

PLAIN TALK ON

Ezekiel

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Chapter 1

A Vision Of God

Ezekiel was a prophet among the Jews in the closing period of that nation's life. The Bible records the history of God dealing with His chosen people.

Sometime after the flood God called Abraham to serve Him, that through Abraham God could bring blessing to all men. God dealt with the family of Abraham; not everyone, Isaac but not Ishmael, Jacob but not Esau.

To show that blessing came to the one who believed in God, obeyed God, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and his family multiplied to become the Hebrews during about four hundred years in Egypt. The Hebrews were led out of Egypt by Moses, and into Canaan by Joshua. In time they developed as a kingdom. David was their greatest king, though they reached their peak in glory under Solomon. Shortly thereafter they were divided into two nations: ten tribes to the north to be known as Israel, and two tribes to the south to be known as Judah.

In time Assyria invaded Palestine. They destroyed Israel, the northern nation, and put Judah under bondage. Then Babylon overcame Assyria and overran Palestine. In keeping with their policy to consolidate the empire by breaking up local communities, so that they might break up local loyalties, they took some of the Jews out of Jerusalem and settled them elsewhere in the land of Mesopotamia, where these Jews lived as captives. Thus the Jews were separated under the heavy hand of martial law. This was a time of deep spiritual gloom in Israel.

According to their Scriptures and to their traditions, they were God's chosen people. Yet their land had been conquered by Babylon, to whom they paid tribute, and some of these people had been carried away as captives. In Jerusalem where Jeremiah was preaching the people were skeptical and cynical. They did not know whether it was worthwhile to believe in God. Under their captors in Mesopotamia the people were discouraged in hardhearted despair. There was widespread common doubt that God would or could help them. By common consent the people felt that God had failed in His promises, and had let them down.

Ezekiel's ministry was to preach to these captives. He had to face this despair, and this attitude of accusing God of failure to carry out His promises. In the opening chapter of his prophecy we find the record of how Ezekiel was prepared for this difficult task. It would be natural to think that a basic preparation would be a comprehensive thorough grasp of the political, social, economic situation.

Here we find that the first element in preparation was a vision of the glory of God. God would be the source of whatever blessing Israel would ever have. Their hope would not be based on the weakness of Babylon nor the strength of Israel as a military might, but on the power of the living God. We read:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1).

A vision is not the thing in itself, but it is the representation of that thing. And so we read on:

And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And everyone had four faces, and everyone had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went everyone straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched

upward; two wings of everyone were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went everyone straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning (Ezekiel 1:4-14).

This is not to be pictured. No artist could draw a picture of this and yet there are some aspects that can be noted.

Note that word in the very beginning – "a whirlwind." It would be common for us to say "a tornado." "Four living creatures." We can understand that: they were created beings, and they were alive. "The likeness of a man." That comes closer to our understanding. "Four faces": that is strange. We do not think about that with any person. We think of one face. These had four faces. "Four wings." Then we notice "they went everyone straight forward." Well that is a simple line. We can follow that.

"The face of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle" those four representations we have elsewhere in Scripture. "Whither the spirit was to go, they went." Evidently these beings were obedient. "They turned not when they went." They went directly. In this vision we may note the ways of God. One thing that comes to us at once, "the ways of God are past finding out." And while we will get an impression as we read it, I doubt very much that we will get any clear picture of what we read.

However "in the likeness of a man" can be understood by human beings. Like a mountain peak there are four sides, four faces, each has a distinct character, man, lion, ox, eagle. Yet all such creatures were one being. As we think of the New Testament where we have the four Gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same thought will come to us: four different aspects of one truth, like four sides of the same house.

These creatures were under control, "whither the spirit was to go, they went." They did not deviate, they went straight forward. They were prompt to act as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

This is a most revealing insight into the nature of God. We cannot draw a picture of it, it does not all come together, but we will get the impression that Almighty God is accomplishing things in an amazing way.

The vision then unfolded with even more insight. In verses 15-23 you have the description of the operation of the creatures; activities, wheels within wheels, in a way that is baffling, yet some aspects can be recognized.

"Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go." Obviously they were under control.

Then again we read that Ezekiel reported that he heard a great noise, "as the voice of the Almighty." Then in verses 26-28 Ezekiel saw above the firmament the likeness of a throne. And the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake (Ezekiel 1:28).

This vision will be referred to a number of times in the prophecy of Ezekiel. It was basic to Ezekiel's message. While the appearance is inconceivable, there are a number of aspects that are meaningful. We can think for instance, and notice that the glory of God ineffable. No one can really grasp it. The ways of God are past finding out. Wheels within wheels. The activities of God control, everyone went straight forward. The throne of God is over all.

Then we read that the one on the throne is like a man. This can be understood. All of this came to Ezekiel at the very beginning before he ever started out with his ministry. He was to have to in mind no matter what he was going to say, that this is the God whom he was serving. This is the God who was controlling the Israel. And it was in the name of this God that Ezekiel was going to preach.

Chapter 2

Ezekiel To Preach To The Captives

In the latter days of the natural history of Israel most of the people were in Judah, in and around Jerusalem, under the dominion of Babylon to whom they paid tribute. Jeremiah was their prophet in Jerusalem at this time. Some of the people had been taken as captives into Mesopotamia by the river Chebar. It was to them that Ezekiel was sent.

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious (Ezekiel 2:1- 7).

These are the words that were given to this man Ezekiel. They are plain words with unmistakable meaning.

While I was reading this I could not help but think to myself that whether we realize it or not, any parent, any father or any mother, seeking to share ideas with their children, especially from the point of view of directing them, will face a situation that is very similar to the one that Ezekiel faced here. The natural heart is enmity against the law of God, is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. I am sure that different children will act in different ways but many and many a time a parent will feel that the words that he or she is speaking to this child oftentimes just seem to go right over them, to be entirely ignored.

Ezekiel was to preach to the children of Israel who were a rebellious nation that had rebelled against God. This shows the remarkable grace of God. Israel deserved to be ignored. God could have turned His back on them and just let them die in their own sins. They could properly have been left to their own fate, but God in mercy sent them this prophet.

Ezekiel's message was to set before them the true word of God, "Thus saith the Lord." Even if the people did not obey God's word, they would know that there had been a true prophet of God among them. This would give them the privilege of repenting, and turning to God. Many might not turn to God, but some would. And for these God would send His prophet to these disobedient people. Ezekiel was warned not to be intimidated by the words nor by the looks of the rebellious people of Israel. He was not to be turned aside even by persecution at their hands. He was to preach the message given to him by God.

In a vision Ezekiel saw a hand stretched out to him holding a roll and "it was written within and without" on both sides and "there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." Ezekiel was told to eat the roll and then "go speak unto the house of Israel." And so Ezekiel records:

So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee (Ezekiel 3:2-3).

Here we have the source of the message that Ezekiel was to bring. The truth and the validity of his message would not depend on Ezekiel's understanding of the times in which he lived. Almighty God had known and judged the people of Israel, and now He wanted them to hear His judgment. He would reveal His word to Ezekiel in Ezekiel's own inner consciousness, and then He wanted Ezekiel to tell Israel

exactly how God felt about them and their conduct.

So that Ezekiel should not misunderstand the deliberate purpose of God's intention, Ezekiel was plainly told what he could expect in response to his message. God told him that if he had been sent to a foreign people they would have listened, but Ezekiel was to preach to Israel even though God knew they would not listen.

And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are imprudent and hardhearted (Ezekiel 3:4-7).

That is the way it was put. Ezekiel was told exactly what he would face, and he was to take a message to those people.

Ezekiel was then told how God would prepare him for his thankless, unsuccessful task.

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. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (Ezekiel 3:8-11).

Their faces were hard but God made Ezekiel's face harder. Their foreheads were hard, but God made Ezekiel's forehead as an adamant harder than flint. Obviously there would be confrontation, even collision.

Ezekiel was not to shrink from the battle. This is a stirring line of thought. So far as you and I are concerned, we can take it very soberly to heart. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, living in this world and giving our testimony in our day and time, we will many many times be confronted by people that are actually hostile, they are actually opposed to what we are doing, but we are to continue doing it. The very presenting of the truth is part of God's plan.

When this revelation had been made, Ezekiel was given another look at the vision of the glory of God, but Ezekiel was burdened by the prospect of having such a gloomy message. He would have no doubt that this was the Word of God.

Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing (Ezekiel 3:12-13).

All of this had been heard by and the glory of God by the river in his mind that the revelation pleasant experience.

So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me (Ezekiel 3:14).

Many and many a time there is a parent, a mother or a father, that has to feel a bitterness in soul. They told the best they knew the truth, they tried to be fair, they tried to be straight in what they had to say, and yet all they met was opposition.

Here was Ezekiel. He could not escape responsibility because he writes "the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." This was the preparation of the prophet who was to bring God's message to the

demoralized Jews who were despondent in their obvious lack of blessing. Their glorious past seemed now so far away. The promises of God seemed so dim. They were full of doubt as to God's interest in them, and as to His ability to help. Their plight seemed to them to be evidence that their faith had no real hope of any help from God. They seemed to be obliged to think that the God of Abraham, the God of David, had either forsaken them or that He could not really help them. But it was to these discouraged, despondent, doubting people that God sent His prophet. And you and I are given our commission to quietly, steadily, go straightforward with our testimony. We will tell the people who will not listen, we will tell it to people who despise us for doing it, we will run into all kinds of problems, but the Lord will want us to say His Word, "Thus saith the Lord."

Chapter 3

Ezekiel Warned To Preach The Truth

Preaching to God's own people presents a special problem to any preacher. It is so easy for God's people to feel that they are now free to live and act as they will since they are now reconciled to God. It is natural for any person who has not accepted Christ as Savior to feel the weight of his own sin. For some this will be a heavy burden, but for some it may be very light. When a person has a dim view of God he will have a dim view of sin. The real significance of sin is not based upon what I think about it, but upon how it appears to God. This is part of the message of the Word of God. It is so easy for the natural man to think that the consequences of sin are simply the effect that such conduct will have upon the sinner himself.

But such a view completely ignores the guilt aspect before God. When the parent tells the child, "Do not walk in the water," and it follows that the child does walk in the water; the child does not only have wet shoes and wet stockings, but the child has disobeyed the expressed command of the parent. This calls for dry stockings and dry shoes, but also calls for treatment about disobedience. The chastisement for disobedience may be much more severe than getting dry socks and dry shoes. So it follows that for souls who are not conscious of God, who have no sense of responsibility to their Creator and no consciousness of any Judge, the proper message to them will present the truth of creation, of the law of God, of the judgment of God who will destroy the disobedient. And only when there is a sense of disobedience, of sin against God, can the Gospel mean anything.

For the repentant soul who confesses his sin, it is good news to hear that God in His grace has provided a way of salvation. One of the most wonderful words that the human heart can ever hear,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

But the case of the reconciled believer is different. Having confessed his sin and having accepted God's offer of salvation, he has been reconciled to God. He can call God his Father and he can count on the blessing of God. The relationship to God is very similar to the marriage relationship. The believer is a member of the Bride of Christ and the Lord is the Bridegroom. This implies the requirement of faithfulness on the part of the bride. The believer turns to Christ not just once, but once for all.

The sad fact is that the bride may become unfaithful. The consciousness of God may become dim. The commitment to belong to God and to Him alone, may become relaxed and taken for granted. Other ideas of conduct in living may seem more promising, more interesting. Thoughts of heaven and of fellowship in communion with the Lord may become more vague. Selfish interest and self-indulgent activities may become more normally routine. The sense of sin may fade while self-complacency, pride and personal vanity may become the inspiration and the guidance for daily living. It is just that way.

The preacher who is sent to preach to people who count themselves as belonging to God needs a definite, clear call from God as to his responsibility for he has to stand in front of those people and challenge them about their own faithfulness. He has that message to take, which is from God a judgment upon them. We can learn much more by noting how Ezekiel was prepared.

