

Ezekiel 19 – January 1

And just like that, we begin a new year. Unfortunately for Israel, in Ezekiel 19, it's the same old story. This time, however, Ezekiel prophesies specifically about the "princes of Israel." Also, in this chapter you'll notice the word *lamentation* or *lament* a few times (3, to be exact). To lament is simply to mourn. A lamentation is an expression of grief or mourning. Ezekiel 19 is a lamentation about the leadership of God's people. It's quite interesting (and I only know this because of a note in one of my study bibles): Ezekiel wrote this poem in such a way that his original audience (the Israelites) would recognize it as a funeral poem. In other words, there was no mistaking the point of this prophecy, specifically, the certainty of punishment for sin (which is death).

As I mentioned above a couple times, this chapter isn't just a general pronouncement of coming judgement; it is a lamentation about Israel's leadership. That fact brings a little extra sting because the kingly line of Israel isn't just a line of any old kings; at least, it wasn't meant to be. It was supposed to be the *line of David*! God promised that the Messiah would come from the line of David, but what good can come from this line of terrible kings??

I am reminded of Nathanael in John 1 saying, "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" when he was told that the Messiah was present and He was from Nazareth. You know, it's almost as if God can take dust and make beautiful things out of it.

This time in Israel's history, that we are currently reading about in Ezekiel 19, isn't the first time the line of Jesus was hanging on by a thread. Think forward to Matthew 1:5 which tells us that Rahab (the harlot from Joshua 2) is part of the line of Christ. Who would have thought that?? And Rahab was the mother of Boaz. And in Boaz's time, it looked like the line was about to end! Oh no! What ever will God do? Will His promise be broken?? Nope. In a crazy turn of events, which you can read about in the book of Ruth, Boaz marries Ruth. So, Rahab the harlot is Ruth's mother-in-law! Wow! And guess what comes of Ruth and Boaz? They have a child named Obed, and Obed had a child named Jesse and Jesse had a child named... David. God said the Messiah would come from David's line and even when it looked like David's line would be broken... God had a plan—He always does!

But even after David, there were 28(!) generations until Jesus. There were so many years, from David to Solomon to the divided kingdoms with all their bad kings, but God's plan never failed. That's the hidden beauty of Ezekiel 19. Yes, Israel's "princes" had sinned and were evil and, no, that was nothing new. Yes, they sinned willfully and were going to receive punishment. But, like we read in Genesis 50:20, towards the end of the story of Joseph, what Satan and the broken world and our sinful flesh mean for evil, God means for good. And He accomplishes that good through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Ezekiel 19 is a passage that ought to make us mourn sin and brokenness, but we ought not to do so with no hope. In fact, we know hope and His name is Jesus.

Ezekiel 20 – January 2

Ezekiel 20 is a chapter of historical recollection. Through 44 out of 49 verses, the writer “narrates Israel’s guilt from the day God chose the Israelites (sometime prior to the exodus event) to the time God exiled them from the promised land.” That is a quote from D.A. Carson on this chapter. Let’s hear another quote from our dear brother to help us understand what’s going on in Ezekiel 20.

Carson says, “[verses 1-32 identify] cycles of rebellion in Egypt (vv. 1-12), the wilderness (vv. 13-26), and Canaan (vv. 27-32). The general pattern is the rebellion, the nature of the rebellion, wrath threatened, and wrath withheld for the sake of God’s name. Each cycle concludes with a statement about God graciously giving something to his people so that they will know he is the Lord.”

As you can see from the quote above, a theme of Israel’s history that we see especially in Ezekiel 20 (and really throughout the whole Bible) is God’s glory received by salvation through judgement. If you’re interested in reading about 600 pages on this topic, I encourage you to purchase the book *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement: A Biblical Theology* by James Hamilton. But, if you don’t want to read the book... I understand!

Anyways, we do see the theme of God getting glory through saving His people from necessary judgment all throughout the Bible. Of course, we see almost endless cycles of it in the Old Testament, as Ezekiel 20 recounts for us, but we see it again in the New Testament, particularly in Jesus on the cross.

In Christ, God saves the world through judgement. You and I receive salvation through Christ because Christ was judged in our place. Christ Jesus, the Messiah, is the ultimate hope that all of the Old Testament was pointing to! The sacrificial system that couldn’t keep up, the kings that couldn’t play nice, and the seemingly endless cycles of rebellion by God’s people all point toward the need for a once-for-all savior! We know, of course, that the savior is Jesus Christ. He is the once-for-all sacrifice, He is the perfect prophet, priest, and king, and He is the savior of ruined and rebellious sinners.

Our hope gets even better, though, when we think about Christ’s resurrection. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was the signifying of His defeating sin and death. He took God’s punishment, satisfied His wrath, and because He lived a perfect life, He arose in victory! The Bible calls Jesus’ resurrection the “first-fruits” because it signifies that more resurrection is coming! Our hope isn’t just to be souls floating around in heaven, but even better! Our hope in Christ is to one day be resurrected to perfect, transformed life in the new heaven and new earth. What a hope!

So as we continue in this new year to read about judgement, remember that it’s never separate from hope. As James says, “mercy triumphs over judgement.”

Ezekiel 21 – January 3

Well, try as I might, there isn't a lot of hope to find in this chapter. Of course, we know that Jesus, the Messiah, is the ultimate hope and that all this judgement and wrath from God was preparing the way for him. But, to be honest, this chapter really isn't about hope; it's about judgement.

We have to experience a storm to love the calm and we have to experience the darkness to love the light. Likewise, Israel had to experience judgement before they could love the hope. And, boy let me tell you, they really experience judgement in this chapter.

In Ezekiel 21, the prophet "sings" a few songs. Most commentators refer to them as "sword songs." If you've already read the chapter—and I hope you have—then you will realize that these sword songs aren't happy, encouraging songs at all. They don't make you nod your head and tap your toes. No, they're more like funeral dirges.

"a sword, a sword,
Sharpened and polished,
Sharpened for slaughter,
Polished to flash like lighting!"

Yikes.

I know we've talked about this almost every day for the last few months, but friends these judgement passages are so plentiful and so graphic because the Lord, through the biblical writers, is showing us grace *by* helping us grasp the full weight of the evil of sin. I am fully, fully, fully, convinced that we don't understand just how bad and evil and ugly sin is *because* we don't have a complete enough grasp on the infinite glory and unspeakable worth of God.

Every time I come across yet another chapter on judgement and sin I try to tell myself, "man, sin must still be worse than I thought... because God must still be more glorious than I thought." In other words, these judgement passages, instead of bogging me down or depressing or boring me, actually humble me (Lord willing) and cause me to realize that I need to keep seeking God because I clearly don't know him in all his glory as much as I can!

Now, don't take this as me yelling at you saying, "*be a better person! Know God more!*" It's not that easy. The whole Christian journey is about us trying to know God and obey him more and more, so don't get too down on yourself today because you don't feel "good enough." I'm just trying to get us to see and embrace the "simple" fact that until we meet him face to face we will always need to be actively striving after fuller, deeper, richer experiences of God... and these myriad passages on judgement mercifully aid us in that endeavor.

Ezekiel 22 – January 4

If you're like me, you struggle at times to figure out how to apply an Old Testament passage to your own life today in 21st century America. Our chapter for today, Ezekiel 22, is one of those passages. You read the first few verses and think, "well what do I do with this? I've never murdered anyone and I've never carved an idol out of wood or metal and worshipped it." In fact, it's more than just the first few verses. It's possible that you haven't even really committed much, if anything, of what the first 12 verses talk about.

Or, at least we think we haven't...

In thinking about if I've ever broken those Old Testament laws, my mind flies to Luke 18:18-30, the story of the rich, young ruler. He, like me at times, thought he had kept all of the Old Testament law. He didn't murder, he didn't steal, he didn't buy any idols in the marketplace, he didn't participate in incest... you get the point.

But, here's the catch: what did Jesus say about murder and adultery and keeping the Sabbath and so on? He said, in Matthew 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgement."

Uh oh. I see how it applies to me now.

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Well darn. Now I really see how I actually have broken the laws of Ezekiel 22.

I hope you're getting the picture at this point! The point is that when we read chapters like Ezekiel 22 and think that they don't apply to us because we've never done any of those crazy things, we need to take a step back and realize that it's all about the heart! We may have never fashioned a physical idol out of wood, but we make idols out of things in our lives all the time like family, money, physical pleasure, etc. We might think that since we've never murdered, we're good to go, but Jesus says if you've ever hated someone (and I think we all have at some point in our lives) then you're just as bad a murderer (in a spiritual sense). The same goes for adultery and all the other things. And how about the Sabbath? You might have never cut your grass on Sunday, but have you ever worried? Friends, we Sabbath by resting in Christ. If you rest on Sunday, but don't rest in Christ the rest of the week then you're the same as a Sabbath-breaker!

I hope this little exercise has given you one more little tool to better interpret the Old Testament and accurately apply it to your life. And, like the people in the Old Testament, we deserve judgment and damnation. But, because of the New Testament (a.k.a Jesus) we have salvation and the redemption of our sins. Praise the Lord!

