanded and not according to the will of any individual. The land allotted for permanent housing for priests and Levites followed a configuration reminiscent of the Israelites' wilderness encampment, with those serving in the Temple being given the land nearest it.

Verses 7-9 explain the limits on land ownership by tribal princes, and the mandate that their civil behavior be guided by righteousness. In verse 9, the word "exactions" refers to the practice of expelling families from their rightfully inherited land. Greed and extortion were two sins that Israel had been guilty of in the past, but victimization of the people by leaders would no longer be tolerated.

The requirement for uniformity in dry (ephah), liquid (bath), and monetary (shekel) measures are

covered in verse 10-12. The previous lack of uniform weights and measures had affected what was offered to the Lord; in time, what had begun as careless practices in measuring became the use of differing measurements for the purpose of extortion. During the time of Exodus, a sanctuary shekel was standardized. However, over time other weights of shekels were used, so that eventually there was no standard any longer.[1] Ezekiel's vision foresaw a Temple where such irregularity would not occur.

With standards in place, the specifics of offerings were given. Verses 13-17 summarize these offerings and the manner in which they were to be gathered. Each individual was responsible for delivering their offering to the prince, who was then responsible for delivering the correct portions to the priests. This was described to Ezekiel as a very precise and orderly process, causing great reverence to prevail.

Scholars hold different views regarding the exact identity of the prince to whom these offerings were to be brought. Though not a king or a priest, he is a key figure in the restored Temple system of worship. His faithful discharge of duties is contrasted to the corrupt princes mentioned earlier in Ezekiel and in the history of Israel. Because he offered a sin offering for himself (Ezekiel 45:22), had sons (Ezekiel 46:16), and was warned about corruption (Ezekiel 46:18), most commentators agree that he cannot be the Messiah, though he is a descendant of David.

Many Bible scholars see the offerings described in verse 17 as being commemorative of Christ's sacrifice of Himself for the sins of mankind, rather than for the actual removal of sin. They view these sacrifices as picture-lessons and reminders to the people of their Messiah's marvelous saving work.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      d. The renewal of worship in the Temple
        (3) The regulations for the division of the land (45:1-17)
          (a) The holy portion (45:1-8)
          (b) The instruction to the princes (45:9-12)
          (c) The provisions for the offerings (45:13-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, what is to be offered to the Lord when the land is divided?

2. What might be the significance of the fact that the holy portion of the land containing the sanctuary will be in the center of restored Israel?

3. In verses 8-12, God commanded the princes and the people to be fair and honest in their dealings with others. What are some ways that this instruction can be applied to your current circumstances?

CONCLUSION

We look forward to the day when we will see the holy sanctuary of the Lord in restored Israel. In that coming Kingdom, all will be just and righteous, and worship of the Lord himself will be at the center.

NOTES

1. Josephus, *The Complete Works,* trans. by William Whiston, (London: William Whiston, 1737), appendix: Table of the Jewish Weights and Measures.

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 45:18 through 46:7

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it upon the posts of the house, and upon the four corners of the settle of the altar, and upon the posts of the gate of the inner court." (Ezekiel 45:19)

In the very early stages of fetal development, human blood begins flowing. Just twenty-two days after conception, a baby's heart begins to beat with its own blood. Indelible in my mind is the day when my wife and I went for the first ultrasound of our oldest son. The image on screen was grainy and we could not discern much, but we *could* see a distinct heartbeat. Our baby's tiny heart was already pumping blood! I will never forget the excitement I felt watching that.

A bit of research about human blood reveals some interesting facts. A heart beats 35 million times a year, pumping one million barrels of blood during an average lifetime. Our blood travels twelve thousand miles a day as it circulates through our bodies. There are four major blood groups: type A, B, O, and AB. Type O-negative blood is called the "universal donor" because it is compatible with any blood type.

Many Biblical references to blood are symbolic: for example, in the sacrifices ordained for Israel, where blood was an atoning and cleansing agent. As part of the worship ceremonies established for the Children of Israel, animal sacrifices were offered to atone for the sin of individuals. The blood of these sacrifices foreshadowed the time when Christ, the Perfect Sacrifice, would offer His Blood for the sins of all mankind at Calvary. In ancient Israel, blood was also used for purification of the sanctuary, altars, and various implements used in worship ceremonies. Our key verse alludes to that aspect.

In today's text, Ezekiel was describing the renewal of worship in the Temple that will one day take place in restored Israel. On the first day of the first month, a young bull will be sacrificed for purification of the Temple. Some of the blood from that offering will be put on the doorposts of the Temple, on the altar of burnt offering, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court to signify that it has been cleansed.

While we look ahead with anticipation to events that will occur in the end time in restored Israel, the Blood of Jesus avails for us today in a precious and unique way. Every sin can be washed away by His Blood! Christ's Blood is universally effective to atone for sin—it does a perfect work in lives because Jesus was the Perfect Sacrifice. And not only can we be forgiven through Jesus' Blood, His Blood can also cleanse us of the carnal nature—the inward tendency toward sin that we inherited from Adam is eradicated by the experience of sanctification, a second work of grace.

Today, do you know what it means to have the Blood of Jesus applied to your heart? Deliverance and cleansing through the Blood is available. There truly is wonder-working power in the Blood of Jesus!

BACKGROUND

This portion of text concerns the timing of certain religious ceremonies and festivals that were to be observed in restored Israel (Ezekiel 45:18-25), and regulations for worship on holy days (Ezekiel 46:1-7). Many Bible scholars believe that the offerings described in chapter 45 are commemorations of Christ's sacrifice of Himself for the sins of mankind, rather than the removal of sin. They view them as picture-lessons and reminders to the people of their Messiah's marvelous saving work.

Verse 18 begins this section with a phrase that appears over one hundred times in Ezekiel, "Thus saith the Lord GOD." The Book of Leviticus opens with a similar phrase, "And the LORD called." Both phrases indicate that it is God who is dictating the words being recorded. Ezekiel's understanding of a sinful nation's path of reconciliation to a holy God continually echoes the foreshadowing that occurs in the Book of Leviticus. The feasts and offerings that Ezekiel saw in the future Temple were familiar to him because of his priestly training.

The purpose for the offering described in verses 18-20 is stated: to "cleanse the sanctuary" (verse 18) and to "reconcile the house" (verse 20). Seemingly, the Temple would need to be cleansed annually because those who ministered there would be human; even though they refrained from deliberate sin, they could become contaminated by association with people or objects that were unclean. The sin offering mentioned in verses 19-20 would be for sins of error or ignorance for which the worshiper was not responsible but that still required cleansing, which is why it is sometimes referred to as a purification offering. In verse 22, the offering prepared by the prince "for himself and for all the people" illustrates the universal need for cleansing.

Under the Law, the burnt offering alluded to in verses 23-25 usually included a "meat" offering (from the old English word for food). However, this offering

was actually grain. Like the sin offering, it was not offered for committed sins, but signified a forsaking of all sin and the complete destruction of the old life. It indicated that the person (or nation) bringing the offering was seeking reconciliation with God at any price.

Among the feasts celebrated in Ezekiel's future Temple would be Passover, referred to in verse 21. Its significance for Israel cannot be overstated, as it commemorates the nation's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It predates the establishment of geographical boundaries for the Jewish nation, and this would have been of particular importance to Ezekiel and his people since they were in exile at the time of his vision. God's deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and His greater redemption through the work of Jesus on the Cross will always be remembered.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorates the time when Israel dwelled in temporary "tabernacles" (or booths) after the Lord delivered them from Egypt, is alluded to briefly in verse 25. The feasts of First Fruits, Weeks (Pentecost), Trumpets, and the Day of Atonement are not mentioned, leaving open the possibility that Ezekiel's vision looked forward to a time when these patterns will have been fulfilled and therefore no longer needed to be observed.

The opening verses of chapter 46 deal with regulations for worship on holy days, and offerings made by the prince on behalf of individual tribes and the nation. It is notable that although the prince was given authority and the responsibility to gather and present offerings, he was not authorized to enter the inner court with the priests. (For a discussion of the identity of this prince, see the background information given in the Ezekiel 44 *Daybreak*.)

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      d. The renewal of worship in the Temple
        (4) The regulations for offerings and feasts
          (a) The offerings at various feasts (45:18-25)
            [1] Semiannual cleansing (45:18-20)
            [2] Passover (45:21-24)
            [3] Tabernacles (45:25)
          (b) The offering for the Sabbaths (46:1-5)
          (c) The offering for the New Moon (46:6-7)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on verse 18 of chapter 45, what will be offered for the cleansing of the future sanctuary?

2. Why do you think some of the Jewish holy days will be celebrated in the future Temple?

3. What type of offerings can we bring the Lord in our day to show our gratitude and appreciation for all He has done for us?

CONCLUSION

The precious Blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the Cross for the salvation of mankind will be cherished and commemorated in the future Temple of restored Israel.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 46:8-24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt offering unto the LORD of a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning." (Ezekiel 46:13)

As a child brought up in a Christian home, family devotions were part of our daily routine. My dad was busy with his job and in the Lord's work, and my mom kept our household running smoothly and worked part-time at the church headquarters office. However, my parents were not too busy to make sure my siblings and I heard the Bible read each morning. We also prayed beside the couch in our living room before heading out for school or other activities. Thus, early in life I learned the value of spending daily time with God.

A mother in our church congregation who did *not* grow up in a Christian home tells how God revealed to her one day the importance of having regular family worship—not just for her own growth as a Christian, but also for her young children. She started that practice right after getting saved. She relates, "Before bed that night, we discussed how the day had gone for each of us. Then we prayed, thanking God for the day's blessings, asking help for the things troubling us, and requesting salvation for our loved ones. The next morning, we prayed again, praising God for His goodness and asking help for the difficulties ahead. Later, I wrote in my diary, 'January 31, 1988: Instituted a time of family worship.'

"Over time, the benefits of having a prayer routine became evident. Reviewing our day with the Lord in the evening helped minimize the children's anxieties and frustrations, allowed me to become aware of what was going on in their lives, and made us all more appreciative of the good things God provided for us on a daily basis. Meanwhile, praying in the morning prepared us for the spiritual battles of the day. I had thought only adults needed prayer, but I learned that the Lord is a help for even those of a very young age, and it is never too early to establish the practice of praying regularly."

In our text today, Ezekiel continued to detail various aspects of worship that will take place in restored Israel. His description of the feasts, festivals, and worship ordinances that will occur highlight the fact that God desires order and continuity in His people's approach to Him. The daily offerings referenced in our key verse illustrate that even in restored Israel, it will be important to continually remember and memorialize Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross. These established times for worship will maintain God's close connection with His people.

Consistent times of worship provide the same benefit for us. Though our devotions on each day may not seem particularly impactful, when we take time with God on a regular basis, the cumulative effect will cause us to mature in our walks with Him. The more we connect with Him, the more we will understand and appreciate what He is saying about Himself, His Kingdom, and His people.

Jesus' sacrificial death was the ultimate expression of God's love for us, and God deserves and desires our devotion. Let's purpose to honor Him by meeting with Him daily.

BACKGROUND

After establishing regulations for worship on holy days in the first part of chapter 46, today's text continues with a series of miscellaneous regulations. Verses 8-10 concern the prescribed manner for entering and leaving of the Temple, and verses 11-15 deal with requirements for various offerings. Verses 16-18 concern the prince's gifts of land to his sons. In verses 19-24, a description of Ezekiel's tour of the Temple complex resumes, and Ezekiel was taken to the area where the priests prepare the offerings for consumption.

The prince referenced in Ezekiel's vision was God's appointed leader, but he was not a priest; his leadership was evidence of a family-oriented system of worship that existed long before the Aaronic priesthood (see Numbers 7). During the patriarchal period it was not unusual for non-priests to perform priestly functions.

Verses 8-10 indicate there was an established flow of traffic for the people of the land as they came to worship at the Temple. This regulation would preserve orderly movement to and from the Temple, especially on feast days when the crowds would be immense. The prince's movements were with deliberation (as in verse 8), and on occasions when others under his leadership were presenting offerings, they entered with him and left with him. The prince, however, was not allowed in the separate place near the Temple itself, which was reserved for priests.

Verses 11-15 give regulations concerning various offerings. Traditionally, the peace offering represented in part a sense of well-being between the worshipper and God. To illustrate this fellowship, portions

of the offering were shared between the worshipper, the priest, and God (with the fat being burned on the altar). These offerings have similarities to the offerings in Leviticus and Numbers, but have been increased in quantity for this new Temple. The symbolism is much debated by scholars.

Verses 16-18 establish that the prince was allowed to give gifts of land to his sons, but even the prince was required to abide by laws that would keep his land within the family unit. Land gifts to those outside the family would once again become royal holdings in the Year of Jubilee, in accordance with the provisions established in Leviticus 25.

The final section of chapter 46, verses 19-24, describes the priests' offering portions being cooked in areas of the inner court, while offering portions to be consumed by the people were prepared in unroofed areas in each of the four corners of the outer court. This separation was in keeping with God's insistence upon separation between the clean and the unclean.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    1. The restoration of the Temple
      d. The renewal of worship in the Temple
        (4) The regulations for offerings and feasts
          (d) The order of entrance and exit of the Temple (46:8-10)
          (e) The offerings of the prince and people (46:11-12)
          (f) The offering for the daily burnt offering (46:13-15)
          (g) The law concerning inheritance (46:16-18)
          (h) The kitchens for the preparation of the sacrifices (46:19-24)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who will be in the midst of the people when they come to worship at the Temple in restored Israel?

2. In verse 12, what is the significance of the word "voluntary" in the descriptions of how the burnt offering or peace offerings were to be given?

3. What benefits are ours when we maintain order and consistency in our worship (verse 10)?

CONCLUSION

Consistency of worship will be a part of the restored Israel to come, because those who are redeemed desire to continually honor and worship God.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 47:1-23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over." (Ezekiel 47:5)

Some years ago, my wife and I lived in a house that had a 16-by-32-foot swimming pool in the backyard, and from time to time, we would invite friends over for a swim. Some of our guests would walk up to the pool, stick a toe in the water, and decide to skip swimming and just watch. Others would sit on the side of the pool and dangle their feet in the water. But some would go straight to the edge and jump into the deep end. One big splash, and they would come up from the bottom and call out to those watching, "This is great! Come on in!"

Our focus verse mentions "waters to swim in." When the man in Ezekiel's account began to measure, he went first into ankle-deep water, then up to the knees, and eventually into water to swim in—water so deep that it overflowed him. And the river was not just something for Ezekiel to look at or describe to others; it was for him to enter into as well.

Such a river had never existed in Jerusalem's history. While there were streams and springs in Israel, there never had been a mighty water source like this. In the semi-arid geography of the region, water like the river Ezekiel entered into would bring life, growth, refreshment, hope, and security. It would truly be miraculous!

A spiritual parallel can be drawn between the river in Ezekiel's account and the life-giving redemption and spiritual blessings that flow from God's throne to all mankind. The river of His grace turns death into life. His power transforms everything it touches. The question is, will we plunge in?

Often Ezekiel's river is used in sermons to encourage individuals to go deeper in the Gospel. Perhaps some have been attending church for years, but have never fully immersed themselves in what God offers. Others have stood around the edges, so to speak, merely observing and maybe "sticking a toe in the water" from time to time. Some may be wading in ankle-deep water, but they have become satisfied with that and have failed to go any deeper.

We can learn from Ezekiel's river that there are immeasurable depths of God's grace and provision to explore. And the deeper we go in the Gospel, the more joy we experience. If we let the Spirit of God take over every part of our lives, we will enjoy blessings we are not able to explain.

If you have never experienced the abundant life that God offers, do not be content with just being an observer. Plunge in today! And if you have been content to linger in "shallow water," get out deeper where there is water to swim in. God can do amazing things in your life, but the blessing comes when you submerge yourself!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 47 begins a description of the transformed land of Israel, which continues through chapter 48. Verses 1-12 of this chapter focus on the great river that flows from the Temple, and verses 13-23 on the portion of the land allotted to the tribes and strangers. (Additional land allotments are described in chapter 48.) The details found in these chapters portray a land and city very different from the Israel or Jerusalem that previously existed in all of recorded history.

The river described in verses 1-12 was remarkable in many ways. It was first visible where it surfaced from under the threshold of the entrance to the Holy Place on the south side of the Temple. It began as a small stream or trickle of water that easily could be stepped across. Although there is no mention of tributaries to this river, at just over a mile from its source, it could only be crossed by swimming.

At about 1.3 miles eastward from the Temple, where Ezekiel could no longer cross without swimming, his guide asked, "Hast thou seen?" No answer is recorded, but further observations are made regarding the restorative properties of the water. Healing or living water is a recurrent theme in the Bible, often symbolizing spiritual life and the blessings that flow from God.

Some think that the plural "rivers" in verse 9 indicates that the Temple stream flowed into the Jordan River before heading southward into the Dead Sea. En-gedi, mentioned in verse 10, is a noted oasis west of the Dead Sea near Qumran and Masada. En-eglaim is thought to be near the point where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea. The "great sea" is a reference to the Mediterranean.

Both En-gedi and En-eglaim were fishing points. Freshwater fish would typically die upon entering the salt water of the Dead Sea from the fresh water of the Jordan River, but Ezekiel's vision looked ahead to a time when that would no longer happen. Verse 11 states that some marshes would not be "healed"

(transformed into fresh water). This was not because transformation was impossible, but so that a salt supply would remain for the area inhabitants.

Verses 13-21 give the general land boundaries of a restored and united Israel. The description closely follows the boundaries given by Moses in Numbers 34. The language in verse 14 indicates that individual tribes would receive roughly equal portions, as opposed to Moses' divisions that were allotted by tribal populations (see Numbers 26:54). The phrase "concerning the which I lifted up mine hand" (verse 14) emphasized that this land would fulfill God's sworn promises of a real land that He made to Abraham (Genesis 13:15 and 15:18), Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and Jacob (Genesis 28:13).

Verses 22-23 welcome "strangers" (Gentiles) to restored Israel. By God's command, these were to be treated as native-born among the Children of Israel. They would even have inheritance rights.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    2. The restoration of the land
      a. The river flowing from the Temple (47:1-12)
      b. The boundaries of the land (47:13-23)
        (1) The portion for the tribes (47:13-21)
        (2) The portion for the stranger (47:22-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many times did the man with the line measure a thousand cubits?

2. In verse 6, why do you think Ezekiel's guide asked him, "Son of man, hast thou seen this?"

3. What are some steps we can take to "go deeper" into the abundant blessings God offers to each one of us?

CONCLUSION

Let's purpose to be among those who "plunge in" to the abundance God offers with our whole hearts!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 48:1-14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And this oblation of the land that is offered shall be unto them a thing most holy by the border of the Levites." (Ezekiel 48:12)

When I was a young boy growing up in southern California, our family often drove past a large vacant lot in the heart of town. The property was fenced off with posts and wire rope, and there were "no trespassing" signs posted in several places. However, the fencing and signs were not particularly effective. Often we saw motorcycles and bicycles zipping around on the overgrown property, and cycle trails crisscrossed the lot. In its rundown state, that neglected piece of ground seemingly was of no use to anyone except bikers.

Then one day that all changed. We learned our Apostolic Faith organization had purchased the property with the intention of building a new church there. When that transaction was complete, the lot became holy unto the Lord. The piece of ground that many in our community felt was nothing but a useless eyesore was dedicated to God and had a new purpose. Over time, the lot was cleared, construction took place, and eventually there was a beautiful new church on that previously empty lot.

During that period of construction, I remember hearing how the Lord worked out the many details that went into selling our old church and acquiring that piece of land. Even though I was just a young boy, it was obvious to me that the Lord truly had given us this property. We were grateful for His provision, and treated the land with the care and respect it deserved as a place dedicated to God and His service. We knew it was holy ground.

In today's focus verse, the Lord told Ezekiel that the portion of land set aside for the Temple grounds was holy to the Lord, including the allotments designated for the priests and Levites. The land was not to be transferred to anyone else, nor used for any other purpose. It was a dedicated place for the Lord and His priests to dwell.

Everything dedicated to the Lord is holy. The Book of Ezekiel begins with a description of the holiness of God, which Israel had rejected and ignored. It ends with this chapter, which provides details of the new Temple and the restored land — all dedicated to God, and reflections of His holiness.

As we look forward to the time when we will see for ourselves the Temple that Ezekiel described, let us be careful to regard God's current sanctuaries and lands with great reverence. When earthly properties and buildings have been dedicated to God for His use, they are sacred, and we must honor them as such.

BACKGROUND

The final chapter of Ezekiel begins with a description of how the restored land will be divided among the seven northern tribes of Israel (verses 1-7), and the central portion of the land will be dedicated to God (verses 8-14). The remainder of tribal land allotments are described later in the chapter.

Ezekiel was given no geographical landmarks to denote the boundaries or divisions of the land allotted to the tribes. This was unheard of in that era. Today, with proper software, one can easily plot equal portions within prescribed boundaries; in Ezekiel's day, this would have been nearly impossible. Tribes were to receive equal portions, with tribal portions delineated from the "north end" southward toward the Temple.

In Ezekiel's vision, tribal portions ran the full width of the country from the Mediterranean Sea to the eastern border, largely defined by the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Because of this, each tribe shared borders with no more than two other tribes. There is no mention of land on the east side of the Jordan River (where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh formerly had land).

Verses 9-12 are a description of the central sacred district (called an "oblation" in verse 9). This area is where the Temple was located. Priests and Levites were also given portions, a departure from the instructions of Moses in which they received no inheritance of land (see Joshua 13:33). According to verse 14, since this area was God's set-apart possession, the Levites were not permitted to sell or exchange any of it.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    2. The restoration of the land
      c. The division of the land
        (1) The portion for seven tribes (48:1-7)
        (2) The portion for the priests (48:8-12)
        (3) The portion for the Levites (48:13-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many tribes were allotted land in verses 1-7?

2. Why do you think the holy district and Temple were located in the center of the land?

3. What are some ways can we demonstrate care and reverence toward God's property?

CONCLUSION

It is important that we properly reverence the places that God has graciously provided for us to worship in.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Ezekiel 48:15-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"This is the land which ye shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their portions, saith the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 48:29)

On May 20, 1862, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act. This legislation encouraged people to move west by allowing citizens who had not borne arms against the country—including immigrants, women, and former slaves—to take steps toward obtaining 160 acres of public land as their own. Those who wanted to homestead paid an $18 fee for a "patent," and were then required to build a home and cultivate their land allotment for five years. President Lincoln said the purpose of the Act was "to elevate the condition of men, to lift artificial burdens from all shoulders, and to give everyone an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life."[1]

While the opportunity was there, fulfilling the requirements for land ownership was not easy. Travel to the plots available for homesteading was plagued by difficulty, and once families arrived, the work was long and hard. One woman who was a teenager when her family arrived at their designated allotment told how they planted corn but grasshoppers ate it all. Although there was wild grass, they did not have a method of harvesting it, so during the winter, their livestock starved. Times were hard for these people.

The Homestead Act became personal to me a few years ago. While looking through paperwork after my aunt and uncle passed away, we found a large certificate signed by President T. Roosevelt in 1905. It was a land patent labeled *Homestead Certificate No. 9743*. My uncle's ancestors must have struggled through the difficulties, obtained ownership, and then passed the land down from one generation to another, because years later, my uncle and his siblings still farmed that homestead.

In today's text, Ezekiel described a future distribution of land to the Israelites. When Ezekiel was given this vision, the Israelite people were captives in Babylon, but God was promising eventual restoration. He said the tribes of Israel would be given land that would be divided by lot; each would be given a specific portion.

The closing words of this chapter and the Book of Ezekiel say, "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there." God was telling Israel that there would come a time when He would dwell with them and be the center of their lives. Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any amount of effort necessary to obtain it. Jesus paid the price. We can possess it by repenting, believing, and then obeying Him day by day.

BACKGROUND

Ezekiel's Temple vision ends with final details regarding tribal apportionment in restored Israel. Land allotments for the northern tribes and the central sacred district are noted in the first part of chapter 48. This final section of the chapter describes allotments for the five southern tribes of Israel (verses 15-29), and concludes with a description of the gates of the city (verses 30-35).

Tribal descendants of Bilhah and Zilpah were generally located farther from the Temple than the descendants of Leah and Rachel. The phrase "divide by lot" in verse 29 does not imply random allotments, but indicates that the division was not done by the will of man; it was to be as God directed.

The prince, mentioned in verse 21, is alluded to many times in Ezekiel's Temple vision, and his actions correspond with the historical functions of princes (tribal leaders or chieftains). Though not a king or a priest, the prince is a key figure in the restored system of worship. His faithful discharge of duties is contrasted to the corrupt princes mentioned earlier in Ezekiel and in the history of Israel.[2] Because of his importance in the worship of restored Israel, in this final chapter of Ezekiel, he and his descendants were given a portion of land very near the Temple as an inheritance.

In this conclusion of Ezekiel's vision, the purpose of all the details given is subordinate to the fact that the Lord will dwell among His people. To the Israelites, the relationship between a place and its name was of fundamental importance. The name of a city usually had symbolic or prophetic meaning, and carried with it a sense of character, importance, or an allusion to some notable event that had occurred there. Sometimes city names were changed to reflect new events or changes. For this reason, the city at the center of the restored nation will be named "The LORD is there," using God's proper name. The fact that the Lord will attach His name to the city "from that day" (verse 35) indicates this will be the center of worship of the one true God.

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IV. The consolation of Israel
  B. Prophecies of the millennial kingdom
    2. The restoration of the land
      c. The division of the land
        (4) The portion for the city (48:15-20)
        (5) The portion for the prince (48:21-22)
        (6) The portion for the five tribes (48:23-28)
        (7) The conclusion (48:29)
      d. The designation of the gates (48:30-34)
      e. The designation of the city (48:35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who would "serve the city" (verse 19)?

2. Why do you think God was so specific regarding the land division?

3. Considering the blessings God gives now, what will some advantages be to living in the city named "The LORD is there"?

CONCLUSION

Eternity with God in Heaven is a bright hope. God's promises can help us hold fast to Him and reach that goal.

NOTES

1. History.com editors, "Homestead Act," *History.com*, updated September 13, 2022, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/homestead-act.
2. See Ezekiel 7:27; 12:10; 21:25; 38:2-3; 39:1.

DAYBREAK

Section Introduction

Overview for Daniel

Purpose: Daniel wrote to his fellow Jewish captives in Babylon to remind them that God had orchestrated the events of world history according to His sovereign will, and to encourage them with God's promises of restoration in the final stage of His Kingdom.

Author: Authorship of the book has traditionally been credited by Jews and Christians alike to Daniel, a prophet and statesman during the Babylonian and Persian captivity. In the New Testament, Christ himself directly associated the book with the prophet Daniel (see Matthew 24:15).

Daniel, whose name means "God is my Judge," was among the first group of Jews to be exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. His adherence to God for over sixty years in the midst of a strongly polytheistic religious culture gives him a unique standing among Biblical characters. He is one of the few in Scripture with a totally blameless record.

Time Period Covered: The book itself describes the political setting in which it originated. This information indicates a span from the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim extending into the early years of the Persian period, or approximately 605 to 536 B.C.

Date Written: Opinions vary as to the precise date, but many scholars suggest that Daniel probably wrote it shortly after the capture of Babylon in 539 B.C.

Key People: Daniel (Belteshazzar), Nebuchadnezzar, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), Azariah (Abednego), Belshazzar, Darius

Unique Features: The Book of Daniel was originally written in two languages. Hebrew was used in Daniel 1:1 to Daniel 2:4a and chapters 8 through 12, while Aramaic (the common language used in Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian communication) was used in Daniel 2:4 to 7:28.

The book contains both a historical/biographical section (found primarily in chapters 1–6) and a revelatory section (found primarily in chapters 7–12).

The Book of Daniel is the major apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, as Chapters 7-12 foretell the end times. (Apocalyptic literature is typically symbolic, visionary, and prophetic in nature, and was usually composed under oppressive conditions with the intent of encouraging the people of God.) The prophecy of Daniel 12:1 speaks of a time of great distress unsurpassed in history — a period that was called the Great Tribulation by Jesus in Matthew 24:21 and is further referenced in Revelation 7:14. The great nations of the world will rise against the Lord; but God will protect His people, and His Kingdom will prevail and endure forever.

Daniel is one of the few Old Testament books that explicitly references a bodily resurrection. In Daniel's last vision, an angel told him, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

History: Daniel's life and service took place during a turbulent time in world history. Assyria's 125-year domination of the region had ended when Babylon conquered Assyria. Nabopolassar, the first king of the new Babylonian Kingdom, was succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled from 606 to 561 B.C. It was under Nebuchadnezzar that the Babylonian empire reached its pinnacle of glory, holding the strongest position of power, wealth, and dominion the world had known to that point.

As Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah the prophets had warned, Israel's continued sinning eventually led to God's judgment, and the Babylonians invaded Judah in 605 B.C. Daniel's exile was part of the first of three deportations (605, 597, and 586 B.C.) carried out by the Babylonians after they subdued Jerusalem.

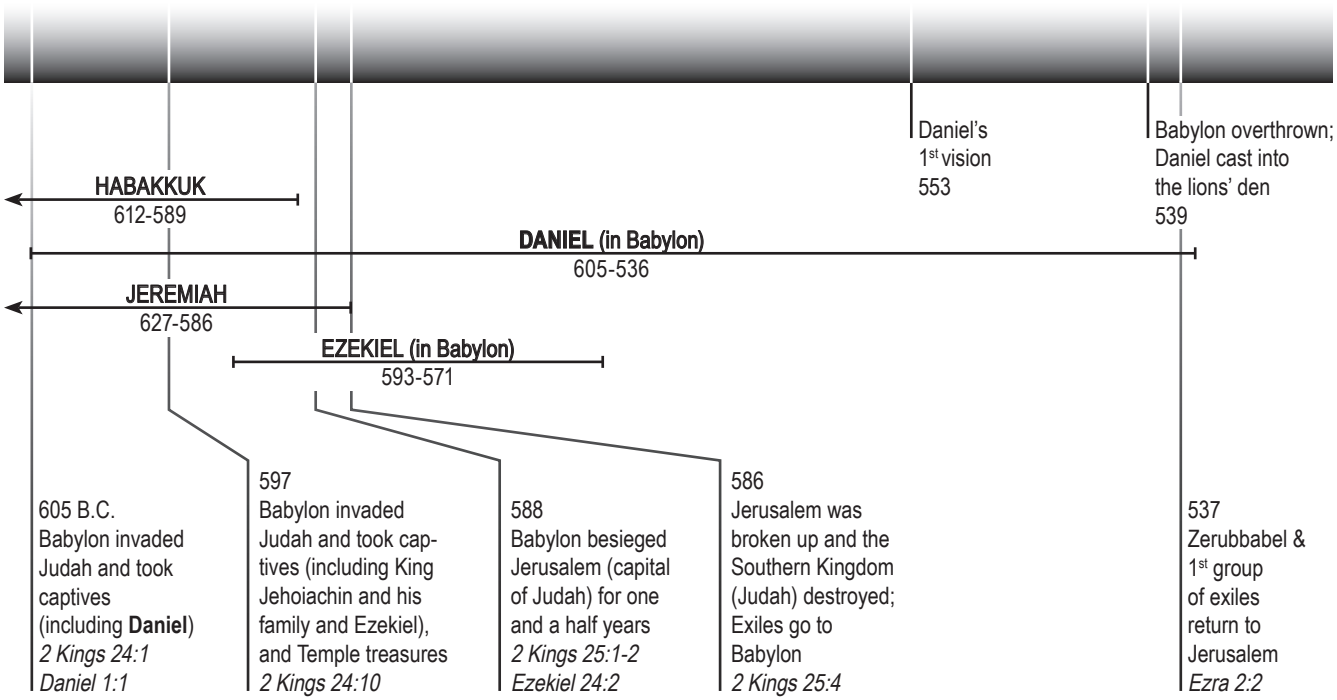
Though the Babylonian empire was short lived in comparison to the Assyrians before them and the Persians after them, it dominated the region during the early days of Daniel. He outlived the Babylonian Empire, which fell to the Medes under Darius.

Setting: Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became the capital of the Babylonian empire. It covered approximately 2,200 acres of land and boasted some of the most impressive structures of that era. Babylon's Hanging Gardens, built by King Nebuchadnezzar, are considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The ruins of Babylon lie in modern-day Iraq, about sixty miles south of Baghdad.

Summary: Daniel presents a strong case for the absolute sovereignty of God. This theme is apparent in a variety of situations, including Daniel's deliverance from the den of lions, his fellow exiles' rescue from the fiery furnace, and his foretelling of the Ancient of Days who will one day save His people from the forces of evil (Daniel 3:23–30; 6:19–23; 7:9–22).

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. The personal history of Daniel (1:1-21)
   A. The deportation of Daniel (1:1-7)
   B. The decision of Daniel (1:8-16)
   C. The delight of Nebuchadnezzar (1:17-20)
   D. The duration of Nebuchadnezzar (1:21)
II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles (2:1 — 7:28)
   A. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the course of Gentile world powers) (2:1-49)
   B. The dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's image (the persecution and preservation of Israel under Gentile dominion) (3:1-30)
   C. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the pride of Gentile world powers) (4:1-37)
   D. The destruction of Belshazzar (the final doom of Gentile world power) (5:1-31)
   E. The decree of Darius (the man of sin and his politico-religious system) (6:1-28)
   F. The dream of the four beasts (the course of Gentile world power) (7:1-28)
III. The prophetic history of the Jews (8:1 — 12:13)
   A. The vision of the ram and he-goat (Israel under Medo-Persia and Greece) (8:1-27)
   B. The vision of the seventy weeks (chronology of Israel's prophetic program) (9:1-27)
   C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14) (10:1 — 12:13)

DAYBREAK

Daniel 1:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8)

Taking a stand for righteousness is more than a spur-of-the-moment whim; it requires making a purposeful decision before God to turn away from sinful behavior in whatever form it presents itself, and then relying on God to help us maintain that commitment.

An eighteenth-century preacher, Jonathan Edwards, was one who had that type of purpose. As a pastor's son, Edwards grew up in an atmosphere of Puritan piety, affection, and learning. In his late teens, a single verse of Scripture brought him to an understanding of his guilt before God, and he responded with acute remorse and contrition. His resulting conversion experience became the foundation of his relationship with his Creator.

Edwards was a young man with many talents and perhaps an equal number of opportunities in life. After a rigorous schooling at home, he entered Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut, at the age of thirteen. He graduated in 1720, well prepared for a future in the halls of academia if he had so chosen. He had an affinity for science and likely could have made a name for himself in that field. However, he chose to study divinity, and while still in his teens, he became a pastor. Before he turned twenty, he found himself far from his native home, living away from family and friends in New York City, New York, and attempting to pastor a group of church-goers who had split off from a Presbyterian congregation.

In this new and uncertain environment, young Edwards realized that he needed both a fixed purpose to stand and a compass for spiritual direction. So he took to writing, setting down on paper a series of thoughts and practices to help cultivate his spiritual growth and stability. Edwards then re-read this list, which he came to call his "Resolutions," at least once a week to keep his mind focused and renewed. Among his seventy resolutions were the following:

"Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God.

"Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.

"Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trump. . . ."

Edwards stayed true to his resolutions, and ultimately became a key figure in the religious revival known as the "Great Awakening," which occurred in the American colonies from about 1727 through the 1740s.

It is not hard to imagine that young Daniel, in our text today, might have written words similar to those of Jonathan Edwards. Perhaps one of his resolutions would have read, "Resolved, that as God has allowed me to be placed here in Babylon, I will continue to honor Him and refrain from defiling myself with idolatrous practices, whatever consequences I may face." With unshakable conviction and holy boldness, Daniel, along with three companions, took his stand because he had a deep-rooted purpose to be faithful to God.

To be able to stand firm and uphold Biblical principles no matter what our environment is a purpose each one of us should have. The enemy of our souls will strive to cause us to doubt, waver, and ultimately abandon our spiritual foundation. However, like Jonathan Edwards and the four Hebrew youth, we can remain true to God in spite of the ungodliness around us and every attempt of Satan to overthrow us. God enabled these young men to do so, and He will help us as well if our heartfelt desire is to ensure that every aspect of our lives honors Him.

BACKGROUND

The first six chapters of the Book of Daniel are historical in nature; the remainder of the book is considered prophetic. Chapter 1 relates the account of Daniel's exile into Babylon, which took place about 605 B.C. Verses 1-2 describe Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, verses 3-16 relate the testing of four of the Hebrew captives' character and their determination to remain true to God, and verses 17-21 recount how their integrity was vindicated.

Historians note that Nebuchadnezzar commonly chose the brightest and most talented youth from conquered nations and placed them into a program educating them in the language and culture of Babylon, thus equipping them to be of benefit to his realm. The phrase "to stand in the king's palace" in verse 4 indicates that these conscripts, who were probably between thirteen to seventeen years of age, were trained to serve rather than to simply enjoy a life of ease at court.

Verses 6-7 introduce four young captives of Judah. As part of their cultural indoctrination, all four were given new Chaldean names honoring the four leading gods of Babylon — the chief god, Bel, and the gods of the sun, earth, and fire. The Hebrew name Daniel, meaning "God is my judge," was changed to Belteshazzar, which meant "Bel's prince." The name of Hananiah, meaning "whom Jehovah favors," was changed to Shadrach, a name inspired by a root word that referenced the Babylonian sun god. Mishael's name, meaning "who is God?" became Meshach, replacing El (Hebrew for God) with the name of the Babylonian goddess Sheshach (goddess of the earth). Azariah's name, meaning "whom Jehovah helps," was changed to Abednego, meaning "servant of the shining fire."

As part of the integration program, the captives were to be given a specialized diet that included "a daily provision of the king's meat" (verse 5). Daniel and his three companions purposed that they would not defile themselves by eating of this meat (verse 8), likely because it had been offered to idols and as such was unlawful for an observant Jew to eat. In addition, the Babylonians ate animals that were ceremonially unclean, and had not been slaughtered or prepared according to the requirements of Mosaic Law.

Daniel requested a menu adjustment of the "prince of the eunuchs," Ashpenaz, who was in charge of the young captives. God had given Daniel "favor and tender love" with this butler/steward (verse 9). These terms, translated from the Hebrew words *hesed* and *racham,* refer to "loving kindness" and "tender compassion" like that of a parent to a child. However, if the steward were to disobey the command regarding the captives' diet, his disobedience could incur severe punishment, so he declined the request.

As a solution, Daniel then proposed to Melzar, the under-steward directly in charge of the four Hebrews, that the four be given pulse and water for a ten-day trial instead of the rich food and wine the king had prescribed. "Pulse" was a variety of dried legumes, such as lentils, chickpeas, or beans, possibly offered in porridge form. This was agreed to, and at the end of the test period, Daniel and his three friends appeared "fairer and fatter in flesh" than the other candidates (verse 15). This clearly was the hand of God at work, for there was no physiological reason why a vegetarian diet would make a discernible difference in such a brief period.

As a result, the steward agreed to Daniel's request for the dietary modification to continue throughout the remainder of the three-year program. In the end, God honored the Hebrew youths' purpose to remain undefiled, and gave the four knowledge, skill, and wisdom far exceeding their counterparts in the training program. Additionally, He entrusted Daniel with prophetic understanding of dreams and visions — a divine bestowment Daniel would use on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar in the following chapter.

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I. The personal history of Daniel (1:1-21)
  A. The deportation of Daniel (1:1-7)
    1. The deportation of the vessels (1:1-2)
    2. The deportation of the youths (1:3-7)
      a. Their selection (1:3-4)
      b. Their diet (1:5)
      c. Their names (1:6-7)
  B. The decision of Daniel (1:8-16)
    1. The request (1:8)
    2. The response (1:9-14)
    3. The result (1:15-16)
  C. The delight of Nebuchadnezzar (1:17-20)
  D. The duration of Nebuchadnezzar (1:21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 5, how long was the schooling period prescribed by the king?

2. How might God have used Daniel's behavior and character to influence the steward to agree to his suggestion?

3. Consider the aspects of your personal environment that could be defiling. What are some steps you could take to avoid being contaminated?

CONCLUSION

Like Daniel and his friends, we want to "purpose in our hearts" to maintain spiritual integrity in spite of the ungodly influences in our environment.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 2:1-24

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." (Daniel 2:22)

When my daughter was five years old, we had a discussion that has stayed with me through the years. It was still spring, but the weather where we live had already turned hot. Since we often went swimming and enjoyed other warm weather activities, she was surprised to learn one day that the season we were in was still spring, not summer. She asked me, "Why isn't it summer when it *feels* like summer?" As I attempted to explain, it quickly became obvious that it would be difficult to come up with an answer a five-year-old could understand. At some point, I concluded that she just needed to believe me.

Considering a child's limited understanding reminds me that even as adults, we are limited in understanding what God sees very clearly. As our focus verse states, He knows every "deep and secret" thing. Even the darkness does not hide anything from Him! Daniel understood that, and thus knew where to turn when he faced the life-threatening situation described in today's text. Although King Nebuchadnezzar demanded information that was impossible for man to know, Daniel was wise enough to trust God to reveal it. And God did just that, giving Daniel a night vision regarding what would transpire in days to come.

While I was still young, God taught me to trust His will for my life and to seek Him for guidance. In my teens, I prayed God would show me what career path to take. I had ideas of what to do based on my strengths, interests, and school teachers' encouragement. However, God led me in an unexpected direction. Years later, I see why God led me in that way, and I'm so glad I chose to trust Him; He truly knew what was best. When I began considering marriage, God made it clear that I should not date a particular young man. Within a couple of months, He brought the right man into my life — one who was a perfect fit. Many times in the years since, my husband and I have turned to God for wisdom, guidance, and understanding. In every situation, He has faithfully revealed the path for us to take.

God rewarded the faith of Daniel and his friends when they prayed for enlightenment, and Daniel expressed his gratitude through praise, saying, "I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee" (verse 23).

Thinking of God's faithfulness should cause us to trust Him more fully — and fill our hearts with praise and thanksgiving for the victories He brings our way!

BACKGROUND

Today's text recounts King Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream (verses 1-3), the impossible demand he made of his wise men (verses 4-16), and God's revelation to Daniel regarding the dream (verses 17-24).

The events in this chapter took place in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, during the three-year training period of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as related in chapter 1. Daniel likely was about fourteen to eighteen years old when he came before the king to interpret the dream.

The word *Syriac,* in verse 4 refers to the Aramaic language, which was the common language used for trading purposes in the multilingual Babylonian Empire. At this juncture in the narrative, the Book of Daniel changes from the Hebrew language to Aramaic, which continues through the end of chapter 7; beginning with chapter 8, Daniel's text reverts to Hebrew. The two languages were very similar and used the same alphabet. The language shift may have been made because this section of the narrative dealt with the Gentiles, while chapters 8 through 12 concerned the Jewish people.

In the Babylonian culture, dreams were considered one of the ways their gods communicated with humans, and as king, Nebuchadnezzar's dreams would have had singular importance. Dream communications in their culture were categorized in two ways: *symbolic* dreams, when the meaning was not obvious and needed interpretation, and *message* dreams, which involved communication delivered directly to the dreamer. While the Babylonians would have considered this a symbolic dream, in fact it was a revelation from God regarding events yet to occur in the timeline of history.

In verses 5 and 8, Nebuchadnezzar told his wise men that "the thing is gone from me." Some interpret this to mean he had forgotten the dream, but more likely it meant "the command has been given" or "I have issued my edict," referring to his declaration that the wise men would all be killed if they could not relate the dream. It seems evident that Nebuchadnezzar wanted a genuine interpretation of

what he sensed was a particularly important dream, so he may have been testing them by requiring knowledge of the dream before accepting their analysis of it.

Daniel and his companions were not among the wise men initially summoned before the king, likely because they had not yet been given a certified place among the professional advisors. However, according to verse 13, they were among those to be slain. The providential hand of God over these Hebrew youths can be seen in the fact that Daniel was granted access to the king, where he promised to show the king the interpretation if he were granted time. Daniel and his friends prayed, and God's revelation regarding the meaning of the dream came in the form of a "night vision" (verse 19). Daniel immediately praised God for sending the vision, extolling His wisdom, might, and knowledge.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  A. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the course of Gentile world powers)
    1. The dream concealed by Nebuchadnezzar (2:1-16)
      a. The dream of the king (2:1-2)
      b. The failure of the wise men (2:3-11)
      c. The decree of the king (2:12-13)
      d. The declaration of Daniel (2:14-16)
    2. The dream revealed to Daniel (2:17-24)
      a. The request of Daniel (2:17-18)
      b. The revelation to Daniel (2:19)
      c. The praise of Daniel (2:20-23)
      d. The instruction of Daniel (2:24)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Verse 16 says that Daniel went to the king and requested time to interpret the dream. Given the king's order to put his counsellors to death, what does Daniel's desire to get involved say about him?

2. What specific attributes of God did Daniel mention in his prayer of thanksgiving after God revealed the king's dream to him? (verse 20)

3. God clearly protected and preserved the four Hebrew youth from death by the king's edict. What are some times in your life when you have been aware of the providential hand of God over you?

CONCLUSION

We can trust God because He knows every detail of the circumstances in our lives, and is well able to resolve even "impossible" challenges according to His divine plan.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 2:25-49

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44)

A few years ago, some church friends and I had the opportunity to visit Peru to attend our church camp meeting there. We stayed in the country a few days afterward to visit the imposing and mysterious Incan ruins of Machu Picchu. The buses that take visitors to the ruins leave at 5:30 a.m. and lines form for the buses at 4:00. So we were up at 3:30 the morning after our arrival in the area to make that trek. It was ridiculous, but totally worth it!

In its breath-taking setting in the Peruvian Andes portion of the Amazon Basin, the sprawling Inca citadel of Machu Picchu more than lived up to our expectations. We spent hours wandering through the amazing ruins and climbing the numerous flights of steep stone steps that interconnect its palaces, temples, and storehouses. Surrounded by lush vegetation, the ancient walls, terraces, and ramps seemed as if they had been carved out of the steep slopes.

Most archaeologists believe that Machu Picchu was constructed around A.D. 1450 as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti. The three primary structures — the Temple of the Sun, the Hitching Post of the Sun, and the Room of the Three Windows — were all built in classic Incan style, with polished drystone walls. The more than 150 other structures in the area (now a UNESCO site) are divided into upper and lower sections with a large square separating the agricultural area from the residential area.

About a century after the Incas built the city of Machu Picchu, the Spanish arrived and conquered the Inca Empire, wiping out most of their amazing kingdom. However, Machu Picchu was not destroyed because it was never discovered — for some unknown reason, the city had been abandoned by its residents before the foreign soldiers could get to it. As decades and then centuries passed, it became overgrown and turned to ruins, and eventually was totally forgotten by the world except for a small local population. The ruins remained undiscovered by the outside world until an American historian, Hiram Bingham, brought them to international attention in 1911. In the years since, tourism, the development of nearby towns, and natural environmental degradation have taken their toll. The Peruvian government has taken steps to protect the site and prevent further erosion of the mountainside, but given time, all man-made structures eventually crumble.

The setting of our text today was Ancient Babylon, another awe-inspiring edifice constructed for a ruler. The ancient Greek historian Strabo wrote of the city, "The roadway upon the walls will allow chariots with four horses when they meet to pass each other with ease. Whence, among the seven wonders of the world, are reckoned this wall and the hanging garden: the shape of the garden is a square, and each side of it measures four plethora."[1] Another ancient writer, Herodotus, said of Babylon, "In addition to its enormous size it surpasses in splendor any city of the known world."[2]

As impressive and powerful as Babylon was, it eventually collapsed. The beautiful gardens shriveled up and died, the stately walls crumbled, and the powerful government once housed there broke apart.

There is a kingdom, however, that will never be destroyed. As Daniel foretold the rise and fall of several world powers, he prophesied that one day Jesus would come to earth and establish His kingdom. Though the greatest powers of the ancient world fell, and the greatest powers of the modern world will one day disintegrate, Christ's kingdom will last forever.

The good news is, we can all have a part in that everlasting kingdom. And that will not be just a one day visit!

BACKGROUND

This portion of Daniel 2 covers Daniel's confident claim to Nebuchadnezzar regarding the king's dream (verses 25-30), his interpretation of the dream (verses 31-45), and Daniel's subsequent promotion (verses 46-49).

While Bible scholars differ in the exact meaning of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, most concur that it was a prophecy of the future Gentile world powers, with parts of the image representing different world kingdoms. In verse 38, the Bible states that the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. Many scholars concur that the arms of silver represent the kingdoms of the Medo-Persian Empire established by Cyrus in 539 B.C. at the fall of Babylon. The brass (or bronze) belly and thighs signified the Greek Empire established by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. The legs of iron symbolized the Roman Empire, which gradually assumed control

over the Greeks prior to Christ's birth. The mixture of iron and clay possibly were an indicator of that empire's weakness.

In verse 34, the stone cut without hands that destroyed the last kingdom represented the Messiah and King of kings, Jesus Christ, who will one day destroy the Gentile world powers and set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. Comparing the ten toes of the image with the ten horns of the beast in Daniel 7:24, it is likely that the ten toes stood for ten world powers that would stem from the Roman Empire and exist at the time of Christ's return.

After the interpretation of the dream, it is noteworthy that according to verse 47, King Nebuchadnezzar not only honored Daniel, but also Daniel's God. Daniel was made ruler over the entire province of Babylon and chief of the governors over all the wise men (see verse 48). He requested that his three Jewish friends assist him in his administrative duties and this was granted; no doubt he trusted them above all his other associates from the training program.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  A. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the course of Gentile world powers)
    3. The dream revealed to Nebuchadnezzar (2:25-45)
      a. The presentation of Daniel (2:25-30)
      b. The disclosure of the dream (2:31-36)
      c. The interpretation of the dream (2:37-45)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Whom did Daniel reveal to be the head of gold? (verse 38)

2. Given Daniel's words in verse 30, how do you think he felt when King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and worshipped him?

3. Looking back through the history of the world with the rise and fall of great kingdoms, what can we conclude about earthly powers? Why is this important to us as believers?

CONCLUSION

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a prediction of future Gentile world history. The fact that this earth is moving toward God's specified end should give us confidence and peace, knowing that one day we will be part of God's eternal kingdom.

NOTES

1. Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo, Volume III Literally Translated, with Notes*, trans. H.C. Hamilton, W. Falconer (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), XVI.I.5, https://gutenberg.org/files/44886/44886-h/44886-h.html.
2. Herodotus. Herodotus: *The Histories*, tran. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London, England; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), I.178-179

DAYBREAK

Daniel 3:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." (Daniel 3:17)

Our text today sets the stage for an amazing rescue from a fiery furnace. However, Alice Lewis could testify that deliverance takes many forms.

Alice found herself in need of deliverance one frigid Minnesota day. The forecast had said the temperature would drop to twenty degrees below zero. The dilemma was that her furnace had just run out of oil. Her husband normally bought fuel for their furnace every Friday when he was paid, but financial needs during the past week had meant he could only buy half his usual amount. Now, it was Tuesday morning and the furnace had just sputtered and shut off. Their tank was empty. Alice started a fire in their wood burning stove, but she noticed there were only a few pieces of wood left. How could she keep her children warm? She began to pray for deliverance, telling God, "We are entirely at Your mercy. Our help is in You."

As Alice continued to pray earnestly, her spirit began to fill with faith and the assurance that God saw their situation and would provide. All day long, she sang praises to God. When evening came, she put her children to bed in their snowsuits and piled on the blankets. When her husband came home from his second job, she turned on their little electric heater, and then they went to sleep.

Around 2:00 a.m., Alice awoke and heard the furnace running. She got up to turn it off, not wanting the fan to blow cold air into the house. She turned the thermostat all the way down, but to her surprise, the furnace did not shut off. She went to the kitchen and placed her hand on the heating vent. To her amazement, *warm* air was coming out! With tears streaming down her face, she went to the basement to check the gauge on their oil tank. It read "Empty." She tapped the tank, and it sounded hollow. There was no oil in the tank, but deliverance had come! She turned the thermostat up to sixty-five degrees, and the furnace kept running, so with rejoicing in her heart, she went back to bed. In the morning, she set the heat up to seventy-two. The furnace continued to run without fuel until the following Friday when her husband was able to buy their weekly amount.[1]

In the circumstances related in today's text, no doubt Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prayed for God's help. Their situation was dire—they needed deliverance! In our focus verse, they expressed their willingness to die rather than bow down to the golden idol King Nebuchadnezzar had made. However, they also expressed their faith that God would deliver them. Neither Alice nor the three Hebrews knew *how* God would deliver them, but they believed that whatever happened, God would be with them and take care of them.

Through prayer and faith, deliverance comes. Whether we face seemingly impossible circumstances or just everyday challenges, we can follow the example we find in today's text, and count on God for help. He will not fail us!

BACKGROUND

This portion of chapter 3 covers the construction of King Nebuchadnezzar's self-glorifying image and the edict for all to bow down (verses 1-7), and the refusal of the three Hebrews to do homage to the image (verses 8-18).

Historians indicate that at the end of the year 595 B.C., prior to the events of chapter 3, a coup attempt against Nebuchadnezzar occurred. This may have been why all the provincial rulers and officials of the realm were called to the plain of Dura to demonstrate their loyalty to the king. The precise location of this plain is unknown, though apparently it was near Babylon. Daniel's absence from this required assembly is not explained; he may have been away from Babylon on assignment for the realm.

Nebuchadnezzar's golden image was over ninety feet tall (about the height of a ten-story building) and nine feet wide, and was probably made of wood overlaid with gold. The size of the image obviously was intended to impress observers. Its location on a plain would have made the brightly gleaming structure visible for miles around.

The instruments mentioned in verse 5 were common in that day. The cornet was a wind instrument similar to a French horn. The flute was a pipe with a mouthpiece at the end. The sackbut was a triangular stringed instrument with short strings that made a high, sharp sound. The psaltery was a kind of triangular or wing-shaped harp played by plucking strings of horsehair that were stretched across a flat soundboard. The dulcimer was a bagpipe consisting of two pipes thrust through a leather bag that emitted a sweet sound when played.

Throwing those people who disobeyed the king or were involved in criminal activities into a burning furnace was a common form of punishment in Babylon.

The fiery furnace for such executions was a huge, industrial-size incinerator or kiln that could have been used for smelting metal or firing bricks.

The wording in verses 8 and 12 implies that the "certain Chaldeans" who brought the charges against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were resentful of the position of these conscripts from a conquered nation who were above them in positions of authority. In verse 12, the Chaldeans made three charges against the Hebrews: that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no regard for the king, that they did not serve the king's gods, and that they refused to worship the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up. All three accusations struck a blow at Nebuchadnezzar's pride and authority. They were clearly designed to arouse the king's anger, which according to verse 13, was exactly his response.

Nebuchadnezzar controlled himself when he first heard the accusation, and offered the three another chance. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego needed no time to deliberate their answer. They would not bow. Nebuchadnezzar's question in verse 15, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" shows his consummate arrogance, especially notable since God's omnipotent power had already been revealed to him through the interpretation of his dream in chapter 2.

According to verses 17-18, the three Hebrews trusted in the living God in spite of the danger to their lives, and by faith chose to suffer rather than to sin.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  B. The dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's image (the persecution and preservation of Israel under Gentile dominion)
    1. The construction of the image (3:1)
    2. The dedication of the image (3:2-7)
    3. The charges against the Jews (3:8-12)
    4. The interrogation of the Jews (3:13-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 2, what was the event the officials of the realm were ordered to attend?

2. Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego able to answer the king so quickly in regards to bowing down to his idol?

3. We may not face death because of our commitment to God, but we will face challenges to our integrity. What are some lessons we can learn from the courageous stand of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

CONCLUSION

God is always present and able to deliver. May we all strive to have the kind of faith that brought victory to the three Hebrew children and Alice!

NOTES

1. Alice E. Lewis, "The Miracle of Fire in My Furnace," SermonIndex.net, accessed August 18, 2021, http://www.sermonindex.net.

DAYBREAK

Daniel 3:19-30

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them." (Daniel 3:27)

In today's text, God brought about a miraculous deliverance for three young Hebrews who faced a fiery furnace rather than bow before a heathen image. While that event took place many centuries ago, God is still able to bring deliverance to those who trust Him.

A believer named Mary told about God's hand of protection over her when intruders broke into her family's home in Nigeria. She related, "In my late twenties, I left my job at the bank and started my own business. My new job involved traveling to Europe and transporting goods to Nigeria. One terrifying night, armed robbers broke into our home yelling, 'Where's the Madame of this house?' That day, I was supposed to have brought home almost $5,000 USD. However, I had given that money to somebody else, so there was nothing for the robbers to steal. My younger brother and my husband helped me hide under a bed in one of the rooms, but I could hear the burglars terrorizing my family, demanding to know where I was. They shot holes in our bedroom walls, and how we escaped those bullets was only by God's divine mercies. They told my son to say goodbye to his dad because they were going to kill my husband. I heard one of the men say, 'Let's finish the man,' and in agony I cried out, 'Jesus!' from under the bed, but my brother was in the room with me and insisted I stay quiet so I would not be found.

