

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

April 25, 2018

EZEKIEL

Answers to the Questions (Lesson 19)

Found on Page 99-102

Results of Breaking the Covenant:

God carried out his judgment. The curses predicted in Jeremiah 7:33-34 and 8:13-17 and in Chapter 14 started to unfold. Back in Leviticus God told Israel that the punishment would be the sword, famine, and plague. Jeremiah made clear to the people that the disasters overtaking them were the results of a broken covenant and not just random circumstances. In the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (and in the exile of the people) the old covenant was terminated.

The Book of Consolation promises restoration of the remnant of both Israel and Judah, healing, renewed joy and comfort, forgiveness of their sin as a result of their rebellion, and restoration of their fortunes.

The New Covenant was necessary because the old one had been broken. The New Covenant would be written on their hearts and not on tablets of stone. The people would be renewed on the inside and not just demonstrate outward conformity to the law. They would have an inner desire to obey God and a heart to know him.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 appears again in Hebrews 8:8-12. The New Covenant is unfolded in the New Testament and through the work of Jesus Christ. It supersedes the old by enabling its intentions to be fulfilled. Christ is the one who has power over sin and brings cleansing so that we are made new creatures.

Lamentations: God is still concerned for his people. God still stands in the midst of his people as a God of compassion and faithfulness. God continues his plan of redemption. God is not done with his people (in a good and healthy way).



EZEKIEL

Jeremiah believed that the future lay with the exiles in Babylonia.
However he decided not to join them when Nebuchadrezzar gave him the chance.
His decision to stay in Jerusalem was clear proof to his accusers that he was not a deserter.
But as we saw in Jeremiah 40-44 trouble came upon the remnant left in Judah.
We last heard about Jeremiah in Egypt where he condemned the exiles for their worship of idols.

Egypt became one of the major centers of the Jewish Dispersion.
In the Jewish colony there was a temple where the Lord was worshiped (but also Anath).
The Jews recognized their allegiance to the Temple in Jerusalem.
Later other Jewish settlements developed in Alexandria and other cities in Egypt.

Jeremiah was proven right –
The future belonged not to the exiles in Egypt but to those in Babylonia.
They faithfully preserved the traditions of the past and returned to start reconstruction.
One of the leaders of the Jewish colonies in Babylonia was the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:1 – In the thirteenth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

So starts the work and ministry of Ezekiel (son of Buzi) who was of priestly descent.
He was sent to Babylonia in the first captivity (along with Jehoiachin).
He was commissioned as a prophet to the house of Israel in 593 BCE for twenty years.
He was an unusual person with many peculiarities.
His oracles often came to him in an ecstasy or when in a trance.
He was seized by the hand of God literally or transported by the Spirit.
He was struck dumb, overwhelmed by a coma-like stupor, and had a second-sense.
He was eccentric but that did not diminish the content of his message.

He insisted that the Lord would utterly destroy Judah because of their on-going abominations.
The end was approaching and their failure to honor the covenant brought upon them the curses.
Only after Nebuchadrezzar destroyed Jerusalem and devastated Judah did his tone change.

Outline of the Chapters

The prophecies given before the fall of Jerusalem (593-587 BCE)

Chapters 1-3 His opening vision and commission

Chapters 4-24 Oracles of doom against Judah and Jerusalem

Chapters 25-32 Oracles against the neighboring nations

The oracles against Tyre and Egypt are clearly from Ezekiel

The prophecies given after the fall of Jerusalem (587-573 BCE)

Chapters 33-39 Oracles of promise

Chapters 40-48 The New Jerusalem

Many of the Jews deported in 597 BCE were skilled artisans whose labor was in great demand. Ezekiel had a private house and the elders would often come and visit him. The Jews had a good bit of freedom to practice their religion. Their life was fairly comfortable even though they yearned to return to their homeland.

In the days before the fall of Jerusalem, his oracles were laments and filled with mourning. While Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem, Ezekiel spoke to those in Judah and Babylonia. And this was the situation that Ezekiel faced:

To the exiles of 597 BCE Jehoiachin was the legitimate Davidic king. As long as the exiled king was free to move about there was hope for a revival. But there existed other prophets who proclaimed that Babylonia would be shattered. Remember that Jeremiah told the people to settle in for 70 years of captivity. Ezekiel believed that the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar was divinely ordered. Therefore rebellion against Babylonia was treason against God (Chapter 17:20).