Then I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days (Ezekiel 3:15).

Did you get that? "I sat where they sat." This would enable the preacher to get a personal feeling of the situation. This is not that the preacher looked at it, and thought their conduct was bad. This is not that the preacher studied the whole circumstances, and thought that their conduct was just natural. No, this is not

what the preacher thought at all. This means the preacher sat where they sat. He looked through their eyes and saw what they saw. He had in mind what they had in their minds. He felt the total situation just as it was. This would enable the preacher to get a personal feeling of their situation.

If I were talking to preachers right now I would tell them I could not think of a better thing to do. When I became a pastor, that was a new thing for me. I had not been born to be that. I had everything to learn about it. And I can remember how I used to go into the church sanctuary on a weekday, and I would think of a certain man in my congregation. I would go down and remember the pew he sat in, and I would sit in his pew. And then while I was sitting there and putting myself in his place, listening to that man up there in the pulpit, I would go over what that man in the pulpit was going to say, my sermon. I would think "How is it going to affect this man?" And after I had done that for awhile in prayer, I would get up and move to another part of the sanctuary of the auditorium and sit where some woman sat. Now I could not quite feel exactly how a woman would feel but I knew how a human soul would feel and I would go over the sermon thinking how is it going to affect that woman.

I did not realize then that I was actually following in the very footsteps of this prophet Ezekiel who was sent to these people. He was to be there and sit where they sat. But this enabled the preacher to get a personal feel of the situation. Then I read further: "And I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days." Just get that idea! He was astonished among them for seven days. We are not told specifically what Ezekiel noted, what he saw, but we are told that he was astonished. Then we can note with interest what he was commissioned to preach to them.

We may also take note that Ezekiel was not directed to do research into society as a whole. He sat where his people sat, looked at what they looked at, and noted what they noted. What he saw astonished him. In seven days he would have a good chance to feel the frame of mind that prevailed among those people. When we read that he was astonished, we have a basis to understand that he saw what surprised him. What that might have been is suggested by the instructions immediately following.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me (Ezekiel 3:17).

And so Ezekiel is called upon to act like a watchman. The very concept of watchman suggests a state of siege in a time of war, an enemy coming up to the city, hostile forces seeking to spoil it, to despoil it, to ransack it. It would call for alert attention on the part of the defenders. Apparently there was that which threatened the life and the welfare of the people of God. The duty of the watchman would be to alert the people to the danger.

Then there follows a simple description of two situations where warning was to be given. First (3:18) in the case of a wicked man he was to be warned that because of his iniquity "Thou shalt surely die." Then if he continued in his iniquity he would surely die. But the watchman would be clear of any blame. However if the watchman did not warn the wicked, the wicked man would die, even if he had not been warned, but the watchman would be to blame. Also if a righteous man turned from his righteousness (3:21) he was to be warned that if he sinned he would die. But if the watchman warned him and then he persisted in his sin, that righteous man would die because of his sin but the watchman would be cleared. But if the watchman did not warn him, that righteous man who had sinned would die in his sin but the watchman would have to answer for that lost soul. This is very sobering. God's people are prone to sin, and the preacher is to warn them of the dire consequences of sin.

Ezekiel was then taken to his house and told to stay there.

And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house (Ezekiel 3:26).

In other words Ezekiel was not to start preaching immediately. He was told "Wait." And he was sent home. Keep quiet and wait. But when God gave him a message he was to speak. God told him,

But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 3:27).

Whether they will listen or not, whether they will obey or not, the preacher is to tell them. This is the commission that was given to the man who was going to preach to God's people.

Chapter 4

Ezekiel Is Shown The Fate Of Jerusalem

While Ezekiel was preaching to the Jews who had been taken as captives away from Jerusalem, he was confronted by general doubt and skepticism about God and His promises. All the Jews knew about the promise to Abraham and the promise to David: and they could not understand their nation being conquered by the Babylonians, and their own condition of captivity. They were discouraged in seeking to trust God and despondent about their own fate. If God were trustworthy He should never have allowed the success of Babylon, nor should He ever have allowed Babylon to move them out of Jerusalem as captives.

In chapters 4 and 5 in the book of Ezekiel, we have the record of how God showed Ezekiel what was yet to happen to Jerusalem in the will of God. At this time Jerusalem was the great capital city, still standing intact as it had been built. In it stood the glorious temple that had been built by Solomon. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were resting comfortably amid the evidences out of the past of the mighty works that had featured their golden day. It would be easy for them to feel confident that nothing could finally hurt them, but now Ezekiel who was with the captives in Mesopotamia was to be shown from God the truth of the whole situation.

Even as Christ Jesus often used parables to illustrate His message, so that all could understand, so God used practical demonstrations to make His message clear to Ezekiel.

Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray 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. Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:1-3).

So in this way Ezekiel had been told to build this model demonstration of Jerusalem and set himself as it were the besieging force to try and take the city. Then he was told:

Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:4-5).

This was to be one day for each year of Israel's history. After that he was to lie on his right side for forty days and "thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year." You know that makes a total of four hundred and thirty days, more than a year in time. This is hard to comprehend. Think about it for a moment. He was to lie in front of this model of Jerusalem for more than a year and then turn over on his right side and lie that way for more than a month. What a training schedule for a preacher and yet how profound! Ezekiel was to meditate for more than a year on the sins of Israel and Jerusalem.

But there was more. Ezekiel was to take a whole menu of items of food and prepare it for eating in a way that meant that it was polluted. You can read about this in Ezekiel 14:9-12. Ezekiel shrank from this distasteful assignment, protesting that he had never defiled himself by eating unclean food. You know how particular a strict Jew would be about eating kosher food. This Ezekiel had done. And now the very way this food was to be prepared it would not even be clean. But God insisted that he do this as a sign to the people of the fate that would fall upon Jerusalem.

In the next chapter Ezekiel was to make another practical demonstration.

And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair, Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; for thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

This sounds strange to us but just think of what it meant to this man. After having spent more than a year in which he was meditating upon the sins of Israel for three hundred and ninety days and then turning on his right side and meditating upon the sins of Judah for forty days, each day counting a year in their history, and now he was to cut his hair, shave his head and beard and do certain things to the hair as a sign of what God would do to Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was given a message to Jerusalem from God. It was pointed out that whereas Jerusalem had been set up among the nations as a model, they had actually been more wicked than the heathen. Although they had been blessed beyond other nations, they had not been faithful to their trust. Jerusalem had disobeyed God and had actually done worse than the heathen nations round about them. In this same chapter we see that God pronounces His intention to smite Jerusalem. He warns them that He will do exceptional things. "And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations" (Ezekiel 5:9). In this round about way, in this fashion, God said, "I am going to do something I never did before and I will never do again." He makes it plain this is punishment because of all their abominations.

The popular notion that God is always kind, always gentle, seeks to honor the Lord, but actually this notion reveals personal ignorance. God is merciful and kind. His love is tender, tenderer than a woman's love, but God is not mocked. He should not be pictured as a fool. God hates sin anywhere, any time in anybody. He is no respecter of persons. God is long suffering, but He can be provoked. "The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30-31).

Now this was a heavy message to bring to the people, but it would clarify things. This was exactly what Ezekiel was shown to do. Ezekiel had to gird himself up and take courage, and go out and tell this to the people. It would explain what had happened and what was going to happen. Though still standing intact Jerusalem was doomed to destruction. But this would not be because of the superiority of Babylon or the strength of Babylon. This would be because God had come to the limit of His tolerance. This sentence was made very clear.

Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord God; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity (Ezekiel 5:11).

But when God's anger was finished Ezekiel was also told that God would deal in mercy. God would destroy the city and scatter the Jews far and wide, but He would not forsake them. In time He would gather them and bless them. But the next thing that would happen while Ezekiel was there: God would destroy. In Ezekiel 5:14-17 we can see just in so many words exactly how God is going to do it. This was the hard message that this young prophet was to bring to God's people. The captives were to understand that the fall of Jerusalem would not mean that God's arm was shortened, He could not save; but it would mean that God's judgment upon sin was certain and real.

Chapter 5

Ezekiel Is Commissioned To Tell The Leaders What God Will Do

The book of Ezekiel is an authentic record of the ministry of a prophet in the history of Israel. In our study of this book we can learn something of what is involved when a man is called out of the company of God's people to serve as a preacher of God's Word. The truth is that God cares about His people and actually wants to bless them in grace and mercy. "God is holy and of purer eyes than to behold evil." The truth is that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." And furthermore "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Because of this the sentence of death had gone out over all the world. All men are doomed to destruction because of their sin and because of the integrity of the holy God.

But God is righteous and in judgment He remembers mercy. The Son of God was the Lamb of God before the foundation of the world. The great truth of the Gospel is that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Because of what the Son of God has done in giving Himself a ransom for many, God called Abraham to receive the blessing of God as a free gift on condition that Abraham would believe in God and obey Him. This promise was offered to Abraham's seed and through them to all mankind. The children of Israel thus received the promise of God.

Sin was still their common lot and had to be dealt with. God had revealed that by the shedding of blood there is the remission of sin. The sinner could come to God by way of the altar of sacrifice. John the Baptist preached this truth which all the prophets had preached to Israel. When the sinner would repent and confess and forsake his sin and yield himself to obey God, he would be received and forgiven. All this truth was revealed in the ritual of worship centered at the altar in the temple. God called some to be priests to lead the people in their worship practices, and God called some of the prophets to show the people the law of God that they might recognize and confess their sin in repentance as they brought their sacrifices.

But the sinfulness of Israel polluted their worship. They became insincere. With their lips they professed to believe but their hearts were far from God. But God is not mocked. The persistent unbelief in Israel brought the judgment of God. The Bible tells us that the judgment begins at the house of God. God's way of dealing with His disobedient unrepentant people was to bring in pagan enemies who would destroy and despoil Israel. This is a very interesting thing. It spares, as it were, the hand of God from inflicting the punishment. He brings in these pagan hostile people who are against God's people anyway and He lets them prevail and they do the killing and the destroying. Thus Israel's defeat and destruction was not because God was unable to save them, but it was actually the judgment of God because of their sin.

In mercy God sent Ezekiel as a prophet to tell them the truth about their distressing fate. God would allow pagans to destroy Israel but there would be a remnant. A few souls would humbly repent and turn to God, and God would watch over them. He would make a way to save them. These would be saved by the grace of God.

So Ezekiel would preach the unwelcome truth to an unrepentant people. In chapter 6 Ezekiel was commissioned to confront the leaders of Israel and to prophesy against them.

And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 6:3-7).

This is the description of the sentence of judgment that had been passed upon these people.

In all this Scripture there was frequent mention of "the high places." This would refer to the pagan practice of building their altars in high places. There the pagans had built altars to pagan gods. When you and I talk about that now it is a distant word. It refers to something away back in history. We hardly feel that we know what we are talking about. But the principle is very present, very much with us, because an idol is anything less than God to which you give your whole heart and mind and self. When we call them pagan people, we mean people who did not know the God of Abraham, who did not worship God as He is revealed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They did not know that kind of God.

But they knew the God of nature. They knew the God of creation, because "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork." They knew that, but they did not have any understanding of the grace of God of dealing with sin. They did not know about that. And so Israel had their pagan ideas. They had fallen into pagan ways. They had built pagan altars, and they had built pagan places of worship in the high places.

This suggests something today like a minister of the Word of God that bases his ideas of the truth on some theory of evolution, or some pastor who proposes to deal with spiritual problems by psychological or sociological approach. Ezekiel predicted dire destruction with many casualties. But even here in 6:8-10 Ezekiel reveals there will be a remnant who will sincerely repent. We read about them "they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations." There would be some that in the midst of all this pagan influence would realize that they were on the wrong track and they would regret it. Ezekiel was instructed to preach sensationally, predicting dire calamity, and then in a belated recognition of God "they shall know that I am the Lord."