"The intruders eventually did find me and ordered me to give them the money. My husband had offered them our cars, but they wanted the money. They told me, 'You love money more than your life.' Then they forced me outside to search the cars. I do not know how we escaped harm, but somehow God preserved us, and eventually the raiders left.

"Afterward, I began to question why God had allowed that incident to happen. I needed God to restore peace in my heart, and in His mercy, God did just that. He walked me back through every detail of the day the robbers had come, and showed me how He had protected us. He reminded me how they had taken my husband and said, 'Let's finish him off,' yet they did not hurt him. They shot their weapons, yet not one person was harmed. When they found me in my hiding spot and led me out to the car alone, they could have beaten me up, but they did not even touch me. In fact, God reminded me that before the invasion, He woke me up and urged me to dress properly and to pray. God had protected us through the whole ordeal. When the Lord brought all of this to my mind, I realized that He was always with me. My questions and doubts disappeared, and I finally understood that whatever situation we may go through, God will always be with His children."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were pressured to deny God, but they would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image, even though they knew the fiery furnace would be their fate. They took a stand, and as a result, God brought them through the flames unscathed. Our focus verse states that not a hair of their heads was singed, their clothing was undamaged, and there was not even a smell of smoke on them.

We serve a mighty God! Whatever challenges come our way, we can be sure that God will be with us. He is more than able to deliver us if our trust is in Him, and whether He intervenes on our behalf or not, our eternal reward will be worth any suffering we may have to endure first. God is faithful to His own!

BACKGROUND

This portion of Daniel 3 describes what happened when the three Hebrews were cast into the furnace (verses 19-23), and the aftermath of their supernatural deliverance (verses 24-30).

The threatened punishment for not bowing before Nebuchadnezzar's image was immediately enacted. The fact that the three Hebrews were "bound in their coats" and that the furnace was heated "exceeding hot" (verses 21-22) shows that everything was done to make sure the three men were quickly and completely consumed by the fire. Their miraculous deliverance is highlighted by the fact that they survived inside the furnace, while those who cast them in perished from the heat. Ancient kilns were in the form of a vertical tunnel that opened only at the top of the dome-shaped column. Since heat rises, the top of the furnace would have been very hot, thus killing the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar instantly when they threw the Hebrews into the flames.

The divine intervention was apparent. The king's astonishment was reflected in his question, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" and his statement that he saw four men walking about in the flames. His assertion that "the form of the

fourth is like the Son of God" (verse 25) likely was not an acknowledgement that the God of the Hebrews was the true God, but rather that their God was chief among the gods. Still, it was a spontaneous tribute to the One whom Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego served.

The fact that Nebuchadnezzar was moved to a reverent respect for the God of these Hebrews was further proved by his edict that anyone who spoke amiss of their God would be executed, "Because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (verse 29). In the aftermath, the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to positions of higher importance in the realm than they had previously held.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  B. The dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's image (the persecution and preservation of Israel under Gentile dominion)
    5. The casting of the Jews into the furnace (3:19-23)
    6. The preservation of the Jews (3:24-27)
    7. The promotion of the Jews (3:28-30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What physical manifestation of King Nebuchadnezzar's anger at the Hebrews' refusal to bow is noted in verse 19?

2. Why do you think God allowed the king to see a heavenly being in the flames with the three men?

3. What steps can we take in our spiritual lives to have the faith that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had?

CONCLUSION

The power of God that delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace is still available today for those who trust God and are faithful to Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 4:1-18

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me." (Daniel 4:4-5)

Dreams are a succession of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that usually occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. Researchers tell us that dreams are a universal human experience— everyone dreams, though many dreams are insignificant and forgotten. However, at times God has used dreams to deliver a message. Sometimes the message was one of hope, and at other times it was of judgment.

Many years ago, Carl Wasara had a dream that impacted his life. He said, "I was born in Finland, and my father died when I was about eight years old. My mother and her aunt were very devout Christians. No doubt it was their prayers that followed me and gave me an inclination toward the Lord.

"In 1905 there was an insurrection in Finland against Russian rule. The Russian military rode through the streets on horses, trampling anyone in their path. I barely escaped by jumping into a coal bin in someone's basement. I was so upset by this incident that I left Finland and moved to Sweden.

"While in Sweden, I had a dream that left a lasting impression. I was sinking in a river about to drown when I saw a woman standing on the bridge overhead. She reached down her hand and pulled me out of the water.

"In 1908, when I was thirty-two years old, I came to America with my brother, and we traveled to Portland, Oregon. One day while taking a walk, I met a Finnish minister. I told him I had a hunger in my heart to know God. He said to go to the Apostolic Faith people at Front and Burnside and they would tell me what to do. I followed his advice and went to the church. There, I saw the woman who had been in my dream. It was such a blessing. I thought she was God's rescuing angel.

"As I sat in the service that night, tears streamed down my face. Though I didn't understand the words being spoken, I understood the Spirit of God. The founder of the church, Florence Crawford, saw me sitting in the meeting and after the service, she came and led me to the altar. God's people gathered around me and began to pray with me, and God wonderfully saved my soul."

When Carl passed away, he had served God for sixty-five years. He had a dream that brought hope, and God led him to where the hope could become reality.

In our text today, King Nebuchadnezzar had a vivid dream that he could recount in detail. However, in contrast to Carl, Nebuchadnezzar's dream troubled him, and rightly so (as can be seen in tomorrow's text). While God does not speak to most of us by dreams, these accounts illustrate the Lord's faithfulness to reach out to each person. He has given His Word and His Spirit to guide us into all truth. Whatever your situation is today, let your heart be encouraged to know that God cares about you, and He will help with every detail of your life if you will let Him.

BACKGROUND

Nebuchadnezzar's second dream is recorded in today's text. The interpretation, given in the latter portion of the chapter, is the text for tomorrow's reading.

Verses 1-3 introduce the chapter and indicate it was written after the events recounted had transpired. The writing has the tone of an official document, and King Nebuchadnezzar addressed it "unto all people, nations, and languages."

Nebuchadnezzar reigned over the Babylonian Empire from 605-562 B.C. During that time, he led his armies in conquering numerous kingdoms. Additionally, he was a builder, and his work included the expansion and fortification of the city of Babylon. Although the dates of the events in this chapter are unknown, scholars believe they took place toward the end of his reign, because verse 4 says he was at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace. The sense is that the wars were completed, the victories had been won, and he was enjoying his life.

Then he had this dream that troubled him. Perhaps he felt concern that it foretold evil and trouble for him. When the wise men of Babylon could not interpret the dream, Daniel was brought in. Nebuchadnezzar was sure Daniel would be able to give him the interpretation; the king had previous experience with Daniel and Daniel's connection to the God of the universe.

In his dream the king saw a tree that was large, strong, and beautiful, and that provided shade, shelter, and food. "The height thereof reached unto heaven" was a common way for ancient writers to describe tall trees or towers. Also, the tree was visible to all people.

Then a "watcher," which was a heavenly being, declared that the tree must be cut down. However, a

band of iron and brass would be put around the stump. Some scholars believe this indicated that the tree would not die completely.

The analogy changed from a tree to a person when the heavenly being said "he" would be given the heart of a beast rather than that of a man. In other words, the person would think of himself as an animal and act like one. Most scholars believe that "let seven times pass over him" means his condition would exist for seven years.

The heavenly being gave the purpose of the declaration: "to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." Although the worship of heathen gods pervaded the culture of this time, the universal and timeless truth of God the Creator being in control would be unequivocally demonstrated.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  C. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the pride of Gentile world powers)
    1. The proclamation of the king (4:1-3)
    2. The tree vision of the king (4:4-18)
      a. The search for the interpretation (4:4-9)
      b. The stating of the dream (4:10-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Nebuchadnezzar make this official statement? (verses 2-3)

2. Why would Nebuchadnezzar have said that the "spirit of the holy gods" was in Daniel? (verses 9 and 18)

3. Although our life experiences may not be as dramatic as the king's dream, how does God show His sovereignty to people today?

CONCLUSION

God wants to meet the needs of your life. If you look to Him and His Word, He will guide you.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 4:19-37

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation." (Daniel 4:34)

Everett Wayne described himself as "one of the orneriest old rascals who ever walked on this earth." However, God has ways of arresting the attention of even ornery old rascals! Everett often told of the day when God radically changed his life.

"When I came to the Apostolic Faith Church, I was a rank sinner. I had stepped out of a card game—the thing that had cursed my life and broken up my home. As I sat at the card table that night, God talked to me. He said, 'Old feller, except you do something, you're a goner!' The Almighty was speaking to my heart, and I knew it. I pushed the pack of cards across the table for the last time. I got right up from that card game and left that place.

"I remembered seeing the sign on the Apostolic Faith Church building that said, 'Jesus, the Light of the World.' I had walked past that sign many times when I was drunk. I had never been inside, but God said, 'This is the place for you to go.' I went right to the church, passing up every beer joint along the way. I could hardly wait until the service was over so I could go to the altar.

"My clothes were dirty, and I was dressed like a tramp, but I knelt at their altar. Not one of the people in that church knew me, but they gathered around me and prayed that God would save my soul. And I prayed also. I meant business with God, and He gave me an honest heart. I said, 'God, be merciful to me, a wretched sinner.' God heard my prayer and answered. What a change! In a moment of time, the old habits and appetites were gone.

"My past life was well covered up, but God sent me back over my past, and I straightened up things that could have put me behind prison bars for the balance of my life. I had committed every kind of sin except murder, and I had that in my heart. I had lost my citizenship, but God restored it. Today I don't have to sneak around the corners to see if the law is looking for me. In a moment of time, God gave me a clear conscience and a clean life. Today, I have joy, peace, and victory in this heart of mine because God is in it."

Like Everett Wayne, in today's text Nebuchadnezzar experienced a radical change through the power of God. Nebuchadnezzar's reason had departed from him because of his pride, and he had lived like an animal in the fields for seven years. However, when Nebuchadnezzar recognized God and blessed "the most High," God gave him back his sanity. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was restored, and he responded by praising, extolling, and honoring the King of Heaven.

The change that resulted in both Everett Wayne and Nebuchadnezzar when they turned God's way with an honest heart was life-transforming, and resulted in heartfelt praise. May that be the attitude of our hearts as well, when we consider God's amazing grace to us!

BACKGROUND

This portion of chapter 4 gives the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its fulfillment.

When Daniel heard the dream, he was overwhelmed and did not speak for one hour, giving evidence of his concern for Nebuchadnezzar. The message of the dream was one of judgment, but Daniel was careful to address the king respectfully throughout the conversation.

The tree that was great, strong, visible to "all the earth," and a source of food and shelter represented the king. Even though Nebuchadnezzar was known throughout the world as a mighty and brilliant king, Daniel told him that he would become mentally incapacitated and act like a wild beast "till seven times pass over him," a period of time that many scholars believe was seven years. The purpose of this judgment was clear, "Till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (verse 25). Yet in the dream, the stump remained, indicating that the kingdom would be restored to Nebuchadnezzar once he understood that God was sovereign.

In verse 27, Daniel pled with the king to turn from his sins, hoping that the pending judgment could be averted. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not heed Daniel's words and humble himself as advised. One year later, he was walking in his palace and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . .?" (verse 30). Archaeologists have ascertained that Babylon was a splendid city encompassing approximately four square miles, making it the largest in the world at that time. The walls were forty to seventy-five feet high and wide enough for chariots to race side-by-side

on the top. Entrance to the city was through fortified gates, eight of which have been excavated by archaeologists. Temples and palaces were decorated with glazed tiles in brilliant colors. The city was built on both sides of the Euphrates River, and had quays for ships and a bridge with brick piles. Canals were used for both irrigation and navigation. The ruins of ancient Babylon are located in present-day Iraq.

God's response to Nebuchadnezzar's pride was immediate. The king's reason departed and he lived as an animal in the fields. Some scholars suggest his affliction was a form of lycanthropy, a type of mental disturbance involving the delusion of being an animal, with corresponding altered behavior. Ancient historians made brief reference to this, noting that there was a time when Nebuchadnezzar was ill or weak and did not reign. It is not unusual that the account is not further detailed in official archives, because defeats, wickedness, and weaknesses of monarchs were often omitted from national records.

When Nebuchadnezzar recognized God, blessed "the most High," and gave Him praise and honor, God restored his sanity. Also, as Daniel had foretold, his kingdom was given back to him.

Nebuchadnezzar's praise to God was expansive. He stated that God is eternal and sovereign (verse 34), as well as omnipresent and omnipotent (verse 35), and just (verse 37). He recognized that God was well able to abase anyone who walks in pride.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  C. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (the pride of Gentile world powers)
    3. The tree vision explained to the king (4:19-27)
    4. The tree vision fulfilled in the king (4:28-33)
    5. The restoration of the king (4:34-37)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Nebuchadnezzar lose his reason?

2. How might Nebuchadnezzar have avoided this experience?

3. In learning from Nebuchadnezzar, what should be our attitude about our relationship to God, and how can we develop that attitude?

CONCLUSION

Our lives should always reflect a humble dependence upon God. If that is not our mindset today, we should pay heed to the consequences that befell Nebuchadnezzar, and mend our ways!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 5:1-16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." (Daniel 5:5-6)

The phrase, "the writing on the wall" is an idiom that describes signs of approaching doom or expresses a presentiment that catastrophe is about to occur. Often the phrase indicates a person's ability or inability to recognize that calamity is approaching. For example, it might be said, "The corporation was bleeding money, and when the CEO's assistant saw the writing on the wall, she started to look for another job."

Many who use that phrase may not know that it has a Biblical origin. It has its roots in our text for today — the account of an event that took place thousands of years ago in the ancient land of Babylon. As Belshazzar, king of that doomed world power, was indulging in drunken revelry and debasing sacred Jewish Temple vessels by using them as wine goblets, a hand appeared and wrote the words "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" on the palace wall.

Our focus verses describe the terror that gripped the king at this astonishing event: "the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." Although the writing on the wall consisted of only three words in Aramaic (a language understood by the Babylonians), the king's pagan astrologers and soothsayers were unable to explain the phrase's prophetic meaning. Their inability troubled the king further. Perhaps he sensed that the mysterious communication had some connection with his flagrantly blasphemous actions or the fact that the Persian armies were encamped around his city.

The queen came into the banquet hall and urged Belshazzar to seek an interpretation from the elderly Daniel, stating that he was a man "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" and asserting that "knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel" (verses 11-12). How interesting that this queen mother of an idolatrous empire had such confidence in Daniel's ability to reveal the answer to the strange mystery written on the wall! Heeding her counsel, Belshazzar called for Daniel and promised him riches and honor if he would interpret the message.

Too often world leaders today, like Belshazzar, demonstrate reckless disregard for God and even outright rejection of His Word and His people. However, God is still in control! He is sovereign, and He is well able to intervene — at times even in dramatic ways — to bring about His purposes.

BACKGROUND

Today's passage covers Belshazzar's feast, the appearance of the writing on the wall, the failure of the king's wise men to interpret the message, and Daniel's summons before the king at the recommendation of the queen.

While Nebuchadnezzar is referred to in several places in this text as the "father" of Belshazzar, in that era and culture the term *father* could denote a variety of relationships. Belshazzar would have known about Nebuchadnezzar's humbling by God, for no more than twenty-five years had elapsed since that event. Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach, followed him, ruling for two years. Next on the throne was Neriglassar, who was in power for four years, and then Labashi-Marduk, reigning less than one year, and then Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, who ruled for seventeen years. During part of Nabonidus' rule, Belshazzar co-reigned with him, and at the time of today's text, Belshazzar was regent of the city of Babylon. According to historical records, he was known for his reckless extravagance and cruelty. He appears and disappears from Biblical history in this one chapter.

The events in this chapter took place in 539 B.C. At the time, Babylon was under siege by the Persian army. While the territories around Babylon had fallen one by one into the hands of the combined forces of the Medes and Persians, Belshazzar seemingly felt the city was fortified enough to withstand an assault of any kind. Archaeologists have found that the city had provisions to supply the populace for twenty years and an inexhaustible water supply, so likely the king felt secure. It was possibly to demonstrate his disdain for the threat of the surrounding armies that Belshazzar hosted the great feast for a thousand of his lords (verse 1).

Archeologists have discovered the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's palace, which included a large throne room 56 feet wide and 173 feet long. Likely, this was the scene of the banquet described in today's text.

In the course of the feast, Belshazzar followed a reckless and profane impulse and ordered that the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem Temple (plundered by Nebuchadnezzar fifty years earlier) be brought for use at his banquet. This sacrilegious act was accompanied by drunkenness, debauchery, and idolatry, as the guests at the feast "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" (verse 4).

The queen referred to in verse 10 was not Belshazzar's wife, as his wives were already present at the banquet (see verse 3). Historians feel this likely was the queen mother, Nitocris. Though the king's wise men had been unable to interpret the meaning of the writing on the wall, she expressed confidence in Daniel's ability to do so and urged the king to summon him to the banquet hall.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  D. The destruction of Belshazzar (the final doom of Gentile world power)
    1. The feast of the king (5:1-4)
    2. The revelation to the king (5:5-12)
      a. The mysterious writing (5:5-6)
      b. The king's decree (5:7)
      c. The wise men's failure (5:8-9)
      d. The queen's recommendation (5:10-12)
    3. The summons of Daniel before the king (5:13-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 5, where did the fingers of a man's hand write?

2. What do you think went through the minds of the invited guests as they saw the "handwriting on the wall"?

3. What does Daniel's character, as described by the queen in verses 11-12, teach us about how we can be a light and a testimony for God in our day?

CONCLUSION

Disrespect and defiance of God by those in positions of worldly power and influence are noted by God and will ultimately be judged by Him.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 5:17-31

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." (Daniel 5:26-28)

God has unique ways of bringing an individual's spiritual condition to his or her attention. In our text today, God used Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting on the wall to impress King Belshazzar with the judgment awaiting him. In a less dramatic way but just as clearly, God captured the attention of Dwight, a minister in our organization, when he was a rebellious teenager who had turned away from his godly training. In contrast to Belshazzar, Dwight responded in time. He relates his experience this way:

"While growing up, my sister, brother, and I were taken to church regularly. Many times I felt God's hand of conviction on my heart, but I stubbornly resisted. As I grew into my teens, I became more and more rebellious against God. I felt confident that I was completely in control of my plans, opinions, and desires and, as a result, I became quite unmoved by spiritual things. One day my sister asked me, 'Aren't you ever going to get saved?' I remember laughing and brushing off her question with a wave as if it were ridiculous.

"After graduating from high school, I went into a trade and began making good money. I became caught up in fast cars and racing, and that course of action brought me to death's door on numerous occasions. There were times I raced in town at 120 mph, and was in skids at 90 mph with the car going sideways and out of control.

"Thank God for His faithfulness! One evening I was home alone with my mother, who was ill, and found she could hardly breathe. Her eyes began to roll back into her head, and at that moment, God asked me, 'Will you give Me your life?' I knew that as soon as I said yes, my mom would be all right. At first I held out, but when I figured she was taking her last breath, in my heart I said, 'Okay, Lord. If You don't let her die here like this, I will give You my heart.' Not one word was spoken, and yet she instantly opened her eyes and said, 'I think I'm going to be all right.' I knew that I had made a promise to God that would have to be kept.

"For a while, I still went on in my own stubborn way, but eventually I went down to an altar of prayer and surrendered my heart to God. A great calm and peace settled in my heart and along with it, there came a real change in my life. I rejoice that God called me and helped me to shed my rebellion. The best move I ever made was to give God a chance in my life."

When we read the story of Belshazzar, it is not hard to imagine the terror he experienced when he saw the handwriting appear on the wall. One moment all was laughter and gaiety, and the next moment "the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another" (Daniel 5:6). Daniel's message revealed that God had judged Belshazzar for his sins and rebellion, committed in spite of the fact that he knew what God had done for his forefather, Nebuchadnezzar. The king had ignored the lessons he should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar's experience, and had even dared to use the sacred vessels from God's Temple at his profane orgy. Now his time had run out, and he was weighed in the balances and found wanting. That very night, Belshazzar's kingdom was overthrown and he was slain.

God is merciful, as Dwight and countless others have proved. However, if a person continues to reject God, there will come a time when a line is crossed and one's eternal doom is forever established. Clearly the message for us is that anyone who has not yet turned to the Lord should do so while He is still calling. No one should wait until the door of mercy closes and judgment falls!

BACKGROUND

This portion of Daniel 5 describes Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting on the wall, and the fulfillment of the doom it predicted.

Among other sinful actions, Belshazzar was guilty of the sacrilegious use of the gold and silver vessels previously stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem. As Daniel reminded him, Belshazzar knew how God had humbled his forefather, King Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 4:28-37). While Nebuchadnezzar had been bold and full of pride, after God humbled him, he was quick to acknowledge the power and sovereignty of God. Belshazzar ignored all that history, to his own detriment.

The writing on the wall consisted of only three words in Aramaic, a language understood by the Babylonians. Daniel gave a two-part explanation for each word. *Mene* meant "numbered" and referred to the fact God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and finished it. *Tekel* meant "weighed" and

indicated that in God's divine balance, the kingdom was found wanting. *Pharsin* meant "broken fragments" (the *U* at the beginning of the word is a prefix meaning "and"), revealing the final doom—that the kingdom would be divided into pieces and given to the Medes and Persians.

That very night, the united forces of the Medes and Persians overran Babylon. Tradition indicates the armies were able to enter by diverting the waters of the river that ran through the city, and then walking past the defenses through the dry channel. Other historians suggest that insurrectionists inside the city actually opened the city gates to give the invading armies access. Whatever method was used, the city fell with almost no resistance by its citizens. However, as Daniel had foretold, Belshazzar himself was slain.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  D. The destruction of Belshazzar (the final doom of Gentile world power)
    4. The interpretation of Daniel (5:17-29)
      a. The humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar (5:17-21)
      b. The arrogance of Belshazzar (5:22-24)
      c. The interpretation of Daniel (5:25-28)
      d. The reward of Daniel (5:29)
    5. The destruction of Babylon (5:30-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 23, what actions of Belshazzar did Daniel indicate had brought about the judgment of God?

2. Why do you think Daniel reminded the king and those present of how God humbled his forefather, Nebuchadnezzar?

3. Today's text refers to a "heart [that] was lifted up" and a "mind hardened in pride" (verse 20). Belshazzar was condemned because he had not humbled his heart, but had lifted up himself against the Lord of Heaven (verses 22-23). What steps can we take to ensure we do not fall into the trap of pride?

CONCLUSION

Continued rebellion against God will ultimately bring judgment. However, while the door is still open, if individuals turn from their wickedness and defiance of God, they will find He is merciful.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 6:1-15

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm." (Daniel 6:3)

In his book *The Moral Compass,* author William J. Bennett shared a story about an ancient Greek sculptor that reminds us of our need for consistent moral excellence.

"Long ago in ancient Greece, an aged sculptor was laboring over a block of stone. He carved with utmost care, poking the rock with his chisel, chipping away a fragment at a time, gauging the marks with sinewy hands before making the next cut. When it was finished, the piece would be hoisted high into the air and set on top of a towering shaft, and so would become the capital, or uppermost part, of a column. And the column would help support the roof of the lofty temple.

"'Why spend so much time and effort on that section?' asked a government official who passed by. 'It will sit fifty feet high. No human eye will be able to see those details.' The old artist put down his hammer and chisel, gazed steadily at his questioner, and replied: 'But God will see it!'"[1]

Daniel, along with many other Jews, had been living in exile in Babylon for many years. During his long captivity, Daniel had been promoted to responsible positions in the government because of his "excellent spirit" and the wisdom and skills God had given him. At the time of today's text, Daniel was made chief overseer and was promoted "over the whole realm." The secret for his continued success through one administration after another was his allegiance to the God of Israel and his purpose to serve Him. Even his enemies could find no fault with his life.

Like the sculptor in the story above, Daniel was aware that God was always watching even when others were not. His integrity never wavered—his promotions, the changing political climate, and the jealousy of the other princes and presidents of the realm did not alter his behavior in the slightest. From his youth, Daniel had been faithful to pray and trust God, and he continued to do so. God meant more to him than his employment or political position.

Integrity and trustworthiness are qualities that will be noticed. Against a backdrop of conspiracy and corruption, Daniel's sterling character and loyalty to God earned the respect of a pagan king. We can learn from his example. One of the best ways to influence unbelievers around us is to be sure we stay true to God and uphold the principles of righteous living outlined in His Word. We may face opposition— Daniel certainly did—but we will win the favor of God!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 6 highlights Daniel's integrity and steadfast commitment to God during times of political change, jealous co-workers, and an inflexible legal system.

The final verse of chapter 5 alludes to Darius the Mede, who assumed control of the kingdom after Belshazzar of the Chaldeans was slain and the Babylonian Empire overthrown by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. The first verses of chapter 6 describe the new regent's redistribution of administrative responsibilities in the realm. The princes of the Persian Empire were called "satraps" in Aramaic—a title for governors of a province or provinces. Over this group of 120, three presidents had supervisory authority, and of these three, Daniel was first because of the "excellent spirit" in him (verse 3). Daniel was likely over eighty years old at this time; he had endured through one idolatrous ruler and regime after another, standing out as a man governed by integrity that was rooted in his right relationship with God.

Those around Daniel had no real regard for truth, the nation, or the king. The words of the corrupt presidents and princes expose their manipulative and self-serving ways: they implied that Daniel could not be trusted because he was "of the children of the captivity of Judah." The word translated *assembled* or *assembled together* in verses 6, 11, and 15 is in contrast to Daniel, who was alone in his stand, but steadfast in the knowledge that God was watching and would uphold him.

There are some notable differences between the accounts of taking a stand in chapters 3 and 6. The setting of chapter 3 is the Babylonian Empire, the order given was the king's own command, the accusers were "certain Chaldeans," and the accusation had to do with public worship and what was required (bowing to the image). Chapter 6 is set in the Persian Empire, the order given resulted from manipulation of the king, the accusers were government officials, and the accusation had to do with private worship and what was forbidden (prayer). The danger in chapter 6 was a lion's den rather than the burning furnace of chapter 3. The differences highlight the reality that God watches in both public and private matters, whatever the context or challenge.

Daniel's habit of regular times of prayer was both exemplary and rooted in longstanding Jewish tradition. While often the Old Testament posture for praying was standing, Daniel knelt, indicating humility and reverence.

The king was distraught when he realized the trap that had been set for a man he respected. However, the law could not be set aside, and according to Persian law, no pardon could be granted, in spite of the diligent efforts of the king.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  E. The decree of Darius (the man of sin and his politico-religious system)
    1. The prominence of Daniel (6:1-3)
    2. The plot against Daniel (6:4-9)
    3. The prayer of Daniel (6:10-11)
    4. The proposal before the king (6:12-15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why do you think Daniel's fellow government officials conspired to have him removed?

2. How long did the decree forbid citizens from making petition of anyone other than the king?

3. What are some ways we can cultivate an excellent spirit like Daniel's?

CONCLUSION

"God will see it" is true of our every action and reaction. However, our lives must be lived with consistent faithfulness not only because God and others will observe us, but more importantly, because our love for God and the principles of His Word motivate our hearts and behavior.

NOTES

1. William J. Bennett, "God Will See," *The Moral Compass* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 724.

DAYBREAK

Daniel 6:16-28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end." (Daniel 6:25-26)

When God brings about a change in a situation or individual, it is a *real* difference! In our text today, King Darius went from wanting the people of his kingdom to honor and pray to him, to decreeing that those in his realm should honor and pray to Daniel's God. That was an amazing change!

This account reminded me of a time when God caused a turnaround for me in an employment situation. I had taken a job with a plumbing contractor to supplement my income as a pastor. Soon after I began working with the crew, it became apparent that one of the men was not happy about my presence. Perhaps he felt that my being hired was a threat to his job. Whatever the basis for his antagonism, it was obvious he was doing whatever he could to discourage me. There was a constant questioning of my methods and many words of criticism directed at me, even in front of other members of the crew.

Of course, this affected me, and I started to wonder if taking the job really had been the Lord's will. When those thoughts came, though, God would remind me of how He had given me the job—someone had called offering work when I was not even looking for employment. The Lord also reminded me how my non-Christian boss was so accommodating to my responsibilities as a pastor.

In spite of that reassurance, the situation with this individual continued to be very difficult to handle. I made the matter the subject of prayer, but one day, after listening to this man's rough cursing and loud, ungodly music for hours, I was so disheartened that I seriously considered quitting, and expressed my thoughts to God.

The response I received was not what I was hoping to hear! God impressed upon me to stay there and wait to see what He would do, so I continued working. Soon after, this individual and I were doing a job together and we had an accident, dropping a piece of pipe weighing about two hundred pounds off a building. It slammed down against a fire sprinkler, bounced up, and came down hard on top of a large gas meter. After we made sure no one was injured, we looked around to see what damage we had caused, and found there was no damage to anything!

