

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 5:5-6 - "Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her. And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them." In this verse we see the people of God in a state of worse sin than the heathen nations around them. How is it that those with the most information about God's character and glory are the most hardened in their rebellion against Him? As stories are told of Pastors, missionaries and Christian leaders falling into gross sin, we wonder how it is possible. The one thing we should know is that all are capable of sin. The difference between the saved and lost is that the saved are disciplined of God (Hebrews 12:6). If you are a saved person living in sin, expect chastening as Israel had. If you experience no chastening, I would encourage you to to examine closely your position in Christ.

Ezekiel 5:8 - "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations." I don't think there are very many things more scary than hearing God is against you. Can you imagine the power of the God of the universe being set against you as a person, or in this case your nation? It can sometimes be overlooked that God hates sin, and will not only dis-allow it to prosper, but if it comes from His people, set Himself up against it. If you are preparing to do something sinful, as a Christian, you may want to read this verse a few times. Be very careful that you do not put yourself in a position against God. If you do, you can be sure you will come out the loser every time.

Ezekiel 7:3 - "Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations." It is sometimes difficult to apply a passage specifically given to Israel to New Testament Christians. Our promises in this covenant are different than the promises of Israel over the years. One thing that has remained the same is the accountability God's people have to Him. In Old Testament Israel, as we see here, people were judged by their deeds; we are judged by our deeds as well. If we do right and follow God, we will be blessed, but chastisement will come to those who reject God's ways. Remember that your deeds have consequences. If you rebel against God and His leading, you should realize this, confess your sin, and ask God to forgive you.

Ezekiel 9:1 - "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand." Sometimes a verse that does not particularly address an issue still makes you think. This is one of those verses for me. It is simply a portion of the larger vision given to Ezekiel during this time, yet it contains a phrase I could not get past. The phrase is in regard to the way in which God chooses to speak to Ezekiel. He does so with a loud voice in the ears. I can't tell you how many times God seemingly spoken to me this way. I am of course not referring to a literal voice in my ears, but rather a figurative one. Isn't it unfortunate that God's servants through the years have needed such a loud and close bit of instruction? I often find myself not hearing the first time, and then regret that God has to speak louder and closer to my ear. Let's listen more closely for God's voice, then maybe He wouldn't have to yell!

Ezekiel 11:5 - "And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." Sins of the mind seem to be some of the most overlooked and common. Our minds are sometimes filled with wickedness, even when our actions are pure. This verse leaves us with no illusions about what God knows of the thoughts of His people. Even if the people could refute their personal involvement in actions described as abominations by the Lord, they could not be held guiltless for their thoughts. The man who stands and shouts "I have done nothing wrong" is often the same one who's mind has been overrun with terribly wicked imaginations. Guard your mind, and remember that God knows what you think.

Ezekiel 11:17 - "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." Gathering all Israel into one place is a colossal bit of logistics. We know however, that God has given His people that land, and they will all be gathered together there in God's time. This caused me to think again of how much bigger God is than we are. Those of us in ministry have a difficult time just getting all of a church congregation together for one service! After talking to several Pastors lately, I am realizing it is sometimes impossible even to gather a quorum of members for an important vote. We seem to have neither the organization, nor power to bring people together, yet God's strategies are effective and thorough. What are great and wonderful God we serve, that can make a promise that seems so big, and then cause it to come to pass with no delay.

Ezekiel 12:2 - "Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house." The house of Israel was indeed rebellious, as God reminds Ezekiel numerous times in this book. I wondered if much of the rest of the world in this generation was as rebellious. Then I

thought of the years of gospel ministry throughout the world, and the masses of people that have rejected Christ and realized we are much the same today. We cover our eyes, shield our ears and harden our hearts to the work of the Spirit in active rebellion against God and His principles. One can only hope that this is not the position of a believer, yet we are not naive enough to think this is not the case in some instances. For years we sit in church, hearing the truth and seeing its testimony lived out in lives, but we refuse to change our ways even when they need it so desperately. A lot of stones are tossed at ancient Israel, but rarely do we actually pause to consider the characteristics we often share with it.

Ezekiel 13:2-3 - "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!" One of the great dangers of teaching and preaching is that we will do so based on our own experiences. Rather than proclaim the truth as it is, we filter it through the experiences we have in life, and cause it to be tainted by our feelings about them. Apparently the prophets of Israel that God speaks about here were very much like some of the Pastors and teachers I know today. They "prophesy" not according to truth, but according to their knowledge of what the people want to hear. Our responsibility is not to survey the modern landscape and then tailor our message accordingly, but rather to study and understand God's message and proclaim it no matter the situation. Don't be like these prophets, ministering to others based on what is in your own heart.