In chapter 7 Ezekiel was given guidance as to the content of his message. The time for a showdown had come. "An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land" (7:2). God was to act without pity.

Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth (Ezekiel 7:8-9).

The ruin and the destruction was to be total.
But again there is mention of a remnant.

But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, everyone for his iniquity (Ezekiel 7:16).

Those of the remnant do not blame anyone else or anything in their plight. They take full responsibility for their distress, accepting their own problems as the day of the wrath of the Lord.

In bringing His judgment to bear upon Israel God will use pagans in His providence. The very pagans that the Israelites sought to imitate would be the very powers who would crush Israel. God would allow this to happen.

Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumor shall be upon rumor, then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 7:24-27).

We cannot help but think to ourselves "What a price to pay for learning the truth by suffering the consequences of one's own foolishness."

Chapter 6

Ezekiel Is Shown The Secret Of Judah's Downfall

After Ezekiel had openly predicted the fate of Israel that they would be destroyed by pagan invaders, God showed Ezekiel the real secret of His judgment.

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the color of amber. And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate, that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy (Ezekiel 8:1-3).

Ezekiel was living at that time in Mesopotamia among the captives. He was at the river Chebar in that area and he was given this vision where he was brought to Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was then told to note the image of jealousy. This is not particularly described but it would appear to be an image of pagan worship that would arouse jealousy in the heart of God. Because this meant that His people were esteeming some other principle, some other ideas, than the revelation of God. Ezekiel was told to note the image of jealousy which was standing at the gate of the altar. This seems to imply that as the worshippers came to the altar to worship God they were conscious of pagan ideas of God. A counterpart of this could be the situation with us today when a person who subscribes to the idea of evolution as a basic principle comes to interpret the Bible in teaching and preaching. You say, "That is not possible." If you know the Bible and if you know anything about evolution, you will say, "That is not possible." That is true, but there are those who do it.

Ezekiel was told "Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations." So in verses 7-12 in his vision Ezekiel was then brought to see a hole in the wall of the court. He was told to dig at this spot, a hole in the wall. Here he saw a door. He was told to go in to the secret chamber. The walls of that chamber were covered with murals depicting aspects of pagan thinking, "every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel." In his vision "there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel" that is the elders, the leaders, "and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shapan" the leader. These people were right in that inner secret chamber. Every man had his censer in his hand and was worshipping. We read "a thick cloud of incense went up."

Thus Ezekiel was given insight into the actual inner thoughts of the elders of Israel as they went through their practices of worship. This is what they were doing, "in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery." Despite their outward participation in the ritual exercises of the temple, this revealed the actual state of their imagination in their consciousness.

In addition to this they adopted an unbelieving attitude toward God. This is what they said, "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." This actually revealed a corruption of their idea of God. They did not deny the existence of God, but they held a perverted view of His operations. They actually dismissed the Lord from having anything to do with the world in which they lived. With minds that were impressed by pagan ideas, and their consciousness being aware of a context of pagan principles, they disposed of the significance of God by holding a false conception of His work as being the truth.

But there was more evidence of spiritual corruption. We read in verses 13 and 14 "Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do." Ezekiel was shown in his vision "there sat women weeping for Tammuz." This seems to refer to an immoral aspect of pagan religious practice. That Jewish women should be given over to a longing for such immorality was another evidence of the widespread corruption and idolatry in the heart of Israel.

But even after this there was yet more for Ezekiel to see. In verses 15 and 16 we read, "Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these." Ezekiel was taken into the inner court of the Lord's house "And, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east." Here were twenty-five men in action. They had their backs turned to the temple of the Lord. They knew the temple of the Lord was there with all that their history told them, and all that their ritual implied, but they were now more impressed with the ideas of worship derived from the pagans who worshipped the sun. You and I might think, "Well who would worship the sun?" Let me ask you this, who would go by the physical processes of the natural world? That would be worshipping the sun.

Ezekiel was then told what God was going to do, because of what had been revealed in the vision.

Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose (Ezekiel 18:17).

That was another aspect of pagan worship.

Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them (Ezekiel 8:18).

The leaders of Israel were actually committing abomination in their worship of God. Now this is something to notice. They went to the temple, they went through the exercises. They did all the things that had been set up to be practised in the name of the Lord, but in their hearts they were conscious of the pagan philosophies and pagan ideas. That is true amongst us right here, just the way it is with us. We have any number of people going into the pulpit to preach. They have the Bible before them and they know what is in the Bible. They have read it. They know it is there. But that is not what they preach about. They preach about something that they have discovered in their understanding of whatever science proposes or natural philosophies of the day.

The leaders of Israel were actually committing abominations in their worship of God. Also "they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger." Not only had they polluted their worship with pagan ideas but they had brought hurt to the people by wrong conduct. So the action of God is plainly described. "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." This was a most sobering vision for Ezekiel.

Just think of this young preacher being face to face with this truth. It is possible to note progression in this revelation. Ezekiel was first shown the image of jealousy. This altar on the outside, this tribute to pagan ideas, an open recognition of the pagan philosophy. He was then shown how the secret thoughts of the elders were actually conscious of the whole context of pagan culture and outlook. He was then shown the longing of the women for participation in pagan immorality. And finally he was shown how the active leaders in worship turned their backs to the temple of the Lord and set their faces to the east as they worshipped the sun.

You cannot help but feel how very close this describes our situation when we have people who undertake to preach and to teach by studying what science will reveal both in the physical sciences and in the social sciences. We will have people who instead of preaching to convert the soul to Christ will actually undertake to describe the psychological processes by which that individual can achieve some inner quietness and peace of his own, and count that that is the peace of God. That kind of thing goes on amongst us all round about us. If Ezekiel were living today he would be given a commission to preach to

the church and tell the church that as long as these things are tolerated, and the fact that they have been tolerated, and the fact that these things have been done, will just simply mean that God will one day begin His judgment right at the house of God. That is what we can expect according to what we have read here.

Chapter 7

Ezekiel Was Given Personal Insight Into The Ways Of God

After being shown in a vision the real cause of God's judgment upon Judah, Ezekiel was next shown what God would do.

He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; 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. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city (Ezekiel 9:1-7).

Isn't that drastic? Thus Ezekiel saw seven men come to do the will of God, six of them were equipped with a slaughter weapon in his hand. Obviously their mission would be to slay. One was differently dressed, clothed with linen and he was equipped with a writer's inkhorn by his side. Obviously he would have a different function, as if he were a secretary. Actually this man was given the first assignment. He was to go through the city and mark, as one marks items for a laundry, those persons "that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Widespread destruction unto death was to come upon all the people; but there were some individuals, the remnant, who did not join the common rebellion against God. Some individuals were personally distressed and burdened because of the common disobedience which was so dishonoring to God. These were to be spared. They would be exempted from judgment.

It is important to note that care was taken before the slaying began that these should be spared. This reminds us of the words in Malachi:

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not {Malachi 3:16-18}.

While it is sadly true that the sinfulness of man can prompt many church members to live worldly lives until the whole congregation can be moved into ungodly living with only a superficial religiosity to cast a nominal relationship with the name of God over all that is done in church activity; it is also gloriously true that some church members will be sincerely, humbly, actually following Christ. These are in the obscure minority in the remnant. It is so good to have it plainly stated in Scripture "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of host, in that day when I make up my jewels."

When care had been taken to insure the safety of the true believers, the other six men equipped to slay were commissioned to smite all others.

Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house (Ezekiel 9:6).

When it speaks of the ancient men you can think of the mature, the older, or we would say the elders. This reminds us that the Scripture has revealed judgment must begin at the house of God. This is indeed a sobering and revealing fact. It emphasizes the importance of leadership among God's people. The responsibility of the general spiritual ungodliness was laid directly upon the elders. There is no mistaking the implication that the leadership of the church is to blame for the waywardness of the people.

When Ezekiel saw the wholesale destruction of the people, he cried out to God in protest.

And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? (Ezekiel 9:8)

Ezekiel was shocked. It looked to him as though the whole of Israel would be destroyed, and so Israel would be completely wiped out.

Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head (Ezekiel 9: 9-10).

That is the way it is. The Lord pointed out that the persistent iniquity of Israel and Judah was exceeding great and they had made matters even worse by spreading their claim that God was indifferent. The Lord made it very plain that He was going to visit their judgment upon their own heads.

It is sobering again to realize that all will suffer, old and young, both maids and little children and women, all will suffer because of the general widespread disobedience to God. Ezekiel was then given another vision of the glory of God in which a throne was dominant. What he was being given to see was the authentic revelation of the sovereign God. God's ways might be shocking and impossible to understand but they were carefully directed and under control.

Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne (Ezekiel 10:1).

All was under control. The glory of God authenticated all that Ezekiel saw. Fire was taken from between the wheels and given to the man who had marked the remnant.

Ezekiel was then given to see more closely the elements in the vision. What Ezekiel saw baffles comprehension. Any artist's picture looks grotesque. It is probable that the vision was like a dream in which the elements and parts are moving and changing. Yet there were some features that can be noted. The cherubim, the living creatures, and the wheels, the fixed structures were involved with each other. It is recorded that "there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings" (verse 8). Then it is recorded of the wheels that they functioned under control, one wheel by one cherubim and another wheel by another cherubim. There was the impression of direct obedience, "whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went" (verse 11).

Then appeared something even more inconceivable. The wheels had faces on them, four faces on each wheel as if to imply the four aspects of the operation of God. As the record continues the complications in the visions do not become at all simple yet there are aspects that can be noted. "And when the cherubim went, the wheels went by them" (verse 16). There was no confusion since the cherubim were living creatures capable of flexible spontaneous action and the wheels were fixed structures, perhaps like natural processes marked by standard consistency, their mutual involvement in performing the will of God resembled the functioning of the human body comprised of fixed skeletal structure motivated by muscles and nerves and directed in consciousness by the head. But no chaos, all was in order.

Chapter 8

Ezekiel Was Commissioned To Confront The Leaders

Ezekiel prophesied at a time when his people were captives of pagan powers. Their home land of Judah, their capital city of Jerusalem, were dominated by the Chaldeans which meant that Babylon seemed more important than Jerusalem. Their ideas were more powerful than the Jewish thoughts were. Their own traditions, the Jewish traditions, seemed weak. The Lord God of Israel was not so powerful when He would allow His people to be captives. We will remember that a pagan altar had been erected at the gate of the temple. Ezekiel had been shown how the imagery of the consciousness of the leaders was marked by pagan ideas. And he had seen how the men worshipped toward the east. Paul told the Corinthians,

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:11-12).

We need to read this record of Ezekiel with great care. We are living in a day when the great doctrines of the Gospel, our Gospel, have been challenged. The Bible says plainly God created the heavens and the earth, but in our time this is no longer held to be true. We turn to natural processes. The Bible story of creation in six days is easy to read, and is commonly known, but it is not believed. Even in our church literature evolution is accepted as the way it happened. When we read that people worshipped the sun in the Old Testament literature, we tend to feel so superior. But when we in our time rest our confidence in natural forces, we are doing the same thing.

The Bible says you must be born again, and speaks of the believer in Christ being a new creature. Modern psychology will speak of psychological adjustment and will urge the person to imitate the way of life demonstrated by Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible says "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Modern social science will urge the person to find himself, to realize his own potential, to insist on being free to do his own thing. What many of us find hard to accept is that accenting the self and emphasizing self-direction is actually contrary to Scripture. This is actually pagan thinking. But such principles have been incorporated into our thinking today and into our teaching in our churches and our church schools. They are preached from many pulpits that are dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel.