We went back to work and finished the job. A while later, as the two of us were having lunch, he said, "It's a good thing you were working here today, preacher! God kept things from getting broken." I was so amazed by his comment that I could hardly respond! The next day we were working with a larger crew, and as about six or eight of us ate lunch together, this same man spoke up and told the entire group about the "miracle" God had worked the day before. From that day forward, he never gave me any more problems. What a change God had made!

This was a powerful testimony to me that God will work for us in His time. Daniel had to go into the lions' den. And my problems were not resolved my first week, or even in my first months at that job. However, God made a difference for Daniel in the face of death, and for me in my work situation. In big or small situations, God is able.

We will all face challenges and trials in life. When we do, let's remember that we have a God who can turn impossible situations around. He is able and willing to meet our needs. If we will allow Him to work out His plan in His time, He will give us the victory.

BACKGROUND

Today's text begins with the apparent success of the plot of Daniel's adversaries, and Daniel being cast into the den of lions. Based on the implication of verse 23, the den was most likely a pit. There were probably different areas to separate the lions, and trap doors for handling and feeding. The king's reluctance to permit this punishment is a clear indicator that Daniel's integrity and devotion to God had impacted the king, causing him to state, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee" (verse 16).

According to verse 17, the den was sealed with a royal signet. Signets were worn either as a ring or on a cord around the neck and were used to make impressions in clay or wax; the impression functioned as a signature or authentication. The explanatory statement "that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel" ensured that the king would not order a rescue of Daniel.

The king spent the night fasting, and then hastened to the den of lions early in the morning. His lamenting cry in essence asked, "Was your God able

to prevail?" The anguish indicated by his question was another indicator of the esteem in which he held Daniel.

In verse 23, Daniel was "taken up out of the den." The law had been fulfilled; Daniel had suffered the prescribed punishment for disobedience to the king's decree. However, the outcome was not what Daniel's opponents expected. The king's outrage over the scheme against Daniel was evidenced by his immediate punishment of the plotters, along with their wives and children. This was severe, but it was reflective of the customs of the Persians of that era. The fact that the lions immediately overpowered these individuals was proof that divine protection had preserved Daniel.

Darius then made a second decree, commanding reverence for Daniel's God throughout his realm. The king's recognition that Daniel's deliverance was miraculous is apparent in the words *signs* and *wonders* (verse 27).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  E. The decree of Darius (the man of sin and his politico-religious system)
    5. The placement of Daniel (6:16-18)
    6. The preservation of Daniel (6:19-24)
    7. The proclamation of the king (6:25-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the king do during the night Daniel was in the den of lions?

2. Why do you think the king made a second decree after Daniel's miraculous deliverance?

3. In what ways might faithfulness to God in the face of opposition have an impact on those who are watching our lives?

CONCLUSION

Just as God proved himself to be a mighty deliverer to Daniel, the king, and the people of the Persian kingdom, He will prove Himself to us if we are faithful to Him and take our needs to Him in prayer.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 7:1-28

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet." (Daniel 7:19)

In the vision described in this chapter, Daniel saw a number of troubling images that included violent conflict between powerful beasts. The fourth beast was particularly fearsome and aggressive. Daniel's attempt to describe this beast brings to mind a giant machine named Bertha.

In 2013, a 9,270 foot long tunnel-boring project began under a portion of downtown Seattle, Washington. Bertha was the machine especially designed for this project. At 326 feet in length and with a weight of over 6,000 tons, Bertha was the largest tunnel-boring machine of her kind when she was moved into position. Her key feature was a cutterhead 57.5 feet in diameter with 750 teeth that performed the task of boring through solid rock and packed earth.

This amazing machine initially worked wonderfully, but when it was barely over 1,000 feet into the tunnel, boring was halted by an obstruction in Bertha's path. This was the first of several delays. In 2019, the tunnel project was finally completed—about two years late and more than $200,000,000 over budget. Lawsuits among insurers, Bertha's builders, contractors, and civic government were many. Though the tunnel was completed, numerous ongoing conflicts continued. Bertha herself was disassembled; most of her components were not reusable, and some have been melted down.[1]

Bertha had some visual similarities to the formidable "fourth beast" of Daniel's vision—a beast described in our focus verse as being "exceeding dreadful" with teeth of iron and nails of brass. Militarily, the fourth kingdom that the beast represented was dominant; it surpassed and was different from all that were before it. Yet it was incapable of delivering a permanent, righteous, peaceful government, and eventually was destroyed.

People long for a harmonious society free of strife and turmoil, but history has proved that elected politicians, legislated policies, military might, and human philosophies cannot achieve this. Only God can provide the peace that people need and desire.

In his vision, it was undoubtedly comforting to Daniel to observe that all the kingdoms were eventually subdued by the righteous rule of the Ancient of days, and to understand that His kingdom could never be defeated. Thousands of years later, it is comforting for us to realize that one day Christ's dominion will displace all earthly kingdoms and will end all chaos, turmoil, and strife. Until then, we need not be unduly troubled by what we observe in the world around us. Ultimately, the Son of man will prevail and rule righteously forever!

BACKGROUND

The information in verse 1 places Daniel's vision in this chapter between the events of Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. The first part of this vision (verses 2-8) follows a pattern similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue with the four sections (see chapter 2). Both foretold the rise and fall of four kingdoms. In Daniel's vision, these were portrayed by hybrid animalistic creatures that were very aggressive and not subject to any moral restraints.

As in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the pattern of succession alluded to in Daniel's vision fits the histories of the Babylonian (lion), Median-Persian (bear), Grecian (leopard), and Roman (the fourth beast with iron teeth) empires. The lion whose wings were plucked aptly characterizes Nebuchadnezzar who was dethroned by God immediately after referring to himself as powerful and majestic (see Daniel 4:30-31). The three ribs in the bear's mouth could represent the three empires conquered by the Medes and Persians: Lydian (Asia Minor), Babylonian, and Egyptian. The leopard with four heads would represent Alexander the Great and the four generals among whom the Greek empire was divided after his death. The "iron teeth" of the fourth beast indicated military strength, and this beast is commonly accepted by many scholars as representing the Roman Empire.

Verses 9-14 introduce a kingdom that was different from the first four in its nature and duration. The "Ancient of days" (God) placed this kingdom within the dominion of the "Son of man" (Jesus). The phrase "judgment was set" highlights the sense of a kingdom with strong moral underpinnings—it points to a legal proceeding in which a Judge presided, and a sentence was passed and then executed. Also highlighted is the point that a kingdom that was eternal and perfect replaced the kingdoms that were transitory and flawed in nature.

The second half of this chapter begins and ends with Daniel feeling troubled by what he saw (verses 15, 28). God's detailed explanation of the meaning

of the vision focused particularly on the fourth beast, whose kingdom gave rise to the troubling figure briefly described in verse 25. Daniel had been an exile from his homeland for most of his life, and had observed firsthand how the powerful vie for military and political power. The Jewish historian Josephus commented that the temporal kingdoms described in this passage are "like chariots without drivers, which are overturned; so would the world be dashed to pieces by its being carried without a Providence, and so perish and come to nought."[2]

The end of this chapter concludes the part of the Book of Daniel originally written in Aramaic, which began in Daniel 2:4. Some feel that presenting this section in a more widely used language was a purposeful targeting of a broader audience, in order to have an effect beyond the Jewish nation.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The prophetic history of the Gentiles
  F. The dream of the four beasts (the course of Gentile world power) (7:1-28)
    1. The background (7:1)
    2. The vision (7:2-14)
      a. The four beasts (7:2-8)
      b. The Ancient of Days (7:9-12)
      c. The Son of Man (7:13-14)
    3. The interpretation (7:15-28)
      a. The explanation of the four beasts (7:15-17)
      b. The explanation of God's kingdom (7:18)
      c. The explanation of the fourth beast (7:19-28)
        (1) The request (7:19-20)
        (2) The judgment of the beast (7:21-22)
        (3) The dominion of the beast (7:23)
        (4) The subjection of the beast (7:24)
        (5) The destruction of the beast (7:25-26)
        (6) The promise of the eternal kingdom (7:27)
        (7) The response of Daniel (7:28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What were some of the characteristics of each of the four beasts Daniel saw?

2. How was the fourth beast "diverse" (different) from the others that Daniel saw?

3. Verses 15 and 28 both mention that Daniel was "troubled." However, an angel was there to assist Daniel in gaining a clearer understanding. What are some ways God provides us with clearer understanding about matters that trouble us?

CONCLUSION

In His time, the God of Daniel will institute a righteous kingdom that will never pass away. Our confidence is in Him.

NOTES

1. "Bertha (tunnel boring machine)," *Wikipedia*, last updated July 18, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertha_(tunnel_boring_machine).
2. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Newcastle: L. Dinsdale, 1784) 10.11.7.279, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2848.

DAYBREAK

Daniel 8:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand." (Daniel 8:25)

It never pays to stand up against God. This is true of nations and world leaders, but it is also true of individuals. Walt Smith was one who learned that lesson. He acknowledged, "I was an unbeliever and a fighter against God. I had no use for anything connected with religion; it was all foolishness to me. But I was one of the biggest fools on this earth—a professed atheist. From the time I was just a boy, I cursed, drank, and smoked. For years I had preached atheism to the men who worked with me in a sawmill.

"The rattle and roar and screech of the saws in a mill is so loud one is barely able to hear a human voice. Yet one day while trimming lumber in that sawmill, about 2:30 in the afternoon, God spoke to my heart, revealing Himself to me. He said, 'The only true happiness is in the Lord.' There was not a man within thirty feet of me, but God spoke to me above the scream of that machinery. In that moment I knew there was a living God. I walked over to a fellow worker I had known for years, a hardened criminal who was worse than me, and said, 'There is a God!' He did not laugh. He seemed to realize something had happened to me.

"The following Sunday morning found me sitting in the back of an Apostolic Faith Church. I thought I was pretty hard and tough, but the Spirit of the living God came down and softened up this heart of mine that was hardened by years of fighting against God. Tears rolled down my cheeks. That gave me hope, and I went forward and prayed. I asked the very God I had denied for years to have mercy on me, and He did. He saved and transformed me in a moment of time.

"God helped me make restitution. Also, I went back to my work at that sawmill, and not an oath crossed my lips. I was not fighting my fellowmen or chewing tobacco, but I lived for God. When I left that mill, every man could tell that God had made a change in my life."

Although Walt had magnified his opinion against God and stood up against Him, after God's Spirit dealt with him, he believed and trusted in God for the rest of his life. He faithfully testified and preached the Word of God until the Lord took him home to Heaven. In contrast, our focus verse tells of a powerful leader who would magnify himself and stand against God but show no repentance, and consequently God would cause him to die.

Each individual will choose whether to submit to God or to resist Him. How much better it is to follow God! Walt Smith proved that, and so can we.

BACKGROUND

This vision appeared to Daniel in the final year of Belshazzar's reign, just before the fall of the Babylonian empire to Darius the Mede (see Daniel 5:31). The vision was more directly targeted at Israel than previous ones, with references that would be of particular interest to the Jewish nation. The scene of the vision was Shushan (modern day Shush, Iran), more than two hundred miles east of Babylon where Daniel had been taken initially as a captive. Rather than taking him closer to home, it seemed this vision was taking him farther away.

In verses 3-14, Daniel's vision describes conflict between a ram, thought to represent the Median/Persian empire, and a male goat, which portrayed the Grecian empire under Alexander the Great, who was succeeded by four generals. These ungodly kingdoms achieved governance by military dominance.

Verses 15-17 describe how Daniel was trying to understand the vision when the angel Gabriel appeared and made clear to him that the vision characterized events to happen "at the time of the end."

In verses 18-21, Gabriel told Daniel of two empires that were looming in Israel's near future. While the animals themselves represented kingdoms, horns were representative of individual heads-of-state. The two horns on the ram represented the kings of Media and Persia (Darius and Cyrus). The rough goat with a horn in verse 21 was an accurate portrayal of the rise of Greece under Alexander the Great. Upon his death, four generals divided up his kingdom, and from one of those "horns" arose the "little horn," thought to describe Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who plundered the city of Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple around 168 B.C.

Verses 23-25 contain Gabriel's description of a reign of terror in which a figure stood up against the Prince of princes, but was "broken without hand." Many scholars believe that Antiochus fulfilled this prophecy, but it may also foreshadow the Antichrist of the last days.

In verse 9 Daniel saw a little horn waxing great toward "the pleasant land," which is the land of Israel.

This poignant portion of his vision was followed by the suspension of the regular offering, and the desolation of the sanctuary. The daily sacrifice, or regular offering, is also referenced in verses 11, 12, 13, 14, and 26. In verse 14, the 2300 "days" is translated from the Hebrew text that literally says 2300 "evenings and mornings," corresponding to the times of day when regular offerings would have been presented by the priests.

This devastation of the Jews' form of worship and access to the Lord made Daniel's vision very troubling to him and to those who heard it. Verse 27 summarizes their reactions.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  A. The vision of the ram and he-goat (Israel under Medo-Persia and Greece) (8:1-27)
    1. The background (8:1-2)
    2. The vision (8:3-14)
      a. The vision of the ram (8:3-4)
      b. The vision of the he-goat (8:5-14)
        (1) The destruction of the ram (8:5-7)
        (2) The description of the he-goat (8:8)
        (3) The domination of the little horn (8:9-14)
    3. The interpretation (8:15-26)
      a. Gabriel's intervention (8:15-18)
      b. Gabriel's interpretation (8:19-26)
        (1) The ram (8:19-20)
        (2) The he-goat (8:21-22)
        (3) The destroyer (8:23-26)
    4. The response (8:27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did Daniel react to this vision?

2. How do you think Daniel was able to carry out his regular business while his heart was so troubled?

3. As we live in the end times, what can we do to be sure our hearts are ready?

CONCLUSION

Today we can purpose to yield ourselves to God and to follow Him with all our hearts. It's the best way to live.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 9:1-27

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name." (Daniel 9:19)

Have you ever had someone try to persuade you to do something? When our children were young, they often accompanied their requests with reasons why my husband and I should say yes. Whether it was going to the mall, allowing a friend to come over, or increasing their allowance, the deciding factor frequently came down to how *their* desires aligned with *our* desires for them.

For example, one time our son suggested a course of action that would allow him to buy a rather expensive laptop computer. His proposal was that he could save for this purchase if we paid him a certain amount each week for extra tasks he would do for us, and he was convincing as he explained how this plan would benefit both him and us. Not only would it take care of tasks we needed done, but it would also teach him to set a goal and accomplish it—an idea, he pointed out, that we ourselves had championed. How could we refuse a request that clearly aligned with what we had already said was our desire for him?

In today's text, Daniel used this approach when he came before God. In captivity and away from Jerusalem, the prophet's heart was burdened for his homeland and people. After he studied and understood what the Prophet Jeremiah had foretold, Daniel realized that the time of Israel's captivity was nearing an end, so he set his face to seek the Lord with supplication, fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. As he poured out his prayer, he stated five requests: that God would "hear . . . forgive . . . hearken . . . do . . . defer not." These requests were not promoting his own ideas for his homeland's restoration. In a sense, he was reciting back to God what he knew God had already promised to do. It was as if Daniel prayed, "Lord, I'm not asking You to do anything that conflicts with Your plans. I'm praying this in accordance with what You said You would do."

As Christians, we often face times when we want God to take action. Perhaps we have an unsaved loved one, a friend who is suffering, or a family member in need of an answer to prayer. If we come before God in prayer, conforming our requests to His will and desires, we can boldly ask Him to hear our prayers and answer according to His plan. We can be confident that just as God responded to Daniel, He will respond to our prayers as well!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 9 begins with an account of Daniel's intercession for Israel. Verses 1 and 2 indicate that Daniel had received and read the letter sent by Jeremiah from Jerusalem to Babylon. The word translated *books* in verse 2 could also be translated "letter" or "scroll," indicating that it was a written document.

The seventy years described in Jeremiah chapters 25 and 29, and Daniel's knowledge of the circumstances of his day, led him to understand that those passages applied to his time. Jeremiah's prophecy, which began when Nebuchadnezzar raided Jerusalem in 605 B.C., was nearing fulfillment, since Daniel 9 is dated 539 B.C. Because Daniel had been in captivity for almost seventy years, he would have had reason to believe that the seventy-year captivity described by Jeremiah was coming to an end.

This prompted Daniel to both physical and spiritual prostration, and verses 4-19 record his subsequent prayer. Both his actions and his prayer closely followed the prescription detailed in Jeremiah's writing. Daniel recognized God as the only One acting honorably, and charged Israel, from the king on down, with having violated God's written and oral commands. He catalogued Israel's sins as violations of God's voice, law, words, judgments, precepts, and finally in verse 13, "thy truth." In Hebrew, the root of the word translated "truth" in this verse is also the root of the word that is usually translated as "amen," and is indicative of something trustworthy, enduring, and completely reliable.

Daniel's prayer was comprehensive and sincere—a marvelous intercessory prayer for his nation. He mentioned Jerusalem repeatedly, twice by name, as well as "thy holy mountain" and "thy sanctuary that is desolate." His focus was on the restoration of the city and of worship.

As in Daniel chapter 8, God responded through the angel Gabriel. The phrase "at the beginning" in verse 21 refers to the previous visit by Gabriel. Gabriel's discourse, beginning at verse 24, marks a change in the Book of Daniel. From this point forward, the Jeremiah prophecy of seventy years transitions into "seventy weeks" of years and a more distant prophecy concerning the end times. In this verse, "weeks" comes from the Hebrew *heptad*

meaning "seven," so a literal interpretation would be "seventy sevens" of years, or 490 years.

Gabriel informed Daniel that seventy weeks had been determined (or decreed) upon the Jews and Jerusalem. In other words, God had put in place a timetable. This information was an addition to what Daniel already understood of Jeremiah's prophecy. This timetable would start when an edict was proclaimed for the rebuilding of the Temple and of Jerusalem, and would revolve around the Jews as a people. The seventy weeks would be divided into three parts: seven weeks to begin, sixty-two weeks in the middle, and one week at the end. This left open the possibility that there could be interval(s) of time in between the three divisions.

In verse 24, Gabriel enumerated six key purposes that would be fulfilled during the seventy weeks—purposes that related to preparation and purification of the people, the holy city, and the Temple. With those preparations in process, the Messiah was set to appear, but would be "cut off" (disappear, vanish) after week sixty-nine. In verses 26 and 27, Gabriel outlined how this would open the way for the city and Temple to be left desolate, ushering in an unclean substitute (identified as a "prince" in verse 26) who would make a covenant with Israel. As explained to Daniel, that covenant would be broken and Temple sacrifice would be stopped midweek, ushering in the devastating judgment at the end of God's timetable.

While Daniel began the chapter wondering about the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation predicted by Jeremiah, Gabriel's new information established that "seventy" was part of an overall pattern involving far greater lengths of time.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  B. The vision of the seventy weeks (chronology of Israel's prophetic program) (9:1-27)
    1. The situation (9:1-3)
    2. The prayer of Daniel (9:4-19)
      a. The confession (9:4-14)
      b. The petition (9:15-19)
    3. The intervention of Gabriel (9:20-23)
    4. The prediction of the seventy weeks (9:24-27)
      a. The program (9:24)
      b. The particulars (9:25-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, what did Daniel set his face to do in order to seek God?

2. In verse 17, Daniel called upon God to hear his prayer. Why could he expect God to answer?

3. Based upon this chapter, what lessons can we learn from Daniel that will help us draw closer to God?

CONCLUSION

God hears and answers supplications like Daniel's that are offered in alignment with His will and for His glory.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 10:1 through 11:1

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words." (Daniel 10:12)

Today's text contains an amazing account of Daniel's experience when he set himself to seek God, and gives insight on what transpired because he prayed. It was a dramatic and precious occasion, and what Daniel saw, heard, and felt had a great impact on him.

When we pray, God may not answer exactly the way that He did for Daniel. The fact is, over his long years of service to God, Daniel prayed often (three times a day), and we can be certain that many of those prayer meetings were not particularly eventful. Whether or not a time of prayer seems outstanding to us, it is important to note that "from the first day" Daniel's words were heard, and our prayers are heard as well.

My own heritage includes two women who were faithful in prayer. When my great-grandmother was seeking her baptism, she consecrated everything that came to her mind, yet still did not receive that experience. In desperation, she told the Lord she would even go to China if that was what He wanted! As plainly as if He were sitting by her side, God let her know that her mission field was her family. Then He filled her with His Holy Spirit.

My great-grandmother faithfully devoted herself to this calling and prayed earnestly for her family all the days of her life. Although she never went to China, others in her family traveled to various places around the world to share the Gospel, and her prayers were with them. The results of her prayers are still evident today, a number of decades later. Many of her descendants have been and are pastors, ministers, musicians, and Sunday school teachers who are offering their talents in God's service.

In the next generation, my grandmother was also a fervent Christian. As a young mother, she suffered much sickness, including tuberculosis and then a staph infection that ultimately took her life. Many prayers went up for her healing. Although God heard each of those prayers, He chose to answer in His own way.

My grandmother's last days were spent in a hospital, but even in the midst of sickness and pain, she made the effort to shine the light of Jesus to those around her. Because of her testimony, three people in that hospital were saved, and many people were impacted by her Christian witness. In addition, she left behind a legacy of faith and hope to her four children and their descendants.

Whatever our situation and needs today, we can be certain that God hears our prayers "from the first day." Whether or not He answers in the way we desire, we can trust Him and know His ways are best. Only eternity will tell all the far-reaching results of faithful prayers.

BACKGROUND

This narrative, which explains further details of God's plan regarding the seventy weeks, took place within a short time after the previous chapter. "The first year of Darius" (Daniel 9:1) and "the third year of Cyrus" (Daniel 10:1) were within the same time frame.[1] Some have suggested that Daniel's sense of deep mourning may have been prompted by a specific event, such as the letter written by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (Ezra 4), who accused the Jews to the king. That the "time appointed was long" in verse 1 indicates not only a passage of time, but implies great conflict and considerable difficulty for God's people.

Daniel's location at the time of this vision was near the Tigris (Hiddekel) river, where verses 5-9 detail his introductory encounter with "a certain man." This man had a distinct and unusual appearance, but he was not an apparition or a figment of Daniel's imagination; he was real and Daniel understood the words he spoke. Since Daniel's companions fled, he was the only one who heard what was said.

Beginning at verse 10, the man prepared Daniel to hear his message from God. Verse 12 makes it clear that he was sent immediately in response to Daniel's prayer. However, the answer was hindered by "the prince of the kingdom of Persia," a supernatural force under the authority of Satan. In contrast, "Michael, one of the chief princes," was an angelic being. He is mentioned again in verse 21 as "Michael your prince" and also in chapter 12, verse 1, as "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." These descriptions indicated that one of his special responsibilities is the welfare of the Jewish people. Verse 14 disclosed that there was further revelation to follow concerning the last days.

The information in verse 20 revealed that the reign of the Persian Empire was not yet over, but when it was complete, a Grecian Empire would follow. This was fulfilled when Alexander the Great conquered the Persians in 330 B.C.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14)
    1. The preparation of the prophet (10:1—11:1)
      a. The situation (10:1-4)
      b. The vision of the heavenly messenger (10:5-9)
      c. The explanation of the heavenly messenger (10:10-14)
      d. The enablement of Daniel (10:15-19)
      e. The conflict of the heavenly messenger (10:20—11:1)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Daniel do for three weeks?

2. What do you think caused Daniel to be "greatly beloved" and how can we emulate him?

3. Daniel was told to "fear not." What should we do when the enemy tempts us to be afraid that God will not answer our prayers?

CONCLUSION

Are you bringing a petition before God? Be assured that your prayers are heard and noted. In His own time and way, God will answer.

NOTES

1. Jerome Peat, "Cyrus 'King of Lands,' Cambyses 'King of Babylon': The Disputed Co-Regency," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 41, no. 2 (Autumn 1989):199, https://doi.org/10.2307/1359915.

DAYBREAK

Daniel 11:2-20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia." (Daniel 11:2)

Several years ago, our family purchased an acre of lakeside property with the intention of building a joint family vacation home on the site. While the men of our family have engaged in various aspects of construction work over the years, and the women of the family are not lacking in ideas, none of us knows much about the technical aspects of home design. So we turned to a professional to draw up a plan that met code requirements and took into consideration the slope of the lot, its shape and dimensions, and the lake view. A few months later, he contacted us to say a blueprint was ready for review.

Poring over the multiple sheets of the floor plan was an interesting experience. While it certainly gave us an idea of how the completed structure would look, it was still a challenge to visualize the finished product. Would the great room area be big enough for the whole family to comfortably gather in? What would the view be from this window? Would the slope of the ceiling in the attic bedroom make that area feel cramped? Should this hall be widened a bit?

The section views and specifications for the foundation, roof and floor joists, and mechanical systems were completely out of our realm of experience. So we scrutinized. We searched online for more information. We measured spaces with similar dimensions. We asked questions. And ultimately, we realized that the designer we had hired was the expert, and we could trust that he knew what he was doing! Thankfully, our trust was not misplaced. The house has been built, and we have enjoyed walking through the new structure and comparing it with the plans we scrutinized so carefully. Our questions no longer matter, because we have the finished product!

In today's text, the angelic messenger began sketching out for Daniel a plan created by the Architect of the ages regarding what would occur in the future of God's people. While the messenger's description was detailed, no doubt there were many portions of the plan that Daniel could not fully comprehend. Perhaps after hearing the words in our focus verse he wondered about, *Who are the three kings in Persia? What does the fact that "he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia" signify?* It must have been difficult for him to imagine exactly how these events would transpire. However, as the circumstances described by the messenger began to come to pass, what assurance it must have given God's people that all was occurring according to a divine plan!

In our day, we can have that same assurance as we observe events around us—we can be certain that all is happening according to God's plan. Many details of what will yet occur in the last days are provided in Scripture, and though some of those details may seem difficult for us to understand or visualize, we can trust the Architect. And one day, our questions will no longer matter because everything foretold in God's Word will have been fulfilled!

BACKGROUND

This text adds new information to the visions of Daniel 8. As with other prophecies, identifying specific leaders/countries may be problematic because names used in a particular era are transitory. For example, the country known as Lebanon today had a different name in Daniel's time. Even when names have stayed the same, national boundaries in some cases have changed dramatically. The Egypt of Daniel's time, while still so named, has different, more clearly defined borders. However, in this portion of text, specific locations (such as the river Ulai in verse 2) and the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west alluded to in verse 4) enable scholars to identify a general region, no matter what the era.

The "mighty king" who stood up (verses 3-4), whose kingdom was divided among four, is widely seen as being fulfilled in Alexander the Great. Upon his death, his four generals divided his kingdom, fulfilling the prophecy that his kingdom "shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven." Ptolemy ruled Egypt, so is considered "the king of the south" (verse 5) and Syria was ruled by Seleucus I, "the king of the north" (verse 6). Their families made an alliance through marriage, and Daniel's prophecy accurately predicted how their history would unfold.

In verse 20 the "raiser of taxes" is widely thought to have been Seleucus IV Philopater, who ruled from 187 to 175 B.C. in the region of Syria/Mesopotamia/Persia. His assassination ushered in the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who would foreshadow the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8.

Of primary importance in revealing this vision was providing reassurance to God's people that He foresaw what was ahead and was in control. When

they observed the foretold pattern of events transpire, they would be comforted as they recognized the Hand of God was shaping man's actions in conformity with His will. Readers of Daniel would understand that God would be glorified as He watched over Israel, protecting them from nations and leaders far more powerful than themselves.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14)
    2. The revelation of the sixty-nine weeks
      a. The rule of Persia (11:2)
      b. The rule of Greece
        (1) The reign of Alexander (11:3)
        (2) The division of the empire (11:4)
        (3) The conflict of Ptolemy and Selecuid (11:5-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 2, what statement is made regarding the veracity of the message?

2. What do you think is meant by the assertion in verse 4 that the kingdom of the mighty king would be "divided toward the four winds of heaven"?

3. Why is the knowledge that God has planned and ordained the events occurring in our world today an encouragement to you?

CONCLUSION

While Daniel and the people of Israel may not have fully understood the meaning of the messenger's prediction of the future, they could be assured that God had a plan and was in control of the world events that were to come.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 11:21-35

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." (Daniel 11:32)

Our focus verse alludes to a specific event that likely occurred during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. However, the second part of the verse is also a spiritual principle that countless individuals have proved true. Since the time of Daniel, many men and women who "knew their God" have remained strong even when facing immense challenges—and their "exploits" during those difficult times prove it. Martin and Gracia Burnham are among that group.

