

Week 35 Chronological

August 24: Jeremiah 51 and 52

The exiles are warned to leave Babylon. Another nation is coming, and it will destroy Babylon completely. Their comforts and riches will be destroyed. Sadly, there were many Jews that remained in Babylon after the exile had ended despite this warning about the future of the nation. These folks had established themselves there, were living comfortably, and probably enjoyed the opulent lifestyle the land offered them. Sometimes, God is going to call us out of our comfort zone. Will we be ready when He does?

We are reminded of God's might and power. He made the earth by His power and established the world by His wisdom. Those that make idols for the false gods are foolish. The metal gods fashioned by human hands have no power. There are further images of the desolation that is headed Babylon's way. Her sea will be dried up and the land will become a jackal's den.

At the age of 21, Zedekiah becomes king of Judah. He does what is evil in God's sight. God's anger was against him and the people, so God banished them from His presence. To his credit, Zedekiah did rebel against the king of Babylon. In Zedekiah's 9th year, a terrible famine hits the city. They have no food and all of the soldiers flee. Zedekiah is rounded up along with his sons and brought to Babylon. He is forced to watch the execution of his sons and then he is blinded.

In Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year as king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guards, enters Jerusalem and burns down the LORD's temple and the king's palace. The bronze pillars of the temple, water carts, and bronze reservoir were broken into pieces. All the treasures in the temple were carried away.

August 25: Lamentations 1 and 2

Lamentations is a book about pain, but with hope in God. The extremes of human pain are described. This book addresses some of the hard questions that come up during times of difficulty. These lamentations are written in response to the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. Though the author is not named, credit for this book is given to Jeremiah.

Though the city was once thriving and filled with people, it now sits alone. Everyone has betrayed her, there is no one to offer comfort. No longer are the festivals celebrated. No one was there to help her when her people fell. Instead, this once great nation was a laughingstock. Her people that were once well fed and taken care of now trade their precious jewels for bread and other simple foods just to stay alive. Jeremiah's heartbreak is wrenching because the enemy won.

This once proud daughter has now been overshadowed by God's anger. Her glory has been thrown down. All her power is cut off and God's hand no longer protects her. The LORD has become like an enemy to them. He is not their enemy, but it feels like it at this point. We must remember that it was the people's rebellion that caused all of this. The people listened to the false prophets' comforting words rather than the truth that Jeremiah was giving them. They

exchanged the uncomfortable truth for a convenient lie. The punishment they are enduring is no one else's fault but their own.

August 26: Lamentations 3-5

The rod of God's wrath is Babylon. God used this nation to bring His judgment upon Judah. Even Jeremiah, the faithful messenger of God, is suffering through the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's pain is so intense, he feels like he has been hit by one of God's arrows. Though the bitter thoughts rage in Jeremiah's heart and mind, he stops brooding over his affliction and puts his hope in The LORD. Because of God's faithful love, they will not perish. His faithfulness is great and His mercies never end. When we are engulfed in bitterness, do we respond the same way?

Adversity and good come from the mouth of the Most High. This is reminiscent of Job's response to his wife when she encourages him to "curse God and die." Job asks if we should only take the good from God and not the bad (Job 2:10). Jeremiah remains confident that God will pay back Judah's enemies for what they have done. God is their only hope!

God's people are compared to gold. They are described as gold, fine gold, and pure gold. This once holy and set apart people had become tarnished. They are worse than jackals that at least feed their young. Instead, they act like ostriches that abandon their eggs after laying them. Babies thirst and the young beg for bread, but no one gives them any. The once rich and ruling class now huddle in garbage heaps. The famine they endured was so bad that even compassionate women resorted to cooking their own children for food. Jerusalem's punishment has been severe, but the punishment is over, and her exile is not extended.

Lamentations closes with a cry to God asking that He remember what has happened to them. The fathers that committed all these evil acts are now dead, but their punishment still rests on the people. They must pay for their food and their inheritance is taken. The last verse of this book asks God to restore the people to Him unless He has completely rejected them.

August 27: Ezekiel 1-4

Ezekiel is comprised of prophecies or oracles in the first person, giving us a sense of the prophet's private memories. This book was written mainly to the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel was one of the 8,000 soldiers and noblemen that were exiled with the king in 597 B.C. He looks and sees a whirlwind coming from the north. It was a large cloud with fire and brilliant light all around it. God's glory has previously been associated with clouds. God's glory had once filled the Holy of Holies in the temple. Four living creatures came out of it. They had human form, but they each had the face of the lion, the eagle, the ox, and a human. The lion was considered the fiercest of animals. The eagle was the most magnificent of birds. The ox was the most valued of domesticated animals. Humans were given dominion over all the creatures God had made. Their fiery appearance is reminiscent of Isaiah's encounter with the seraphim in Isaiah 6.

Ezekiel falls face down in worship, giving God the glory He is due. God tells Ezekiel to stand up and then He will speak to him. God is sending him to the Israelites. They have transgressed

against The LORD. God encourages Ezekiel to not be afraid of this task. God commands him to eat the scroll He presents to him. The scroll is “sweet as honey” to Ezekiel.

The LORD is sending Ezekiel to the Israelites, the people that speak the same language as he does. However, God also says that he would have better luck getting them to listen if they did not speak the same language as Ezekiel. The people will not listen to Ezekiel because they do not want to listen to God. God sends him anyway. Ezekiel is faithful and goes, despite knowing that no one is going to listen.