As we stated earlier Jeremiah was a contemporary of Ezekiel who remained in Jerusalem. Both prophets spoke about the four tenets of their understanding of God.

- 1) The people believed they were the Lord's chosen people and enjoyed the blessings of their covenant relationship with him. Based on this belief they had a sense of confidence in the power of God who would ensure their welfare and protect them.
- 2) They believed that the Lord had granted land to their ancestors and that they inherited that land. The Lord ultimately owned the land they inhabited and they believed their presence was the will of God. As their deity, the Lord would fight to protect their land and to ensure that the people were not forced from it.
- 3) The people of Judah believed that the Lord had entered into an eternal covenant with the descendants of David, promising that his dynasty would reign in Jerusalem forever. The king was the adopted son of the Lord whom God would protect against attack by any and all nations. Israel did not go so far as to make this same proclamation about their kings but it affirmed that the relationship between the Lord and King David was unique. The people were to give their total support and loyalty to the king for he ruled with the Lord's blessing.
- 4) Jerusalem was crucial to the theology of the pre-exilic Judeans because the Temple of Solomon stood within its walls. More than 300 years after it was constructed, King Josiah (of Judah) initiated a reform movement that sought to close down every other site. He believed that the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem alone was suitable for appropriate worship of their God. It followed that the people thought that their God would not permit the city (in which his temple stood) to be destroyed.

Reaction / Response by Ezekiel:

- 1) It is true that the Lord and Israel were covenant partners but the people had for centuries failed to fulfill their covenant obligations. During the time of Ezekiel the people were idolatrous and the idols even found their way into the Temple (Chapter 8). Because the rebellious house of Israel had failed to honor its covenant obligations, the Lord would bring the covenant curses upon them that included deportation, destruction, and death.

- 2) God had indeed granted to Israel the land promised to its ancestors but its failure to obey the covenant regulations meant that Israel could and would lose its right to inhabit that territory. God would either expel the people from their homeland (Chapter 14) or cover it with their corpses (Chapter 6).
- 3) The Lord determined long ago that the descendants of David would rule over the people of God. But the kings of Judah blatantly broke the laws of God and ravaged their subjects. They oppressed the very people whose rights they were duty-bound to protect and rebelled against the pro-Babylonian policy that Ezekiel insisted was the will of God (Chapter 17). The kings would not go unpunished.
- 4) Ezekiel believed that the glory of God resided in the Temple in Jerusalem. But he insisted that the Lord had abandoned that Temple because the abominations committed within it had polluted the place completely. Without the protective presence of God, the Temple was doomed to destruction, as was the city in which it stood – a city so corrupt that it had out-sinned Sodom (Chapters 16 and 23).

The words of Ezekiel were accompanied by signs enacted with dramatic power.

He was instructed to draw on a clay brick a diagram of Jerusalem under siege.

He was directed to lie for 390 days on his left side then for 40 days on his right side.

This represented the number of years Israel and Judah would be punished (respectively).

While lying on his side he was to lay out small rations of food and water.

He was to cut off his hair with a sword and separate it into three parts.

This was to demonstrate the three kinds of fate that would befall the people of Jerusalem.

He packed his bags and at night dug through the wall.

This showed a person trying to flee from the city in the night.

He ate his bread with quaking and drank his water with trembling.

This symbolized the nervous fear people would experience during the coming siege.

When his wife died he refrained from mourning.

This was a sign to the exiles that the news of the fall of Jerusalem was too deep for tears.

His words and signs stirred up modest curiosity but they did not evoke repentance.

Their reaction was quite different from Jeremiah (but Israel remained a rebellious house).

Ezekiel insisted that there never was a time in the history of Israel when the people were sinless.

He traced their unfaithfulness to the wilderness wanderings but also to the time in Egypt.

Before they could know forgiveness the people had to experience divine judgment.

His message was addressed to the people as a whole.

But within the community individuals had a personal relationship with God.

In the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the suffering of the innocent came to be a critical issue.

