

Sunday, September 23, 2018—Ezekiel 40-42

When a natural disaster occurs, people may have a brief window of time when they can gather some important items from their homes. Some of the most commonly collected items are picture albums and photographs. Those photos and albums contain priceless memories that stir rich conversations and warm thoughts long-forgotten.

In the twenty-fifth year of captivity (40:1), Ezekiel received a vision from God. They went to Jerusalem, and the messenger began to walk Ezekiel through the Temple complex, measuring every part of the structure. Ezekiel took copious notes, recording the thickness of the walls, the width of the openings, and the height of the ceilings. In a day without photography, Ezekiel was “taking a picture” of this most holy place.

Jerusalem had fallen 14 years earlier. Many had been in exile for a quarter of a century. Jeremiah had told them some would be away for 70 years, so no one would have been surprised by anyone who thought the Temple would never be seen again. With this vision to Ezekiel, God was reminding His people of what would one day come again and the power of His promises. Ezekiel was providing a “snapshot” so future generations could consult his writings and rebuild the Temple well.

God wanted the holy to be separate from the common (42:20) yet visible to and accessible by the common world. He uses His people today as His Temple, living in the world but not being of the world. Pray for a life of holiness that demonstrates His glory and goodness to the common world.

Saturday, September 22, 2018—Ezekiel 37-39

There is no pit so low that the grace of God cannot reach down and rescue the vilest of sinners. There is no prison so strong the hand of God cannot break through to free the one hoping in Him. God specializes in the impossible in order to demonstrate His sovereignty and holiness.

Ezekiel continually shared words of judgment for the people of God and the nations around them. The devastation He promised was like nothing they had ever seen, and its accomplishment would be irreversible. God, however, can bring light from darkness and life from death, so He gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. “Can these bones live?” He asked Ezekiel, and Ezekiel admitted only God knew. God reassembled those bones and breathed life into them. He told Ezekiel He would bring life from death and unity from division within His own people. He would stir worship where there had been idolatry and sinfulness. He would provoke reverence for Himself and His people where there had been mockery and attack. This would show His sanctifying power (37:28).

He then gave Ezekiel a vision of the last days. In massive numbers the nations will march against Israel, yet they will crumble under the hand of Yahweh. The nations will see the reality of God like never before. They will respect Israel like never before. They will understand the power of His holiness, the destructiveness of sin, and the righteousness of His ways.

Praise God for the power of His holiness.

Friday, September 21, 2018—Ezekiel 34-36

The only thing worse than being lost is being lost and having no one searching. God spoke harshly against the shepherds of Israel, those charged with leading the people of God, because they had led poorly and, in fact, allowed the flock to wander as they wanted. God’s people had worshiped idols in every way possible, and the shepherds had done nothing to arrest this vile behavior. “My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and there was no one searching or seeking for them” (34:6).

God was going to bring judgment on these spiritual leaders—priests, prophets, kings, and others—who had used these people to their advantage. They had grown comfortable physically while the country had died spiritually. God had called them to something far different, and He was going to demonstrate His righteous anger against them all. Then, He Himself would be the good shepherd and seek the lost, bandage the wounded, strengthen the weak, and lead them with justice (34:16).

God doesn't need people to do His work, yet He gives them the privilege to partner with Him. When they falter, He restores. When they obey, He produces bounty. The shepherds had found a way to plenty, but they had done this through injustice and spiritual laziness. God had a better way, and He was going to bring that about without them.

God's searching for His people, restoring them, and leading them well are all for the honor of His name (36:22-23). Thank God for rescuing you. Pray for a life which demonstrates His holiness to all who see.

Thursday, September 20, 2018—Ezekiel 31-33

In Holy Sonnet X, John Donne speaks to Death and tells it not to be proud. While Death seems powerful, Death is a "slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men." The high and the lowly all end up in the same condition, and the right medication can help one sleep better than death can. Death is, in the end, not so mighty and will one day itself die.

God spoke similar words some 2,000 years earlier to Egypt. While the accomplishments of Egypt were spectacular and even Eden would be envious of the splendor of the land, Egypt was marked for destruction, and the world would tremble at its end (31:16). Pride comes before the fall.