Ezekiel 23 – January 5

Word of Warning: if you read the Emmaus Road with your children, I would suggest reading this chapter first by yourself and then putting some thought into how you can relate it in an appropriate manner to your kids. Adults need to read it for what it is, but there is nothing wrong with children getting an accurate, but softened version. Don't soften the truth! Just the way it's presented. But for adults, if this chapter makes you feel uncomfortable (I hope it does!) that's a good thing. If it makes you blush, that's a good thing. This life isn't a game; it's not child's play. This is serious stuff, and our chapter for today is evidence of that.

I really don't want this devotion to be one that just makes us feel awful about ourselves because there's nothing extra-holy about feeling terrible about yourself (especially if it doesn't end in Christ). However, what this chapter undeniably shows us is how serious God takes sin. We can't get around it, and frankly I'm not sure that we can ever hear it enough. Now, again, we have to be careful because God has no intention of scaring us in to obedience. We obey God because we love God, not because we're scared of what he'll do if he catches us disobeying. So, please don't walk away from this devotion, or others like it, and think that you have to "be a better person or else." That's not the gospel. BUT, there must be balance! Say it with me "b-a-l-a-n-c-e."

I stress this need for balance because it's so easy for us as sinful humans to vacillate from one extreme to the next. We're either legalistic (be a better person or else) or we're antinomian (a word meaning "against the law.") In other words, we either think the law can save us or we think that law doesn't matter and we can do whatever we want because of God's grace—neither is true! That's why we need balance.

So what is the balance? The balance is found in Christ. We realize that, yes, we are wretched sinners. We have sinned against a perfectly holy and righteous God and we deserve eternal punishment. We have prostituted ourselves out to idol after idol, and God doesn't wink at sin. God doesn't sweep it under the rug. We can't just say, "oh well, I tried my best!" Sin demands justice. We see that clearly in Ezekiel 23.

But this is where Christ comes in. We realize that Christ paid the penalty for sin! However, he didn't die on the cross and rise to new life for us to keep living however we want to. No, he bought us with his blood—we are his. And now we obey out of joy. As Christ molds our hearts to love him more and more, we joyfully reflect his glory to the world more and more. That's the balance! We aren't hopelessly trying to work our way to heaven, but we also aren't hopelessly doing whatever we want! We are loving God and loving our neighbors because we are set free by the blood of Christ to do so.

Ezekiel 23 is rough and raw. It doesn't hold back. It pulls back the curtain and shows us the reality of sin. But we know that because of Christ it doesn't end there. Christ paid for sin and now lives in his people to walk in the light. Israel needed a savior and so do we, and his name is Jesus.

Ezekiel 24 – January 6

Recall yesterday how we talked about Christ. Really, since January 1, 2017 we've been talking about Christ and how he changes everything. Well, today, we need a lot of Jesus. The chapter for today, Ezekiel 24, is heartbreaking. The happenings of Ezekiel 24 put my faith to the test. Have you ever put the durability of something to the test? You wonder how much you can fit in one bag or how many things you can stack up or how many Christmas decorations the flimsy boards in your attic can hold? Well, I feel like Ezekiel 24 adds a little weight to the boards of my heart. When I read Ezekiel 24 I felt my heart creak and groan under the weight.

There are two stories in Ezekiel 24. One story is a parable comparing Jerusalem to a cooking pot and the other is the death of Ezekiel's wife. Though the cooking pot parable isn't pleasant, it's obviously not the part of the chapter that weighed on my heart.

When I come across Scripture like the second half of Ezekiel 24 my faith is tested and I have two options: trust God or don't. Like C.S. Lewis said, I can hold on in the dark to what I knew was true in the light or I can give up and give in to the darkness. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells me that all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable, so I choose not to throw anything out just because I don't understand it. Can you imagine if your kids (if you have kids, that is) threw out every one of your rules that they didn't understand? HA! That would be utter chaos. We were all kids at one point. Think about if you had rebelled against every single thing you didn't understand. That would have led to terrible results!

When I come up on something in Scripture that I don't understand, I don't cast it aside or explain it away—I trust the Lord. I trust the Lord that he is all-powerful and all-loving and even if I can't see it, I trust anyways. I trust because I've seen God's power and God's love so many times in my life. It's not fair at all for me to take one thing I don't understand and pit it against the countless times I've seen God work in powerful and loving ways.

So, I don't know why God took Ezekiel's wife from him. And the text is painfully clear that it was indeed God's plan and God's doing. I really don't know why other than the fact that it was used in the judgement and ultimate healing of Israel. So, in that sense, her untimely death was absolutely used by God for the good of all his people. But that didn't make it much easier for Ezekiel, I'm sure. I'm sure Ezekiel cried private tears. By the way, God didn't want him to make a *public* spectacle of his mourning, but Ezekiel wasn't commanded to not be internally sad at all. So, I'm sure that Ezekiel cried himself to sleep many nights after the rather sudden death of his wife. Just like Job cried out to God. Just like Jesus, the night of his arrest, cried out to his father.

Speaking of Jesus, that's another reason why Ezekiel, and I, and you, can trust God in the midst of trying times. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." In other words, Jesus isn't sitting up in heaven, unable to relate to our pain in this earth. He endured it... and he rose again. And we will rise again. Hallelujah!

Ezekiel 25 – January 7

We have just completed 24 chapters worth of judgment on Israel. Now, the Lion of Judah has turned to face a different prey. From Ezekiel 25 to 32, the focus is on the judgment of other nations. Here in chapter 25 we have short sections on Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. What's interesting about the next 8 chapters is that they are in preparation for chapters on Israel's future hope. So, Israel endured prophecies of judgment for quite a while (basically the first 24 chapters!), but that's not the end of the story! There is judgment on other nations for their part in the process and then, at the end, there is the promised restoration of Israel (which is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, but we'll talk about that later).

So, in these short sections on the judgement of Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, do you notice a trend? Do you notice a common denominator? First off, they're punished for what *they* did, not for how God used their sin. Some people could read this and think, "well wasn't it God who used them to judge Israel? Why are they paying for what God did?" But the answer isn't that it doesn't matter and God can do whatever he wants. The answer is that they sinned. God *used* their sin, but he didn't author it. God committed no sin. Think about Job: Satan killed Job's family and afflicted him with sores. God didn't do that. God was watching over Job the whole time and knew that it would ultimately be good for Job to go through all this. So it is with Israel and the surrounding nations. God didn't make anyone sin. Think about James 1:13-14 that tells us that God tempts no one, but we are all tempted and dragged away by our own sin. By God's great *mercy* he doesn't let even sin go to waste! He uses that for His glory and our good! What a loving and merciful God!

If you're tempted to think that God's not fair... you're right! If God was "fair" then he wouldn't have sent his sinless son to die on a cross for YOUR sins. You and I burning in Hell for eternity is what would have been fair! We sinned against God. Right? Could you look me in the eyes and tell me you didn't or that God forced you to? Nah, I didn't think so.

Hopefully, it's settled in your heart that these people are being punished for *their* sin that they willingly (and with pleasure!) committed. Another common denominator is the phrase, "they will know that I am the Lord."

You know what I find interesting about that? That's the same reason that we do missions. We send teams to Portland and to Africa and we seek out church planters who need our aid so that people will know that Jesus is Lord. Whether through glad submission or deserved judgment, everyone will one day know that Jesus is Lord. (Hint: that's the point of all of history!)

Ezekiel 26 – January 8

Starting with our chapter for today, Ezekiel 26, the next three chapters focus on the city of Tyre. Ezekiel 26 is a prophecy against Tyre, Ezekiel 27 is a lament for Tyre, and Ezekiel 28 is a prophecy against the rulers of Tyre. Oh, and Sidon is mentioned briefly at the end of chapter 28. We often read of the cities of Tyre and Sidon together, but here Tyre is the main focus.

The reason why Tyre gets 3 chapters dedicated to them is because their arrogance was so immense. Tyre was a very wealthy city. In fact, it was an economic super power, so to speak, because it was an island. Nowadays, most islands aren't considered economic super powers, but when all import and export happened via water travel an island was the place to be! So, God wanted to bring them extra low because they were extra proud.

It's fascinating to see the poetic way that God, through Ezekiel, prophesies judgement on the water-nation of Tyre. Verse 3 says, "I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves." The next verse says that Tyre will be made like a bare rock (as opposed to a luscious island). In verses 5 and 14, Ezekiel says that God will make this once wealthy super power a place that is only good for fishing.

It's no coincidence that what God gave Tyre, God will take away because of their sin. It wasn't Tyre but God who allowed them to be perfectly positioned to be an economic super power. Instead of growing proud, Tyre should have stewarded their gifts well and been a help to other nations. When God gives blessing, He expects it to be used for his glory and the good of others and he expected no less from Tyre and their blessings. But they choose to live selfishly and arrogantly, so God took those blessings away from them.

Here's where things might get confusing. It's really easy to make the application for today: if you live bad, God will take your earthly blessings. But's that not true, is it? Job was a righteous man and he was stripped of his blessings. And we see evil people prosper in this life all the time. So, what is the application for today? What can we take away from the judgment of Tyre if not the admonishment to live our lives better so our blessings aren't taken from us?

Romans 8. Turn there if you have a moment. Verse 31b-34 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?"

I brought us to these verses because IF you are in Christ, if you're a follower of Christ, then these verses are true for you. If your old self has died with Christ then there is now no condemnation for you. Your sin won't outdo God's grace to you in Christ Jesus. Of course, if you continue on sinning without *repentance* or any *growth* over an extended period of time, then you might want to reconsider if you're actually in Christ or not. But if the Spirit is indeed in you, then you are free from wondering if God is going to take everything from you at any moment.