Our young people are actually being taught what is contrary to the Gospel without even knowing their error. It is so common today to hear speakers seeking to build self-esteem and self-confidence, even in our Sunday Schools, our young people and our churches, altogether ignoring the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth who made it plain that if any man wanted to follow Him, he should deny himself. Jesus of Nazareth said, "I do nothing of myself, I do all things to please my Father." Ezekiel prophesied in a day when it was popular to neglect the Word of God, as it was presented by the faithful prophets. Recognition was given to pagan ideas by a pagan shrine that had been built right at the gate of the temple.

Ezekiel was commissioned to confront the popular leaders of his time. Moreover the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the Lord's house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city. . . Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man (Ezekiel 11:1-4).

Ezekiel was called upon to talk to them and tell them "These are the men that devised mischief and give wicked counsel in the city." Any human being will have his own ideas of how he might prosper, but he will feel the need of help. He is probably wrong in his ideas but he has them, and he is willing to listen to someone who will tell him how he can do better. Thus leaders appear and are ready to step up and talk.

They try to tell these people how they can do better than what they are doing. Unless that leader knows the truth from God, he will teach the things that seem good but which are not. Paul spoke about people who have itching ears, desiring to hear certain things that are not true. This will be the case of the blind leading the blind. Ezekiel was then given the message that he was to preach to the leaders of the people.

In Ezekiel 11:4-12 there is a description of what he was to say. For instance in verse 4: "Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man." And then as we go along "Speak, Thus saith the Lord." This was the main point of his preaching. Ezekiel had come to tell them what God was going to say about it, and then went on "For I know the things that come into your mind, everyone of them" (verse 5). God was acquainted with their natural ideas and understood how futile their advice was. Such leaders have caused the death of many.

Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain (Ezekiel 11:6).

Scarcely any of us can even hope to grasp, ever get an idea, how many souls are destroyed by teachers and preachers who mislead them in what they say.

Jesus of Nazareth taught that God has His eye on what happens to children. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Those are the words of Jesus of Nazareth. He went on to say "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). And again He said, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14). No more sober warning could ever be given to those who have responsibility in leadership. Our public today is inclined to allow professors, teachers, in secular institutions freedom to teach anything, since they are not clergy anyway. But God has given no such license. The professor who presents his ideas in such a way as to destroy faith is responsible to God even if he does not believe in God or even enters a church. God will bring him to judgment and will destroy him.

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).

As Ezekiel prophesied in verse 13 Palatiah the son of Benaiah died. This was so shocking that Ezekiel cried out to God, "Wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" And God answered him in verses 14-20 and His answer was that when judgment had fallen on the people that scattered them far and wide, "yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Then God described how He would assemble the true believers saying,

I will even gather you from the people . . . I will give you the land . . . I will give them one heart . . . that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:17-20).

Here again we find that just at the time when God's judgment is to fall upon those who have been misleading and those who are misled and His judgment will fall upon them all to destroy them, yet in judgment God remembers mercy.

And even today as I have been referring to the fact that we have right amongst us all manner of teaching going on that is contrary to the Word of God, even today on the very campuses where faith is being destroyed God is calling out believers. There are among these young people on college campuses response to God that puts many church members to shame. And this is how God revealed to Ezekiel what

he was to do in his day and time. And in our day and time we can be very sure that the same God looks down now as He did then and today He sees those who mislead and who misguide the young people. It is God's judgment upon them that is going to be their great distress.

Chapter 9

Ezekiel Was Commissioned To Show How God Would Work In Judgment

When Ezekiel was prophesying he was not merely setting out truth as to the reality of God or as to the nature of the universe. He did not engage in any argument to prove any point in reality. God is a living Being and He has a personal present interest in the affairs of men. God not only sees and knows but He is a living God that does. He participates in things. The course of history, of human affairs, is all seen, understood, known and controlled by the living God. So Ezekiel did not argue about the reality of God nor about the providence of God. He had something to say to God's people about God's will for them.

Israel had been chosen by God as the nation through whom God would bless the whole world. But this would not be because of any superiority on their part. As a matter of fact in the time of Ezekiel God's people were altogether out of the will of God. They had actually turned away from God and had sought help from the pagans round about. It was to these people that Ezekiel was sent to interpret to them what God now planned to do with them. God was going to act and in that action the fate of Israel was involved. In the 12th chapter of Ezekiel we read what God has to say to him.

The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house (Ezekiel 12:1).

This was Ezekiel's fate.

Every now and again this will happen when a preacher is called upon to minister to a people who are not willing to walk with God. You see there are people in churches, and there are churches for that matter, that do not want to be godly. They do not want to be holy. They think that belongs to somebody else. They want all the blessings of God without having to commit themselves to Him. And so here Ezekiel is told, "Thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house." Ezekiel was given to understand that he could not expect ever to convince the Jews by any kind of rational logical argument. These people of which we read here "have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house." They would never come to any knowledge of the truth. Yet he was to minister God's truth to them.

Ezekiel going to demonstration were in his own conduct what was happen to Israel. And when you think about this demonstration you can have in mind what we have just been saying. These were people who were unwilling to listen. These were people who willing to consider what was being said. They could not led by that method. So Ezekiel was directed to demonstrate in his own conduct what was going to happen.

Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house (Ezekiel 12:3).

And so he was to move his personal belongings out of his house to another place, so Israel would understand they were going to be evacuated from their homes. The Lord said, "For I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel." He was to do this in plain sight of all the Jews because this was what was going to happen to them. They would be uprooted from their homes and scattered everywhere.

Here again God tells Ezekiel there will be a remnant. "But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence" (verse 16). So God would overrule in all that happened so that the people would realize that He was really Almighty God. And that ends by saying "And they shall know that I am the Lord." After this Ezekiel was called to demonstrate a further aspect of God's will for the people.

Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; and say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 12:18-20).

Events would be so fearful that widespread anxiety would prevail throughout the nation.

Then Ezekiel was given further instructions. In chapter 12, verses 21-28 Ezekiel was told that he should challenge the common idea that nothing would ever happen to change the course of events. They had gotten into that pessimistic frame of mind. We read here for instance,

What is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth (Ezekiel 12:22)?

People were just saying to each other, "Nothing is ever going to happen. Nothing is ever going to change." But Ezekiel was to tell the people that the time had come when God would act.

Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision (Ezekiel 12:23).

It is going to happen what God is going to do.

For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 12:25).

These people who had just said to each other, "Nothing is ever going to happen, nothing is ever going to change", Ezekiel was to tell them that the time had come. Events were going to happen.

In chapter 13 Ezekiel reports how he was to prophesy.

Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord (Ezekiel 13:2).

He was actually to address himself in his preaching to the prophets who were around in the country and was to tell them plainly what God would say. This passage is a direct judgment of God upon false prophets. You will find it all through this 13th chapter. They are referred to as foolish prophets "that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!" These prophets claimed to be speaking God's message to God's people.

They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The Lord saith: and the Lord hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word (Ezekiel 13:6).

Because of this God would judge them.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God (Ezekiel 13:8-9).

God has a special judgment for men who get up and preach and teach saying that they are telling you the truth of God, when actually they are speaking out of their own minds. God will judge them. God will thoroughly destroy all that the false prophets have heir ministry. They are again identified,

To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 13:16).

We think today about preachers who will encourage the people falsely, giving them a false basis to think that everything is going to turn out fine, when it will not; urging them to do the very best they can, so they can accomplish something which they cannot do. Not only was Ezekiel to tell these prophets their doom, but he was to challenge also certain women who were prophesying out of their own heart. Now this is a basic condition of all these people. The Lord was particularly against these women as Ezekiel reported.

Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life (Ezekiel 13:22)

It is possible for preachers to preach in that way that as they are preaching the truly sincere believers sitting in the pews are saddened to hear the words so empty coming from the pulpit. Whereas other people who are not walking in the ways of God hear things said from there that encourage them to believe that they are doing all right, that they are going to make out all right. But it is not true. And the Lord is particularly against such preaching wherever it occurs.

Chapter 10

Ezekiel Instructed How To Preach To Insincere Worshippers

People who believe in God have developed a way to come to Him for guidance and for blessing. Since the days of Moses it had been established that the prophet should come before God on behalf of the people and get from God insight into the situation facing his people and learn about their guidance as to how these people could do the will of God (Deuteronomy 5). Thus the leaders of the people would come to God and listen to the prophet who would reveal to them the will of God for them.

In the 14th chapter of Ezekiel it is written:

Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me (Ezekiel 14:1).

Ostensibly they came to learn God's will for them, for their conduct. Outwardly this would all seem to be in order. But God revealed to Ezekiel that these men were not sincere.

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? (Ezekiel 14:3)

This is the way God revealed to Ezekiel.

What would be an idol today when we read about "they set up their idols in their heart"? What sort of ideas could dominate a preacher's heart as he proceeds through his order of service? A man could act as a minister of the Gospel and go through the routine worship exercises even though he has more confidence in the theory of evolution than he has in the first chapters of Genesis. He could lead in the singing of hymns and use the language of Scripture even though he believes he should seek psychological adjustment rather than to have his people born again by the power of God in the Gospel. As a minister a man might lead in prayer, verbally asking God to grant certain blessings while he personally believes his hearers should act in certain ways, doing certain things, in order to bring these things to pass.

Such idols need not be vulgar nor vicious nor grotesque. They are simply preferred patterns. They seem to be reasonable, appealing, and they come as desirable ideas. It may be quite unnoticed that they seem so reasonable because they are supported by the culture in which the congregation lives. Thus a preacher may actually doubt the word of Scripture. He may not accept the record in the Bible and yet he reads from it. He has it there before him in the pulpit. He may have accepted the idea that the biblical record is full of errors, and of contemporary cultural mistakes, while he reads the Scripture as it is written in the service of the worship as if it were the Word of God.

This can happen even amongst us. We hesitate to use the language Ezekiel used but that is the language that is proper. God asked Ezekiel, "Should I be inquired of at all by them?" Which is a way of saying, "Should I listen if they come to ask me things? If they come to pray to me?" I personally grew up in agnostic skepticism. It never seemed any temptation to pretend that I believed the Bible. I never felt I wanted to say that. When I first met persons in the church who professed to believe in Christ though they did not accept Scripture as authoritative, I was astonished. I was amazed that anybody could claim that they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and doubt the Scriptures that tell about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I am still doubtful to this day. I hate to think they want the position and that is why they are doing it. Such men want the prestige of being a minister. They want the pay of being a pastor, a minister, when they know that they do not believe the Gospel as it is set forth in the Bible. That is still puzzling to me right now. I do not quite know how to understand that whole business.

So far as Ezekiel was concerned, he had no way of knowing when he saw them coming. When those elders came and sat before him, he did not see anything about them that was alarming. God spoke to his heart and told him "These men have ideas that are not mine. These men are believing and trusting in that

which is different from me. And should I listen to them when they come to pray?" Yet I believe that this message of Ezekiel is directly aimed at just such persons. God told Ezekiel that He would personally deal with such persons.

I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols (Ezekiel 14:4-5).

This does not refer only to certain objects of wood and stone that a person could think had some supernatural power. Anything that I think of more than I do of God is an idol. You can see who I am serving by just noticing where I spend my money and how I use my time. Of course there is a great deal of my life that is set, a great deal of what I am doing day in and day out is necessary. I am not talking about that. I am talking about what I do in my spare time. I might have some habit of my own, some personal conduct of my own that I just prefer. I just go ahead and do, and it could be questionable whether that is acceptable to God. If I do not question at all, but I just go ahead and do it anyway, that can become an idol for me. God says, "That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols." Here God is putting His finger, as it were, down on a very important thing. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." What is it that I prefer? And by that you can tell where I stand.

Ezekiel was given a very simple direct message to these people.

Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations (Ezekiel 14:6).

In other words when anyone comes to worship God with such reservations in his heart about the things that he prefers, God will deal personally with that person.

I the Lord will answer him by myself: and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 14:7-8).