For seventeen years, Martin and Gracia served God as missionaries in the Philippines. However, in the early morning hours of May 27, 2001, as the couple was away from their home celebrating their eighteenth wedding anniversary, three men holding M16s charged into their hotel room yelling, "Go, go, go!" The couple, along with eighteen other hotel guests and staff, were taken hostage by members of Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim terrorist group with ties to al-Qaeda.

The Burnhams were thrust into life on the run in the steamy jungles of the southern Philippine islands, where they endured near starvation, constant exhaustion, death threats, and frequent gun battles. For months, Martin and Gracia suffered from sleep deprivation, dysentery, and the stings of tropical insects as their captors attempted to obtain money for their release. They were forced to wade through chest-deep water, trek long hours through difficult terrain, and endure pressure to convert to Islam. What possible "exploits" could the two of them do in such circumstances?

The account of their 376 days in captivity gives the answer—in fact, multiple answers. In little ways, day after day, they were faithful in the midst of the most difficult of situations.

Martin, who was handcuffed to a tree on most nights, would look his armed captors in the face as they snapped on his restraints and say, "Thank you very much." Then he would wish them goodnight, because he had purposed that he would remain joyous even during this most trying time of his life. Martin and Gracia shared with their captors the food that eventually made it through to them from fellow missionaries, even though they themselves were starving. Gracia washed the bedding of a sick terrorist, and sang Gospel songs to encourage herself and their fellow captives. Martin quoted Bible verses frequently, including Psalm 100 just hours before his death, because he desired to "serve God with gladness." (He was killed during a shoot-out between the kidnappers and Filipino troops who were attempting to rescue them.) Gracia forgave their captors and later reached out to those who could be located; four of them ultimately turned to God.

Most historians agree that our focus verse looked ahead to the time when Antiochus IV Epiphanes turned on Jerusalem. At that time, some of the Jewish people forsook their covenant with God and embraced Greek culture and customs. Those who knew their God, however, were "strong" and did exploits in the face of incredible pressure and opposition.

This verse is more than just a prediction of future events; it also offers great encouragement for our day. The word translated *strong* in this verse means "to fasten upon" in order to fortify. It tells us that when we face challenging circumstances, we can cling to God with the assurance that He will strengthen, uphold, and encourage us. And while our exploits for Him may never make the headlines, in small ways and large, we will be enabled to live in a godly manner that proves our connection to Him.

BACKGROUND

This section of Daniel's vision begins to focus on the "vile person" (verse 21) who would persecute the Jews and become known to generations as the epitome of evil. Antiochus IV Epiphanes is widely regarded as fitting Daniel's description. He ruled the region around Jerusalem from 175 to 164 B.C.

Regarding verse 21, Adam Clarke comments, "They did not give him the honor of the kingdom: he was at Athens, on his way from Rome, when his father died; and Heliodorus had declared himself king, as had several others. But Antiochus came in peaceably, for he obtained the kingdom by flatteries. He flattered Eumenes, king of Pergamus, and Attalus his brother, and got their assistance. He flattered the Romans, and sent ambassadors to court their favor, and pay them the arrears of the tribute. He flattered the Syrians, and gained their concurrence; and as he flattered the Syrians, so they flattered him, giving him the epithet of Epiphanes—the Illustrious."[1] But that he was what the prophet here calls him, a vile person, is fully evident. According to Jewish historian Josephus, he "pillaged the whole city [Jerusalem], some of the inhabitants he slew, and some he carried captive . . .

He also burnt down the finest buildings . . . He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God, and to adore those whom he took to be gods . . . And if there were any sacred book, or the law found, it was destroyed: and those with whom they were found miserably perished also."[2] This portrays an individual who arose to power through political machinations and diplomacy, rather than by military prowess.

Verses 25-29 parallel Antiochus' expedition against Ptolemy in Egypt, where the Egyptian army was defeated. Intrigue followed as army leaders on both sides displayed behaviors similar to those that had propelled Antiochus to power. Upon entering Egypt a second time (verse 29), Antiochus was not nearly as successful militarily; the threat of intervention by the Roman senate prompted him to capitulate and pull back his army.

"Chittim," in verse 30, referred to people from the west, especially the sea-faring west. This somewhat generic term has had slightly different meanings depending upon the era, but could apply to Greeks, Romans, inhabitants of Mediterranean islands, or points farther west. History records that Antiochus, upon being intimidated into withdrawal by the Romans, returned to Israel and vented his anger upon Israel. He violated agreements made with Jewish leaders and began radically changing their traditional worship of the Lord, saying they must conform to Grecian worship. Regarding the Temple and sacrifices, Josephus wrote of him, "He left the temple bare . . . he forbad them to offer those daily sacrifices . . . And when the King had built an idol altar unto God's altar, he slew swine upon it."[3]

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14)
    2. The revelation of the sixty-nine weeks
      b. The rule of Greece
        (4) The description of Antiochus (11:21-35)
          (a) The rise of Antiochus (11:21-24)
          (b) The invasion of Egypt (11:25-30)
          (c) The persecution of the Jews (11:31-35)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to the first verse of our text, how did the "vile person" obtain the kingdom?

2. What comfort can we find in verse 27, which states that "the end shall be at the time appointed"?

3. Verse 32 states, "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." What are some specific opportunities for "exploits" you can see in your current circumstances?

CONCLUSION

In difficult and trying times in life, we can lean upon God for strength. As we do, He will enable us to live in a way that proves our commitment to Him.

NOTES

1. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes,* p. 611.
2. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Newcastle: L. Dinsdale, 1784) XII.5.4, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.html#link122HCH0005.
3. Ibid.

DAYBREAK

Daniel 11:36 through 12:3

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3)

Ruth Slater was a woman who did her best to "turn many to righteousness." When she was saved, she gave her life fully to serving her Savior. In her testimony she said, "My people were pioneers, and I was born in a sod house. My mother would take my sister and me in a lumber wagon to old-time revival meetings. As I heard her sing the hymns, I realized that she had God in her heart, and I knew He was real. Yet, I was a stubborn girl, and as I rode home in the wagon, my feet not yet able to touch the floorboard, I determined that I was not going to serve the Lord. I thought the world held so much for me, and I did not want to take the way of the Cross.

"However, God had other plans for me. In the spring of 1911, I knelt at a kitchen chair in our farmhouse and gave my heart to the Lord. I was just nineteen years of age at the time, and I told God that if He would come into my heart and make a change, I would give Him my life. Oh, what a change He did make! He took the pride and stubbornness out of me and filled my heart with such peace and happiness. Later God sanctified me and filled me with the Holy Ghost.

"After I was saved, I longed to do something for God. Whenever the church papers, *The Apostolic Faith*, were printed, the church leader would let me help fold them. We would sit on old-fashioned high stools in a little six-by-five cubbyhole in the Front and Burnside church building to work. The papers we folded were handed out and also mailed around the world. I never thought a time would come when I would be one who handed out those papers, but later I was blessed to give them away by the hundreds and thousands to people with hungry hearts throughout the world."

A vivacious and energetic woman, Ruth was zealous in spreading God's Word to people wherever she lived or traveled. When she lived in Hawaii, she walked many miles throughout the islands handing out thousands of pieces of Gospel literature on a one-to-one basis. She was a very giving person who did much for others, asking no payment but that they do the same good for someone else. Without doubt, Ruth will be among those who shine "as the stars for ever and ever." Her life's mission was to tell others about Jesus and His power to change lives and make people ready for Heaven.

Much of today's text describes the Antichrist and the terrible time of the Great Tribulation. Yet at the end of this passage, a beam of hope comes through, and it is clear that those who serve God will be rewarded. Each of us has the opportunity to be among that number. Ruth Slater's testimony can be an encouragement for us to take the focus verse to heart and to also do our best to turn many to righteousness.

BACKGROUND

Verses 1-35 in Daniel chapter 11 alluded to various ancient rulers, concluding with Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Verse 36 transitions to a description of the future Antichrist, who will exalt himself above all gods, including the God of gods. Verses 40-45 describe some of the wars the Antichrist will encounter, and the establishment of his center of operations near Jerusalem. Chapter 12, verses 1-3, relate to the Archangel Michael's intervention on behalf of Israel, the resurrection of the dead, and the witness of God's saving power in the lives of believing Jews.

In other portions of Daniel, the Antichrist is identified as the "little horn" (Daniel 7:8), and "the prince that shall come" (Daniel 9:26). Paul described him as "that man of sin" and "the son of perdition" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Verse 36 of chapter 11 describes the Antichrist as a man who will do as he pleases, a dictator who will regard himself above all other gods or religions. He will prosper "till the indignation be accomplished," a reference to when he sets himself up as god in the Temple in Jerusalem at the mid-point of the Tribulation period.

In verse 37, the phrase "God of his fathers" does not indicate that the Antichrist will be Jewish. Daniel used the Hebrew word "Elohim" for God, which could imply any god in general, rather than the Jewish term "Yahweh," which signified the God of Israel. Most scholars agree that the "desire of women" referred to a Jewish woman's desire to be the mother of the Messiah, implying that the Antichrist will have no regard for Jesus Christ, the true Messiah.

The root of the Hebrew word translated *forces* in verse 38 means "a fortified place, a defense." Most scholars believe this means that the Antichrist will put his trust in military might, to which he will allocate a great deal of his resources. Verse 39 is a reference to Satan, the "strange god" that is worshipped by the Antichrist, and the rulers who submit to the

Antichrist's authority, earning them portions of land to rule over.

Verses 40-44 convey that the Antichrist will be attacked by armies from the north and the south, who will threaten his world rule. As a result, the Antichrist will utilize his military strength, and many nations will be overthrown, including Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia, causing the Antichrist to become even more wealthy and powerful. Other nations will be able to escape his wrath. The "glorious land" in verse 41 is a reference to Israel, indicating that the attacking nations are located north and south of Israel. In verse 44, the Antichrist receives disturbing news of rebellion from the east and the north, causing him to "go forth with great fury" to destroy those who rebel against him.

Verse 45 is a reference to the Antichrist establishing his operational center between the seas (the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea) and "the glorious holy mountain" (Mount Zion), somewhere near Jerusalem. At the mid-point of the Tribulation period, the Antichrist will desecrate the Temple by setting himself up as god (2 Thessalonians 2:4) and breaking his covenant with Israel, signifying that his end is coming, and "none shall help him."

Daniel 12:1 indicates that after the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel, Michael the Archangel will rise up to defend God's people, the Jews. There will be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation to that same time." This is a reference to the second half of the Tribulation period, known as the Great Tribulation. The Archangel will guard and protect the remnant of Jews whose names are written in the Book of Life. This is an indication that a remnant of Jews will believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior during the second half of the Tribulation and will be protected from the wrath of the Antichrist.

Verse 2 is a reference to the two separate resurrections that will follow the Tribulation. Those who are martyred for their faith during the Tribulation will be resurrected before the Millennial Reign. The rest of the dead will be resurrected after the Millennial Reign, prior to the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:4-5).

Verse 3 signifies that after the resurrection, those who were wise unto salvation will shine "as the brightness of the firmament" in their glorified bodies, and those who won others for Christ will shine "as the stars for ever and ever."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14)
    3. The revelation of the seventieth week (11:36—12:3)
      a. The description of the willful king (11:36-39)
      b. The war of the willful king (11:40-45)
      c. The tribulation and deliverance of Israel (12:1-3)
        (1) The tribulation and salvation of Israel (12:1)
        (2) The resurrection of the dead (12:2-3)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 36, what will the Antichrist do?

2. What do you think is implied by the statement that the Antichrist will "honour the God of forces"? (verse 38)

3. God's people should have an evangelistic spirit and a desire to "turn many to righteousness" (Daniel 12:3). What might be indicators in the life of a person who has that desire?

CONCLUSION

There is great reward for spreading the Gospel light in any way we can.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Daniel 12:4-13

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Daniel 12:13)

There is a group of people in the United States called "preppers," who are identified that way because they are focused on preparing for the end of the world or some other great apocalyptic event. They stock up on guns, ammunition, food, water, and generators. Some build underground bunkers with air-filtration systems, or buy homes on secluded islands or in remote areas where they can live off the grid. One business executive invested in a fifteen-unit underground apartment complex, selling all of the units at a hefty price except one he retained for himself. Some preppers have helicopters fueled and ready for immediate departure if disaster strikes in their locality. Others have bags of gold coins stashed away for use in the event that paper money becomes worthless. One of these individuals recently stated, "My current state of mind is oscillating between optimism and sheer terror." Worry over survival readiness is constantly on the minds of these people.

Certainly, it is prudent to be prepared for emergencies and natural disasters. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, and floods occur with some frequency in parts of our world, so suitable preparedness is good stewardship. And we know from the Book of Daniel and other places in Scripture that a time of great trouble is ahead for this world. However, the best preparation that we can make for the end times—or any type of crisis—is *spiritual* preparation. If we have established and maintained a close relationship with God, we have taken the right steps to ensure a secure eternal future where we will ultimately be safe in His care.

In our text today, Daniel was told by God to shut up the words regarding the end times and not worry about what was ahead. It had been revealed to Daniel in the verses just prior to our text that a future time of trouble was coming and Israel would be at the center of these events. However, Daniel was encouraged to go on with his life and the plans God had for him.

As Christians today, we can learn from the words given to Daniel in our focus verse. God had a course He wanted Daniel to complete, and Daniel needed to remain focused on that. Like him, we should follow the plan God has for us and obey His leading. There is a "rest" provided for the people of God—a place of perfect security. As we keep our hearts pure and holy before the Lord, we do not need to fear the terrible things that will happen after Jesus returns. We expect to escape the Great Tribulation that will come upon this world—our hope is in a bright future ahead with the Lord!

BACKGROUND

After receiving a wide scope of revelation in previous chapters, in this concluding chapter, Daniel was told to seal the book until the end of time (verse 4). In verses 5-8, the timeline given refers to the last three and a half years of the Tribulation period. In verses 9-13, the angel reassured Daniel that after he died, he would be resurrected at the end of time to stand with his people (the Jews) and see all these things fulfilled.

Daniel's sealing of the book in verse 4 could have a two-fold meaning. In one sense, sealing would preserve the book from being altered. The angel told Daniel to seal the book "to the time of the end," when knowledge would be increased, and man would be better able to understand Daniel's revelation. The Hebrew meaning of the phrase *shall run to and fro* is "to push forth, to row (by implication, to travel)." Some Bible scholars suggest that modern advancements in modes of travel and technology are a fulfillment of verse 4, and an indication that the end is drawing nigh. Others believe that the phrases "run to and fro" and "knowledge shall be increased" have more to do with a search for knowledge of the Scriptures, thus gaining a better understanding as the end draws near. Both of these interpretations could be applicable to this verse.

In verse 5, it seems that Daniel was standing by the Tigris (Hiddekel) River (see Daniel 10:4) when he saw the two angels standing on opposite banks. One of the angels addressed the man clothed in linen (see the earlier reference in Daniel 10:5-6) and asked, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" Although the second angel did not participate in the exchange, he may have been fulfilling the concept that two witnesses were required to establish an oath. The man clothed in linen responded that it would be for "a time [one year], times [two years], and an half [half a year]." This was a reference to the last three and a half years of the Great Tribulation period. Based on a lunar calendar of 360 days, which was used by the Jews, this was a period of 1,260 days. By the end of that period, the Jews (holy people) would be scattered, and Daniel's revelation would be fulfilled.

In verses 9-10, Daniel was told that these prophecies would be "closed up and sealed" and not

understood until the time of the end. Many would come to know the Lord and would understand, but the wicked would not understand.

Verse 11 refers to the beginning of the last half of the Tribulation period, when the Antichrist will set himself up as god in the Third Temple in Jerusalem and cause the daily sacrifices to cease (see Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Scholars believe that the extra thirty days in verse 11 (from 1,260 to 1,290 days) may be the time of cleansing the earth and judging of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46) before the start of the Millennial Reign. Those who come to the 1,335 days (verse 12) may refer to those who will govern with Christ during His reign.

In verse 13, the angel told Daniel to live out his life, and then rest as he waited to be resurrected at the end of time to participate with his fellow Jews in Christ's Millennial Kingdom.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prophetic history of the Jews
  C. The vision of Israel's future (the history of Israel in the 70 weeks, cf. 10:14)
    4. The conclusion to Daniel's prophecy (12:4-13)
      a. The instructions concerning the book (12:4)
      b. The questions regarding the Great Tribulation (12:5-13)
        (1) The first question (12:5-6)
        (2) The reply (12:7)
        (3) The second question (12:8)
        (4) The reply (12:9-13)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 4, what was Daniel told to do?

2. What evidences do we see of knowledge being increased in our day?

3. Why is it so important to get ready for Christ's return? How can we prepare and help others prepare for this event?

CONCLUSION

Eternal life awaits those who have made proper spiritual preparation. As Christians, when the end comes, there will be no need for extra food or a secure shelter. We will forever be with our Savior and the Giver of all good things!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Section Introduction

Overview for Habakkuk

Purpose: To record the discourse between the prophet and God concerning God's ways in the punishment of evil, and the prophet's ultimate affirmation of faith.

Author: Very little is known about Habakkuk, the author of the book. The Scriptures record nothing about his ancestry or place of birth, although the fact that Habakkuk 1:1 refers to him as "the prophet" implies he was recognized as a professional prophet. Based in part on the liturgical nature of the book, some scholars suggest that he was a member of the Temple choir; if so, he would have been part of the tribe of Levi charged with the responsibility of maintaining the Temple music.

To Whom Delivered: The Southern Kingdom of Judah

Key People: Habakkuk and the Chaldeans, also called the Babylonians

Date Written: The exact date of Habakkuk's prophecy is difficult to determine, as there are no indicators in the text such as names of contemporary kings or references to specific events. Based on the prophet's description of the Chaldeans, most Bible scholars agree that this prophecy was likely composed around 612 B.C., after the fall of Nineveh but before the Babylonians' siege and capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Setting: Whatever the exact date of authorship, Habakkuk wrote his prophecy during a turbulent era of ancient history, when the Southern Kingdom of Judah was deep in sin. Judah was also in a precarious position politically due to the impending invasion by Babylon, a nation that was becoming the major world power as Assyrian domination was declining.

Unique Features: Habakkuk is one of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament, and one of two whose book deals extensively with the prophet's own personal relationship with God. The other book in this category is Jonah. However, the conclusions of the two books are very different: Jonah ends with the prophet angry at God, while Habakkuk ends with words of trust and rejoicing.

The prophecy of Habakkuk is presented in poetic form and is an example of high-quality Hebraic poetry. Along with Nahum and Malachi, this prophecy is characterized as a "burden," indicating that the message is one of destruction.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of ancient writings discovered in caves of Qumran in 1947, include the *Pesher Habakkuk* (Commentary on Habakkuk), identified as *1QpHab* and dated by scholars to the first century B.C. The scroll is roughly fifty-six inches in length, and is comprised of thirteen columns of Herodian script written on two pieces of leather sewn together with linen thread. Because of its relatively pristine condition, it is one of the most frequently researched and analyzed scrolls of the several hundred that have been found.

The *Pesher Habakkuk* interprets only the first two chapters of the Book of Habakkuk. This supports the supposition that chapter 3 was not originally part of the prophesy, although the prophet Habakkuk is still considered to be the author. Chapter 3 is a prayer, but it includes the musical term "selah" in verses 3, 9, and 13. Therefore, some scholars believe Habakkuk composed this final portion later as a liturgical psalm and added it to the original work.

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most quoted Old Testament statements found in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul referred to it in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Its statement, "the just shall live by his faith" became a cornerstone belief of Martin Luther, who is credited with starting the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s.

Summary: Habakkuk's prophecy consists of just three chapters. In chapter 1, he complained about the pervasive injustice around him and questioned why God did not seem to care. God answered with a perplexing vision that revealed His coming judgment on Judah, using the Chaldeans as His tool. This led to further questions from the prophet, who could not understand how God, who is holy, could use such an evil nation to execute judgment on His own people for their sins.

In chapter 2, Habakkuk determined to wait on God for further illumination, and stationed himself like a watchman on the city wall until God's answer came. God responded by explaining that He would also judge the Chaldeans, and much more harshly. He instructed the prophet to write down the vision and make it known throughout the land. Although judgment was in the future, it would be fulfilled in God's

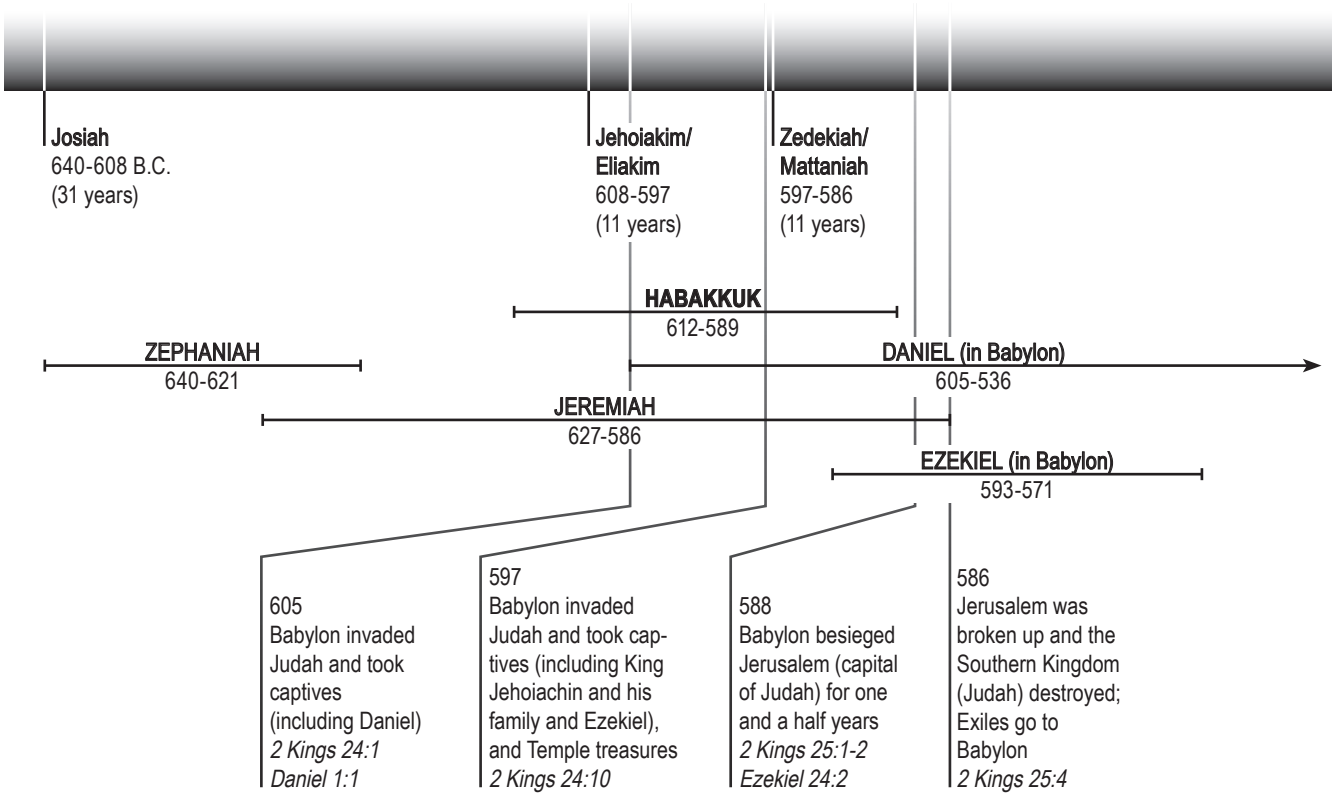
appointed time. The chapter concludes with a series of five "woes" pronounced upon the greedy, the covetous, the violent, the drunkard, and the idolator.

Chapter 3 is the prophet's prayer expressed in the form of a psalm. In this conclusion, Habakkuk expressed his faith in God, even though he did not fully understand. The chapter is comprised of three parts: instruction regarding how the psalm was to be performed, a picturesque description of God's presence and the prophet's confident assurance of God's deliverance for His people, and a closing affirmation of faith.

Throughout the book, Babylon provides an example of any nation that exalts itself above God and practices injustice, violence, and idolatry. In the end, God reminded Habakkuk and every generation that God will deal with evil. Those who trust His timing and plan are encouraged to remain faithful to Him.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. Prologue (1:1)
II. The dialogues (1:2—2:20)
  A. The first dialogue (1:2-11)
    1. Habakkuk's complaint of God's inactivity (1:2-4)
    2. Jehovah's answer (1:5-11)
  B. The second dialogue (1:12—2:20)
    1. Habakkuk's complaint of God's activity (1:12-17)
    2. Habakkuk's action (2:1)
    3. Jehovah's answer (2:2-19)
    4. Jehovah's position (2:20)
III. The prayer and praise (3:1-19)
  A. Prayer for future intervention (3:1-2)
  B. Praise for past intervention (3:3-15)
    1. God's person (3:3-4)
    2. God's power (3:5-15)
  C. Peace in present inactivity (3:16-19)

DAYBREAK

Habakkuk 1:1-11

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." (Habakkuk 1:5)

As we make our way through life, sometimes the sinful choices of people around us will deeply affect us. Added to this, the Bible indicates that personal trials will arise to test and strengthen our faith. When such occasions come into our lives, we may be tempted to wonder whether God is still in control. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America's best-known poets, captured such thoughts in a poem that was later adapted into a beautiful Christmas carol.

On April 12, 1861, the American Civil War began. According to the American Battlefield Trust Organization, the war cost the lives of approximately 620,000 soldiers.[1] Longfellow, who was very patriotic, was deeply affected by the war. Also, in July of that same year, he lost his wife of eighteen years in a tragic accident. Two years later, in 1863, his oldest son Charles, who was serving in the Union Army against his father's wishes, was horribly wounded.

We get a sense of the inner struggle Longfellow felt as he wrote the following words on Christmas Day in 1863: "I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat, of peace on earth, good will to men!" A few stanzas later, the poem continues, "And in despair I bowed my head, 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men!'"

We could argue that Longfellow had just cause to despair, given all he had suffered. Yet, the poem continues with these words of hope: "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead nor doth He sleep; the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men!'" Longfellow's words remind us that God is still sovereign and rules in the affairs of mankind, regardless of our individual outlook.

Habakkuk must have felt a similar mounting despair as he looked around at society in his day. Yet, he too found a solace in the God of the ages. In our text, the prophet spoke of feeling compassed about by wickedness, and mourning because iniquity, grievance, and violence were prevalent. However, God responded to his cry and let Habakkuk know that He was doing something that would cause the world to wonder marvelously. This passage is a good reminder that God is always in control of the events around us.

Perhaps you've suffered some great personal loss that has left you wondering whether God notices what is going on in your life. It may be that the tragedy is yet unfolding at this very moment. Take courage in the Lord! Like Habakkuk and Longfellow, you too will find that God knows what you are going through. He will comfort and reassure you. And perhaps through these very trials, He is producing something so eternally beneficial that your present challenges will fade into insignificance when compared to the end result, so hold onto your hope in Him!

BACKGROUND

In this first chapter, verse 1 is the title that Habakkuk applied to his prophecy, which originally would have been a manuscript. The prophet's name occurs in only two places in the Bible, both times in this book. Very little information about Habakkuk is given in the Word of God, but whatever his background, at this point in history, God relied on this man to disclose His plans for the future of Judah—a future that included God's coming judgment using the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as His tool.

Verses 2-4 contain Habakkuk's first question to God, which was actually a lament rather than an accusation. Two different words are translated as "cry" in verse 2: the first is a plea for help, and the second refers to a sudden cry of alarm. Habakkuk expressed dismay that sinfulness and corruption had flourished unchecked in society. He questioned if this evident rise of iniquity signaled some level of disinterest on the part of God. It is clear from Habakkuk's words that he correlated God's apparent level of benefaction to the rate at which He quashed wrongdoing.

Verse 3 gives insight into the main characteristics of Habakkuk's society—iniquity, grievance (misery or travail), spoiling (desolation), violence (injustice), strife, and contention (discord) were rampant. His statement that the wicked "doth compass about the righteous" meant that sin surrounded and was affecting every member of society, including righteous individuals who were not participating in it.

Beginning with verse 5, God responded to Habakkuk's question by assuring him that judgment was coming. The word *behold* is an imperative command meaning "look up, see, or take notice." God stated that this would happen "in your days," which indicated that it would happen very soon, within the

prophet's lifetime. What God would do would cause those who observed to "wonder marvellously," indicating onlookers would be completely astounded.

In the remainder of God's response to Habakkuk, He explained what this judgment would consist of. Since the city of Babylon was in Chaldea, references to the Chaldeans were about the Babylonian Empire. Historians relate that the Chaldeans rapidly gained in power around 630 B.C. By 605 B.C. they had conquered Assyria, the former world power. In verse 6, the Chaldeans were described as "that bitter and hasty nation," meaning that they acted on rash impulse, committing their fearful deeds without forethought.