You might not have material blessings in this life (money, health, etc.), but, if you're in Christ, you don't have to ever worry if God's mad at you and ready to strike you down, like Tyre, with his next breath. Yes—you really are that free! Now, steward that freedom well! Live radically for God, not because you're scared, but because you're free!

Ezekiel 27 – January 9

Yesterday, we read of how our situation is different from Tyre's in that we don't have to live life on the edge of our seat because of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus. Today, in Ezekiel 27, we'll see how we can relate to Tyre. To be more specific, I want us to see how we can embrace Ezekiel's lament about Tyre.

Ezekiel 27 is basically one long poem. The first part of the poem (verses 3-11), portrays the city of Tyre as a beautiful ship that was envied by the nations. Ezekiel says that every part of the ship, from the oars to the sails, was made by beautiful and costly materials from all around the world. The Hebrew word "yaqar" means "precious/costly/rare" and it may have been used here for the materials of which the "ship" of Tyre was built. Long story short, Tyre had it all!

I want us to relate the beauty and magnificence of Tyre to the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden was *perfect*. The animals dwelt peacefully together and all the vegetation was fruitful. There might not have been any weeds, and, who knows, it may have always been the season for everything! (I doubt it, but it's a nice thought).

In the Garden of Eden, God spared no good thing. In other words, God didn't worry about the price tag. He wasn't hunting for good deals. He didn't wait 'till Black Friday to stock the Garden for Adam and Eve. God is so unfathomably great and beautiful that what overflows from his being is the endless diversity of nature's beauty. God opened his mouth and perfection came out.

But you know the rest of the story. Now, look for a moment at verse 25 of our chapter for today. Ezekiel has been exalting the greatness of Tyre for 25 verses, but then things turn south. In verse 26, Ezekiel says that "the east wind will break you to pieces far out at sea." He goes on to say that all that they have will sink into the heart of the sea and that all the people will scoff at Tyre and scorn it and, in the last verse, they will "come to a horrible end and will be no more."

It's not a coincidence that Tyre's story parallels the story of creation's fall. That's how I wanted us to relate to it today. The cycle we see throughout all of human history is that of exaltation then destruction.

That was the cycle, that is, until Jesus. Jesus turned that cycle on its head by receiving destruction (his death) first and *then* receiving exaltation (his resurrection). The resurrection was such a big deal, not just because it allows us to go to heaven when we die, but because it was the beginning of a whole new world. No longer do we endure the cycle of exaltation then destruction. Death and destruction have been defeated! Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the father and we will be, too! John Piper says it this way, "Christians don't die. They go from life to better life!" That's so true! When Jesus rose from the grave, all who live for him began their ascent upwards, so to speak. Our exaltation has already begun and it will be consummated when we step into the blissful garden of rest that we call heaven!

No longer does the end of the story read: "you have come to a horrible end and will be no more." Now, the story reads "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Romans 8:17

Ezekiel 28 – January 10

Today we have reached the final chapter dedicated to Tyre. In Ezekiel 28, we have the words that the prophet was directed to say specifically to the ruler of Tyre. Ezekiel's words are pretty striking, to say the least.

Ezekiel's words to the King of Tyre aren't just intense, they're also extremely deep and poetic. Some people even think that the language of verses 11-19 is referencing Satan. However, I personally don't see why Ezekiel would all of the sudden be talking about the devil when he was just addressing the King of Tyre.

I believe that what Ezekiel was doing was simply using beautiful language to express the particular nature of the wicked King's fall from grace. In other words, I think that Ezekiel was being so dramatic and poetic in order to show how good the king of Tyre had it and how far and hard he fell. Apparently, this wasn't just any old king who made a mistake. This guy had it all! For whatever reason, God had blessed this man immensely. God had set him in "Eden" and "adorned [him] with every precious stone." Verse 14 says that he was "anointed as a guardian cherub" and was on "the holy mount of God."

Not only had God given this king an incredibly high position (that he was supposed to steward well!), but this guy was apparently actually a pretty good guy. Before his fall into extreme pride and arrogance, this king was "blameless in [his] ways." Even though these verses aren't about Satan himself, I do think that Ezekiel is comparing the King of Tyre (whose name is probably Ethbaal, by the way) to Satan and Satan's fall.

To summarize all this, Ethbaal, the King of Tyre, had it all. He was the supreme ruler of one of the greatest cities on earth. But, as Proverbs 16:18 reminds us, pride comes before the fall and the higher the pride, the farther the fall.

While verses 12-15 reveal how esteemed Ethbaal was, verses 16-19 show what his end was to be. Does verse 19 ring a bell? Ezekiel says that Ethbaal will come to a horrible end and will be no more. That's the same language Ezekiel used to describe the downfall of the whole city of Tyre.

Just as death came into the world through the one man Adam, the city of Tyre was destroyed under the rule and reign of the one king Ethbaal.

I wonder if Romans 5 is coming to your mind. Particularly verses 12-19. Who knew there were so many connections between Ezekiel and Romans?? These verses in Romans 5 that I mentioned above talk about how sin and death entered the world through Adam and how, likewise, salvation is made possible for the world through one man—Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, we read about so, so, so, many evil kings and wicked kingdoms that came and went. Israel, and the whole world, really, was in need of and waiting for salvation. Of course, Israel knew that and the other nations didn't, but regardless it was all the world that needed a savior, not just Israel. And, of course, we know that savior to be Jesus Christ, the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for and the rightful King of the whole World. Through one man the city of Tyre fell and through one man the cosmos is redeemed.

Ezekiel 29 – January 11

As of yesterday, we concluded the 3-chapter section focusing on Tyre. As of today, we begin a section focused on Egypt. This section lasts four chapters (29-32) and lays out a prophecy against Egypt (29), a lament over Egypt (30), a prophecy against Pharaoh (31), and a lament for Pharaoh (32).

Today's chapter, Ezekiel 29, details a prophecy against Egypt. Now, before we dive into the specifics, we need to remember that Egypt is a big deal in the history of Israel. Of course, that's where they were enslaved for all those years between Joseph and Moses. Likewise, that's the place that over and over and over again God warned them *not* to go back to. But, because of their hardheartedness they mixed and mingled with Egypt one too many times throughout the years. I remind us of this because Egypt isn't just another "random" city that waged war against Israel at some point—no, Egypt and Israel have a *long* history together and that informs these next few chapters.

On to the specifics! Ezekiel 29 details a prophecy against Egypt, as we have already seen, and this one is a doozy. In verses 6-10, we see God chastising Egypt for treating Israel so poorly. Apparently, there were times when Egypt could've come to Israel's aid, but clearly chose not to. Because of their insistence on treating Israel poorly, we see in verses 11-16 that God lays a very specific prophecy on them: they will be desolate for 40 years. The 40-year judgment is no coincidence, by the way, but that's another discussion.

In verses 17-20, we read about Egypt becoming a "reward" for the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar (pronounced Neh-ba-cud-nezz-er). This simply means that God will allow Babylon to plunder Egypt and receive their "booty." This is another way of punishing Egypt.

The very last verse, verse 21, says something that I find quite interesting. Ezekiel writes, "On that day I will make a horn grow for the Israelites, and I will open your mouth among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord." What in the world does it mean that God will cause a horn to grow for the Israelites? Like a car horn? Or, maybe, an animal horn from a rhinoceros or a buffalo or something of that nature? Good question!

In ancient times, a horn symbolized strength. It was with horns that some animals protected themselves and with horns that people blew the sounds of victory. We actually see a "horn" referenced many times in the Old Testament. Psalm 18 records David referring to God as "the horn of my salvation" and Luke 1:69 is New Testament quote of an Old Testament passage referring to Jesus as a mighty horn.

In verse 21, in talking about a horn, we see yet again the great mercy of God. Remember that at this point Israel hasn't done any real repenting. We've seen nothing but prophecies of judgment. Yet, God here again shows mercy to Israel by telling them that around the time ("on that day") that Egypt is judged, he will give them strength to rise up and knowledge to know the Lord. What mercy! Even in judgment, there is mercy—remember that today.

Ezekiel 30 – January 12

Today we begin the second installment in the “Judgement Against Egypt” saga. Per usual, we find a lament following a judgment. Quick word of application: God does not take joy in judging just as a parent does not take joy in punishing. That’s why we often see laments shortly after pronouncements of judgment. That doesn’t change the fact, though, that like a punishment for a child, judgment for God’s children (or other nations) is ultimately for the good.

But today we aren’t focusing on the judgment aspect, but the lamentation aspect of it all. Therefore, we will focus mostly on the first couple verses. The rest of the chapter is more judgment-heavy than one might expect in a lamentation, but the first few verses really set the tone.

Verse 2 says, “Wail and say, ‘Alas for that day!’” Alas is a word meaning “regrettably” or “sadly” or “unfortunately,” etc. So, Ezekiel is basically saying, “cry out because this day is about to be terrible!”

We might think that response is kind of obvious, right? Like, who wouldn’t wail when such a judgment is bearing down on you? But, we see an ignorance of coming judgment each and every day, don’t we? There are many times when you’re teaching or preaching that you just want to scream, “Alas! Wail for the coming judgment!” because it seems at times as if people aren’t getting it! Ezekiel was probably telling Egypt, “you better believe what I’m telling you and, if you believe it, you probably ought to be wailing right about now.”