That is the way it was put. God then told Ezekiel that the judgment would stand despite the presence of godly persons who might make intercession.

In Ezekiel 14:12-21 there is a whole list of calamities, four calamities, that will befall Jerusalem. They will have trouble, trouble, trouble, no question about that. Then we read:

Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought upon it (Ezekiel 14:22).

Because from where Ezekiel was living, as it were in the future before him, he was going to find out as everybody would that God would destroy Jerusalem, totally destroy it and He would destroy it because of their insincere relationship with Him. But after that God would do something that would glorify His name.

And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 14:23).

We may remember how Paul considered himself as belonging to the remnant. We read: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Romans 11:5).

In chapter 15 of Ezekiel we have a lengthy parable that one can just read and let it speak to you. The parable showed Ezekiel clearly that Jerusalem would really be rejected. That is what He wanted to show and that is what He showed to them. In all of this we are finding that God is showing to Ezekiel the

message that he is to deliver to these people and He finds among these people persons who are particularly responsible are the leaders. The leaders are responsible not because they do not go through the motions because when they are going through the motions of worship they are not sincere. God sees this and God will not put up with it. We need to take this very soberly to our own heart. No one of us is ever good enough to stand before God, but we can be sincere. We cannot bring in a record that is perfect but we can turn over to Him one hundred percent, such as we are. We can belong to Him and this is what He asks of us and requires of us, that we should totally, altogether put our trust in Him. He says, "Repent and come to me," and then we will be blessed.

Chapter 11

Ezekiel Preaches The Fate Of Jerusalem

Ezekiel was called to present the Word of God to his contemporaries. He was specifically sent to confront first one group and then another group, and tell each group what God wanted that group to know. In chapter 16 he was commissioned to speak to Jerusalem in words like this: "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abomination." The word "know" implies that these people were to appreciate. They were to realize the actual meaning of what they had done.

In the chapter that follows there is no specific description of what Jerusalem did or did not do, but there was a very definite and severe appraisal of the manner of life which prevailed in Jerusalem. The whole chapter makes use of the figure of an unfaithful wife. Israel was to belong to God as a wife belongs to her husband. Jerusalem was to worship God as Almighty, was to be guided by Him; and He was to be counted on for needed help. Jerusalem was to esteem God above all else and was to serve Him and Him alone. That was the arrangement that God set up and that He wanted.

Jerusalem, as all Judah and Israel, was surrounded by pagans. The pagans had ideas about everything, about life and about the spiritual world. Their ideas were popular, and they were made attractive. Their ideas seemed more reasonable, more promising of benefits than the traditions of Moses. In former chapters we have seen that Ezekiel had been shown by God that the temple leaders were actually cherishing pagan ideas in their hearts and minds even while they were performing simple ritual services. This is a condition that God will not tolerate. In this respect He is a jealous God. He demands one hundred percent of heart and mind. It was to these people that Ezekiel was to preach the Word of God.

In chapter 16:3-14 Jerusalem was to remember her origin. Jerusalem was originally forsaken as an unwanted birth. God in grace and mercy ministered to Jerusalem as to a forsaken infant, and in due time established Jerusalem in beauty and in riches. But Jerusalem trusted in her own beauty and turned to others rather than to God. Because she was so blessed of God, she was attractive. Because she was so wanton in her heart she gave herself to any man, to strangers. To ingratiate herself to such strangers, she took the fair jewels of gold and silver with which she had been endowed by God and gave them to her lovers that they might be lured and encouraged to come to her.

All this is in the figure of speech, the actual incidents are not specified. Only the idea is kept plain. Jerusalem actually used what God had given her to serve her own wishes. All this provoked God to anger.

In Ezekiel 16:27-34 we see that Jerusalem had acted even worse than a typical harlot. Instead of receiving gifts or hire from her lovers, Jerusalem had actually given gifts to these men with whom she sinned. And then in verses 35-42 it is revealed that because of this God will give her over to the pagans who will destroy her and rob her. This is one of the sad aspects of sinful living. People enter into sin because they think they are going to get what they want. But they are going to be disappointed.

And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more (Ezekiel 16:39-41).

This is the way God soberly and somberly speaks to these people. God will give Jerusalem over to the pagans and they will really and destroy her.

In Ezekiel 16:43-59 we read that Jerusalem in her sin had actually been worse than Sodom whose sin is outlined. This is very interesting.

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good (Ezekiel 16: 49-50).

This is what happened to Sodom. But Jerusalem had sinned worse than that. And Jerusalem had sinned twice as bad as Samaria. So they were to be judged. When Sodom and Samaria were to be judged, Jerusalem would also be judged. As we read on, we read a wonderful fact:

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 16:60-63).

In these words you actually have a description of the plan that God had, to bring out a remnant from among these people that God would bless.

In chapter 17 the whole message is revealed in the parable of the great eagle. This is set forth in terms as if you were listening to the description of a dream, because things are reported that are quite unnatural. A great eagle came and took a clipping of a great cedar tree and planted it in the spot where he thought it would prosper. Then another eagle came and the cedar turned to this second eagle for help to become even greater. But this was not to be. The interpretation of this strange vision showed that after Babylon had made the king of Jerusalem a vassal serving Babylon and dependent upon Babylon, this king appealed to Egypt for aid in rebelling against Babylon. But this maneuver on his part was not successful because Babylon crushed both Egypt and Jerusalem. In chapter 17 when you come down to the end of that chapter you will see how God will finally overrule and set up His own kingdom. In spite of the fact that Jerusalem again and again was failing so far as God was concerned, God had made a promise to Abraham and God was going to keep that promise, even if those people were not reliable.

Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it (Ezekiel 17:22-24).

In this sort of language the Old Testament is pointing forward to what is going to happen in the time of the Gospel, when God does something that is absolutely fantastic. It is not to be believed, and that is that God will receive a sinner, a person who has actually done wrong, and is wrong in God's sight; and if that person will commit himself or herself to God, Almighty God will forgive and will receive and will recreate, will have him born again and will give him the Holy Spirit within him, and will actually produce something that will be an astonishment everywhere to everybody. The grace of God which is past understanding is what God will do through the Gospel. The Old Testament prophets, like Ezekiel, who told the people what God was going to do and measured out to them the result of what God was going to do and the way He was going to destroy them, always came around to say, "But God will eventually carry out His promise to a small group of people who will believe in Him." And so we come along very humbly thanking God and praising His Holy Name that He arranged that we should be able to come to Him and rejoice in His grace and mercy.

Chapter 12

The Ways Of God In Judgment

It is quite common for people to think that character is inherited. I remember in an election of deacons in a church where I was pastor, a man was nominated because his father now deceased had been a good elder. This young man came to church each Sunday bringing his mother. He had a good job in business. From the Sunday when he was ordained and installed as a deacon he never again came to church. He never attended one meeting of the deacons. I know. I was his pastor.

In the same way the public is inclined to ascribe a father's evil conduct to the son. One can hear this comment any time, "He will never do any good. Look at his dad." In some aspects of life this may be true. But it is not true in spiritual matters. Guilt is not inherited, neither is righteousness. Ezekiel was charged to make this clear to Israel.

The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezekiel 18:1-4).

It was a popular proverb in Israel and you can just feel how it goes, "the fathers have eaten sour grapes," and this would carry over so that "the children's teeth are set on edge," because of the father having eaten sour grapes. Spiritually speaking, so far as God is concerned, this was not true and Ezekiel was to make this clear to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel went on to say:

But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, and hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbor's wife, neither hath come near to a menstrous woman, and hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; he that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man (Ezekiel 18:5-8).

All of this is a total description of what would be right in God's sight.

Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God. If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to anyone of these things, and that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbor's wife, hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him (Ezekiel 18:9-13).

Then Ezekiel heard this message:

Now, lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, that hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbor's wife, neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, that hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it

shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. 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. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways unequal? are not your ways unequal (Ezekiel 18:14-29).

And then the discussion goes on. All the way through if the righteous man's son does evil, he shall die. But the sinner can change his ways. If he forsakes sinning and turns to righteousness, he shall live. It is so helpful to have the Gospel in mind. The sinner is not left to himself. Christ Jesus worked all righteousness perfectly. When the sinner accepts Christ Jesus the righteousness of Christ is counted for him as though he had done it himself. And so continuing in this report that we had in this book we read

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. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live (Ezekiel 18:21-22).

Everyone should keep this in mind, the wicked shall die but God had no pleasure in this. Some might think God must have pleasure in the death of the wicked or He would change this. No, He could not do that. The truth is that the death of the wicked belongs to the moral order of the universe, and it must happen.

But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal (Ezekiel 18:24-25)?

In all of this Ezekiel is making it plain to the people that the ways of God should be recognized as fair and unbiased. God is not prejudiced. Justice will be done fairly.

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby, ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

And thus in this 18th chapter of the book of Ezekiel we have such a thorough, careful discussion of the

way of God in judgment. Each man will be judged by God as to how he does. Any man, no matter what his background has been, no matter what his past has been, if he turns to evil and walks in the way of evil, he shall perish. And any man, no matter what he has done, no matter how much wrong he has done, if he turns to God and walks in the way of peace and walks in the way of righteousness, he shall live. And in this God is no respecter of persons. He deals with all men equally, looking upon them in mercy and compassion, having no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rejoicing in the faith of those who trust in Him.

Chapter 13

Ezekiel Reviews Israel's History

In chapter 19 Ezekiel sets out a lamentation for the princes of Israel. This is the way it is worded in Scripture. It is actually a case of telling something, saying something, that is distressing. It reads like the description of a dream. Using the figure of a lioness as the mother of the princes, the truth of what happened in the history of Israel is set forth in this lament.

One of the lion's whelps became strong but was taken captive by Egypt where he was kept in chains. This would not need to be actually a record of what happened, but it was symbolic of what happened to Israel as a whole. The lioness took another of her whelps and made him strong, but the nations rose against him and took him in chains to Babylon. This obviously was fulfilled in the captivity when the Jews were made subject to Babylon. After this Israel was destroyed. And so we read:

But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground. And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit, so that she hath no strong rod to be a scepter to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation (Ezekiel 19:12-14).

In chapter 20 the record is there that a number of elders of Israel came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. Apparently they looked upon him as a prophet. They recognized him as such. And so they came to him to hear what God would say to them. Ezekiel was given the charge to show them their sin.

Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers (Ezekiel 20:4).

So Ezekiel reviewed the history of Israel to show how the people had disobeyed God. At the time of their deliverance from Egypt God had called on them to forsake any confidence in the idols of Egypt.

Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt (Ezekiel 20:7-8).

When they refused to obey God, God could have destroyed them since the principle is true that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." But for His name's sake He spared them. You see God had promised Abraham that He would deliver Abraham's seed from their enemies. And here Abraham's seed, now the children of Israel, were captives in Egypt and God had promised Abraham He would deliver them. So God went ahead to deliver them even though they did not deserve it.

Then God gave them in the wilderness the Ten Words to guide them into blessing. Now the Ten Words that we commonly call the Ten Commandments were not given as a procedure, a basis, by which Israel could qualify to enter into the land. They were given to Israel who was going to get into the land by the grace of God, as a guide to receive blessing, after they were in the land. If they would keep those Ten Words, they would be blessed of God. He set out ritual procedures also for them to follow. In other words, Sabbaths for them to observe that they might be blessed. But again they rebelled and disobeyed God.

Once again He did not destroy them though He let them die in the wilderness. Then God dealt with their children.

But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my sabbaths. Then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake (Ezekiel 20:18-22).

God did not spare them because they were worthy, He spared them for His name's sake. He had promised Abraham that He would take care of Abraham's seed, that He would deliver them. So He went ahead to do it. God wanted to call out His people, scattered as they were, a remnant that would serve Him.

I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen (Ezekiel 20:41).