Ezekiel is placed as a watchman. He is to warn the wicked that they will surely die. If the wicked person does not believe Ezekiel’s words, then he or she bears the punishment for it. However, if Ezekiel keeps silent, then Ezekiel is guilty of letting them stumble. The LORD instructs Ezekiel to dramatically enact the siege of Jerusalem. He takes a brick and draws the city on it. Then he constructs a siege wall, ramp, pitches military camps, and places battering rams against it on all side. God instructs Ezekiel to make a certain type of bread, using human excrement as the heat source for baking. Ezekiel requests that he be allowed another fuel source since he has never eaten anything to defile himself. God allows him to use cow manure instead. The people have become so destitute that they will resort to eating this bread baked in an unsettlingly fowl manner.

I know there are certain stores that sell “Ezekiel bread”. Any time I come across it in the store, I try to figure out what heat source they used! I know the fuel source is disgusting and we are repulsed by the idea. I hope and pray that we are repulsed by the sin in our lives.

August 28: Ezekiel 5-8

To dramatize the fall of Jerusalem, God orders Ezekiel to shave his head and beard. One third of the hair is to be burned up, another third is cut up by the sword, the last third is scattered to the wind where God will send sword after them. However, Ezekiel is supposed to keep a few strands and keep them in the folds of his robe.

Jerusalem has rebelled against God. They have been even more insubordinate than the nations around them. As a result, God has set them apart for destruction. His judgment against them will cause fathers to eat their sons and sons to eat their fathers. They will be a ruin and disgrace among the nations around them.

Ezekiel is then told to prophesy about Israel’s idolatry. God is going to destroy their high places. Their altars will be desolated, and the incense altars will be smashed. The slain residents will fall before their idols.

God announces the end of Israel. One disaster after another is coming their way. Doom has come to them. God’s wrath is poured out and they will be judged according to their ways. Ezekiel reflects on his first vision for fourteen months. As he is sitting in his house with the 70 elders, the hand of the LORD came down on him. Ezekiel sees the form of a man with fire below his waist and something like the gleam of an amber above the waste. The figure gabs Ezekiel by the hair and takes him away to the entrance of the North Gate. God show Ezekiel the

detestable acts of paganism that are happening in the temple that was made for Him. Ezekiel is shown the 70 elders, burning incense to foreign gods, complaining that Yahweh is not listening to them. Perhaps He would listen to them, if they would worship and serve Him, rather than these images.

August 29: Ezekiel 9-12

Ezekiel sees six men coming from the direction of the Upper Gate. Another man was with them, clothed in linen with writing equipment at his side. The man in linen is charged with going through the city and marking whoever groans at the detestable acts. God charges the others with going through the city and killing anyone that does not have the mark.

The glory of the LORD leaves the temple. It moves away from the threshold and goes to the entrance to the eastern gate of the LORD's house. Eastern movement is associated with departure. It is understood that when Adam and Eve left the garden, they went east. God's glory moving in an eastern direction indicates that He will ultimately leave the city altogether.

The Spirit lifts Ezekiel up and he is shown 25 men that plot evil and give wicked advice. While Ezekiel is prophesying, he stops and cries out, asking God if He will end the remnant of Israel. God responds that even though He has scattered them among the nations, He will bring them back. They will end the detestable practices of their ancestors. Upon making this promise, God's glory leaves Jerusalem.

The exile of Jerusalem is dramatized by Ezekiel. He packs an exile's bag. In the evening, he goes into the sight of the people headed for exile and digs a hole in the wall to climb through. God asks Ezekiel after he does this whether anyone stopped him and asked what he is doing. Ezekiel is to tell them that he is demonstrating what is about to happen to them.

The expression "the days keep passing by, and every vision fails?" is the test of true prophecy. If a prophecy did not come true, the person who made the prediction was a false prophet. God is going to change this mentality to "the day draws near, as well as the fulfillment of every vision." God will speak a message and it will come to pass.

August 30: Ezekiel 13-15

There were false prophets in Israel. They have been giving words of comfort and telling people what they want to hear. Ezekiel is told to prophesy against them and tell them to hear the Word of the LORD. Woe to those prophets that would seek their own benefit and follow their own imagination. They have ensnared the people, but God will free the people from them. They will no longer see false visions or practice divination.

Some elders approach Ezekiel. God confronts them for their idolatry and the stumbling blocks they have set up. When someone like this approaches a prophet, God will answer accordingly. God will answer them according to their many idols. The judgment against them is so that they can see the error of their ways and return to God. They are estranged from Him based on their idolatry.

The reading today closes with the parable of the useless vine. What good is that vine that is cut off the branch? Can it be used for anything useful? Even if it was kept whole, it could not be used. Just as the withered branch is used for fire, God will give up the residents of Jerusalem. He will turn against them. The land will be desolate because of their unfaithfulness.

August 31: Ezekiel 16 and 17

The LORD commands Ezekiel to remind Israel of how they were despised. In this text, Israel is compared to an unwanted baby. No one cared for it, the umbilical cord was not cut, it was not washed clean and rubbed with salts or wrapped in clothing. Instead, it was thrown out into the open field. God is the One that decided to make Israel live. He is the One that called Abraham out and laid the foundation for this nation to rise. The nation is His, and He is faithful to it, but they prostitute themselves with the gods of other nations. They do not have loyalty to the LORD. Because of their unfaithfulness, God will shame them. Other nations that were destroyed by God because of their sin were not as sinful as Israel is. God will restore these other nations so that Israel will be shamed.

Ezekiel tells the parable of the eagles. The great eagle mentioned in verse 3 is Nebuchadnezzar. He was a phenomenal military strategist. Lebanon in this passage refers to Israel. In ancient times, the Lebanon mountain range was covered in cedars. The cedar refers to king David's family and dynasty. The top of the cedar that is removed represents Jehoiachin, the king taken into exile in 597 B.C. The chapter ends with God's promise of restoration for the nation.