So, in this interesting chapter (to say the least), what’s some application we can take away? Not that the Bible loses any potency when we fail to “take something away,” but that’s a different conversation.

Anyways, what we can take away is that our job, much like Ezekiel’s (at times), is to warn the world of the coming judgment. Now, don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying we should stand on street corners (or on Facebook) and blast people with hellfire and brimstone. What I am saying is that if people never see something different about our lives, thus opening the door for gospel conversations, then we probably aren’t doing our jobs very well. Does that make sense? We don’t have to preach fire and brimstone... we have to do something harder, actually. We have to live in a way that shows people where our hope lies. We live in such a way that shows people that we have joy and happiness because we aren’t subject to coming judgment and so we live free! We can live this way by the Spirit of Christ. Just as it took the Spirit resting on Ezekiel for him to prophesy like he did, it takes God’s spirit in us to live a free and joyful life—a life that helps rescue others from the coming judgment.

Ezekiel 31 – January 13

A prophecy against Pharaoh forms the third chapter of our Egyptian Prophecy series. If you recall, the last two days have consisted of a prophecy against Egypt and a lament for Egypt. Now, Pharaoh is in the prophet's crosshairs.

This is another poetic chapter. The whole thing is framed by two rhetorical questions (verse 2b and 18). The first question asks, "Who can be compared with you in majesty?" and the second question asks, "Which of the trees of Eden can be compared with you in splendor and majesty?" The answer to those two questions is presented in the form of an allegory, or fable, if you will.

The story basically consists of God comparing Egypt to Assyria. In fact, one might be confused and think that this is actually a chapter about Assyria! It is indeed about Egypt... just about how Egypt is *like* Assyria. Assyria was apparently a very strong and wealthy city (sort of like Tyre), but (also like Tyre) it became proud and thus fell, because as we discussed a few days ago, pride comes before the fall. Our chapter for today goes on to say that Egypt is like Assyria and will fall, too, because of her pride. Sort of like Jesus does at times with his parables recorded in the gospels, God gives an explanation to this story in the very last phrase of this chapter. "This is Pharaoh and all his hordes, declares the Sovereign Lord," explains God through Ezekiel.

Isn't it crazy how hardhearted people are? I don't write that to make you feel like you're the worst person ever, but I do say that to provide you with a slice of humble pie (that we all tend to need more often than not!). We've been reading for about a month now about the sins of Israel and the surrounding nations and it seems like no one ever learns!

I could go on, today, to talk about how we're like that nowadays (which we often are) and that we ought to be so thankful for Christ (which we should), but I actually want to take a different approach for a moment.

I believe that in the Old Testament Satan had power and freedom that he doesn't quite have anymore. I believe that with the resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven was inaugurated, meaning, it was begun. I think that as we speak Satan is losing more and more power. Now, you might say, "but look at the world around us! It's as terrible as ever!" But, it's actually not...

In Old Testament times, the gospel was *not* going forth to all the nations. Everyone was *not* a part of the nation of Israel was being judged and perishing. Thank the Lord that isn't the case anymore! The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is actually going throughout the whole world as we speak! The kingdom of God is *growing*. So, the hardheartedness of Israel and of the other nations (Egypt, Tyre, etc.) isn't actually as prevalent nowadays as you might think. Yes, hardheartedness still exists, but the Kingdom of God, that started like a mustard seed, is steadily growing and tearing through that hardheartedness! Praise the Lord!

Ezekiel 32 – January 14

Today is the last day of Ezekiel's Egypt quadrilogy (like a trilogy, but 4!). The focus of today's chapter is a lament over Pharaoh. Sort of like chapter 30, which was a lament for Egypt, this isn't the type of lament that we usually think of. In other words, it's not really that sad. Most laments involve wailing, but this one is more judgment-centered.

Nonetheless, Ezekiel is technically commanded by God to "take up a lament" and it says in verse 9 that the nation of Egypt will mourn because of the judgment against Pharaoh, so there are definitely elements of lamentation in this chapter.

Another interesting feature about this chapter is that it's really divided up into two sections. The first section is verses 1-16 and verses 17-32 complete the second section. The first section records Ezekiel "wailing" for Pharaoh and the second section records Ezekiel "wailing" for the "hordes" of Egypt.

What I would like to focus on today, however, is how this chapter fits in the overall plan of God. But first, before we jump up into that, let me warn you about the details. There are a lot of, at first glance, confusing things in the bible. In this chapter, particularly in the second section, you might be tempted to wonder about "the pit." For some reason, we are so often consumed with trying to figure out the details that we miss the forest for the trees, so to speak. So, in regards to this particular chapter, don't spend much time trying to figure out what the pit is. Frankly, it's not that important, or, at least, it's not the main point. Is it hell? Maybe. Is it meant to be interpreted more figuratively than literally? Probably. Either way, it's really not the point.

So, what is the point? As usual, I'm glad you asked. The point lies in verse 32, the last verse of the whole chapter. In this verse, we have a sort of summary. Ezekiel says in verse 32, basically, that Pharaoh and all his hordes will ultimately be destroyed and forgotten—the end. This is important because, as I mentioned over the last few days, Egypt is quite important to Israel's story. Egypt wasn't just another random country that had a fight with Israel at some point. So, this chapter, and particularly verse 32, signifies the final destruction of Israel's archenemy. I don't want you to miss this: this entire section of prophecies against foreign nations (chapters 25-32) climaxes—intentionally—with the destruction of Israel's archenemy, Egypt. What poetic justice! You thought you were reading random chapters about more judgment, but it was actually a story all leading up to Israel's nemesis (Egypt) being defeated! It's like watching a movie!

Here's the thing, though: what this looks forward to, what it signifies, is a time when *all* of Israel's enemies will be defeated. And don't forget, as we read about in Romans, Israel and the church are now one body in Christ, so this isn't looking forward to *physical* destruction of countries that are against the *physical* nation of Israel. What it's looking forward to is when God in Christ will fully and finally cover the whole earth with his rule and reign. What an ending to this story!

Ezekiel 33 – January 15

Having concluded the “prophecies against foreign nations” section yesterday with the defeating of Israel’s archenemy, Egypt, which points forward to the time when God in Christ will fully and finally consummate his reign and install once and for all his kingdom in a new earth, we now begin the last portion of Ezekiel. Chapters 33-48 could be titled, “A Time to Rejoice: Words of Restoration and Hope.” (I am borrowing that from D.A. Carson’s NIV study bible). In other words, after 32 chapters of pretty much nothing but judgment, hope is now arriving in major ways.

Our chapter for today, Ezekiel 33, is a renewal of Ezekiel’s call as “watchman.” This call first took place, of course, in chapter 3 (particularly verses 16-21). It makes sense that his call would be renewed at this point because it is at this point that he is shifting from a message of condemnation to a message of hope, from death to life, if you will. We learn about part of Ezekiel’s “new” task as watchman in the first few verses. The watchman is to blow the trumpet to warn of impending danger and the people are to attend to the watchman’s warnings! I usually don’t like drawing immediate and shallow applications for us today from any and every little thing in the Old Testament; however, I do think that Ezekiel’s task and the people’s response to it is somewhat indicative of our tasks today. We are to proclaim the Word, to fight for truth and to ward off evil, and we all have a responsibility to respond to that truth. It’s not just the pastor’s job to proclaim truth; it’s everyone’s. Likewise, it is everyone’s responsibility, including the pastors, to be accountable and to respond to our brothers and sisters in Christ. In short, as New Covenant Christians, we are all watchmen and we are all the audience! That’s probably not a perfect correlation, but you get the point. The people proclaim truth, the pastors proclaim truth; the people hold each other and the pastors accountable, and the pastors hold each other and the people accountable. We all have a responsibility in the body of Christ!

One last thing that we see in this chapter is something that we haven’t seen yet in the entire book: real repentance. In chapter 18 the Israelites blamed their ancestors for their sin and, later in that chapter, they blamed God. Finally, over 10 chapters later, they are taking some sense of ownership for their sin. That’s also sort of the reason why Ezekiel’s mouth was opened and he was “no longer silent” (verse 22). As we’ve mentioned throughout the book of Ezekiel, it takes a lot of judgment, at times, to break through hard hearts. Now, we’ve finally seen an example of it coming to fruition. Of course, Israel isn’t perfect and they still say some dumb stuff as recorded in this chapter, but this does mark the beginning of a new future and new hope for the remnant of Israel. A new hope that one day breaks into this earth in the form a baby in a manger—Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Ezekiel 34 & 35 – January 16

Oh boy, this chapter, much like chapter 22, causes me to examine my own ministry and heart for the flock. I have to be careful here because there are times when there is a guilt that settles down on a pastor that is misplaced and inappropriate. I ask that you please pray for us that we might know when we are to minister to people and when we are to recognize that their demands are narcissistic, ungodly, and warrant no attention. That may sound harsh dear friends but please know that Satan loves to lead God's people to waste God's resources on things that have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. It is more challenging than one might realize. Now, back to Ezekiel 34 and 35.

Chapter 34 is an indictment against the "shepherds" of Israel. This would be equivalent to pastors today. If you keep this in context of what is unfolding through Ezekiel's prophecy, you might note that as God talks of restoration, He must deal with those who led the people to such apostasy. You see, the shepherds bore responsibility for the moral and spiritual direction of the nation. God is not going to restore the people while leaving corrupt leadership in place. If so, they would gradually end up at the same place. What you will find in chapter 34 is abundant references to the ultimate Shepherd who will lead the people as a shepherd should. This of course is referring to Jesus Christ (vv. 11-16). Friend, if you ever wondered whether or not leadership matters, read 1 Samuel 8:11-18. There you will get a preview of what we see unfolding in today's chapter.