This is a promise that God makes out of His grace. He actually is going to bless these people in spite of their disobedience. In spite of the fact that they failed Him, but for His name's sake He is going to do this. We need to pay special attention because right here is where our salvation is implied.

And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 20:42-44).

Here God is promising them that He is going to do graciously by them. He is going to scatter them first in judgment, but then He is going to call them back together. God is going to establish them, and they are going to want to do His will, By His grace He is going to overcome their own backwardness. This is one of the promises in the Old Testament that predicted the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field; 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 20:45-47).

The immediate prospect was that God would judge them with fire.

In chapter 21 Ezekiel was commissioned to prophesy against the land of Israel. He was to demonstrate grief over their fate. We read

Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh (Ezekiel 21:6-7).

He was to go around sighing and when the people asked him why, he was to tell them that it would just be that bad. He was to say that the future would just be that bad.

Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished (Ezekiel 21:8-9).

He was to preach about a sword, the symbol of the coming judgment upon Israel. And now we read

that he was to cry and howl and "smite upon thy thigh."

By the way if you put all that together, can you picture a man preaching who preaches sighing in the presence of the people, and crying out loud and howling in his preaching and smiting upon his thigh? You would call that dramatic sensationalism in preaching. But this seems to be called for at a time when the people are lethargic.

In the latter part of this chapter, as you read in verses 18-32, Ezekiel was to predict that the king of Babylon would launch a two-pronged attack to destroy both Judah with Jerusalem and the Ammonites. Thus the prospect for Israel was one of dire calamity. All this would be in the will of God because of the sin of His people. God actually has to deal with His people in judgment from time to time, but He will do it. One thing is absolutely sure, no one is ever going to be able to accuse God of failing to carry out what His righteousness will prompt. This is what He was prompted to do for them.

Chapter 14

The Unfaithfulness Of Israel

The book of Ezekiel is very much like a preacher's notebook. There are notes of messages, not necessarily following one another as in a theme, one paragraph after another on the same subject, but unrelated; and yet all dealing with some one problem. Thus there will be repetition because each message is a unit in itself. Thus in chapter 22 Ezekiel again preaches against the sins of Jerusalem. He was to show her all her abominations.

Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations (Ezekiel 22:2).

Then Ezekiel specifies the sins that prevailed in Jerusalem.

The Jews had fallen into pagan practices, making idols of their own just the way the pagans had idols of their own. We should remember when we mention the word "idols" we are in grave danger of just leaving that in the Old Testament, thinking that idea belongs back in the days when people bowed down to bits of stone and wood, and made something of that. Actually, the idol is anything in a person's consciousness which is considered first before God. Their social conduct was demoralized and their religious practices had deteriorated. It is significant to note that when Ezekiel was pointing out the faults and the failings of Israel, while he referred to their personal conduct and their social misconduct, that was not the basis of the indictment. That was not the basis of what he had to say against them. What he had to say against them was the fact that they did not follow God.

In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. Thou hast despised mine holy things and hast profaned my sabbaths (Ezekiel 22:7-8).

As Ezekiel specifies the various sins one can learn that God notices every act as it is practised.

In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath committed abomination with his neighbor's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbors by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 22:9-12).

This is the specification of these things. It is a compact listing of their evil deeds.

The Lord then challenged Jerusalem to face the judgment that He will bring. He warns them that He will scatter them among the heathen and "will consume thy filthiness out of thee."

In verses 17-22 the Lord conveys His message to Ezekiel using the figure of speech in which He likens the house of Israel to the dross which is burned away in the refining of silver. Just as the impurities in the ore are burned away in the smelting process, so will Jerusalem be destroyed.

There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof (Ezekiel 22:25).

In this way Ezekiel is referring to the conduct of the religious leaders. Ezekiel was also to reveal that God had noted

Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them (Ezekiel 22:26).

This teaches us the function of the priests among God's people. It is the responsibility of the minister of the Word of God to teach the people the difference between the holy and the profane. When the minister is unfaithful, the people suffer in their consciousness of God.

Ezekiel also had a message concerning the princes, the leaders, who administered the government.

Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain (Ezekiel 22:27).

Thus there is a description of the unhappy condition of Israel. The prophets that should have declared the Word of God had failed to do so.

And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken (Ezekiel 22:28).

They had preachers who said that they were preaching the Word of God, and it was not the truth. God had not given them anything to say. In our time we can think of preachers who prepare their sermons out of their own minds, perhaps out of the local newspaper, maybe out of some magazine article they have read, out of their own reading and thinking and not out of the Scriptures. At the same time public affairs in Ezekiel's time were marked by oppression and robbery so that they "vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully." All this marked the general condition as being sinful and offensive to God.

In such a situation there was need for intercession on behalf of the people, and God revealed this to Ezekiel.

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).

Such a man in the Old Testament times was Moses who pled with God to spare Israel for His own name's sake, and such a person is Christ Jesus who makes intercession for us. Even for those of us who believe, we have to remember and we do honestly and sadly recall, that even though we believe in the Lord and trust in Him and accept His salvation and rejoice in His mercy and grace, even then we are not always faithful. We do not always obey God. But our Father in heaven looks down upon us with compassion. He sees it and we have an Intercessor, we have the High Priest Himself, Jesus of Nazareth, in glory at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

When Israel was being dealt with God looked for somebody who would make intercession for them. There was no one. Since there was no one to do this, Israel would be destroyed. In chapter 23 the message is very simple. It is recorded here Ezekiel was to bring this message to Israel using as figures of speech two immoral sisters by the names of Aholah and Aholibah to represent Israel and Judah, representing Samaria and Jerusalem. The Old Testament frequently depicted Israel as the wife and God as the husband, by way of emphasizing the importance of total faithfulness to God on the part of Israel. This might well have remained in the Old Testament if it had not been that James brings this right up into our consciousness in his writing.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4).

Here James makes use of this concept of adultery as referring to the waywardness of our hearts, our spiritual beings, when we turn away from God and get interested in other things.

God deserves and requires that He be first in our hearts and minds. In the Lord believers are inclined to put Him first but humanly speaking, personally speaking, we have our own interest and we often turn in those ways. So far as God is concerned, He considers us as a wife would be thought about who was unfaithful to her husband. As we have gone over this material again and have been conscious once more of how wayward God's people can be, our hearts are humbled before God and we humbly turn to Him and ask Him to graciously and mercifully intercede on our behalf and not deal with us according to what we do, but deal with us according to His grace and mercy.

Chapter 15

God Will Destroy Jerusalem And Her Enemies

In Ezekiel chapter 24 we have the illustration of a cooking pot on a hot fire. Ezekiel was to show Jerusalem the terrible judgment that God would bring upon her, who was called the "rebellious house." Despite the chastening which God brought to Jerusalem in her history, and He had dealt with her again and again in her failings, she remained stubbornly rebellious in her refusal to obey God. Her continued rebellion finally provoked God to fury.

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. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 24:13-14).

Then an event happened to Ezekiel personally which was to be taken as a sign for all the Jews. His wife died suddenly.

Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded (Ezekiel 24:16-18).

Ezekiel was forbidden to mourn or to show his grief on the death of his wife as a sign to Jerusalem. In the judgment of God their loved ones would be destroyed. They would, as it is written, fall by the sword. When that happened they came to Ezekiel for comfort. He was to preach to them the real cause of their loss.

Ezekiel had not been allowed to express his grief when his own wife died, but now when calamity struck the people and their loved ones were destroyed, we read:

In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 24:27).

In chapters 25-28, Ezekiel was commissioned to announce the judgment of God against the nations who rejoiced in Israel's distress. Because of their willful and prolonged disobedience, Israel with Jerusalem, was to be judged and destroyed. Ezekiel was sent to preach this truth to them. There were neighboring nations who took pleasure in seeing Jerusalem suffer. Ezekiel was now to preach to these and warn them of the judgment that would come upon them because they took pleasure in Israel's distress. So we read in chapter 25 that the Ammonites were told in plain specific language what was going to happen to them.

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).

No mention is made of other sins. No doubt the Ammonites had sinned in other ways, many in great sins, but the fact that they took pleasure in the distress of Israel because of the judgment of God was the basis of God's judgment upon them.

In Ezekiel 25:8-11 our attention is drawn to Moab. Because Moab and Seir discredited Israel and looked upon them as if they were pagans, discounting their faith in God, they would be included with the

Ammonites in the judgment that was to come.

In verses 12-14 we read the judgment against Edom. Edom had taken vengeance against the house of Judah and now God would repay them. This is a very interesting thing. Now God was actually dealing in judgment with Jerusalem, and was actually going to lead them through an experience of real destruction. But when other people rejoiced in it, He would deal with them. We read:

And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 25:14).

The Philistines are included in the sweeping warning of coming judgment which is to be against the enemies of Judah.

Thus saith the Lord God; Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred; therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethim, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast. And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them (Ezekiel 25:15-17).

This is a most astonishing line of revelation from God, that while God does deal with His people in all righteousness and justice, and on occasion will chastise them; and in His chastisement He will actually bring distress upon them; at the same time God will not tolerate that anyone else should take any pleasure in the distress of His people.

The greater emphasis is laid upon the coming judgment upon Tyre. At that point in history Tyre was the rich prosperous leader among the cities on the Mediterranean Sea. There had been long tension between the pagan rulers of Tyre and the kings of Israel. Jezebel had come from Tyre bringing Baal worship into Israel when she married Ahab the king of Israel. Misfortune to Israel gave pleasure to Tyre. Ezekiel was given specific details for preaching to Tyre and announcing her fate. Chapters 26, 27 and 28 are given over as a report of the instruction that was given to Ezekiel.

Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people. . . . Behold, I am against thee . . . and they shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 26:2-6).

Apparently some must suffer before they will believe that God is Lord. And each time when God brings out the idea that He would judge them, He says He is going to judge them and punish them and destroy them until they will know that He is God. In chapter 26 God reveals to Ezekiel that Babylon will invade and crush Tyre with wholesale destruction. The destruction of Tyre will be an awful shock to surrounding nations but God will permanently destroy that great city. History has confirmed the fulfillment of that prophecy.

In chapter 27, we have Ezekiel preaching a lamentation for Tyre. First he outlined details of the great wealth, the splendid products of art and craftsmanship that that city produced, the store of riches that distinguished Tyre. Then he described the bitter grief of all who witnessed the collapse and destruction of that great city.

In chapter 28 Ezekiel then pronounced a special message to the prince of Tyre who despite his accumulation of wealth and power would be destroyed. Following this Ezekiel addresses the king of Tyre. Though his achievements were great and his power was great, he was to be utterly destroyed. A similar fate in the closing verses of chapter 28 would happen to the city of Zidon which was the companion city to Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea. And so Ezekiel, this prophet of God, is called upon to outline the judgment of God, not only against Israel which he does, but against those nations that took pleasure in the distress of Israel. In all of this we are soberly reminded that our conduct is an open book in the sight of

Almighty God and God will not tolerate on our part any sort of lack of compassion toward anybody whatever the situation may be. It behooves us to be very careful to have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God does not have.

Chapter 16

Ezekiel Was To Bring Warning To Egypt

Chapters 29-32 of Ezekiel deal with Egypt. Although Ezekiel was a prophet who lived with the captives by the river Chebar, at one time he was a man who revealed and proclaimed the word of God. And here we see that he had a message to deliver to unbelieving people, to Egypt.

Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt: speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself (Ezekiel 29:2-3).

Using this figure of speech in which Pharaoh is likened to a great dragon in the river, Ezekiel revealed that the dragon would be hauled out from the river and left to lie in the fields and become the prey to the birds of the air. He would be destroyed.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee. And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the Lord: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it (Ezekiel 29:8-9).

This implied that Pharaoh and the people of Egypt had claimed Nile river upon which they depended was something that made. They had treated it as if it were their own, and did not recognize that it was something that God had provided.