Verses 7 through 11 foretold what the Kingdom of Judah would experience at the hands of the Chaldeans. God said the invaders would march rapidly through and take possession of the land. The phrase "their dignity shall proceed of themselves" (verse 7) likely meant that since the reputation of the Chaldeans was well-known, it would cause great fear throughout the land. The horsemen of the aggressors would ride faster than leopards, their attack would be fiercer than that of wolves that prowl at night, and they would come suddenly, like an eagle swooping down on its prey. With one vivid description after another, God indicated through Habakkuk that the invaders would cover the land like a sandstorm, and nothing would be spared from their onslaught, not even kings, princes, or strong towers.

God's answer to Habakkuk's question ends in verse 11 with a prophecy regarding the leader of the Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar. He would offend the one true God by crediting their military success to an idol. The whole of the message indicated that the events about to transpire were an outpouring of divine wrath, despite any human opinions to the contrary.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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I. Prologue (1:1)
II. The dialogues
  A. The first dialogue (1:2-11)
    1. Habakkuk's complaint of God's inactivity (1:2-4)
      a. His indifference to his prayers (1:2)
      b. His indifference to sin (1:3-4)
    2. Jehovah's answer (1:5-11)
      a. The fact of coming judgment (1:5)
      b. The instrument of coming judgment (1:6-11)
        (1) Their destruction (1:6)
        (2) Their description (1:7-11)
          (a) Their reputation (1:7)
          (b) Their swiftness (1:8)
          (c) Their warfare and judgment (1:9-11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the main point of Habakkuk's first question to God?

2. How did God answer Habakkuk's question?

3. Based on God's response to Habakkuk, what are some truths we can use to bolster our faith when we look at the wickedness of our world today?

CONCLUSION

When we are tempted to wonder about God's level of care, we can look to the example of Habakkuk as a reminder that God is working out His divine plan, even when the events around us seem out of control.

NOTES

1. American Battlefield Trust, "Civil War Facts," https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-facts, accessed Sep. 1, 2021.

DAYBREAK

Habakkuk 1:12 through 2:20

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Habakkuk 2:3)

Waiting can be challenging. Early in our marriage, my husband and I went through a situation that required months of waiting. Since before we were married, we had discussed the possibility of someday adopting a child from Korea. One Sunday morning, my husband and I chatted with an older couple who had visited our church service. In the course of conversation, they mentioned that they had been operating an adoption center in Korea, but were closing it—they had just one three-year-old girl remaining for placement. Several couples had been interested in adopting this child, but they wanted to place her in a Christian home.

In the days that followed, my husband and I could not get that little girl out of our minds. Eventually, we felt God's leading to investigate adopting her. However, we were not sure we could even locate the couple who had visited our church. Their name was common—in fact, the phone directory listed many individuals with the same first and last names as the husband. Amazingly, we were quickly able to locate the right couple. When we identified ourselves over the phone and explained the reason for our call, the woman choked up. With tears in her voice, she said that she and her husband had been praying ever since our meeting at church that we would feel led to adopt this little girl—even though nothing along that line had been discussed!

With that affirmation of God's leading, my husband and I set out on our adoption journey. One by one, obstacles emerged—and disappeared. The Holt International Adoption Agency agreed to process the paperwork and assist with the required medical exams for our daughter-to-be. She was the last adoption they handled for children not in their care. The normal income requirements for adoptive parents were waived—a necessary accommodation since my husband was still a fulltime student. We "passed" the required home study evaluation and attended some pre-adoption classes. And finally, a family law attorney here in Portland agreed to handle our adoption process . . . for free!

Then, with the hurdles overcome, we waited, and waited some more.

During those seemingly endless months, at times it all felt like a dream. Would we really become parents to a little girl we had never seen, who lived thousands of miles away? Still, we felt assured that God was in control, and we knew we must keep our trust in Him while we waited.

In today's text, Habakkuk was in a time of waiting. God had given him a revelation, but it was for the future. However, God reassured him with the words of our focus verse: "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." The word translated *tarry* here means "be behind," and the implication is that the fulfillment would arrive in God's time. In essence, God was giving the prophet the same encouragement He gave us throughout our adoption journey: "Be patient! I will work out My plans in My perfect time."

God does not always allow us to know *how* He is going to work. When what we think needs to happen does not happen immediately, we may be tempted to ask, "When, God, *when*?" Most of us need to grow in the area of trusting God instead of focusing on the "how" and "when" questions.

Are you waiting for God to work in some situation in your life today? Do not falter in your faith! Learn to live in confidence while God is working. Our daughter finally arrived, and we became a family of three. And in the process, my husband and I had a refresher course in understanding that when we entrust situations to God, we can have peace while we wait, knowing that His ways and timing are always best.

BACKGROUND

The final six verses of chapter 1 relate the prophet's questioning of God's purpose concerning Israel. This is followed in chapter 2 by a description of his watching in prayer and the subsequent woes addressed to the Chaldeans (Babylonians).

God had told Habakkuk He would judge His people through oppression by the heathen Chaldeans who had already been used of God to destroy the Assyrians and Egyptians. In verses 12-17 of chapter 1, Habakkuk asked how God, who is holy, could use such an evil nation as an instrument of judgment on His own people. Verse 14 indicates that the prophet was fearful as he realized the people of Judah would become like helpless fish being captured by a fisherman (Chaldea). The word *angle* in verse 15 is a hook, while the *net* and *drag* refer to a seine, a fishing net that hangs

vertically in the water. The prophet reminded God of the ruthless character of the Chaldeans and asked if God would not intervene.

In chapter 2, Habakkuk waited like a watchman on the city wall to see how God would respond. It might seem from verse 1 that he was expecting to be "reproved." However, that word in the original language meant "countered my argument." God told him to write down the vision and make it known throughout the land. Public notices of that day typically were written on clay tablets in large characters and posted in the market places. The commandment to "run" in verse 2 has been interpreted to mean either that those who read the notice should flee from the attack of the Chaldeans, or that the prophet himself should hasten to spread the message throughout the land.

In verse 3, God assured Habakkuk that although judgment would be in the future, it would be fulfilled in God's appointed time. He reminded Habakkuk that "the just shall live by his faith"—those who held steadfastly to God could depend upon His faithfulness. The word translated *faith* is the Hebrew *emunah*, which is derived from a verb meaning "to be firm." This verse is one of the Old Testament statements most often quoted in the New Testament. Paul referred to it in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. It became a cornerstone belief of Martin Luther, who was instrumental in the start of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s.

In verses 6-19, God pronounced a series of five "woes." Most Bible scholars feel these were directed against the Chaldeans, although the evils described will incur God's judgment wherever they exist. In Bible prophecy, a "woe" is generally an indictment, a pronouncement of judgment, or a mournful lament. A modern paraphrase might be, "Oh! How horrible it will be!" The word "woe" occurs fifty times in the prophetical books of the Old Testament.

The woes described in Habakkuk 2:6-19 were as follows:

- Habakkuk 2:6-8—Woe to the greedy.
- Habakkuk 2:9-11—Woe to the covetous who exalt themselves.
- Habakkuk 2:12-14—Woe to the violent.
- Habakkuk 2:15-17—Woe to the shameless drunkard.
- Habakkuk 2:18-19—Woe to the idolater.

The chapter ends with a call to worship in verse 20—an affirmation of faith that also provides a fitting transition to the hymn for public worship recorded in chapter 3.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The dialogues
  B. The second dialogue (1:12—2:20)
    1. Habakkuk's complaint of God's activity (1:12-17)
      a. How can a holy God use an evil instrument? (1:12-13)
      b. How can God permit the righteous to fall to wicked? (1:14-15)
      c. How can God condone such action? (1:16-17)
    2. Habakkuk's action (2:1)
    3. Jehovah's answer (2:2-19)
      a. Record the vision (2:2)
      b. Recognize God's will (2:3)
      c. Realize their wickedness (2:4-5)
      d. Reasons for their judgment (2:6-19)
        (1) Their greed (2:6-8)
        (2) Their self-exaltation (2:9-11)
        (3) Their violence (2:12-14)
        (4) Their shamelessness (2:15-17)
        (5) Their idolatry (2:18-19)
    4. Jehovah's position (2:20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Habakkuk 1:12, what words did the prophet Habakkuk use to describe God?

2. What attitude of the prophet is shown in Habakkuk 2:1 by the picture of a watchman and a tower?

3. What are some ways we can demonstrate in our lives that we are living "by faith"?

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we can trust that God is working in our lives, even when we do not understand His ways or know His timing.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Habakkuk 3:1-19

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

On a bluff overlooking the ocean, I sat staring into the distance. Families played on the beach below, oblivious to the turmoil I was in and the emotional "fog" that encompassed my soul. Though the day was bright and sunny, it seemed that wave after wave of sadness swept over me. I considered the loss and pain my family was enduring, and wondered when life would return to normal. In fact, would "normal" *ever* be an option for us again?

Then, as those troubled thoughts chased through my mind, it seemed a still small Voice whispered to my soul, "And if nothing changes, will I be enough for you?" At first I tried to pass off the words as just a fleeting thought, but then they came again, "If nothing changes, will I be enough for you?"

To be truthful, I did not want to hear those words. Deep in my heart, I knew God was enough. The sticking point was the "if nothing changes" part. I wanted to shout my response, "But things *have* to change, Lord! This situation *must* be rectified."

Looking back, I realize now that the enemy of my soul was attempting to tear down my faith in the promises God had given. The question was not about God's ability to intervene in the situation at hand. At stake was the willingness of my heart to embrace the plan of the One who is in control of every situation. Could I truly accept that He alone would be enough, whatever happened?

The chapters prior to today's text describe the dire situation facing the prophet Habakkuk. God had revealed that Babylon would invade Habakkuk's homeland and execute judgment on his people for their sins. Fear had gripped Habakkuk's heart as he saw the growing power of this enemy, and he realized that his people would soon be overcome. The prophet wrestled with the thought that God would use such an evil nation as an instrument of justice. In our text today, however, Habakkuk expressed his decision to hold to his faith in God, even though he did not fully understand.

That day on the bluff, I prayed and finally made a determination similar to the one Habakkuk expressed in our focus verse. My conclusion was this: If Jesus is all I ever have, He is enough. Though my heart is broken and my words are ignored, Jesus is enough. Though I walk alone, Jesus is enough. In heartache beyond comprehension, let me hold onto Jesus, because He is enough. My troubled thoughts became a prayer, "No matter what comes, Lord, help me hold onto the assurance that You are enough!" And He *did* help. The fact that God was in control in those difficult circumstances was proven in the weeks and months that followed.

Today, are you facing a seemingly impossible situation? Are you conflicted or anxious about what you see on the horizon, and uncertain about how resolution could ever come? Learn a lesson from Habakkuk's affirmation of faith! We may not always receive the answers we want, and the answers may not come when we think they are needed. However, we *can* purpose to keep our eyes on Jesus and rest in Him. He has a plan in place for us, and it will work out for spiritual good if we will just hold steady in faith.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 3, which is designated by Bible scholars as a prayer, is Habakkuk's response to the vision God had given him of the judgment that would come upon Judah at the hand of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). The prophet began by asking for a revival of God's work in the current chaotic situation, requesting compassion and mercy for the people although God's anger was warranted. In highly figurative language, Habakkuk remembered Israel's exodus from Egypt (verses 3-7) and recognized God's power in and over creation (verses 8-11). His prayer reflects the cultural understanding of his day that the sea and rivers can be destructive or constructive, a curse or blessing. In this case, they illustrated God's power over darkness and oppression.

Habakkuk alluded in this prayer to incidents from Israel's history, including the Flood of Noah's day, the Exodus, the crossing of Jordan, and the Battle of Kishon, and each of these incidents involved God's miraculous deliverance. In verses 12-15, the prophet rehearsed God's deliverance through His anointed leaders, like Moses, Joshua, and David, and he expressed his own awe at those deliverances. The Hebrew word for *anointed* is *mashiyach,* which is also used specifically in reference to the Messiah or Anointed One. The implication was that all the prior anointed leaders who brought deliverance pointed ahead to the Messiah who would bring full salvation.

In verses 17-18, though obvious tokens of God's goodness had been withdrawn (crops had failed and flocks had perished), the prophet expressed his determination to still rejoice because of his relationship with the God of his salvation. The "hinds' feet" in verse 19 alluded to the stability and agility of deer, who are sure-footed even in dangerous terrain.
Habakkuk's point was that God would give His followers confidence and ability to navigate with assurance through difficult times.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The prayer and praise (3:1-19)
  A. Prayer for future intervention (3:1-2)
  B. Praise for past intervention (3:3-15)
    1. God's person (3:3-4)
    2. God's power (3:5-15)
  C. Peace in present inactivity (3:16-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 2, what two specific things did Habakkuk request in his prayer?

2. In the historical instances Habakkuk mentioned in this chapter, what was God's ultimate purpose and plan?

3. When circumstances in life seem dire and discouraging, what are some strategies we can employ to keep our hearts encouraged?

CONCLUSION

Even when events around us are troubling and the future seems uncertain, we can have a confident assurance that God is in control and will cause all events to fit into His divine plan.

NOTES

Overview for Obadiah

Purpose: The purpose of Obadiah's prophecy was to pronounce God's judgment upon Edom because of that nation's actions toward His chosen people, the Jews.

Author: The author of the book was the prophet Obadiah, whose name means "servant of the Lord" or "worshipper of Jehovah." At least twelve men named Obadiah appear in Scripture; however, Old Testament scholars cannot point with certainty to any of them as the author of this book. Whatever his identity, the author Obadiah was faithful to the true God, carefully delivered God's message regarding the ungodly nation of Edom, and was fully convinced that God's justice would ultimately triumph.

To Whom Written: The Edomites and the Jews living in Judah

Date Written: It is nearly impossible to date the prophecy of Obadiah precisely, due to the scant historical information contained in the book. Scholars have proposed a number of options spanning several centuries. Some place Obadiah's prophecy around 853-840 B.C., during the reign of Jehoram in Judah. This dating is based upon Obadiah 1:10-14, which indicates that a major calamity had occurred in Judah and the Edomites had used that circumstance to their own advantage. Other scholars suggest a date of 586-553 B.C., in which case the Chaldean invasion under Nebuchadnezzar may have been the background for the prophecy.

Setting: Edom was a mountainous area located south of the Dead Sea and north of the Gulf of Aqaba, a region that is now part of Israel and Jordan. During the days of Israel's monarchies, Edom's capital was Sela, the secluded valley and natural rocky fortress now known as Petra.

Edom prospered through its control of a major trade route connecting Africa with Mesopotamia, and its mining of iron and copper. Obadiah 1:6 indicates the Edomites safeguarded the wealth, which had been accumulated through trade, in the clefts of the rocks.

History: The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac who sold his birthright to his twin brother Jacob, and later was defrauded by Jacob of his father's blessing. The Edomites were hereditary foes of Israel. During the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, Moses wanted to lead the people across Edom into Moab, but the king of Edom refused to allow passage. Later in the people's journey northward, Balaam prophesied that Israel one day would possess Edom (see Numbers 24:18). In following years, a number of hostile encounters took place between the nations of Israel and Edom.

References to the Edomites occur throughout the Old Testament. They are first mentioned in Genesis 25:30, and their final mention occurs in Malachi 1:2-5. Other prophets who spoke of Edom include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos. The Herods of New Testament times were of Edomite lineage.

While it is uncertain exactly when Edom ceased to exist as a nation, several fulfillments of the destruction pronounced upon this enemy of Israel occurred throughout Edom's history. The last clear reference to Edom in archaeological findings is an Assyrian inscription of 667 B.C.

Unique Features: Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of just one chapter with twenty-one verses. Acceptance of the 853-840 B.C. date of authorship would make Obadiah the earliest writing prophet, placing him a few years prior to the prophet Joel, and a contemporary of the prophet Elisha. Obadiah is one of only three prophets who pronounced judgment primarily on other nations (Nahum and Habakkuk are the others).

Summary: Obadiah's brief prophecy divides naturally into two sections: Edom's destruction (verses 1-18), and Israel's restoration (verses 19-21).

The nation of Edom, which eventually disappeared from history, remains one of the prime examples of the truth found in Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Outline

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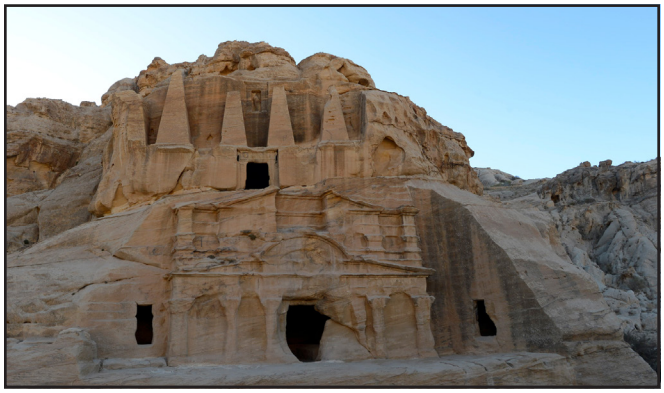
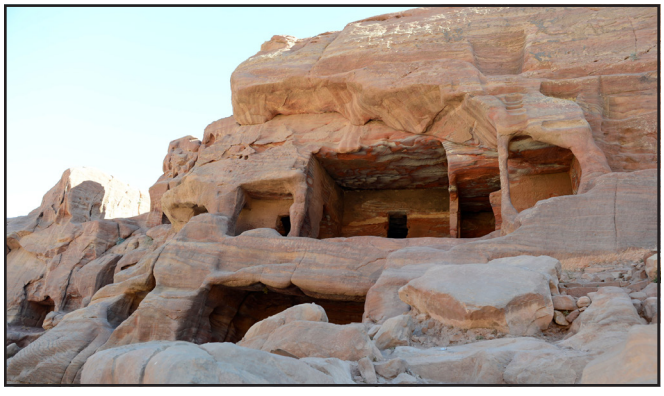
A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. Introduction: The vision and theme (1:1)
II. The fact of Edom's judgment (1:2-9)
    A. The deception of Edom (1:2-4)
    B. The destruction of Edom (1:5-9)
III. The cause of Edom's judgment (1:10-14)
    A. Violence to Judah (1:10-11)
    B. Boasting over Judah (1:12-13)
    C. Enslavement of Judah (1:14)
IV. The character of Edom's judgment (1:15-18)
    A. The imminence of judgment (1:15-16)
    B. The completeness of judgment: time and extent (1:17-18)
V. The restoration of Israel (1:19-21)
    A. The remnant's return (1:19-20)
    B. The kingdom's advent (1:21)

Petra: A City in the Rocks

The ancient city of Petra was inhabited—and perhaps even built—by the Edomites. This archeological wonder located in the south of modern-day Jordan was named one of the "new" *Seven Wonders of the World* in 2007 and is visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. The remains of this city built in the sides of towering rocks (notice the size of the people near the structures) gives context to the warning Obadiah delivered to the Edomites, **"Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD." (Obadiah 1:4)**





DAYBREAK

Obadiah 1:1-21

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them." (Obadiah 1:10-11)

"Sibling rivalry" is a phrase many of us can identify with, especially if we have brothers or sisters or are parents of a sibling group. However, it is important to remember that it matters to God how we treat others — both inside and outside the family circle.

Recently, I skimmed through a humorous online post titled "18 Things Every Oldest Sibling Knows to be True." It immediately became clear that the author felt being first in the family line-up comes with significant positives. For example, she stated that oldest children believe they have a right to boss younger siblings. They insist the front passenger seat of the car is reserved for them, and are convinced that their parents are far more strict with them than with the younger children. According to the article, older siblings feel protective of younger children in the family, but they also assume they have the right to make younger children do anything and everything for them for as long as possible.

The post concluded by stating that older siblings love their younger family members, even when they are "the most annoying people in the universe." That caught my attention, because I had just been reading the Book of Obadiah. Love and concern for the well-being of others certainly were not evident in the family relationship referenced in Obadiah's prophecy!

Obadiah's message was directed to the Edomites. The family lines of Edom and Israel went back to a common forefather, Isaac. Esau (ancestor of the Edomites) and Jacob (ancestor of the Israelites) were twin brothers and sons of Isaac. Based on their shared ancestry, one might assume the Edomites would have immediately rushed to the defense of their northern brothers when Judah was invaded by Babylon. However, that was not the case. Animosity had repeatedly flared up between the two nations throughout their histories. And when Judah came under attack, the Edomites exulted over Judah's distress, captured and delivered Israelite warriors into the hands of the enemy, and even participated in looting the defeated nation. Because Edom mistreated their brothers in Judah, God's judgment was coming upon them.

All of us would readily condemn Edom's treachery, betrayal, and looting. However, God also condemned Edom for pride, for failure to help Judah in a time of need, and for taking advantage of their brother nation's vulnerable state. Through the prophet Obadiah, God told the Edomites, "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee" (verse 15).

As followers of Christ, we should demonstrate justice and mercy toward all. We may not agree with an individual's perspective or condone his or her behavior, but God does not give us license to denigrate or belittle anyone. While we can and should oppose sin, we also should extend grace and pray for others, even those who are not doing right. Let us purpose to live as peace promoters and brothers (or sisters) to all. Remember what God told the Edomites, "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee"!

BACKGROUND

The Edomites, to whom the prophecy of Obadiah was directed, lived in a mountainous region south of the Dead Sea that included the city of Petra. (That area is now in the nations of Israel and Jordan.) The Edomites made their dwelling places in high rocky cliffs that offered natural fortification. Their trust in their perceived military advantage was evidenced by their haughty and self-exalting attitude, and resulted in a series of wicked actions against the Children of Israel. These actions were doubly offensive because the Edomites were the descendants of Isaac through Esau, and thus possessed a shared ancestry with the very people they were mistreating.

The first of four main points in the Book of Obadiah occurs in verses 1-9. Through the prophet, God declared that retribution was coming to Edom through other nations that would rise up in battle against them. Edom's pride was the cause of this judgment. The instrument of judgment would be Edom's own military allies, and the result would be absolute destruction, with no Edomites surviving.

The second main point occurs in verses 10-14. God instructed the prophet to itemize the wicked actions taken by the Edomites against the Children of Israel in Jerusalem. Four actions were noted: the Edomites did not help the people of Judah to withstand the attack on Jerusalem; they rejoiced in Jerusalem's downfall; they aided in pillaging the city afterward; and they gave over those who fled to Edom seeking refuge.

Thirdly, verse 15 contains a proclamation that the coming judgment was imminent. The phrase "all the heathen" indicates that the warnings regarding pride and judgment are universally applicable. Verses 16-18 provide a stark contrast between the judgment to be poured out on the wicked, and the deliverance provided to the righteous. Verse 18 repeats the prophecy that Edom would cease to exist as a result of this judgment.

Verses 19-21 contain Obadiah's fourth and final point. These verses, which are yet to be fulfilled, promise a coming regathering and restoration of Jerusalem in which the harmful actions of Edom against Israel will be completely reversed. The capstone of this restoration, and the final note of the prophecy of Obadiah, is a beautiful phrase that points to the day when the Messiah will rule over Jerusalem, "the kingdom shall be the LORD's."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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I. Introduction: The vision and theme (1:1)
II. The fact of Edom's judgment (1:2-9)
  A. The deception of Edom (1:2-4)
  B. The destruction of Edom (1:5-9)
III. The cause of Edom's judgment (1:10-14)
  A. Violence to Judah (1:10-11)
  B. Boasting over Judah (1:12-13)
  C. Enslavement of Judah (1:14)
IV. The character of Edom's judgment (1:15-18)
  A. The imminence of judgment (1:15-16)
  B. The completeness of judgment: time and extent (1:17-18)
V. The restoration of Israel (1:19-21)
  A. The remnant's return (1:19-20)
  B. The kingdom's advent (1:21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the source of Edom's problems?

2. What lasting effects resulted from Edom's actions?

3. What can we do to avoid the same problems that caused Edom's downfall?

CONCLUSION

God cares about how we treat others! As followers of Christ, we should promote and practice concern, justice, and mercy for all.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Section Introduction

Overview for Esther

Purpose: The author's purpose in writing the Book of Esther is not explicitly stated, but it clearly demonstrates Divine Providence working to preserve the Jewish race from whom the Messiah would come. Even though God's people had been disobedient to God and were in exile, they were still objects of His mercy and concern.

Author: The author is unknown, although some Bible scholars attribute the book to Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah. Most agree that the author likely was a Jew writing for the remnant that had returned to Judah under Zerubbabel. He may have lived in a Persian city, possibly Shushan. The detailed descriptions of court life and traditions, as well as the events that occurred in the book, point to an eyewitness author.

Date Written: Sometime after 472 B.C.

Time Period Covered: Most historians estimate that the events in the book cover a period of about twelve years, from approximately 483-472 B.C.

History: King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes the Great) ruled over the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 B.C. He is best known by historians for his failed invasion of Greece, which took place several years after the account of Esther. Ahasuerus inherited his vast empire from his father, Darius I (who is mentioned in Bible passages such as Ezra 4:24; Daniel 6:1 and 25; and Haggai 1:15). His mother was Atossa, the eldest daughter of Cyrus the Great, who was prompted by God to decree that the Temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt (see Ezra 1:1-4).

Key People: Esther, Mordecai, King Ahasuerus, and Haman, the king's advisor

Setting: Events in the Book of Esther took place in the Persian Empire, with most of the action occurring in the palace of King Ahasuerus in Shushan, the Persian capital (now located in western Iran). The existence of this king is extremely well attested; archaeologists have discovered the ruins of the very palace where these events occurred.

During this period, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had known to that point, incorporating the provinces of Media and Persia as well as the territories possessed by the previous empires of Assyria and Babylon. It covered what today is Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.

At the time of the events of the Book of Esther, the first group of Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem after its overthrow by the Babylonians. The Temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem, although it lacked the glory of Solomon's Temple, and the Jews there were struggling to reestablish Temple worship according to the Law of Moses. Approximately forty years after the time of Esther, under Ahasuerus' successor Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah would return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls.

Unique Features: The Book of Esther is the twelfth and final book in the historical section of the Old Testament, and one of only two books in Scripture that bear the name of a woman. (The other is Ruth.)

A notable feature of the Book is that no name, title, or pronoun for God appears in it, nor is there any direct reference to prayer. This omission seems to have been purposeful; it is possible that given its setting and timeframe, any reference to the Jewish God or faith would have resulted in its contents being destroyed. However, God's presence, sovereignty, and loving care for His people are evident throughout the text.

The Feast of Purim, which commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot, is still celebrated a month before Passover. The entire Book of Esther is read aloud in synagogues during that holiday.

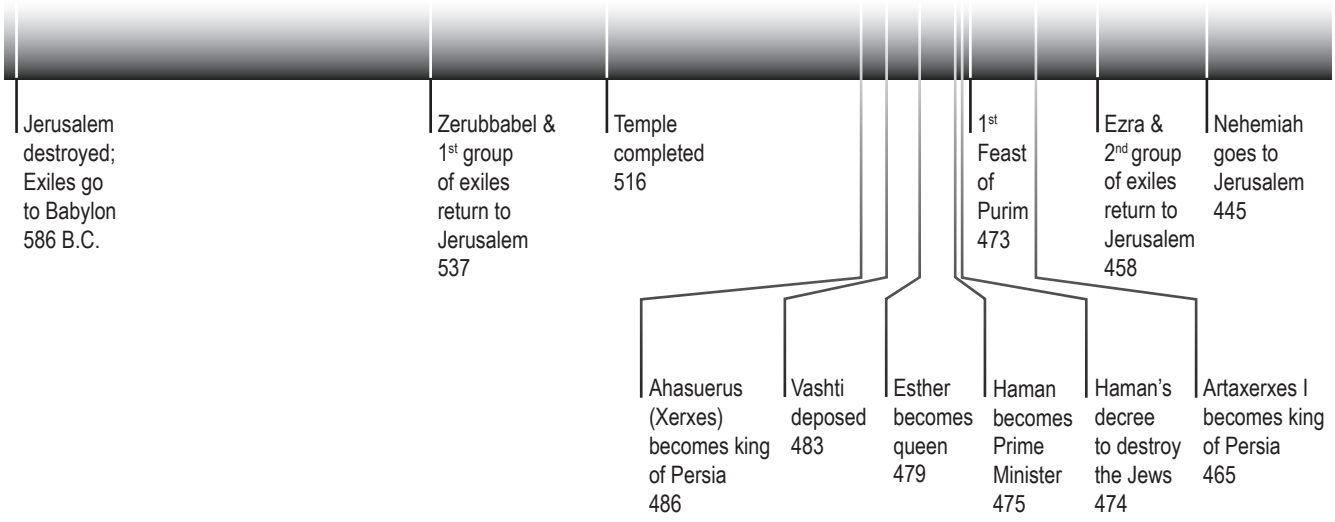
Summary: In chapters 1-2, Esther became the queen to Ahasuerus of Persia. She was personally chosen by the king after he exiled his first wife, Vashti, because she refused to make an appearance at an extravagant banquet he had prepared for the nobles and princes of his empire.