Now, you may think that I am placing too much emphasis, value, or importance on the role of the leader (pastor) but please know that I am not. If you read the first six verses in this chapter you will read of neglect, misuse, abuse, and influence in the wrong direction (vv.14). Then I want you to note verses 5-6 where it is written, *"They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them."* Poor and ungodly leadership set the people up, the sheep, to fail.

Beloved, do you realize that all of us like sheep have gone astray and turned to his/her own way? We are prone to sin and left to ourselves we do not choose the ways of God. This is not only true of you, it is also true of the leaders of our church. We need ongoing discipleship, accountability, and teaching. We must all remain tethered to the Truth of God's Word and the local church is God's means to assure that happens. We need each other and we need good, bible-centered teaching. Precious people, when we aren't taught the Bible well, it says here that we become "food for every beast." We become easy pickings for the Evil One when we are not anchored in the Word and found in the protection of the Body of Christ. The effects of unbiblical leadership can be seen all over our community and nation today and if we aren't more diligent, the path that we are on is going to lead us to horrible ends. For your part, make sure that you are sitting under godly spiritual leadership and are being fed the life-giving and protecting Word of God faithfully and accurately. Edom, which is described in chapter 35, is an example of this end.

Ezekiel 36 – January 17

Please don't be confused today as Ezekiel addresses the "mountains" of Israel. This is just symbolic for the whole nation. This chapter is about Israel being born again in my opinion. You could say regenerated or restored too. Like in the case of each of us, there is an order to being reborn. It must always begin with a recognition of one's own sinfulness. We see that in this chapter as God reminds Israel of her own sinfulness that brought on His judgment (v. 3). The restoration that is to take place must first be preceded by an acknowledgment of this fact. When that takes place, God begins to restore His people (v. 8ff). As He mentions the results of His favor on the people in verse 8, I find myself so moved and amazed by verse 9 where it is written, "For, behold, I am for you." Wow!

Now, we must not miss what follows in that same verse, "And you will be cultivated". That my friends, means that He is going to work the soil of our hearts to make us what we are to ultimately become. In other words, this is the pruning or better, the clay in the Potter's hands. Remember today that it is His love for us that causes Him to shape us through discipline, life lessons, and even suffering. There is far more at stake than our happiness or even our holiness as we live our lives. We will find in this chapter that the glory of His name is more important than anything else (v. 21-22). I thank God that giving Him ultimate glory is at the same time the surest means to giving each of us ultimate joy. I hope you recall pastor Joe's message on that subject.

Beloved, it is so unfortunate that too many so-called Christians give no consideration to how our individual lives impact what others think about God. If you note at the end of verse 22, God says that His name had been profaned by His people among the nations. As He declares His will to vindicate His name among the people, please note that it will be vindicated in part by the obedience of His people in the eyes of others. In other words, as we live in accordance to His Word, those around us get to see Him in a more accurate light. They get to see Him for who He really is. Look at what is written in verse 23b, "Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight." Don't you see? As we live in obedience and actually look like our Father in heaven, AND as He blesses us with favor because we are living right, the people will see the benefits, the joy, the difference that He makes in the lives of those who live for Him.

Folks, can you imagine what the nation would be like if we actually lived in such a way that others were drawn to our church and not repelled from it? I wonder how many people don't come to church because of the poor examples of what they see in the lives of those who do go. Are you a child of God? If you are, then you have been given a new heart that is filled with His Spirit (v.26). He goes on to say that He will cause us to walk in His ways; sounds a lot like Philippians 2:13-14. Dear brothers and sisters, let's stop thinking that we are Christians if we are still living like the lost people in this world. This new heart that true believers are given causes us to live differently in this world. It causes us to see our sin for the horrific offense that it is against a holy God (v.31). It causes us to love Him and others more and to live humbly before our Great God who is for us not against us. Can it be said of you, "Because of your lifestyle, they know that God is the Lord and He is good and holy?"

Ezekiel 37 – January 18

Let me begin by telling you that I unequivocally believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead. The New Testament is replete with passages that teach this wonderful biblical truth (1 Cor. 15 for example). Even the Old Testament points to bodily resurrection as we remember Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. The Bible tells us that he believed God would raise him from the dead. The book of Daniel (12:2-3) alludes to it as well. Now, having said that I believe in bodily resurrection, let me say that I do not believe this chapter of Ezekiel has anything to do with that subject. It is clear to me that what God is doing here is simply encouraging Israel with a hope that the nation will someday be “resurrected”.

Any suggestion that there could ever again be life in the old dried up bones would appear preposterous. Yet as Ezekiel surveyed the scene in the valley of bones, he heard a question, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (v. 3). The prophet’s answer was restrained and filled with his awareness of human helplessness in the face of death (remember his own wife had died in chapter 24) but also respect for the mystery of God’s power. He knew that if the bones could live it was a matter only God knew and that the giving of life was a deed only God could perform (v. 3). Thus, when God told him to preach to the dead, dry bones, he obeyed despite its apparent absurdity. The message he was to deliver was a simple one, “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” (v. 4). That word consisted of a promise to give breath, life, tendons, flesh, and skin to these bones so they would know that he is God Almighty (vv. 5–6).

God interpreted the vision for Ezekiel. It was God’s response to the people’s expression of hopelessness, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” (v. 11). These “bones” were “the whole house of Israel” (3:7; 5:4; 12:10; 20:40; 36:10; 37:16; 39:25; 45:6), meaning both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (v. 11). The question “Can these bones live?” was designed to show him the impotence of Israel during the exile. God made marvelous promises to the nation in chaps. 33–36, but the real issue was, “Can these bones live?” Can a dead and impotent nation in exile and under the control of a godless nation be resurrected and become a living, thriving kingdom once again?

Sin had brought about the death of the nation of Israel (Rom 6:23). Sin’s destructive power is most apparent on a personal level, where it destroys human lives (37:1–3; Eph 2:1–22; 1 Pet 1:3–12). Only God can produce life for those who are physically and/or spiritually dead (37:3). Nothing but a miracle will resurrect the dead (John 11:25; 1 Cor 15:1–58).

What a marvelous message of encouragement this was, both to Ezekiel and to the people in exile. There is no finer illustration of the life-changing power of the preached word than what the prophet saw in his vision. It has the power to transform those who are dead in trespasses and sins and make them new, living creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). God has always used the “foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21). The enabling power of the Holy Spirit also is portrayed in this passage. The Spirit empowered the dead, dry bones and gave them life and animation. This was Paul’s testimony. He was unable to live the life of a believer (Rom 7:13–25), faithful to the commands of God, without the enabling power of God’s Spirit (Rom 8:1–17).

Ezekiel 38 – January 19

This closing section of the prophecies of restoration addresses a final but crucial question. If Israel was to be restored permanently to the land, what about future enemies? What about the opposition of the premier enemy of God's people in every age, the adversary, Satan? If God's people are to enjoy permanent residence, permanent blessing, and permanent peace in the restoration, what will be done about the struggle between good and evil, God and Satan? These final chapters (38 & 39) of the restoration section speak to these questions. It is most likely that Gog and Magog represent the forces of the antichrist that will rise up against Israel during the tribulation period (Rev. 18).

There are seven messages that make up chapters 38 & 39 that each begin with the phrase, "Thus says the Lord God". (1) God will bring Gog and his allies against Israel (38:1–9; Rev 16:13–14; 20:7–8). (2) Gog's evil thoughts and intentions will lead him to invade Israel (38:10–13). (3) Gog will advance against Israel from the north (38:14–16). (4) God will display his awesome judgment against Gog (38:17–23). The other two messages will be found in chapter 39. Oh, how I rejoice at the reminder of the sovereignty of God over all things. I don't know why God's sovereignty is a hard pill to swallow for some people. I for one rejoice and find great comfort in knowing that nothing is outside of His care and control. For example, God and Magog will rise up against Israel. They believe that they are doing it at the on accord with one desire which is to destroy Israel and take the spoils of her land. What we come to know is very different from that conclusion.

Notice how God describes His sovereignty in the choices of Gog and Magog. In verse 4 God says, "I will turn you about and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army...." He will bring them out (v.8), they will be brought up against His people (v.16). God is in control not the pagan nations that will attempt to oppress His people. God is actually using them to purify and refine Israel for the coming of the Lord. Just as a teaching moment and a side note, it is very likely that the peace that Israel will be experiencing during this period (vv. 10-13) will be that spoken of during the first half of the tribulation period (Dan. 9:27).

I am reminded of what Pastor Joe wrote on December 17, for Ezekiel 1 when I read 38:16. Here it is written, "So that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes." In other words, God is going to show up mighty and strong when He takes on Gog and Magog to defend His people. Again, we see that a major theme in the book of Ezekiel is the glory and honor of God Almighty. What we read about in verses 18-23 is what will take place during the second half of the tribulation period. You can find the same descriptions of God's warfare against the antichrist in Revelation 6:12-17; 11-19; 16:17-21; and 19:11-21.