Yet thus saith the Lord God; At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered: and I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which it bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I am the Lord God (Ezekiel 29:13-16).

In words like this Ezekiel explained or set out that Egypt would be destroyed. While the people would come back and live there as a nation, it would be the basest of the kingdoms.

And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army (Ezekiel 29:17-19).

In language like this it is set out that Egypt would be given over to Babylon in providence because Babylon had destroyed Tyre against which God had pronounced His judgment.

In chapter 30 in the first 19 verses we have a lament set forth because of the disaster that was to fall upon Egypt with special reference to Pharaoh.

. . . the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, lo, it shall not be bound up to be healed, to put a roller to bind it, to make it strong to hold the sword (Ezekiel 30:20-21).

In language like that he had indicated that God had personally taken a hand in the whole situation to destroy Pharaoh. This is the theme all the way through. In chapter 30 in verses 20-26 he specifically

describes the destruction of Pharaoh.

In chapter 31 Ezekiel was to challenge Pharaoh personally.

Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness?
(Ezekiel 31:2)

Then he goes on to use this figure. He says that Assyria was like a tall cedar in the forest with his heights over all the trees.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness (Ezekiel 31:10-11).

In other words although Assyria had become so strong and was like a great tree in the forest, yet because of pride, God would have Assyria chopped down, and Egypt would be engulfed in this disaster. That is the message throughout chapter 31.

In chapter 32 Ezekiel was to pronounce a lamentation for Pharaoh. Pharaoh could only await dire destruction.

For thus saith the Lord God; The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon thee. By the swords of the mighty will I cause thy multitude to fall, the terrible of the nations, all of them: and they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt, and all the multitude thereof shall be destroyed. I will destroy also all the beasts thereof from beside the great waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of beasts trouble them. Then will I make their waters deep, and cause their rivers to run like oil, saith the Lord God. When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I am the Lord. This is the lamentation wherewith they shall lament her: the daughters of the nations, shall lament her: they shall lament for her, even for Egypt, and for all her multitude, saith the Lord God (Ezekiel 32:11-16).

In these repeated words God is setting forth the fact that Egypt is to be destroyed. "The sword of Babylon shall come upon thee" and Egypt shall be made desolate.

Ezekiel was to mourn and to bewail the fate of Egypt who would be totally destroyed. Now after this attention to Egypt and her fate, Ezekiel is given a stern warning about his own responsibility. Ezekiel is told that he is to be a watchman over the house of Israel.

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchmen unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me (Ezekiel 33:7).

In the next two verses Ezekiel records the question asked by Israel since Ezekiel was recognized as a prophet and gives the answer that should always be kept in mind by everyone.

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel (Ezekiel 33:10-11)?

This is the great word that is spoken.

Then there follows a careful discussion of the procedures that would demonstrate the absolute fairness of God's action in dealing with all men. The basic principle that will prevail is that each individual is responsible to God personally for his own conduct. It does not make any difference about his family. It depends on himself.

In verses 21-29 Ezekiel was told the fate of Jerusalem. Despite their pride and their misplaced confidence of being favored because they were descendants of Abraham, their sins were open before God and their destruction was sure. So we read:

For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. Then shall they know that I am the Lord, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed (Ezekiel 33:28-29).

In this chapter 33 we were given to see the grave responsibility of the preacher. He is to tell the truth. He is to tell the truth to God's people. God's people are to understand that while God is gracious and God is merciful and God will do great things for them if they put their trust in Him, He is no fool. God is not mocked. And if His people continually turn away from Him, they continually depend on themselves because of their own pride, God will surely judge them.

Chapter 17

Unfaithful Shepherds Will Be Judged

The book of Ezekiel gives a report of how a preacher can be guided as to what he is to say and to whom he is to say it. We have just noted how Ezekiel was commissioned to preach and it says in the book to "prophesy to Egypt." This shows that God's messenger is to minister to all men. Even when men do not believe in God, God still has them in mind. All men everywhere are His creation. God judges all men. He gave His Son to die for the sins of the world. We need to remember that whereas God is ready to save whosoever will come unto Him, it is also true that He will judge unto destruction all men whether they believe or not. As His creatures, living in His world, depending on Him for life and strength, all men will answer to God, even for every idle word that is spoken.

We come now in the book of Ezekiel to chapter 34 and here Ezekiel was commissioned to warn the shepherds of God's people of God's judgment upon them. In the way in which things are arranged under God's guidance and providence every living human being does not have the same ability nor the same task to perform. There are some who have special gifts to lead, and there are others who are without those gifts and they find their blessing in following. Among those who are leaders are those who are given responsibility to watch over the others, such as the shepherds watch over the sheep. With reference to God's leaders we would normally today think of minister, pastors, preachers; with reference to them God has very definite ideas, very definite revelation about them.

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. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost (Ezekiel 34:2-4).

Here is a marvelous outline of what pastoral work will amount to. It is worth looking at again. This is what God notices in pastors. "The diseased have ye not strengthened." Some people in the congregation have personal difficulty like sickness and disease. They need help. "Neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken." And that can happen with people between each other, between fellow members of the congregation. Human relationships can be broken. It can happen in a family. And a pastor's responsibility is to see if he can help in this thing and bind up that which was broken. "Neither have ye brought again that which was driven away." There will be some people who will wander away from the congregation. This is a pastor's responsibility. Have you brought again that which was driven away? "Neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered" (34:4-5). That is to say the beasts of the field actually got those sheep because the sheep wandered away.

We have that happening with us today. We have that happening in church life because ministers and preachers do not preach the whole Gospel. You will have members who wander away into other units of fellowship. They will be led away by unsound teaching because the pastor did not teach the truth. If preaching from the pulpit does not emphasize God's answering prayer, the people will not be encouraged to pray. And if they do not pray, they are going to become victims for other ideas from the outside. It all follows on through. And so they were scattered because there is no shepherd and "they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered."

My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them (Ezekiel 34:6).

This is the pastor's responsibility.

Following this in this same chapter we come to a more direct word.

Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them (Ezekiel 34:7-10).

This is a simple restatement of the judgment of God. God noted how the people suffered because of the negligence of unfaithful shepherds. Here He revealed in detail the punishment that He would bring upon those shepherds.

Now from verse 11 on, the tone of this chapter is changed. The focus of the message is upon God's people, the sheep who have been scattered, who had suffered from the unfaithful shepherd. What the shepherds had failed to do, God would undertake Himself. God would do it.

For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment. And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats (Ezekiel 34:11-17).

Then there is set forth the wonderful prediction of what God would do in His grace.

Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing (Ezekiel 34:22-26).

And that, by the way, is where that phrase came from. There is no indication that this is the result of any action on the part of God's people. They did not earn this. This is out of God's grace.

In chapter 35 there is set forth the instructions Ezekiel received for the message he would deliver to Mount Seir. These people were not included in Israel and the message is one of judgment. Mount Seir would be destroyed because of their attitude toward God's people. This is an amazing thing. Their attitude towards God's people was noted by God and directly dealt with. God would actually establish Himself among His own people in the hearts of His own people by the way He would handle and destroy their enemy. Thus we read in chapter 35 these very words. In all of this we are learning more and more of how God wants to deal with His people, and we are getting some very definite instructions concerning the ministry because when we have just been reading about those shepherds we could not help but think about our local pastors, all of those who preach and teach the Word of God. Such men have a great responsibility because God looks to them to help His people in their personal relationship with Him. So

we turn ourselves to God humbly and ask Him for His blessing.

Chapter 18

The Valley Of Dry Bones

In Ezekiel 36-37 there is set forth God's gracious plan to bless Israel.

Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord God; Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession: therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Because they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people: therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which became a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen that are round about; therefore thus saith the Lord God; Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed my land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey. Prophesy therefore concerning the land of Israel, and say unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I have spoken in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: therefore thus saith the Lord God; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame (Ezekiel 36:1- 7).

That is the way it is put. Because the heathen had gloated over possessing Israel, God will act in judgment against them. Now this will not be because Israel is better, but because the heathens prided themselves for conquering the land of the people of God.

And then is set forth the plan of God to exalt Israel.

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).

The same line of thought continues through verses 11-12. In this passage God details how He will bless the land of Israel but in order to keep it clear that God is doing this in grace, Ezekiel is to remind Israel that they actually deserve judgment and punishment.

Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land (Ezekiel 36:16-24).

But God continued in His grace.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within

you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:25-28).

Then He goes on to say that Israel will be saved by the power of God, not because of any works of their own but by His grace and mercy. Actually this serves as a great prediction, a prophecy, to point forward to the New Covenant which was mediated in New Testament times by Christ Jesus. All this is to be done for the glory of the name of the Lord. And may I emphasize in passing nobody earns it. Nobody achieves it. This is not something you work for. This is something you receive, and thank God.

In chapter 37 we have one of the most stirring revelations in all Scripture. This seems to me to reveal how God will accomplish His salvation among sinful men.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

God sent Ezekiel out into that valley of dry bones and asked him point blank, "Is there any future for these bones?" And Ezekiel said, "Now I do not know, you would know, I would not know." And God said, "Preach to them." And he began to preach to those dry bones and you know that as he preached, they came together and formed into the structure of the human body.

In the New Testament we read "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). This brings something to your mind. If any of you happen to be ministers or preachers or teachers, I want to point out something: when a person comes to know the Lord, and comes to accept God, the first thing he needs to know is the structure of the Gospel. He needs to know what the Gospel really is. In so many words what do you mean? That will give him a form, it will give him the skeleton structure and the muscular form. But there is no life in it. And there are any number of people that know what the Gospel is, and are just as dead as stone. A person can know and needs to know the mental or intellectual understanding that is necessary. We may have that, but that is not life. You need to know the Lord. And after you know what the Gospel is, you need to have personal dealing with the Lord.

Did you notice here he was to preach first and simply say, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you." He was to preach this way to those bones. And they came together and formed a body, but it had no life in it. Then he preached not to the body, and not to the people. He preached to the wind. And if you know the Old Testament language you will know that the word "wind" is the same as the word "spirit." He called upon the Holy Spirit of God to come into these people and when the Holy Spirit came, when the wind blew upon them, breath came into them and they were alive. That is the way it goes.

The wonderful thing is that this interpreted vision is interpreted plainly in the next few verses so that no one can mistake its application.

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith

the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord (Ezekiel 37: 11-14).

Chapter 19

God's Plan For His People

In our last study we noted the classic vision of the valley of dry bones. That was found in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel. The truth revealed was specifically applied in that very chapter to Israel, so there would be no need to ever misunderstand that this was meant to show what happens among God's people. You will remember the vision itself. Ezekiel saw this valley filled with dry bones scattered about and it says about them they were very dry. The bones lying around in chaos can represent confusion in the public mind about God. He was afterwards told that those bones represented the people of Israel. Each bone is real but nothing fits together in any structural fashion. They are just scattered around. The individual soul can be just like that. The mind may have items of concept and of insight about God without having any comprehensive structure of ideas that would be valid to inspire confidence or to ground faith in God as a Person.

No doubt many persons have no true idea of God. Their minds are just like that valley filled with bones, dry bones. The power of preaching was shown in the function of prophesying. Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy to the dry bones. He was to address them. And he was to tell those bones that God would vitalize them, He would make them alive and cause them to live. For instance:

Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 37:5-6).

This is not anything that is natural, but here it is set up in this way. There is no question about what it says. Now the thing that strikes me so interesting he was to talk to those bones as dry as they were, very dry. And he was to tell them what God was going to do.

So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them (Ezekiel 37:7-8).