In chapters 3-4, Mordecai (Esther's relative and guardian) refused to pay homage to Haman, the king's advisor. Infuriated, Haman devised a plot to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom. He convinced the king to issue a decree calling for the slaughter of all the Jews on a particular day. Mordecai heard of this plan, and challenged Esther to go before the king on behalf of her people.

In chapters 5-10, Esther took her petition to the king and pled for the protection of her people from Haman's wicked devices. As a result, Haman was executed and Mordecai promoted to a position of honor. The king issued a new decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves, thus sparing their lives.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. The danger to the Jews (1:1—3:15)
  A. The background to the plot (1:1—2:23)
    1. The divorce of Vashti (1:1-22)
    2. The elevation of Esther (2:1-18)
    3. The service of Mordecai (2:19-23)
  B. The formation of the plot (3:1-15)
    1. The rage of Haman (3:1-6)
    2. The plans of Haman (3:7-15)

II. The deliverance of the Jews (4:1—10:3)
  A. The frustration of the plot (4:1—7:10)
    1. The decision of Esther (4:1-17)
    2. The reception of Esther (5:1-8)
    3. The humiliation of Haman (5:9—6:14)
    4. The hanging of Haman (7:1-10)
  B. The dissolve of the plot (8:1—9:16)
    1. The elevation of Mordecai (8:1-2)
    2. The revocation of Haman's edict (8:3-17)
    3. The defense of the Jews (9:1-16)
  C. The sequel to the plot (9:17—10:3)
    1. The institution of the feast of Purim (9:17-32)
    2. The greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)

DAYBREAK

Esther 1:1-22

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small." (Esther 1:19-20)

Throughout history, hasty or ill-advised decisions by kings, military leaders, and heads of state have led to unimagined consequences. Often, those decisions were the result of poor counsel. Perhaps it is true that leaders are only as good as their advisors!

One wonders who advised the British Parliament of 1774 to pass the laws intended to penalize the Massachusetts colonists for the Boston Tea Party rebellion. Rather than suppressing the rebellion, those laws added to the storm of outrage that ultimately led to the American Revolutionary War and independence for the United States.

During the battle of Gettysburg in 1863, who advocated for the tactical error known as "Pickett's Charge"? Following orders, about 12,500 Confederate soldiers moved across an open field in the face of heavy artillery fire. That maneuver cost 1,100 lives, and 4,000 more were wounded. That was the turning point of the American Civil War; the Confederacy ultimately surrendered in April of 1865 and the union of the United States was preserved.

An ill-advised decision by Russian Emperor Alexander II resulted in the sale of 586,412 square miles of territory to the United States for a mere two cents an acre. While some would deem this one of the greatest mistakes in all of Soviet history, it was of great benefit to the United States. In just fifty years, the profits from Alaska came to more than one hundred times the amount that had been invested in its purchase.

Countless other examples of faulty advice and the outcomes could be cited, but consider one found in the Book of Esther.

In today's text, an angry King Ahasuerus asked his advisors what to do when his queen, Vashti, refused to appear at his banquet before him and the nobles of the kingdom. Memucan, one of these supposedly wise men, suggested that the queen's refusal would incite kingdom-wide insubordination by women who would rise up against their husbands. In order to prevent this imagined scenario, Memucan recommended that the king depose Vashti and put another woman in her royal position. The assumption was that this step would cause all women of the land to honor their husbands.

Neither Ahasuerus nor his advisor could have imagined that heeding Memucan's advice would ultimately save a people from extermination. But that is exactly what happened! Vashti's banishment set the stage for the events recorded in the Book of Esther. As a result, the Jewish captives in Babylon were preserved from extinction and the Davidic lineage from which the Messiah would one day come was maintained.

Over 2500 years have gone by since Memucan gave counsel to King Ahasuerus, and the Persian Empire long ago disappeared into the annals of history. However, the account preserved for us in the Book of Esther offers valuable lessons for our day.

First, be careful where you go for advice! There are Memucans in our day as well—individuals who offer advice based on faulty perspectives, unclear thinking, or imagined outcomes. God's Word, or the godly advice of His representatives, is our best resource when guidance is needed.

Second, be prayerful and cautious when making important decisions. Ahasuerus made a rash and impulsive proclamation, possibly while in an intoxicated condition. God is honored when we ponder our choices and make sure that they align to His instructions and will for us.

Finally, be assured that even when civil laws or governmental authorities seem to be spinning out of control, God is still sovereign. He is working behind what we see going on all around us, and His perfect plan will one day be revealed.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 introduces the first main character of the Book of Esther, and provides the foundation for the rest of the account depicting Divine Providence at work on behalf of the Jews. The events in the text took place in the palace of King Ahasuerus at Shushan during the third year of the king's reign. This was between the two returns of the Jewish exiles to their native land (as related in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah). Today, the excavated urban and architectural remains of Susa (an alternate name for Shushan) are preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

They include portions of a palace, which belonged to Artaxerxes I, the successor Ahasuerus.

Verses 1-9 describe a 180-day series of feasts held by King Ahasuerus to display the glory and majesty of his empire. According to verse 1, Ahasuerus ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. Some scholars suggest that the king and his advisors used this time of festivities to strategize regarding future military campaigns; these campaigns were not waged to ensure survival, but rather to acquire more wealth, territory, and power. The display of wealth during the feasts may have been to prove that the king had sufficient material resources to carry out such plans.

Historical sources substantiate the Biblical account concerning Persian customs of this era, including the fact that royal banquets were elaborate affairs. The Greek historian Herodotus explained that the Persians drank as they deliberated matters of state, believing that intoxication put them in closer touch with the spiritual world.

According to Jewish tradition, Ahasuerus' command for Vashti to be brought before those in attendance (verses 9-11) resulted from an argument among the men at the feast as to which country had the most beautiful women. Ahasuerus seemingly decided to settle the issue by putting his queen on public display. The reason for her refusal is not recorded in Scripture.

The description of the wise men "which knew the times" (verse 13) indicates that these counselors were astrologers who used their observations of the stars to formulate their advice. The fact that the decree was sent throughout the whole kingdom (verse 22) implies that it was considered of great importance.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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I. The danger to the Jews
  A. The background to the plot
    1. The divorce of Vashti (1:1-22)
      a. The feasts of Xerxes (1:1-9)
        (1) The feast for the nobles (1:1-4)
        (2) The feast for the people (1:5-8)
        (3) The feast of Vashti's (1:9)
      b. The demise of Vashti (1:10-22)
        (1) The refusal of Vashti (1:10-12)
        (2) The decree of Xerxes (1:13-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What detail in verse 10 gives an indicator of the king's condition when he commanded that Vashti be brought before those present?

2. Do you think the advice offered by the wise men resulted in the outcome they assumed would occur? Why or why not?

3. What should be our course of action when we are faced with a rule, law, or cultural expectation that conflicts with Christian values or Biblical directives?

CONCLUSION

Even though God's people were living in exile, He was working on their behalf, setting in place individuals and orchestrating events that would culminate in their deliverance from the threat of extermination.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 2:1-23

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her." (Esther 2:15)

When our oldest daughter was entering her teen years, she approached me asking about using some of the numerous beauty products she had seen promoted in advertisements. While understanding her desire to look attractive, I was also concerned about the impact of advertising that suggests young women are somehow lacking or less beautiful if they do not use particular beauty products or wear specific brands or styles of clothing.

Not wanting to inflate the issue, but recognizing the need for God's help to give a wise response, I breathed a quick prayer asking for guidance. Then I responded, "If your time spent in devotion, prayer, and Bible reading is proportional to the amount of time you spend in preparing your clothing, face, and hair, I am sure God will help you know what is right." She smiled and simply said, "Okay, thanks."

In the years that followed, that brief discussion did not absolve me from my responsibility as a parent. Occasional direction and correction in this matter was still needed along the way. However, I believe it did emphasize the Biblical truth that what exists in the heart will be evident in the life.

In our text today, Esther was an example of that truth. While the king apparently chose this young Jewish woman to be queen because of her physical beauty, her heart and character were what truly set her apart from the others. Verse 15 of our text relates, "Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her." When the time came for Esther to appear before the king, she went in simply, bringing only what the chamberlain advised. And ultimately, Esther received the king's favor, love, grace, and kindness.

My daughter, too, has grown into a fine Christian woman with a heart for the Lord's work and her family, thus reflecting true beauty. The Holy Spirit has been faithful to teach her over the years concerning what is important to bring before her King, and like Esther, she is now the recipient of God's favor, love, grace, and kindness.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 of the Book of Esther relates the events surrounding King Ahasuerus' choice of Esther as his new queen. According to the date given in verse 16, these events occurred about four years after the celebration in chapter 1 which resulted in Vashti's banishment.

Esther's relative and guardian, Mordecai, was a Benjamite in Shushan, approximately eighty to ninety years after his great-grandparents had been taken there in captivity. In spite of the passage of that significant amount of time, he had not lost sight of his heritage nor his identity as a Jew. Mordecai had raised his orphaned family member whose name was Hadassah in Hebrew, but Esther (meaning "star") in Persian.

Esther was "fair and beautiful" (verse 7), and she was among the young women chosen to come to the king's palace as candidates for queen after the former queen was banished. She joined other candidates under the care of Hegai, the king's chamberlain who had charge of their beautification and preparation for royal inspection, and soon won his favor. The kindness extended by this chamberlain to Esther is described by the Hebrew word *hesed,* the word used in several Old Testament texts to describe the mercy and loving kindness of God.

Mordecai instructed Esther not to disclose her Hebrew lineage (verse 10), possibly due to the prejudice of the Persians, or a supposition that her Jewish lineage might have kept her from being chosen as queen. During the year of preparation for the candidates, Mordecai checked daily on Esther's status from outside the preparation compound, and she was obedient to his instruction. Ultimately, Esther won the favor of all, including the king.

Mordecai may have had a part in the legal system of Shushan since he "sat in the gate" of the city where civic leaders conducted business. Verses 21-23 describe an assassination plot against the king, which Moredecai overheard and reported to Esther. She then "certified," or made known, this plot to the king. As a result, the assassination attempt was foiled, the guilty plotters were executed, and the matter was documented in official records.

The seemingly insignificant facts of Esther's hidden Hebrew heritage and Moredecai's spotless character and loyalty to the king played a significant role in God's preservation of the Jewish people, detailed in later chapters of the book.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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I. The danger to the Jews
  A. The background to the plot
    2. The elevation of Esther (2:1-18)
      a. The search for a successor to Vashti (2:1-4)
      b. The qualifications of Esther (2:5-7)
      c. The preparation of Esther (2:8-11)
      d. The selection of Esther (2:12-18)
        (1) The procession of elimination (2:12-15)
        (2) The choice of Esther (2:16-18)
    3. The service of Mordecai (2:19-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How long were the women required to prepare prior to their presentation to the king?

2. Why do you think Esther brought only what the chamberlain advised rather than other things as the rest of the women did?

3. How can we protect our hearts from the voices in the world suggesting we are somehow inferior as God's children?

CONCLUSION

True beauty and character are developed inwardly, but ultimately the outward evidence will be recognized by those around us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 3:1-15

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." (Esther 3:5-6)

On the annual Jewish holiday of Purim, Jewish people gather in synagogues to hear the Book of Esther read aloud. Adults and children alike wait eagerly for the reading of chapter 3 because with this chapter, their fun begins. When the name Haman is read in the first verse—and then fifty-three more times in the remainder of the book—the synagogue erupts with boisterous noise as attendees try to drown out the name with their uproar. People blow horns, hiss, and shake noisemakers called graggers. Children shout. Adults stamp their feet and boo at the top of their voices. In every possible way, they show their disgust and contempt for Haman, a man who had murderous hatred for the Jewish people.

Today's text reveals the reason for this annual display of disdain, for it describes Haman's plot to annihilate the large number of Jews living in Ahasuerus' kingdom. Mordecai, Esther's relative and guardian, had defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman, an arrogant, egotistical advisor to the king. Haman was infuriated, and according to our key verses, determined to destroy not just Mordecai, but all of the Jewish people in revenge. He convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of the Jews on the thirteenth day of the Hebrew month Adar—a date Haman chose by casting lots.

However, God was still in control. Purim (from the Hebrew root *pur*, meaning "lot"), commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's genocidal plot. Observed annually on the fourteenth day of Adar, these celebrations include raucous customs showing the Jewish people's scorn for their enemy and joy for their deliverance by God.

We too can celebrate deliverance from the plots and strategies of an evil adversary. Our victory is not over a vengeful national official, but over the Prince of Darkness himself. Are you facing challenges, opposition, or even outright persecution for your faith today? Remember who your real enemy is. While you probably will not hiss and boo when his name is mentioned, you can remind yourself that he has already been defeated because Christ won the victory for us at Calvary. And *that* definitely is reason for celebration—not just one day a year, but every day!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 3 introduces Haman, who became the archenemy of Mordecai and the Jewish nation, and describes his plot against the Jews.

Bible scholars suggest that when Mordecai "bowed not down" to Haman, "nor did him reverence" (verse 2), his refusal likely was not based on unwillingness to give due civil respect, but because divine honor or worship was inferred. Bowing may have represented the kind of obeisance paid to Persian deities, which even pagan Greeks refused to do. Based on his loyalty to Jehovah, Mordecai would not participate in any form of idolatry.

Because Haman's ego was injured by Mordecai's refusal to honor him, he purposed not only to kill Mordecai, but all the Jews in the country. When Haman offered to pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury if the decree of extermination were written, the king acquiesced. Haman no doubt assumed this tremendous sum of money would be obtained through the plunder of Jewish homes and businesses. The king made no attempt to investigate Haman's accusations against the Jews; large massacres of this nature were common in that era, because human life was held in little regard.

Verse 7 indicates that lots were cast in the first month of the Jewish calendar, and the date determined for carrying out the decree was established for the twelfth month, almost a full year later. This eleven-month period no doubt was a time of great anxiety for the Jews, but it provided an interval in which Mordecai and Esther's plan could be effected.

The king's ring, mentioned in verse 10, was a symbol of authority that was equivalent to a personal signature. The ring's surface would have had a raised royal symbol, allowing an imprint to be made when the ring was pressed into soft wax. This method was used in ancient times to certify official documents.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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I. The danger to the Jews
  B. The formation of the plot (3:1-15)
    1. The rage of Haman (3:1-6)
    2. The plans of Haman (3:7-15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was Haman's position in the ruling hierarchy of the kingdom?

2. What significance do you see in the fact that there was an eleven-month delay between the decree of death to the Jews, and the date their fate was to be carried out?

3. If you live in a country which is primarily safe and law abiding, what are some ways you can show you are genuinely thankful for that blessing?

CONCLUSION

God is sovereign over the affairs of men. Though evil may appear to triumph for a time, God will always be victorious!

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 4:1-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

Like Esther in our text today, Nicholas Winton was an individual who saved many people from extermination at the peril of his own life. In 1938, as a young London stockbroker, Nicholas received a phone call from a friend suggesting that he come to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where his help could be used on an "interesting assignment." Convinced that a European war was inevitable, Winton agreed, and upon his arrival, he saw for himself the full scope of the problem facing Jews. Refugee camps were filling with Jewish families forced from their homes, and people in the camps were struggling to survive the harsh European winter. Winton was horrified by the appalling conditions, and his greatest concern was for the children.

Having heard of the efforts of agencies in Britain to rescue Jewish children from other locations on the Kindertransport, Winton set about organizing a similar operation for the children of Czechoslovakia. As a British citizen with many business contacts throughout Europe, he was convinced that he could arrange the evacuation of young refugees to safe locations outside of Nazi reach.

At first, his plans were developed around a dining room table at his hotel in Prague. Winton contacted the governments of nations he thought could take in the children. While most of his requests were refused, England and Sweden agreed. One by one, anxious parents who understood the imminent danger to their families came to Winton and placed their children into his hands. As his operation expanded, he opened an office in central Prague. Word spread, and soon hundreds of parents lined up outside Winton's office seeking a safe haven for their children.

The first evacuation of children left Prague by plane for London on March 14, 1939, the day before the Germans occupied Czech territory. In following months, Winton was able to organize seven more transports of children out of Prague by rail. His rescue activities ended abruptly in early September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland and Britain declared war on Germany. However, in those few short months, the lives of 669 children were saved.

Winton never spoke of his pre-war efforts for Jewish families, but in 1988, his wife found a scrapbook of pictures of the children, a complete list of their names, and letters from some of the parents. She finally learned the whole story and shared it with others. In the years that followed, Winton received many acknowledgements for his humanitarian deeds. However, the memento he cherished most until his death in July of 2015 was a ring given him by some of the children he saved. It was inscribed with a line from the Talmud, the book of Jewish law—"Save one life, save the world."

As Christians, most of us probably will never be called upon to save the lives of others or perform some other great, heroic deed. However, opportunities to serve God in a unique role come to all Christians. Just as God created us as one-of-a-kind individuals in a particular environment, each of us will have occasions to serve Him in ways and places that are not possible for anyone else. We do not want to overlook or ignore those opportunities! As Mordecai said to Esther in our focus verse, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" When we follow God's plan for our lives, He will lead us to be in the right place at the right time to accomplish the tasks He has designed for us.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 4 of the Book of Esther describes the despair and consternation of the Jews as the decree of King Ahasuerus that allowed for their destruction became known (verses 1-3), and Mordecai's urging of Esther to intervene on behalf of her people (verses 4-17). In this chapter, the tide of events began to shift toward the Jews.

The act of putting on sackcloth and ashes to demonstrate grief was not only a Jewish custom but was also common in the Persian culture as well. Mordecai went out into the streets of the city publicly mourning the king's decree, but he did not enter the king's gate because "none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth" (verse 2). This was because only what was deemed cheerful and pleasant was allowed at court; anything sorrowful or melancholy was banned from the king's presence. This custom obliged Mordecai to keep his distance from Esther, only coming *before* the gate rather than taking his usual place *in* the gate.

Esther, who lived in the cloistered seclusion of the palace compound, apparently had not heard of the decree. However, when she was told that Mordecai was in mourning and wearing sackcloth and ashes, she

sent him different clothes. He refused this gesture in order to make her aware of the cause of his distress. This succeeded, and Esther sent an emissary, Hatach, to inquire about the cause of Mordecai's mourning. In response, Mordecai outlined Haman's plan to Hatach and gave him a copy of the decree to give to Esther.

The decree, which called for the destruction of "a certain people," did not name the Jews specifically, so it is possible the king did not know these "people" included Esther. In addition, Esther had hidden her lineage in obedience to Mordecai's instruction. However, Mordecai believed that if the decree went forth, Esther would not be spared.

Verses 8-12 describe Mordecai's request—that Esther would go before the king and make supplication for her people. Esther's initial response, through Hatach, was that to do so would put her life in danger, for Persian law stated that anyone who came into the king's presence without a royal summons could be subject to the death penalty. The fact that the king had not called for Esther for thirty days indicates that she was not a current favorite, and thus could have no expectation that he would allow her to live after such a breach of protocol. Also, if she went to the king on behalf of her people, her lineage would be known, which could have brought a sentence of death for her, given the decree.

Although the Book of Esther does not directly mention God or faith, there are veiled inferences of Him. For example, when Mordecai stated in verse 14, "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place . . . ," he was making a declaration of faith that somehow God would deliver His people. The word translated *enlargement* is the Hebrew word *revach*, which means "space, deliverance, enlargement, respite, or relief."

Another allusion to God occurs in verse 16 when, after agreeing to go before the king, Esther instructed Mordecai to gather the Jews together to fast for her. The implication was that prayer would accompany the fasting, as prayer and fasting were normally practiced together in the Jewish religion. Sometimes when a fast continued for many days, a break would be taken at night, but Esther specified the people were not to eat or drink "night or day," showing the grave danger of the situation facing her and her people.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  A. The frustration of the plot
    1. The decision of Esther (4:1-17)
      a. The plot discovered by Mordecai (4:1-3)
      b. The plot relayed to Esther (4:4-8)
      c. The resolve of Esther (4:9-17)
        (1) The peril of the decision (4:9-12)
        (2) The nature of the decision (4:13-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 11, what was Esther's initial response to Mordecai's request that she approach the king on behalf of her people?

2. What do you think ultimately caused Esther to agree to go before the king?

3. Mordecai warned Esther that if she held her peace, deliverance would come another way. What does this tell about the importance of doing our part to speak a word for Christ when we have the opportunity?

CONCLUSION

Although we likely will never be called upon to save a nation as Esther was, God has divinely appointed our steps as well. He has called each of us to be courageous, faithful, and obedient in living our lives for Him. As we do so, He will direct us to opportunities in His service.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 5:1 through 6:14

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." (Esther 6:13)

The account of Haman and his plot against the Jews reminds me of a t-shirt my fellow travelers and I saw while visiting Israel several years ago. It was emblazoned with the words "Civilizations, Nations, and Empires that Have Tried to Destroy the Jewish People," followed by two columns with the headings "Nation" on the left and "Status" on the right. Below the headings was the following list:

- Ancient Egypt – Gone
- Philistines – Gone
- Assyrian Empire – Gone
- Babylonian Empire – Gone
- Persian Empire – Gone
- Greek Empire – Gone
- Roman Empire – Gone
- Byzantine Empire – Gone
- Crusaders – Gone
- Spanish Empire – Gone
- Nazi Germany – Gone
- Soviet Union – Gone
- Iran – ???

Under the list was the caption, "The Jewish people: the smallest of nations but with a Friend in the highest of places! So… BE NICE!"

If we were to insert names of national leaders into this chart, Pharaoh would represent "Ancient Egypt," Hitler would represent "Nazi Germany," and Haman, in our text today, would certainly represent the "Persian Empire." This man's hatred of the Jewish people precipitated a national crisis as he conspired to have them all destroyed. Thankfully, the Jews had—and still have—a Friend who is all-powerful. The events in these chapters may appear to be coincidental, but they are evidence that God is always at work, providentially arranging events and timing for His purposes. Not only was Haman's evil plot against God's people averted, but he paid for his wicked scheme with his life.

Just as God protected the Jews of Haman's day, those of us who have been saved through Jesus' Blood (Jew and Gentile alike) can be assured that He will fight for us. Today, if you are engaged in a spiritual battle, God is on your side. You can quote our focus verse and say to the enemy, "Thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." When we are serving God, triumph is not a matter of *if*, but *when*. No matter how dire our situation may seem, He will win the victory every time.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 5 and 6 of Esther can be divided into three sections, with each segment involving one of the principal characters in the narrative. Verses 1-8 of chapter 5 deal with the intercession of Esther; verses 9-14 concern the pride of Haman; and chapter 6 describes the reward of Mordecai.

The three-day fast of the Jews requested by Esther (described in verses 15-16 of chapter 4) had taken place, and in the beginning of today's text, Esther made her approach to the king. Since the king had not extended an invitation to her, she took this action at the risk of her life. It was especially courageous given the king's treatment of his former queen, Vashti (see Esther 1:19,21). However, the king not only accepted Esther's presence, but he said her request would be granted up to "half of the kingdom," a statement Bible scholars indicate was more of a proverbial expression than a literal offer.

Esther did not immediately voice her ultimate request, but instead invited the king to a banquet. No reason is given for her delay, but she likely desired to win the king's confidence. In addition, she wanted Haman to be present, an indicator that she had already formulated a plan to expose Haman's plot.

At the banquet, King Ahasuerus repeated his offer to grant Esther's desire up to half the kingdom. Again, she delayed, merely inviting the king and Haman to a second dinner the following night. Her statement that if they came, "I will do tomorrow as the king hath said," seemingly was a promise that she would make her true desire known at that time.

Verses 9-14 of chapter 5 concern Haman's plan to hang Mordecai. Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman had infuriated him, and he complained bitterly to his friends and wife. They advised him to build a gallows and then speak to the king about executing Mordecai. Their obvious assumption was that the king, who had already agreed to the destruction of the Jewish people, would have no objection. The extraordinary height of the gallows (approximately seventy-five feet) possibly indicated that Haman wanted to make an example to the people with this execution.

The events in chapter 6 mark a transition in the book, in which the tide of events that previously had been against the Jews began to reverse. God's providence is clearly seen in the fact that the portion of royal records read to the king to combat his sleeplessness was a report of Mordecai's disclosure of an assassination plot against the king (see Esther 2:21-23).

Learning that Mordecai had never been rewarded for this deed of integrity, the king asked who was present in the court among his advisors. In an indicator of God's timing, Haman had just arrived to request the execution of Mordecai. When the king asked him for a recommendation regarding what should be done for a man the king wished to honor, Haman assumed the recipient would be himself and suggested a lengthy list of tributes. The resulting "turning of the tables" must have been exceedingly humiliating to Haman. Instead of executing Mordecai, he was forced to parade the man he despised through the streets and exalt him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  A. The frustration of the plot
    2. The reception of Esther (5:1-8)
      a. The appearance of Esther before the king (5:1-4)
      b. The request of Esther to the king (5:5-8)
    3. The humiliation of Haman (5:9—6:14)
      a. The plan of Haman to hang Mordecai (5:9-14)
      b. The king's debt to Mordecai (6:1-3)
      c. The honoring of Mordecai by the king through Haman (6:4-11)
      d. The sorrow of Haman (6:12-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. When Esther appeared without invitation at the king's court, what did the king do to indicate that she had found favor in his sight?

2. What seemingly coincidental events in these chapters prove that God is always at work for His people?

3. What do these chapters teach us about standing up for what is right, even when doing so presents a risk to our personal safety or well-being?

CONCLUSION

The events that occur in our lives are always under God's sovereign control, and He is more than able to deliver.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 7:1 through 8:2

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request." (Esther 7:3)

For many centuries, the dreaded disease of smallpox devastated people around the world. However, there is no reason to fear a smallpox epidemic in today's world, due to the remarkable work of Edward Jenner and later developments based upon his research.

Edward Jenner was born on May 17, 1749. At the age of thirteen, he became an apprentice to a renowned surgeon in South Gloucestershire, England, where he worked for seven years gaining the experience needed to become a surgeon and medical doctor. By 1788, Jenner was a successful surgeon with a well-established practice.

Early in 1796, Jenner began working to develop a vaccination to prevent smallpox, based in part on the common belief that dairymaids who had suffered from the mild disease of cowpox were immune to smallpox. From this, he speculated that cowpox not only protected an individual from smallpox, but also that the matter from a cowpox blister could be a means of protection for others. He took the risk of testing his hypotheses by inoculating twenty-three subjects — including his own eleven-month-old son! No doubt he did this with significant apprehension. However, his hypothesis proved correct; everyone in his test group experienced either a very mild cowpox infection or no symptoms at all.

In light of that success, the following year Jenner left his practice and continued to work on perfecting the smallpox vaccine, initiating the first scientific attempt to control an infectious disease by the deliberate use of vaccination. Later, he presented his research and test results to the British government, though it took years before the extraordinary value of vaccination was publicly acknowledged.

Some days before Jenner died, he stated to a friend, "I am not surprised that men are not grateful to me; but I wonder that they are not grateful to God for the good which He has made me the instrument of conveying." Today, Jenner is often referred to as "the father of immunology" in the scientific community. His work on smallpox inoculation is said to have "saved more lives than the work of any other human."

Reading of Jenner's efforts and the many individuals who undoubtedly escaped death because of his accomplishments made me think of Esther's actions in today's text, and the great deliverance the Jews experienced as a result. Esther's revelation of her identity as a Jew and her plea to the king for her people made Haman's criminal ploy apparent, though at great personal risk to her own well-being.

In our lives, we may try to avoid situations where we feel being followers of Christ could put us at risk of negativity or even overt hostility. We may be tempted to sidestep making our beliefs known, or hope that someone else will voice a Christian perspective on an issue. Had Esther refused to petition the king for her people, God would have raised up someone else. However, Esther chose to use her position as queen to plead for the lives of her people.

What has God chosen us to do? We may not have the dramatic opportunities of Edward Jenner or Queen Esther, but God will give us ways to take a stand for Him. And who knows? Souls may be saved from eternal death through our witness.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 7 of the Book of Esther records the events that took place at Esther's second banquet for the king and Haman: the king's repeated offer to grant Esther's petition, her revelation of her identity as a Jew and the petition for her people, Esther's indictment of Haman, and Haman's execution. The first two verses of chapter 8 indicate that Mordecai was promoted to fill Haman's position in the kingdom.