The wonderful truth for us to take away today is that God will ultimately destroy all the enemies that rise up against us. Someday, all temptation will be removed, all resistance to the will of God, and every wicked attack of the evil one. The day will come when our restoration will no longer be short lived. The victory is ours through the finished work of Christ on the cross. Today we face battles and skirmishes with the enemy but someday he will be relinquished for good.

Ezekiel 39 – January 20

Most scholars believe that what you are reading about in this chapter occurs at the end of the tribulation period so is likely the Battle of Armageddon. I stand amazed at the might of God that will be demonstrated against the powers of Satan on behalf of His people and His glory. Verse 3 tells us that God will disarm the enemy and they will become food for the birds and beasts of the field (v.4). I know this statement is a repeat from yesterday but please let it sink in from verse 7 that God, at this point, has had enough of His name being mocked, ridiculed, and profaned. As sure as He has spoken it, it will be done (v.8). Friends, check yourself this morning and make sure that you are living your life to the glory of God and not to His shame. This is no joke or game that we are playing as ambassadors of Christ. My mind jumps in this moment to Hebrews 2:1-3a where it is written, “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” It is past time to get serious about His salvation.

Beloved, today I want to remind you not to take the patience and gentleness of God as indifference causing you to be lax in your pursuit of holiness. This chapter reveals to us the level of God’s wrath and judgment against sin that should shake us to our core. We should be wakened further to our need to honor God with not only our lips but more so with our lives. When God unleashes His wrath against evil and sin, including having other gods before Him, I don’t believe we have adequate words to describe the scene. All I know is that I want to be standing with Him not against Him on that day.

When we use the term “saved”, I wonder if we even understand what that means. You should immediately ask yourself, “Saved from what?” Friends, what we are saved from ultimately is the punishment of hell. We are saved from scenes like the one described in this chapter. How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Think for a moment of the Israelites standing with their backs against the Red Sea, faces toward the approaching Egyptian army, and terror all around them. Surely, they thought they were going to die as there was definitely no way out. There was no escape. You know the story – God rescues them and does what only He could do in saving them from certain death.

For you and me today friends the rescue is no less amazing. Without Christ, we find ourselves in a prison from which there is no escape. This is far worse than Alcatraz or the infamous French prison the Chateau D’If (The Count of Monte Cristo). The escape that Christ provided for us out of the chains of hell should rock our world. Please do not neglect so great a salvation folks. If you do, there is no escape from the confines of hell nor the terror of moments like this one described in chapter 39 of the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 40 & 41 – January 21

Here begins the details of the 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ following the 7-year tribulation period. As horrific as the judgment of God will be on the nations that have opposed Him and His people for thousands of years, the reign of Christ on earth will be both beautiful and breathtaking. From here until the end of this book we will see the fulfillment and climax of Israel's restoration. It begins in this chapter with a description of the new Temple on Mt. Zion (most likely) in Jerusalem. This temple will exceed even the beauty and wonder of Solomon's Temple. God gives Ezekiel yet another vision and in this vision an Angel of the Lord is his tour guide. To help you understand a bit more of the timeline here it will be helpful to know that what is happening here is described in the book of Revelation beginning in 19:11. Also it will be good to know that we, as believing Gentiles, will be included in this too (Matt. 25:31-46).

It is important that we not miss what I believe is the major emphasis of this chapter which is God's desire to dwell among His people again. The Temple represented the presence of the Lord among His people and surely added a sense of legitimacy to the restoration process of God's people. Oh, how this must have been a comforting reality for the people. You might recall that in chapters 10 and 11 we read of the presence (glory) of the Lord departing from the people and the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem. All of that was being restored at this point in history. This temple was to be a source of light and blessing to the whole world. Once again God would be accessible to the people. The dry seasons were ending and the parched land was being renewed. I don't know about you but I know what it feels like to go through dry seasons and then to sense the presence and favor of the Lord once again. This moment in the history of the world will be infinitely more refreshing and soothing than that.

Now for those of you who want to figure out the dimensions of the Temple it will be necessary for you to know that Ezekiel was using what is known as a royal cubit which measured approximately 21 inches. It would be the average of the length from the tip of a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger PLUS the width of his hand at the base of his fingers. So, there you go – get to figurin'.

Another tidbit of information that adds meaning to the design of the Temple is that gates represent access while the walls represent security for those within and limited access or even exclusion to those without. The presentation of the temple anticipates the return of God's glory, which departed as an act of judgment reported in chaps. 10–11. The gates are a foreshadowing of the accessibility God gave to all people through Jesus, who presents himself as the door by which one can enter to God and be saved (see John 10:9–21). We don't have to wait until the millennial reign of Christ to enjoy access to God. I thank God today that because of the Cross of Christ, we have enjoyed access to the Father since the veil was torn and Christ became our forerunner. Aren't you thrilled to know that our bodies are the Temple of God and God the Holy Spirit indwells us even now.

Ezekiel 42 – January 22

One cannot but be impressed by the detail and careful plan that unfolded in Ezekiel's description of the temple. He was shown by his angel-guide the future temple that would exceed all former temples in size and beauty. He saw a temple that had perfect symmetry and was symbolic of the holiness of God. The various levels and divisions that led to the holy of holies provided separation between the common and the holy (42:20). There is no doubt that God wanted to demonstrate His accessibility to the people while at the same time setting Himself apart as Holy. This was a temple that was clearly designed for worship and sacrifice to God, who had promised to restore his people Israel to their land.

After discussing Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness, the apostle Paul wrote, "Now these things occurred as our examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (1 Cor. 10:6). He also wrote, "These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction." (1 Cor. 10:11). The word translated "example" is the one from which we get the English word "type." It means an "image" or an "impression" like those stamped on the face of coins. The image is a representation of a real person or object. In the Old Testament "types" were in the form of images painted with words. Descriptions of the temple, priesthood, and worship regulations such as those envisioned by Ezekiel were all prophetic "types" of the life and work of Christ. The following represents a summary of some of the more obvious typological associations in chaps 40–42.

First, the sanctuary was the third division of the temple complex and the most holy place in the temple area. Like the tabernacle and temples before it, this structure will be a reminder of God's desire to dwell among His people. It was for this reason that the Messiah came and the "Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us" (John 1:14).

Second were the three levels. The three temple sanctuary levels and the placement of these divisions are dim types of the triune nature of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There were side rooms on each of the three levels, which presumably were areas for individual worship. These private chambers were meant to teach us that our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances will not excuse us from the duties of the "closet". We must not only worship in the courts of God's house, but must enter into our chambers, enter into our closets, and read and meditate, and pray to our Father in secret. These side chambers could only be entered through the middle level (41:7). Just as Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, is the one through which we gain access to all three (John 14:6).

I cannot express enough that when God's plan is finally fulfilled and the new heaven and earth are in place, there will be no need for a temple complex as God will reside and dwell among us Himself.

Ezekiel 43 – January 23

I truly cannot imagine the beauty and the sense of awe as Ezekiel was allowed to see a vision of the glory of God literally filling the temple. As He approached the gate from the east, Ezekiel could hear His voice like that of rushing waters. It's interesting to note that when His Spirit departed from Israel, He went out to the east (11:23) and now returns from the east. Some day we are going to see the glory of the Lord Jesus returning from the east as well. That moment will be breathtaking and, like Ezekiel, I assume we too will fall to the ground in worship.

Keep in mind that the temple represents the presence of the Lord and in this case, He literally moved in so that the people would know that He is among them (v.7). Take note of the contrast that Ezekiel is making between Christ's reign and that of earthly kings. It is written in the second half of verse 7, "And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings." Compare this with what the author of Hebrews writes in 1:8-9, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." Do you see that in contrast to the sinful ways of earthly kings our Great King Jesus will be a king whose reign is righteous and He is the one who loves righteousness and hates lawlessness? Jesus is our King and He loves righteousness. He will lead us as one who hates lawlessness. Imagine if we had a president, governor, leaders who loved righteousness and hated everything that was lawless. That day is coming dear people.

Ezekiel provides for us an intention of this chapter. When seeing the glory of the Lord, an appropriate response is that we fall down in shame because of our sins. Much like what we see in Peter's response to Christ in Luke 5:8. The hope was that the people would be humbled in His presence and motivated to worship in accordance with His plans and means of worship (vv.10-12). Beloved, are you moved to repentance and obedience when you are confronted with the holiness of God. A right response to meeting Him is worship. If you can sit in His presence and remain unaware of your sinfulness and need for Christ and the Gospel then I must say that something is wrong with your understanding of who God is and who you are. I would assume that your view of God is too low and your view of self is too high.

I wonder when we finally see Jesus for who He really is, how sad might we be for the failed joys that could have been ours had we simply rested and trusted in the Creator of the Universe. If we would just realize that "He holds all things together by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). A high view of God should lead us away from anxiety and into faith. We should not be a restless lot but a contented and peaceful bunch. God made a way in the temple to make restitution for sins and to establish peace between Himself and the people. Praise the Lord that He has accomplished those things finally and completely in Jesus Christ. Do not forget that this, although a very real edifice during the millennial reign, is still a picture of His plan of redemption and His presence with us.

Ezekiel 44 – January 24

It is clear to me in a chapter like this one that we can easily get lost in the details. Granted the details are important but we must not lose sight of the big picture either. For example, when you read about the ordinances that the Levites had to observe you may not realize what God is communicating through those regulations. First of all, let me give kudos where they belong in this case to the sons of Zadok. We read in verse 15 that even when the other Levites and the people went astray and sinned before the Lord, the sons of Zadok maintained faithfulness in service to God (1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Kings 1:32-40). As a result, God gave them special places of service in the millennial temple.