Again let me point out to you, which I think is very, very significant to me, Ezekiel did not put those bones together. He did not fit them. All he did was say what God was going to do. God fitted them together. As he prophesied God did this very thing. We should note that not only was Ezekiel commissioned to preach but he was told what to preach. He was not just to talk to them. He was to tell them what God was going to do. And when we read in the New Testament "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believed" we should keep in mind that it is the preaching of the Gospel that will save them that believe the Gospel. So you can say "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching the Gospel to save them that believed the Gospel." The prophet was to tell the dry bones in their chaotic state what God would do with them and then God would do what the prophet had preached.

Isn't this tremendous? Wouldn't this be a challenge to any minister, any preacher, to realize that if he would stand in the pulpit and simply tell the people what God is going to do, what God is willing to do, God can actually be doing that very thing in those very people to whom that preacher is preaching. The preacher does not have to know how it happens. The preacher does not have to be able to do it, he need not necessarily trace it out. He simply tells what God is going to do, and God does it. The result of this preaching the Word of God to the very dry bones was that they actually became organic beings, but they were not living. Isn't that amazing? There was no breath in them. And I wonder if this could indicate the spiritual state of a congregation or of a church member, because this seems to imply that a person could have the whole body of the Gospel in mind to the extent that he might be aware of the whole pattern of

God's work and still be spiritually dead. It would be like having an automobile in perfect mechanical order but no gas in the tank. That car, be it ever so complete in design, would never be able to get anywhere. No doubt there is a place for doctrinal preaching for theological reasoning but the tragic truth is that intellectual understanding will not be sufficient.

The prophet was then to preach to the Holy Spirit of God.

Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

How would anybody preach to the Holy Spirit? Pray! He called upon the Holy Spirit to do certain things. He called upon God by praying. In praying he would call upon God to enter into these structured bodies. And here then is the simple pattern of God's program for His people. The ministry of the Word to them in their chaotic state of mind would structure them with an understanding of God's way of doing things, but God Himself would come and make them alive.

Following this classic revelation and perhaps related to it is a further revelation that seems very meaningful. At that time Israel was divided into two parts, named after the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim, the northern kingdom, was also called Israel. Manasseh, the southern kingdom, was also called Judah. And now notice this: now Ezekiel is to witness a miracle that involves him, Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand (Ezekiel 37:15-17).

When the people asked Ezekiel what the meaning of this was he was to tell them plainly that the reunion of all Israel would be part of God's blessing. You know that is amazing. Ezekiel did not fit them together. He did not splice them. He held them together and the holding of them together enabled God to blend them. Oh, when I think back on what I have seen of where some person in a heart of love would hold two individuals together that they would become one. I can remember an instance when two sisters were so sharply divided. They would not talk to one another. But there was a third sister who held them together in her heart. She could not let them go. And while she held them together in her heart, God blended those two. Not only would Israel be reunited as one nation, but they would be redeemed from their involvement of pagan idols and ideas. They would be cleansed. If you were to read verses 20-28 you would find that David, and that will mean the House of David, the Seed of David, which 'we understand will be Jesus of Nazareth, will be their King, their Lord. And they shall walk in the will of God as in the New Testament. They shall dwell in the promised land forever. We read: "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them" (verse 26). And God will dwell with them forever. "Yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (verse 27). I am particularly impressed to note that this whole performance of grace begins in the believing ministry of the prophet, the pastor, the mother, who has a direct share in the blessing that God's people share in the grace of God.

Chapter 20

Judgment Against Gog

Does God have any dealings with natural man? We rejoice that salvation is provided in Christ Jesus for all who believe, but does God have any interest in, does He have anything to do with, persons who do not believe in Christ? We should remember that God is Creator of all and He is a Provider for all. The sun shines upon the good and the bad, the rain falls upon the just and the unjust. God has dealings with everybody. Peter told Cornelius, "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). God is Judge of all the earth. Every human being is alive because God created him and each single action of any man is open before the eyes of God. What men may do is no surprise to God. He knows. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one. This is precisely why Christ Jesus came to die for all men. There is no difference between persons in the eyes of God so far as they are concerned in themselves. They are all lost. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12). But does God have any word for the natural man in his sin?

The truth is that God does have a word for such. It is implied in His law, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Ezekiel was serving as a prophet in Israel. It was his function and privilege to proclaim to Israel God's message to them. Living among the captives by the river Chebar, he prophesied to these displaced persons as well as to those who lived in Jerusalem. But every now and again Ezekiel was given a message to outsiders, to the pagan people surrounding and dominating Israel. And this is now our portion to study in chapters 38 and 39. Ezekiel was commissioned to deliver a message to Gog, king of the land of Magog. He was to announce the judgment of God.

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: and I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armor, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords (Ezekiel 38:2-4).

The message he was to bring to this pagan leader was simple and plain: God was against him. God is a living Being, and He is over all. It is when God acts, that is what settles the matter.

After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them (Ezekiel 38:8).

Time will seem long but God will act: even for the people of Israel, God will act. After a time of victory in which the military forces of Gog, this pagan king, would conquer the land of Israel, we read

Thus saith the Lord God; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought (Ezekiel 38:10).

Gog would be tempted to move in on defenseless people.

And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land (Ezekiel 38:11-12).

In other words, Gog would be tempted to move in on Israel and plunder them.

And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes (Ezekiel 38:16).

God would let this pagan prince achieve victory and move in on Israel and take over the country and set himself up, just in order that God might demonstrate in the way He would deal with him to all the world how God will deal with people. In doing this Gog would move in on Israel, actually his conquest of Israel would be in the plan of God to chasten Israel.

So far as Israel was concerned, Israel would be chastened. The whole world would know that He as God had noted the waywardness of Israel and would punish them through this pagan invader. But when His purpose to chasten Israel was finished, God would restore Israel. Then He would deal in judgment with the pagans on the basis of their own deeds. They moved in to plunder God's defenseless people, which God allowed, but now the invaders are to be destroyed in judgment for their wanton conduct. We may remember the betrayal by Judas actually contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but this was no credit to Judas. His action was sinful and for that he was judged and destroyed.

Someone who is not doing the will of God may actually be prosperous up to a certain point, and someone who is not a godly person at all may have advantage over some believing person. That believing person may need to be chastened, may need to be hustled, and this unbeliever is allowed victory over him but when God is through chastening that believing person and restores him to Himself in grace and mercy, then God will deal with that unbelieving person who took advantage of Him and deal with him according to his actions. Remember Judas, his action was actually that which contributed to the ongo of the Gospel, but he got no credit for that. God used him even in his own evil intentions, God used him to bring His will to pass but then God turned around and judged him.

This is what we are to understand with reference to this prince that we call Gog. God would bring judgment against Gog in the form of military defeat and natural calamity.

And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 38:21-23).

In chapter 39 this whole message is reviewed and restated. For instance when we read in chapter 39 "Therefore thou son of man, prophesy against Gog." Now for your own thinking keep in mind who Gog is. The name of Gog is used to refer to the leader, the prince, of a pagan power of unbelieving people who moved in on God's people and plundered them with God's permission. But they are now going to be dealt with.

Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: and I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel: and I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fallout of thy right hand. Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. Thou shalt fall upon the open field: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God. And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am the Lord. 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 39:1-8).

All of this is setting out the fate of Gog is sealed, it is sure: their weapons for warfare shall be burned

and their dead bodies shall be buried so that the land may be cleansed. Israel is to know for sure that God is the Lord and all the world is to know that the Lord God of Israel is Lord over all. None of this was done to augment Israel. God was not setting up Israel as anything great. It was for God's own glory.

Chapter 21

Ezekiel's Vision Of The Future

The book of Ezekiel seems to be the prophet's own record of the revelations he received from the Lord. As a matter of fact when you read this book you could well think that you were looking into the notebook of a preacher, where he had made notes of the things he was going to declare to other people. This gave him insight into the events in which God dwelt with His people and instruction as to just what he was to say and to whom. The book is featured by visions given to Ezekiel which gave the prophet understanding about the ways of God which he would never have known otherwise. In the latter part of this book, chapters 40-48 Ezekiel is given an extended vision of what will happen in the future. Specific revelation is given about the future temple and the future leadership of the people of God. It is reported that the Jewish rabbis would not permit any man under 30 years of age to read this portion of Scripture. When some of the scholars were asked the meaning of this portion, they said that when Elijah returned he would explain it. This is enough to discourage any attempt to expound its meaning in detail. In the reading of these chapters one can feel the likeness of a dream. Persons appear and disappear. Events occur without any relation to each other. Yet we can be sure there is some meaning intended for those who read. In chapter 40:1-2 we read that Ezekiel was taken to the top of a high mountain so that he could see all.

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 show thee; for to the intent that I might show them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 40:4).

He was to pay close attention to see, to hear and to think and then he was to report to Israel all that he had received. In chapter 40, verse 5, through chapter 41, verse 26, Ezekiel saw a man with a measuring rod, a sort of a yardstick, measuring carefully and specifically all aspects of the city and of the temple. Then in chapter 42 we find that the chambers of the priests were carefully measured, all was found to be symmetrical and in order. Then the scene in his vision shifted.

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: and, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me (Ezekiel 43:1-6).

Once again Ezekiel saw the glory of God.

Ezekiel was then given a commission to call upon the people to put away their evil doings that they might not defile the house of God nor His holy name.

And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places. In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger. Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house (Ezekiel 43:7-12).

Attention is then focused upon the altar, the center of worship. In the remainder of that chapter, verses 13-27, the measurements of the altar are noted and the procedure of worship and the ritual is set forth.

In chapter 44 the focus of attention is upon the leader, the prince, and the priest. A special entrance to the east gate was reserved for the prince. No one else could use that gate. Then Ezekiel was shown that the glory of God filled the sanctuary. So in chapter 44 we read:

Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord: and I fell upon my face (Ezekiel 44:4).

Now Ezekiel was instructed to reprove the priests and to charge them to sorrow for their sins. Even so some of them were given definite tasks to perform and all were told that they were to live off the offerings brought by the people, because they were serving the Lord.

In chapter 45 attention is focused upon the land and its ownership. All the land was to be carefully divided and assigned. A certain portion was to be set aside for the prince. A certain portion for the sanctuary. And the remainder was to be divided among the tribes. From chapter 45, verse 9, through chapter 46 careful instruction was specified to guide procedures in worship. They were to be righteous in their conduct and careful in their ritual.

Thus saith the Lord God; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord God. Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath. The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer. And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs: twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh. This is the oblation that ye shall offer; the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of wheat, and ye shall give the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of barley (Ezekiel 45:9-13).

This was all carefully outlined through chapter 46:15 all the way through about this. After that special instruction was given to the prince and to the priest. In chapter 47 is the report of the vision of rivers of water which had healing powers. After this there was further revelation concerning the division of the land among the tribes. Then in chapter 48 verses 1-29 the portions are assigned to the several tribes respectively and these are described. The book closes with a description of the city plan which provided for gates of entry. All of this being set forth in this way, in the form of a vision, brings to our mind that the future is in mind, God has it in mind and that it is carefully planned.

All these measurements indicate the symmetrical structure which would mean that everything is according to God's will. I have often pointed out and would say to you again that in the reading of any of the visions that when it comes to measurements of time or of distance, space, that you can afford to accept those as symbolic. I do not think they are to be taken literally. When this speaks of so many years or so many days, I do not think you need to look at the calendar. And when this speaks about the measurement of space or even the measurement of those various utensils which they used, these things are, I think, more symbolic than real. The idea that you could draw a picture of all this and in that way know what God is going to do, I think is really unfounded. I do not think that will fit in Scripture. Over and over again when visions are presented there is the truth included and the truth does not appear in identifying the various items. The truth appears as you read it and get the feeling of the whole thing. And so far as this is concerned, so far as Ezekiel is concerned, remember Ezekiel is preaching to a group of people who have at this time no place of their own. They are captives in a strange land and here they are being assured that God has the future in mind and He is going to have things set up the way He wants them set up and that is

the way they are to be. Thus we come to the end of the book of Ezekiel.