Today, there are businesses which seem too big to fail. There are celebrities who seem too popular to fade away. Interests become idols. Hobbies become hang-ups. Any good thing God provides for enjoying life can begin providing a false sense of security or identity or purpose. In reality, all of these people, things, places, and activities will one day pass out of popularity, wear out and need replacing, or die. Only God is eternal.

God has appointed His people as watchmen, responsible for telling the world of impending battle and judgment (33:7-9). To avoid this responsibility invites personal judgment. Nothing is worthy of worship and devotion except God Himself. Nothing is too big to fail except His Kingdom. Tell His story. Share His glory. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (33:11), so work to see them come to repentance.

Wednesday, September 19, 2018—Ezekiel 28-30

In Ezekiel 28, God speaks to the ruler of Tyre. God affirms the wisdom and skill of this remarkable human, but He makes clear the king is merely a man. He is not a god, but he considers himself so, and his pride will be his downfall. A little more than 500 year later, the scene shifts as the king of Israel, Herod, receives the worship of the people of Tyre, who called him a god. Herod's pride led to his swift and disgusting demise.

Pride is the human conclusion that life's blessings and bounty are a result of personal effort rather than the grace of God. To be sure, God designs humans to work hard and use the skills and gifts He has given. God wants life to be abundant, but He never wants people to misplace their trust in Him and allegiance to Him. No mere mortal deserves worship, and He will bring down those leaders—of large nations and small—who proudly exalt themselves and accept the worship of others (29:16).

Pride turns the attention to self. Humility turns the attention to God and His holiness at work in and through the believer (28:25). When leaders and individuals allow themselves to be

puffed up, they garner the attention and trust of people but will never be able to fulfill the needs those people have which only God can meet. Ironically, He may use another flawed, prideful ruler (30:24) to execute His judgment.

Pray for daily humility and holiness to be useful to God alone.

Tuesday, September 18, 2018—Ezekiel 25-27

Because children have a unique relationship with their parents, they can mistakenly believe they receive unjust treatment when they misbehave. “My parents don’t punish the neighbors like this when they make them mad.” To some extent, they may be right. Parents aren’t responsible for others’ children, but receiving proper discipline is no proof of injustice.

God’s children likely thought God was mistreating them when He sent them into exile or allowed Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. “He doesn’t treat others this way,” some surely mused. They were right. God saw Israel as His chosen people, His treasured possession. He had higher standards for them, but His disciplining them wasn’t mistreatment.

As Sovereign over the whole earth, God also held everyone to standards of righteousness. In Ezekiel 25, He tells Ezekiel to tell Israel that He will punish Ammon, Seir, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and others for their mocking His people when Babylon invaded and destroyed the Temple. He was indeed going to “punish the neighbor kids” for misbehaving.

God wasn’t going to give a simple slap on the wrist. God said others would look on with horror at what happened to them, and the places would be forgotten (26:1-27:36). Sin results in desolation.

As Ezekiel delivered this news, he wasn’t to taunt and wag his finger. “Now, son of man, lament for Tyre . . .” (27:1). The hand of God is powerful, and His people should tremble at what He does to them and others. Pray for a heart broken by sin and humbled by His righteousness.

Monday, September 17, 2018—Ezekiel 22-24

The book of Ezekiel is set in days of judgment. The people with Ezekiel are in Babylon because the sin of God’s people led to their exile. Much of the message Ezekiel delivered to his people detailed the further judgment coming to the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

That judgment was warranted. God said the people had forgotten Him (22:13). The leaders were no longer acting as shepherds over the people but were selfishly using them (22:25). God had been patient and searched for one single man who could stand in the gap, the breach in the wall of holiness which protected the people yet could not find one (22:30).

The example of Israel, the northern kingdom, should have been adequate. They prostituted themselves spiritually, and Assyria devastated them. Judah, however, did not learn, and they gradually deteriorated before their own eyes. The Chaldeans marched the young and wise off to Babylon, and they eventually destroyed the city. Forgetfulness was costly (23:35).

To illustrate the depth of depravity the people were experiencing, God took Ezekiel’s wife but told Ezekiel not to mourn. Just as his wife was his pride and joy, the Temple had been the symbol of Jewish identity. God was going to allow it to be destroyed because of the people’s sin. Nothing had provoked their repentance to that point. This was the consequence.

Pray for a daily renewal of recognition of God and dependence on Him. Pray for awareness of the consequences of sin and increasing joy in Jesus so following Him and fleeing sin become life-giving practice.