Both of them did not advocate extreme individualism.

Ezekiel turned the question of God's justice back on those who questioned him.

He reminded them that they were not as blameless as they proclaimed.

They were also entangled in the sins of Israel and had to accept full responsibility.

He did not explain the cause of suffering.

He insisted that it provided an opportunity for repentance and faith.

His appeal was in vain for the people were too enslaved by their false loyalties. Ezekiel offered the exiles no hope that their homeland might survive the Babylonians. He insisted that the Lord was bringing about its downfall.

Underneath his pronouncements of judgment were certain presuppositions:

Ezekiel asserts the Lord's unparalleled sovereignty over history and the nations.

God is at work in the world and controls nations and events according to his plans.

The plan includes the destruction of Judah that is the doing of God.

Ezekiel also insisted that the punishments of God are just.

The plans of God are not capricious or just a whim but the merited response to sin.

The punishment is proportionate to the crime.

His oracles of judgment are filled with passion and devoid of sentimentality.

But the words of doom are not the only words spoken by Ezekiel.

In Chapters 33-48 there is hope of restoration.

He insists that Israel will not remain in exile forever.

For the sake of the Lord, God will regather the people from the nations.

The Lord will return them to their homeland and ensure that the sins of the past are not repeated.

The Lord will enter into a new covenant with the people.

The people will be shepherded by a new David.

All potential foes will be eliminated in God's final battle (Chapters 38-39).

The glory of the Lord will return to a new and perfectly ordered temple (Chapters 40-48).

Image of the Good Shepherd

Chapter 34

Vision of the Dry Bones

Chapter 37

Pentecost Sunday (May 20)

Lessons for Us:

- 1) Ezekiel's description of the Temple reminds us that there is a difference between the Holy and the profane and God expects us to respect that difference.
- 2) It is our responsibility to obey God and worship him alone.
- 3) God honors his promises. Eventually we experience the fulfillment of every promise God ever made. Some may come true during our lifetime but all will be fulfilled in the life to come.
- 4) We are to honor the name of God. At least 60 times Ezekiel quoted God as saying:
They shall know that I am the Lord.
- 5) It is the church which must do God's tasks today. Not only must we pray for God's will to be done but we must be about our Father's business helping to accomplish His will. With God on his throne and Jesus Christ at his right hand can we do anything less?

Assignment for May 2

Complete the Exercises on Pages 103-107

Read Daniel (or the portions outlined on Page 107)

THE LITERARY PROPHETS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER (Estimates)

NINTH CENTURY (EARLY ASSYRIAN PERIOD)

- 1) Obadiah (ca. 845 BCE)
- 2) Joel (ca 830 BCE)
- 3) Jonah (790-750 BCE)

The latter is during the period of *The Divided Kingdom* in Israel's history. To the north and east the empire of Assyria was beginning to make its presence known in Israel.

EIGHTH CENTURY (ASSYRIAN PERIOD)

- 1) Amos (755 BCE)
- 2) Hosea (750-725 BCE)
- 3) Isaiah (740-700 BCE)
- 4) Micah (735-700 BCE)

In 722 BCE, the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity. These prophets proclaimed God's message as the nation was being threatened from the north.

SEVENTH CENTURY (CHALDEAN PERIOD)

- 1) Jeremiah (626-586 BCE)
- 2) Zephaniah (630-625 BCE)
- 3) Nahum (625-612 BCE)
- 4) Habakkuk (625-605 BCE)

Assyria was eventually defeated by Babylon. These prophets served as God's messengers when the Babylonian empire threatened the kingdom of Judah.

SIXTH CENTURY (THE EXILE)

- 1) Ezekiel (593-570 BCE)
- 2) Daniel (605-536 BCE)

Like many of their countrymen, these prophets were taken into Babylonian captivity. From Babylon they served as God's messengers to both the captives and the kings.

SIXTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES (POST-EXILIC PERIOD)

- 1) Haggai (520 BCE)
- 2) Zechariah (520-518 BCE)
- 3) Malachi (ca. 440 BCE)

After the Jews were allowed to return home from Babylonian captivity, God used Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to rebuild the temple. Later, Malachi was used to reform the priesthood during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.