In an attempt to clearly make a distinction between the holy and the profane, clear guidelines are given to the presiding priests. First they are not to wear anything when serving but linen garments as they are light, natural, and represent purity unlike wool that is manmade and would cause the Levites to sweat. An interesting restriction is given next in verse 19. We read that they must take their “holy” garments off when they are among the people and put on regular clothes. Why you might ask? The verse says that they must do this so that “they would not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.” That is strange! What does it mean?

Well, it appears that the correct way to interpret this is to assume the people might imagine that some degree of holiness or sanctification is transmitted to them by merely touching the garment of the priest. This would certainly not be true as they are but men and not Christ. If you go back to 42:14 you read a similar passage. Please don’t let your minds go to some unbiblical explanation as if there were some special powers in the garments. That is not the case. This is again showing a distinction between the holy and the mundane. The holy garments were to be worn when attending to the things of God and regular garments worn when attending to the everyday needs of men. People are quick to err and jump to heretical conclusions so I believe that God headed that off by avoiding the issue altogether.

There were other regulations about how they were to cut their hair, govern their marriage options, or drinking wine. The whole point of it as I said before is found in verse 23, “Moreover, they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane.” You see beloved, I am reminded once again of the need for God’s people to reflect a proper image of Him. We are to deny self, to take up our cross, and to follow after Him. As we do, we are to live and walk in a manner that is worthy of being called children of God. How will the lost see Him unless they see Him in us? Live today as though you have been set apart for His glory. May your life become a living sacrifice to the glory of the Lord.

Ezekiel 45 – January 25

This chapter reminds me of how thoughtful the Lord is towards people. In the beginning here, we see Him making provision for those who will serve the temple. It is encouraging to know that God remembers those who serve Him and has made provision for their needs. Much of that provision is to come from the people whom the Levites are serving. This act of provision should help us see how important worship is to the Lord. In the center of town was to be the portion allotted for the temple and those who serve there. It was not to be the leftovers like so many offer to the Lord today. Worship of God is supposed to have the prominent place in our society. This makes me think of how far we have fallen as a nation. More and more God and the things of God are being abandoned and relegated to the periphery of our culture.

I for one am thankful that God made provision for those who serve Him. Paul wrote in 1 Cor.9:13-14, "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also, the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." Not only did God make provision for those who serve, but for all of His people.

The temple is set in the middle of the city for all to have access to worship God. Now we must not miss that once again we find regulations and standards for worship. The priests and the people are responsible for dealing with their sin before coming to worship. For the priest we read about the need for honest scales and proper dealings with people (vv.9-12). The important truth that we must take from this section is that just dealings precede acceptable worship. Proverbs 11:1 says, "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight." This is what Jesus was getting at in the Sermon on the Mount (5:22-24) where He says if you have sin in your life in regard to others, go get that right and then come back and present your offering to the Lord. Again, the point is that we should live in right relationships horizontally (with humanity) so that our relationship with God vertically is not a sham. God is making Himself available to the people and He is providing the means for cleansing that they may stand in His presence.

Let me quickly answer a question that you may have. Why are they appearing to observe the Passover during the millennial reign? We don't observe it now. In essence we still do it is simply called the Lord's Supper. Jesus Christ instituted this in place of the Passover because He was and is the Lamb whose blood saves us from death. I want to quote from Dr. D.A. Carson who writes, "The vision describes future realities that cannot be fully expressed in terms of Ezekiel's present realities." In other words, Ezekiel is using language that his audience would have understood. If he talked about the Lord's Supper they would have no reference point to provide meaning. We, on the other hand, must be sure to interpret what we are reading through the lens and understanding of the rest of God's revelation through His Word – particularly the New Testament. So, when you read about the Passover in this chapter read that through the lens of what Scripture has taught concerning the fulfillment of these things in and through Christ.

Ezekiel 46 – January 26

These regulations can be confusing and overwhelming, can't they? I am sure I sound like a broken record but don't forget to read this through the knowledge that we have from the New Testament and the reality that these requirements are met in Christ. Remember, Ezekiel has to use language that the Judahites could understand and relate to in their day. Can you imagine how thrilled they will be when they come to see that all of these things are fulfilled in Jesus Christ? For example, in verse 13 it says that the "prince" must offer a year-old lamb without defect as a burnt offering – every day! He is also to provide a grain offering every morning. What a joy when he and they realize that all of that has been accomplished in Christ in His once for all sacrifice of Himself as the spotless, perfect Lamb of God. So, don't get confused here. We will not be reverting back to the ceremonies that were in place before Christ came.

Having said that, I must also remind you that the lesson for us today is that God absolutely expects us to worship Him every day and to present ourselves as living sacrifices to Him. We are told that to do so is our "reasonable" act of service or worship to God (Rom. 12:1-2). There are many lessons in a chapter like this one that we can learn. We can determine that God is an orderly God as He has even thought about the flow of the people in and out of the temple (1 Cor. 14:33,40). Don't let your mind add some silly superstitious belief to verse 9. The only reason that they are to go in one gate and out the other is not because it is bad luck to go out of the same door you entered but simply because it will be a much better way to have order and a smooth flow of the mass of people entering and leaving the temple. Our lesson – details matter and God is reasonable and orderly in His actions. Don't read more into it than what is there.

I find it interesting that the "prince" can only go through certain gates and only has access in the temple to a certain point. We must remember that he is not a priest. The glory of the Lord went through the east gate while the prince went through the door on the porch (v.2,8). Can you get the picture here? The prince went to a particular door and stood by the post of the gate and the people had to stand behind him (v.3). The prince could see the priests, who were allowed to go to the altar to make sacrifices, doing their duties. I imagine that it was meaningful to the people to see the prince humbly accept his position of limited authority. It makes me think of the nature of King David as told to us in Psalm 84:10, "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." We don't know who this prince is but we can know that he has a humble heart as it is demonstrated here where we find him and the people looking on with gratitude and awe. Even princes must draw near to God and worship Him with reverence and godly fear demonstrating that even they are unworthy to approach Him. Oh beloved, Christ is our prince who allows us to draw near to Him. Let me close with this beautiful truth, "Therefore brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart and full of assurance of faith" (Heb.10:19-22a). Praise the Lord! Isn't this wonderful news?

Ezekiel 47 – January 27

This chapter is one of my favorites in all of the Old Testament. Remember that as you read this, like the rest of Ezekiel, you must keep in mind that much of prophetic literature is highly figurative and symbolic. Thus, everything that you read does not demand a literal interpretation. In this chapter for example, when Ezekiel talks about a river flowing from the temple, we must interpret that through the light of what is written in John 7:37-39 which describes Christ as the source of life and that living water. Jesus said, “Come unto Me all who are thirsty and a river of living water will flow from your innermost being.” Even that was symbolic of the Spirit living within a believer providing life and fruitfulness.

Ezekiel sees a water source that originates at the temple (vv.1,12) with an interesting increase in depth as it flows farther out from the temple. It begins as a trickle (v.2), then becomes ankle deep (v.3), knee deep (v.4), waist deep (v.4b), and then so deep that he couldn’t cross it but could swim in it (v.5). We are told that it is the source of life out of death. This water gives abundant life, supernatural fruitfulness, and sustainability in the land. We are told that as this river reaches the Dead Sea that the salty water become fresh indicating that life is going to spring forth from death. It sure does sound a lot like what the Garden of Eden was like at the beginning of creation.

There is no question that the supernatural source, growth, and effects of this “river of life” anticipate Jesus as the believer’s source of life (John 7:38). It is also reminiscent of the river of the water of life spoken of in Revelation 22:1 flowing from the throne of God. This is all about the joy and fruitfulness of life lived in the presence of the Lord. Dear friends, there is so much beauty and wonder in this chapter like the leaves of the trees will be for our healing is indicative of heaven.

I cannot help but invite you to come to the One today who can satisfy your thirst - the Lord Jesus. Note that as you begin a journey with Him it may initially feel like you are experiencing a trickle of His power and presence but as you continue the journey, the relationship will feel more like a river in which you dive into for ultimate joy. You may feel today like your life is more characteristic of the Dead Sea than a fresh water lake teeming with life but that too can change as you experience the life-giving effects of the Son of God as your Lord and Savior. Someday you will see that Jesus was all you ever needed. Why not accept that fact today? The Psalmist wrote in 73:28, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge.” I hope you have too.

Ezekiel 48 – January 28

The book of Ezekiel could not have a more appropriate ending than this, “The Lord is there.” I want to conclude these devotions on Ezekiel in the same place where Pastor Joe started 42 days ago. Joe wrote of the reality of God’s presence “in the midst” of us. Where is that you might ask. The answer is everywhere. When we are doing well or when we are walking through valleys of sorrow and struggle, He is in the midst. As I write this final chapter to Ezekiel, we are 6 days from Christmas. I cannot help but think of the incarnation of Christ and the meaning of that amazing truth. Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, is God with us.