Esther showed wisdom in how she framed her request (verses 3-4). With humility, and without giving context, she appealed to the king's emotions, stating her life was in danger.

The people of conquered nations frequently were sold into slavery in ancient times. However, the decree instigated by Haman enabled the Persians to kill the captive Jews, so Esther's plea to the king in verse 4 was a life or death matter. Her statement that selling them into slavery would not "countervail the king's damage" was an assertion that the contributions made by the Jews through their work as employees of the Persian Empire significantly outweighed what the king could have gained by selling them into slavery. Instead, the Jews were being "sold" to destruction. This was a reference to the money Haman had offered the king in chapter 3 verse 9, to persuade him to decree the elimination of the Jews. Esther was exposing the truth about

Haman—that he was not a faithful servant of the king, but an adversary more interested in his own status than any benefit to the king.

The king and Haman both became aware of Esther's identity as a Jew at the same moment, and Haman instantly recognized that his plot, while not directed personally at Esther, had put his relationship with the king in great jeopardy. Historians indicate that a king rising up in anger from a banqueting table (see verse 7) was an indicator that no mercy would be given to the one who caused the anger. The veil placed over Haman's face (verse 8) signified that he had been condemned to death; in Persian custom, a king would not look upon the face of a condemned person.

It was customary for a king to confiscate the estate of a criminal, so the first verses of chapter 8 record that the king gave Haman's holdings to Esther, who in turn gave them to Mordecai. This would have made known her desire to have Mordecai elevated to the position Haman formerly held. When the king took off the ring (the seal of designated authority) and gave it to Mordecai, that action indicated the king's concurrence.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  A. The frustration of the plot
    4. The hanging of Haman (7:1-10)
      a. The request of Esther for her people (7:1-4)
      b. The exposure of Haman (7:5-6)
      c. The plea of Haman (7:7)
      d. The demise of Haman (7:8-10)
  B. The dissolve of the plot
    1. The elevation of Mordecai (8:1-2)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the king promise Esther when he encouraged her to make her request of him?

2. Why do you think Esther did not verbalize her request to the king at the first banquet she held for him and Haman?

3. What character traits in Esther do you most admire? What are some steps you could take to develop those traits in your own life?

CONCLUSION

Are we willing to step out for God even though there may be personal risk involved in doing so? Through our faith and actions, God's purposes will be forwarded.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 8:3-17

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." (Esther 8:16-17)

The words of our focus verses describing the feelings of the Jews when they heard of King Ahaseurus' second decree made me think of a story my aunt told about an event in our family history many years ago. During World War II, my grandparents purchased a new home on 40th Avenue in the Hawthorne district of Portland. At the time, my aunt and her older sister were both still living at home with their parents. My grandparents also had four sons: one working in the shipyards, and the other three serving overseas in the military. Naturally, the war was an ever-present weight upon the minds of all the family.

Prior to their move, the family had lived in a house on Burnside Street, and increasing traffic made the area seem quite noisy, so they were happy to move. They assumed that since 40th Avenue was not a through street and was in a residential area, the neighborhood would be quiet. On moving day the family was busy from morning until night transporting their belongings and unpacking a few necessities. Late in the evening, they all four fell into their beds exhausted. Just a few hours later, however, loud shouts and horns honking in the street awakened them. What was happening? This certainly was not the quiet neighborhood they had expected!

Grandpa hurriedly got dressed and went out to see what was going on. After a few minutes, he came back in with a smile on his face. The commotion that awakened them was a celebration! Word had just come of the Allies' formal acceptance of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender. The date was May 8, 1945, and Portland was joining the rest of the nation in rejoicing!

No doubt those who participated in the exuberant celebration of V.E. Day back in May of 1945 felt many of the same emotions experienced by the Jews in today's text, who were rejoicing after a critical victory. God had miraculously delivered them from the murderous scheme of Haman, whose hatred of the Jews in general, and Mordecai in particular, had inspired an evil plot to have all the Jews in the kingdom killed. Now that plot had backfired, and Haman had ended up receiving the punishment he had designed for Mordecai. At the same time, the Jews were given the right to defend themselves against the irrevocable edict Haman had instigated.

When we read our focus verses against that backdrop, we can sense the tremendous relief the Jews felt at their deliverance. Gone was the foreboding that had hung over them like a dark cloud since the evil decree had gone out against them. In its place were relief and thanksgiving—or, as the writer of the Book of Esther expressed it, "Light, and gladness, and joy, and honour." What a victory God had given them!

Today, are you looking to God for a victory over some attack of the enemy, or the answer to some specific prayer? Scripture tells us that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Remember, we can trust God and depend upon Him and His promises. He did not fail the Jews of Esther's day, and He will bring us through to victory as well. When He does, we will experience joy like that of the Jews on the memorable day recorded in our text.

In the long term, consider how we will feel when we make Heaven. Satan's opposition will be over and our victory will be complete. We do not know exactly what that will be like, but we can be sure it will be better than any victory here on earth. Imagine for a moment the light, gladness, joy, and honor we will feel when we see Jesus face to face. What a blessed hope!

BACKGROUND

Today's text centers on the second decree of King Ahasuerus. According to the law of the Medes and Persians, the first decree was irrevocable and could not be set aside, so the king issued this second decree to allow the doomed Jews to defend themselves if they were attacked. In effect, this nullified the initial decree.

The king's second decree came about when Esther once again went before the king, and once again the golden scepter was extended to her—an indication that she was accepted into the king's presence. When Esther proposed that a second decree be written, verse 5 records that the thing seemed "right" before the king. The word translated "right" comes from a root word meaning "straight" and implies something that is advisable, proper, or advantageous.

The king's subsequent proclamation was written under the supervision of Mordecai (see verse 9) and then dispatched throughout the kingdom "by posts on

horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries." Bible scholars state this would have been the fastest possible means of spreading news of the second decree.

The final verse of today's text states that "many of the people of the land became Jews [proselytes to the Jewish faith]; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (verse 17). The word *fear* in this verse is translated from a Hebrew word meaning "sudden alarm."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  B. The dissolve of the plot
    2. The revocation of Haman's edict (8:3-17)
      a. The second request of Esther (8:3-8)
      b. The proclamation of the king (8:9-14)
      c. The joy of the Jews (8:15-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was Esther's request this time when she appeared before the king?

2. What might have been some of the emotions Esther felt as she approached the king again on behalf of her people?

3. What are some ways you can prepare yourself to face a serious trial of your faith?

CONCLUSION

God did not fail the Jews of Esther's day, and He will not fail us. He still blesses His people with answers to urgent and believing prayer. And when He does, we will experience many of the same emotions the Jews felt when God resolved the life-threatening situation facing them.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 9:1-16

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them." (Esther 9:3)

God is able to send help in situations that look impossible or threaten His children, whether it be on a national or an individual level. Deanna and her friend Jane had a personal experience that illustrates this. They had been visiting Christian believers in India for a number of weeks, and were leaving on the weekend of the biggest Hindu festival of the year. Thousands of people were at the airport.

Jane had become extremely ill during the trip and was in a wheelchair. After the two women had been at the airport a number of hours trying to make boarding arrangements, airline officials told them they would not be able to leave until the next day. To add to the problem, they had five big pieces of luggage, and no hotels in the vicinity had vacancies.

Deanna gathered their things and moved Jane away from the ticket counter. Silently, she prayed, "Lord, we need help now. You are all we have. We don't know anyone in this city. You have to take care of us." Even before she finished praying, a man walked over and asked, "Are you in need of help?" As experienced travelers, the ladies were wary of strangers, but Deanna prayed in her heart again, "Lord, I asked for help, and this man has come, so I'm trusting this is of You."

The man told them of a place that had one vacant room but was an hour away by bus. Deanna wondered how she could get Jane and their luggage onto a bus, but the man said, "Madam, would you please trust me and let me help?" With another prayer in her heart, she agreed. As they walked toward the bus, the man asked why they were in India. She said, "I am telling every person I possibly can that Jesus saves, sanctifies, and fills people with the Holy Ghost. He heals our bodies and gives us eternal life to look forward to. He's everything to me." A big smile broke out on the man's face, and he said that although he had been raised Hindu, someone had told him Jesus saves and he became a Christian. He had taken the Christian name of Jonah.

The bus was plush and had seats for everyone, which is unusual for that area. The place Jonah sent them to had a nice, clean room. The next day they went early to the airport, and as they arrived, there was Jonah. At the ticket counter, they were told that even though Jane had medical documents, she could not board a plane unless she had received a specific test. They were put in a separate area to wait, and then a doctor, a nurse, and the head airline staff all came at once. Jonah told Deanna and Jane to stay seated, and he began to talk with these people. The ladies do not know the details, but shortly they were allowed on the airplane without any additional testing. God had intervened and used Jonah to help them!

The experience of these two women reminds us that God can still turn circumstances around and do what is impossible. In our text today, the plight of the Jews was more widespread and desperate than the situation Deanna and Jane faced, but the same God worked in both instances. Our focus verse tells us that the rulers and officers helped the Jews, but we know God was the source of that help. When we face difficulties, we can turn to Him, and He can do anything!

BACKGROUND

In today's text, the momentous date had arrived. By a decree of the king, the Persian people had been authorized to kill all Jews, and once a decree had been given, Persian law prohibited changing it. However, the additional ruling that followed Esther's entreaty to the king gave the Jews the opportunity to fight back against their enemies.

The objective of Haman's plot had been to annihilate the Jews. Therefore, the Jews' resistance was in self-defense, as attested to by several indicators. Verse 2 says the Jews laid their hands "on such as sought their hurt," and they did not take any spoil or prey from their enemies (verses 10, 15, and 16) even though this was allowed by the king's decree (Esther 8:11).

Mordecai had continued to gain honor in the kingdom and by this time was second under the king. Consequently, the officers of the empire sided with the Jews, rather than against them, out of fear of Mordecai (see verse 3).

Shushan, also called Susa, was the site of the winter palace for the Persian ruler. Today the city is called Shush and is located in Iran, and in the 1970s, archaeological findings from the time of Esther were discovered there. The city had two sections that were separated by a canal. The upper city on the west side included a fortress, while the lower city on the east side was not fortified. Verse 6 says that five hundred

men were destroyed in Shushan on the thirteenth day of Adar, and scholars believe this was in the upper city. Haman's ten sons were included in this number.

When the king gave Esther opportunity for an additional request (verse 12), she asked that the Jews be given another day to fight their enemies and that Haman's sons be hanged, although they were already dead. It is thought this second day of fighting may have taken place in the lower town. While no reason is given for Esther's request regarding Haman's sons, perhaps they were leaders of those who were vengeful over Haman's demotion and death, or maybe the Jews felt that hanging them would serve as a warning to others.

Clearly, after understanding that a decree had been made to wipe them out, the Jews were anxious to secure and prolong their safety, and by God's power they were able to accomplish that.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  B. The dissolve of the plot
    3. The defense of the Jews (9:1-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why were many people in the kingdom fearful of the Jews?

2. Why do you think some people still fought against the Jews even though the general opinion had changed?

3. What impossible circumstances has God changed in your life or the lives of your family members?

CONCLUSION

Are you facing an "impossible" situation today? Look to God, because He will help — sometimes in ways that amaze us.

NOTES

DAYBREAK

Esther 9:17 through 10:3

DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

"As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor." (Esther 9:22)

Have you ever experienced a situation when desperate sorrow was transformed in a moment of time to unspeakable joy? Kim Abernethy, a young missionary who served with her husband Jeff at a remote mission compound in Liberia, had that happen to her.

In late March of 1990, just prior to the rebel uprising that ravaged Liberia, Jeff and Kim and the other missionaries in their area were notified by the American Embassy that Charles Taylor's rebel forces, armed with guns and machetes, were in their vicinity and were planning an attempt to commandeer the mission compound. The missionaries were ordered to leave the area immediately, as the situation was so inflammatory that no one knew what would happen next.

Since Kim was seven months pregnant, she and her two little girls were evacuated by plane just forty-five minutes after the notification from the embassy. Arrangements were made for Jeff to load up important mission files and a few necessities, and then drive their beige Isuzu Trooper the one hundred miles to the capital city of Monrovia, where he would reconnect with his family. He would also take with him as many as possible of the Liberian Christians, to remove them from the danger zone.

Kim and her girls arrived safely in Monrovia and settled into an apartment with some other missionary families to await Jeff's arrival. However, that evening as the missionaries were eating a simple meal together, a couple of men from the Peace Corps came in. The men talked quietly to one of the missionaries, and after a few moments, that missionary came to Kim with a grave face and asked her to step away from the group. The news he gave her was devastating. Earlier that afternoon, the Peace Corps men had traveled the road that Jeff was to take between the mission station and Monrovia, and had come upon a terrible sight—a beige Isuzu Trooper askew by the side of the road, riddled with bullets. Everyone inside and outside the vehicle was dead. Due to the extreme danger, the Peace Corps men had been unable to stop and investigate further.

Kim felt like her heart would explode. Desperately calling on God for grace and composure, she managed to put her little girls to bed, and then called their families in the United States, not divulging details but asking them to pray for Jeff's safety. Through the long night hours, she sat in the small bedroom beside her sleeping girls, claiming God's promises in order to fight the fears that threatened to overwhelm her. Almost crumbling under the stark reality of what she might face the next day, she prayed for God's help.

Early in the morning, as the sun began peeping over the horizon, she heard noises outside . . . the beep, beep, beep of a horn and the sound of a vehicle approaching. Could it be news? She hurried outside, and to her joy saw her husband's Trooper coming through the gate—with no bullet holes!

She later wrote, "I remember being held back until the vehicle stopped, but as soon as Jeff stepped out of the car, I tackled him . . . crying, blubbering, talking almost incoherently. All the pent up fears and anguish of the past hours released in an array of overpowering emotions."[1] Right there, the missionaries gathered around the couple and joined in prayers of rejoicing, thanking God for His divine protection of Jeff and the other Christians with him, and praying for the families who had lost loved ones in that identical Isuzu Trooper.

Our focus verse today speaks of a time when the Jews of Persia celebrated a similar experience of sorrow turning to joy, and mourning to a good day. They had been miraculously delivered from the murderous plot of Haman, and as a result, an official feast of rejoicing was proclaimed.

As Christians, we may never encounter a time of personal crisis as dramatic as the captive Jews faced in Persia, or like Kim and Jeff faced in Liberia. However, we will encounter circumstances that try our patience, ruin our plans, and take us in unexpected directions. Still, we must trust God to provide the safety, protection, and provision we need. He may not always work in the way that we hope or assume is best, but we can be certain that He will never fail us. And one day, all challenges will be over and we will rejoice forever around His Throne!

BACKGROUND

Today's text describes Mordecai's institution of the annual Feast of Purim in celebration of the great deliverance of the Jewish people (verse 17-32 of chapter 9), and the continued advancement of Mordecai in the Persian Empire (chapter 10).

Esther had been faithful in what Mordecai had instructed her to do, and as a result, God delivered her and her people from those who purposed harm against them. After the fighting ended, the Jews celebrated with feasting and merriment. Mordecai recorded all of these events and sent dispatches throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, instructing the Jews to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar (on the Jewish calendar) as a holiday.

Esther 9:17 describes the origin of the festival now known as Purim. The name is the plural form of the word *pur* which means "lot," alluding to the fact that Haman had cast lots to determine the date when the extermination of the Jews would take place (see Esther 3:7).

Verses 29-32 point to a second official proclamation made by Mordecai, which instructed the Jews to include a time of fasting and mourning during the annual observance of the festival. These verses also add Queen Esther's authority to the establishment of the decree.

To this day, Jews continue to celebrate Purim for two days in the Jewish month Adar. The Jewish calendar runs on a lunar cycle rather than the Gregorian calendar used by most of the world; on the Gregorian calendar, this holiday typically falls during February or March.

Purim is said to be the most joyous day of the Jewish year, and is loved by young and old. During the celebration, the entire Book of Esther is read aloud, plays are performed, gifts are given, and children dress up in a variety of costumes, including those depicting Esther, Mordecai, and even Haman. A typical cookie served during the festivities is called "hamantaschen" (meaning "Haman's pockets"), and they are supposedly shaped like either Haman's hat or ears.

In conclusion, the Book of Esther reinforces a principle attached to God's covenant with the Jewish people that has never been rescinded: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. The deliverance of the Jews
  C. The sequel to the plot (9:17—10:3)
    1. The institution of the feast of Purim (9:17-32)
      a. The joy of the Jews (9:17-19)
      b. The origin and meaning of Purim (9:20-28)
      c. The establishment of Purim (9:29-32)
    2. The greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How many days did Mordecai tell the Jews to celebrate the Feast of Gladness?

2. According to Esther 10:3, why was Mordecai held in such high esteem in the kingdom?

3. The Jews were instructed to never let the account of their deliverance fade from their memory nor that of their descendants. Applying this principle to our lives, what spiritual blessings and benefits should we preserve in our memories and pass on to our descendants?

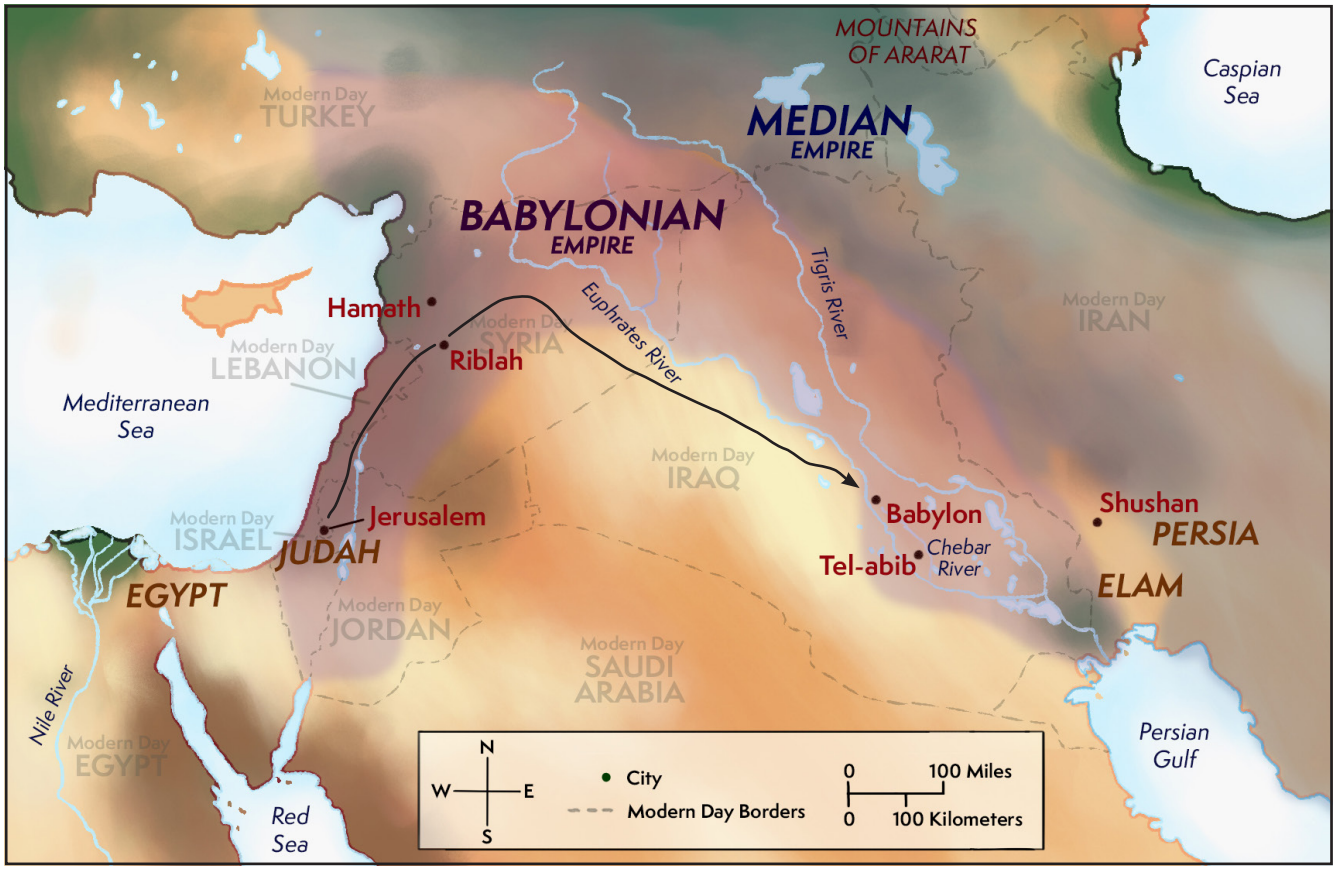
CONCLUSION

When we go to God in prayer with an urgent need, God always hears our petition. In His perfect way and timing, His answer will come.

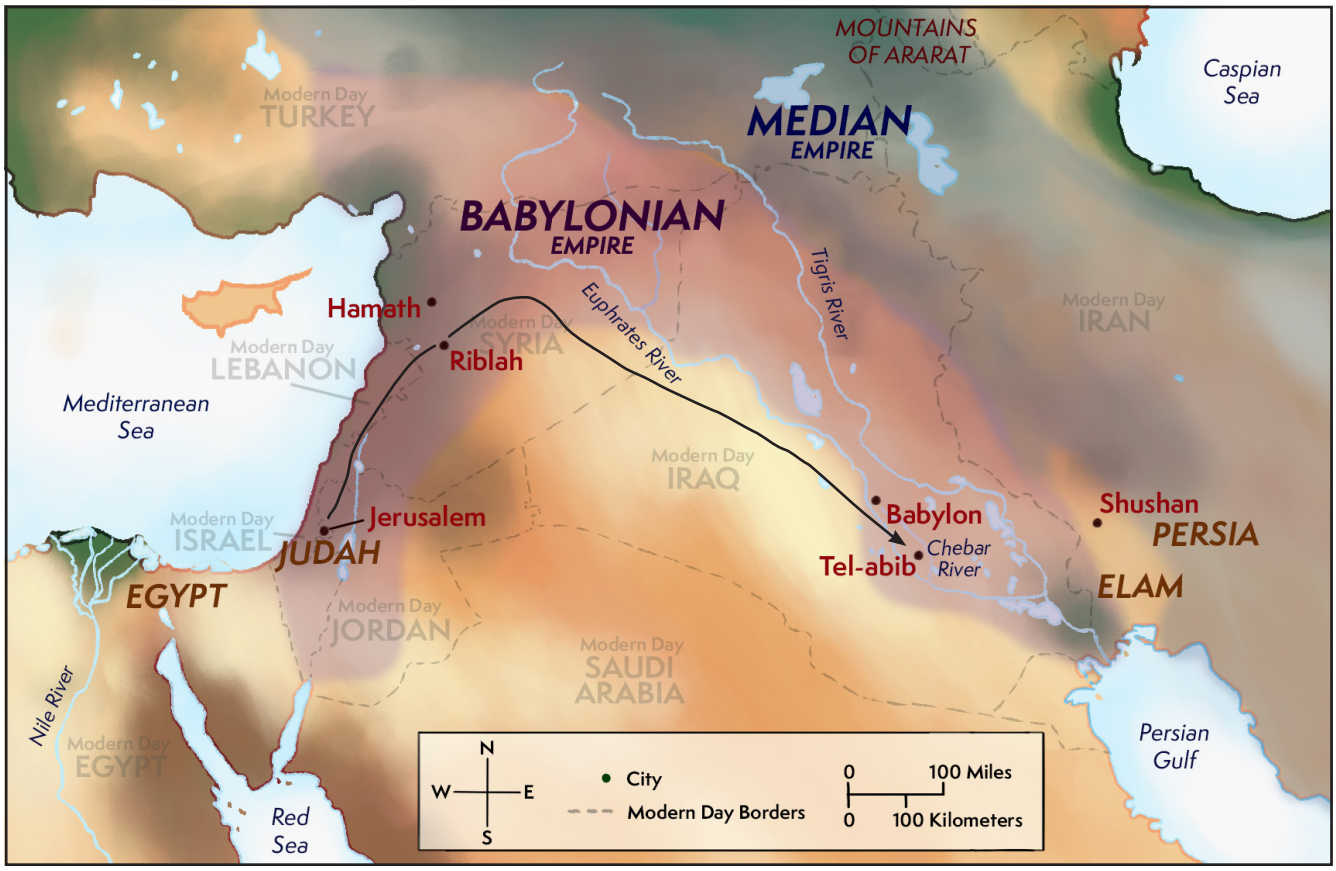
NOTES

1. Kim Abernethy, *In This Place: Cultural and Spiritual Collisions Refine the Heart of a Young Missionary in Liberia, West Africa*, (USA: In Every Place Publishing, 2011).

Daniel Taken Captive with the 1st Group of Judean Exiles



Ezekiel Taken Captive with the 2nd Group of Judean Exiles



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Judah's Enemies in the Times of Ezekiel and Obadiah

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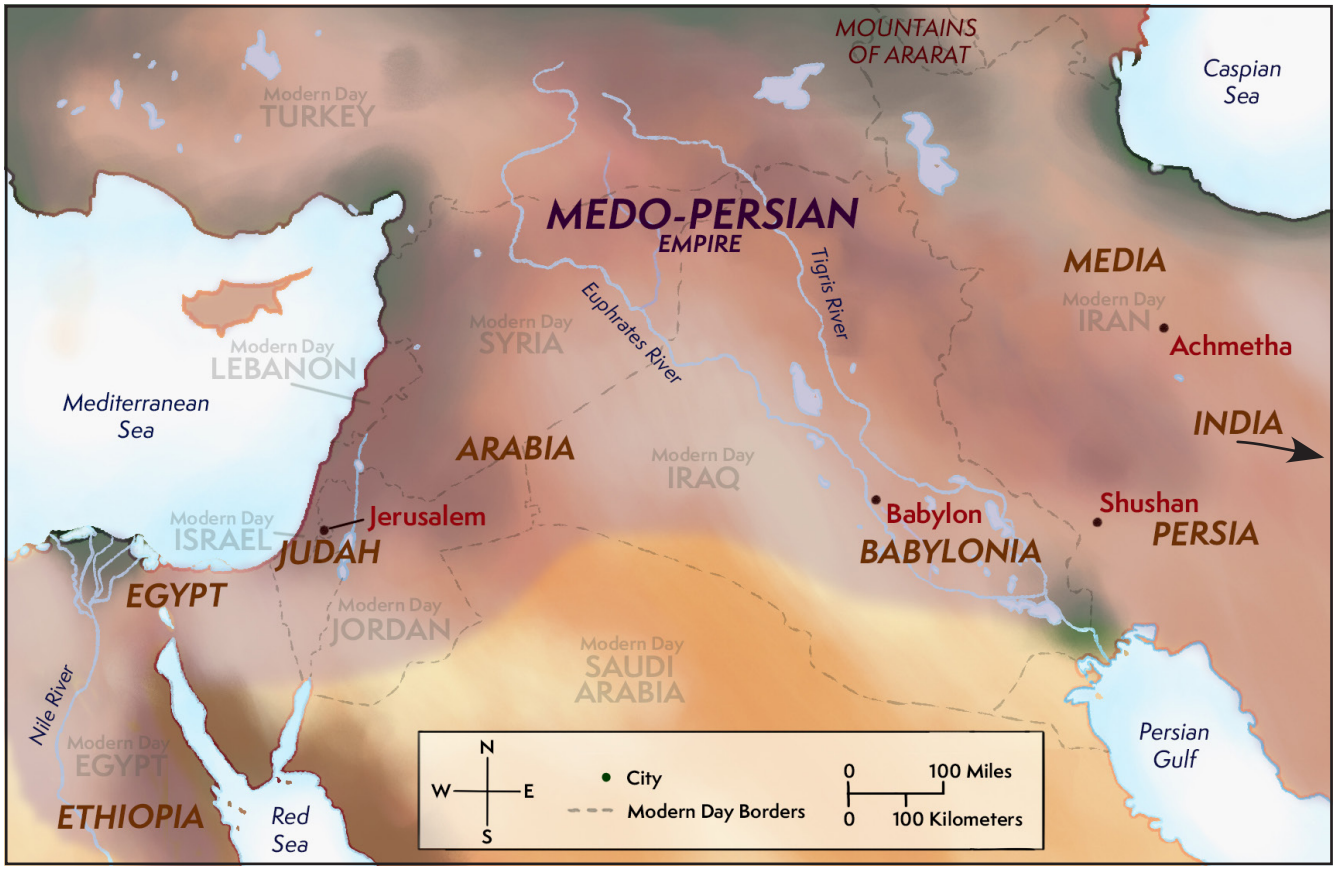
The Medo-Persian Empire in Esther's Time



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