As Ezekiel closes, he closes giving the city the name Yahweh Shammah which means, “The Lord is there.” That has been the hope of the people all along. Back in chapters 10 and 11 we experienced the Spirit of the Lord leaving the people and now He is back for good. You and I can live each down knowing that as Hebrews 13:5 says, “He will never leave us nor forsake us.” We can be certain that as He has placed a down payment on us, He will surely redeem us totally in the end. God is a covenant keeping God so we can trust that every promise He made to Abraham, David, and to us through Christ in the New Covenant is fulfilled. Our God is with us. What else do you need?

Beloved, these 12 gates that are mentioned in this chapter are intended to show us that we have access to God. There is a gate for all the tribes to have access. The reality of God’s permanent presence is the ultimate blessing. Sometimes people talk about who they want to see when they get to heaven but friend, I want you to know that the only reason it is heaven is because God is there. If He were not, then it wouldn’t be the place to be. Without the divine presence of God (chapters 8-11) the city, the people, and the temple were all destroyed. There was no hope for the people of God. With the divine presence the city, the people, and the temple are all restored. It is His presence that guarantees life will come out of death. It is His presence that assures us of provision both spiritually and physically. When restoration is complete, we will see the impact of God’s favor on us.

Let me close with words from Revelation 21:3, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.’” The revelation that Ezekiel is given in this final vision was one of love, fellowship, and salvation and should be a source of great hope for us and our future. God has given us a “new heart” and a “new spirit” that will someday fit perfectly in this new city. God accomplished all of this through His Son our Savior the Lord Jesus. Through faith in Him we can be made new (2 Cor. 5:17). When Ezekiel closed with “The Lord is there”, it was intended to tell us He would always be. We are safe beloved in the arms of the One who will never let us go.

Daniel 1 – January 29

Tremper Longman III, renowned Old Testament scholar, explains that the book of Daniel, which bears the name of its author, is broken into two parts.¹ Chapters 1-6 present accounts of Daniel and his friends living in the royal Babylonian court. Chapters 7-12 convey four apocalyptic visions (we will cross that bridge when we come to it, as they say). Despite the seemingly sharp turn in genre, the book is unified by a single important message: in spite of the dire circumstances that make it seem like evil is winning, God is in control and will have the final victory. Rather than leading us to attempt to chart and calendar the end times, this book is meant to comfort God's people. It has done so throughout history and in the present day. With that overview in mind, let's take a look at the first chapter!

Voila! Controversy in verse 1. Daniel writes that the Babylonians came to Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim's reign. The unusually astute reader may recall that Jeremiah recounts things a bit differently. Jeremiah 25:1 states that Nebuchadnezzar's first year was Jehoiakim's fourth. Jeremiah 36:9 states that the Babylonians showed up in Jehoiakim's fifth year. What are we to do with this apparent error in our supposedly infallible Bible? As always, research reveals the Bible to be just fine. There were two forms of dating the rule of a king. Jeremiah employed the Judahite method, which reckons the first year of a king's reign as his first year. Daniel, living in the *Babylonian* court, used the *Babylonian* method, which counts the first year as the "accession year." Both accounts, along with secular histories of Babylon, line up perfectly. Usually I would not spend much time with textual criticism in a Christocentric devotional, but I felt it necessary today for two reasons. First, we must be prepared for the world to hurl arguments against scripture at us. This is natural, as scripture condemns their very way of life and calls them to repent and turn to Christ. Second, it should give your confidence a nice booster shot to know that when we read an "error" in scripture, it is *always* a misreading or misunderstanding on our part. This checks out time and time again. The Bible is trustworthy!

Now, back to the text itself. In verse 2, Daniel chooses his words precisely: "And *the Lord* delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..." (emphasis mine). On the surface, it appears that Nebuchadnezzar's superior military power brought about victory. The Babylonians surely credited some of their pagan gods. But Daniel credits none other than the Lord himself. This is right in line with all of the preceding prophets, who explained that God would hand his people over for chastisement (especially Jeremiah). He also promised to deal with the Babylonians in due time, but we aren't there yet. This first chapter sets the stage for Daniel's God, the one true God, to show his power over the pagan gods. We see the "confrontation" in a sense with their name changes: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah become Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshac, and Abednego (names that praise God changed to names that praise pagan gods). Reread the story, even if you are familiar with it. The young men refuse eat the Babylonian food. And after ten days, they are proven to be superior to the other men. It would seem they are attempting to keep kosher and not cross their consciences, but Dan. 10:3 shows that this was not the case. Rather, they were simply giving room for God to work—to show off, in a sense. And that's exactly what he does. This sets the stage for the next five chapters.

¹ See his article on Daniel in the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, edited by D.A. Carson.

Daniel 2 – January 30

In the first chapter, Nebuchadnezzar subjects Daniel and his friends to rigorous diet and academic curriculum in order to shape them into Babylonian wise men. They were to serve his court well. At the end of that chapter, they are found to be at the top of their class. Nebuchadnezzar of course believes this is due to his training regimen. With a dash of dramatic irony, the reader knows that God's intervention is what has made them look much healthier. But what of their knowledge? Are the Babylonian teachers just very skilled? Chapter 2 shows that their true wisdom, over and above that of the Babylonians who cannot interpret the dream, comes from God as well. Paul contrasts the wisdom of the age as foolishness compared to the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 2:6. Again with a healthy dose of irony, Daniel is able to interpret the dream (because of God), and it anticipates God's victory over evil human kingdoms and the establishment of the kingdom of God!¹ Remember that backdrop as we take a look at the text: the wisdom of man is foolishness compared to the wisdom of God, and this will ultimately be shown when the kingdom of God is consummated and fully established.

I love when biblical writers erupt in personal praise. Daniel does just that in verses 20-23 of Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar has decreed that all the wise men be put to death for failing to interpret his dream. Daniel begs for one more night; during that night, the Lord shows him the meaning of the dream. Upon waking, he bursts into praise, thanking the God who "deposes kings and raises up others... [who] reveals deep and hidden things" (Dan. 2:21-22). You see, Nebuchadnezzar's rule *depends* on the God of Daniel. Additionally, Daniel's wisdom *depends* on God. Men are only wise if God makes them so.² Recall the overarching theme of the book: even when it seems evil has won the day, God is in control and will have the final victory.

So, what about the dream itself? There is no need to rehash each detail here. Instead, let's look at the big picture. Verse 11 is interesting: "What the king asks is too difficult," the wise men say. "No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among the humans." How fitting, then, to read Daniel in verse 27: "No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, *but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.*" Daniel rightly interprets the dream, in which God shows that his kingdom will ultimately destroy every other kingdom. We have experienced the in-breaking of this kingdom in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To utilize an image from Narnia, *the ice is starting to melt*. Though Nebuchadnezzar reveals his ignorance by bowing to Daniel, and also never becomes an exclusive worshipper of God, he still recognizes (even if just for a moment) the superiority of Daniel's God. "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings..." (v.47). He did not know just how right he was!

¹ D.A. Carson, *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*

² Ibid.

Daniel 3 – January 31

Today we come to perhaps the most famous chapter in the book of Daniel. We can approach the story of the “fiery furnace” in at least two ways. First, their courage and reliance on God is instructive for us in this day. Regardless of social pressure, we must not capitulate to the idolatrous actions of those around us. Now, there is no guarantee that we will be spared from whatever our “fiery furnace” may be. Still, their actions are to be commended. But a second (and not contradictory) approach is to read it thematically. We can do a little of both today. What I mean by thematically reading is seeing it for where it sits in the *entire narrative* of scripture. Babylon is referenced in Revelation often. Does that mean there will be a resurgence of this long-gone nation? No. To borrow language from Augustine, this is about the City of God versus the City of Man.¹ We see this even in Genesis 3: the snake will wound, but the son of the woman will crush the head of the snake. Then Cain and Abel. Then Noah and the wicked humans. David and Goliath. And most prominently, *Israel and Babylon*. This comes to a head in Revelation when those in the City of God finally and completely overthrow the City of Man (Babylon is often used as shorthand). With that as the interpretive backdrop, let’s take a look at the familiar passage!

In verse 4, the heralds proclaim that “Nations and peoples of every language” must bow down to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar. Sound familiar? The multitude of Revelation 7:9 is described similarly: “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages...” (Rev. 7:9). This idolatry is the great evil of the “city of man,” of all who reject God. Nebuchadnezzar has placed himself in the position that belongs only to the one true God. Most polytheistic people of surrounding cultures would have no problem bowing to another golden statue. But that is not the case for God’s people—then or now. This is a distinctive mark of Christianity. At the end times, the city of man will be overthrown. All those who refused to worship the one true God, or who placed other Gods before him (usurping glory that is due Him!), will be cast into Hell. This eschatological (end times) truth, should lead us to live differently *now*.

That is exactly what happened with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They know the ultimate victory belongs to God. Thus, they are able to say, “He will deliver us... But even if he does not, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold image you have set up” (Dan. 3:17-18). Their courage comes from confidence in God’s *ultimate* victory, not just the current one. They know he can save them from the furnace, but it matters not. They will be vindicated when all is said and done. But he does save them from the furnace. And though the identity of the fourth man in the furnace is undisclosed, be it God himself or an angel, one cannot help but see a type of Christ figure. Jesus came to live in our dangerous, wicked world in order to deliver us, to give us victory over sin and death, a greater “fiery furnace.” So in your day to day, or in extreme circumstances, we trust God because of his ultimate, consummate victory. He can deliver us from the moment, but he has *already* delivered us from our greatest enemy! All glory be to Christ.

¹ This deserves much more explanation, but we can simplify it as good vs. evil.