Ezekiel 14:6 - "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations." Once you have turned yourself over to an idol, it is difficult to break the habit of putting it before God. Many have defined an idol in just that way; anything you set as a higher priority than your Lord. If we indeed embrace this definition of an idol, our society ranks right up there with the most idolatrous in history. Church members will often describe all the "tremendously important" things they are doing that keep them from church each week, and most of them fit quite nicely into the idol category. The only solution to the problem is usually to simply turn from the idol back to God. Simple solutions like this are only simple on paper however; in real life they take a hearty dose of faith and commitment.

Ezekiel 16:1 - "Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations," When I sin, the last thing I want is to be reminded of it. Sin is not an enjoyable thing to have placed in front of your eyes time and time again, especially when it is not only God doing the reminding, but another man. I'm rather certain that the nation of Israel was not happy to have their abominations brought before her as the Lord commanded Ezekiel, yet what can be more effective to change behavior? If you struggle with sins of the mind just imagine a scenario in which what you think would be broadcast in front of friends, family, and brothers and sisters in Christ. This scary thought, in some cases, has brought me to the place where I was ready to confess my wrongdoing and turn from it. I can see why the Lord wanted Israel to know her abominations and be reminded what they meant. This method is not only effective for bringing to mind our accountability, but can also cause us to turn from our wrongs by making us come to grips with reality.

Ezekiel 18:21 - "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." Turning from sinful actions to right actions is always demanded of God's people. Our responsibility is always to decide to do the will of God, while at the same time rejecting our own will. Some have written and spoken about this as a replacement principle. Each action of unrighteousness should be replaced with an action of righteousness, almost as in the principle of science that says every action has an equal and opposite reaction. I don't know if this completely holds true in all circumstances, but we do know that the encouragement to reject sin in scripture is usually accompanied by an admonition to do good. If you are struggling to eliminate a particular sinful behavior from your life, perhaps adding a new habit of righteousness might also be positive.

Ezekiel 18:30 - "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Sin, in the final analysis is the ruin of all who do not trust in Christ. Our sinful rejection of Christ not only sentences us to an eternity separate from Him, but also often causes us great pain in our earthly life. The question can be asked, what good has ever come out of sin? Certainly it does nothing but cause pain, anguish, frustration, and ultimately the destruction of all that is good in the world, and in our lives also. Anyone who urges another to turn from sin is certainly urging them to do so for their own good. This is why God's commands are so beneficial to us, and not as we often feel; a burden. The very fact that we have rejected any evil way will certainly make our life better. Sin, on the other hand, by its very nature causes us irreparable harm. Realize just before you decide to sin that all this action will do is bad. The enemy may lie and tell you good will come of it, but certainly he does not have your best interest in mind!

Ezekiel 20:3 - "Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you." What a strong word of rebuke this is to the

elders of Israel! The Lord will only speak to them His words, and they are to ask and say nothing. His disgust with them has grown to the point where He will not even allow them to address Him. While sometimes it's hard to know just exactly what kind of communication God allowed under the Old Testament system, we do hear Him speaking loudly on the matter in instances such as this one. God's only concern here is that Israel hear what He has to say. He is not the slightest bit interested in any type of two way communication with those who have committed such great sins against Him. I often wonder how far some of our prayers make it. We make such grand inquiries and lofty requests of God, yet we often also fail miserably at hearing what He is saying. Let's listen to this verse and do a better job of hearing "Thus saith the Lord".

Ezekiel 20:22 - "Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth." Our action or in-action can have a remarkable effect on how the lost view God. We must realize that we represent Him, and our behavior can either glorify or "pollute" His name in their sight. We see clearly in this instance that God even makes a choice of His own, based on what will bring Him glory among the people set against Him. Our recognition should always be that God is concerned about how He is viewed by the world. Not only should we seek to glorify Him, and show others His greatness, we should also be careful not to pollute people's view of Him with our own bad behavior. Be always aware that God wants to be glorified, and make choices that will please Him.

Ezekiel 22:26 - "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them." The problem with some religious "worship" is that it so greatly resembles its worldly counterpart, that it is no longer distinguishable as religious. You may notice that I have carefully used the word religious where some may place the term Christian. Much that passes for "Christian" these days is nothing more than worldliness cleaned up. We are just like Israel in our blurring of the distinction between holy and profane as we learn to love the things of the world and then purpose to bring them into the church, changing only their label. This is today's great scourge of the church in America, yet we see that the dilemma is not new. Some may be deceived into believing that God will accept this counterfeit, but He sees clearly our desire and does not. In this day He made Israel aware of their reflection on Him, and in our day we should have the same understanding. Our desire to blend the un-blendable holy with profane is not ignored by the Father and succeeds in nothing but tarnishing Him.

Ezekiel 26:13 - "And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard." One of the first things to leave during trial or rebellion is a Godly song in my heart. I note very clearly that it is a Godly song that leaves, because we know that much of the music of today promotes rebellion. Therefore a sinner can have a heart full of un-godly songs, being far from the Lord. Rock & Roll has long been the music of the rebel, as it goes against so-called social norms and encourages the hearer to cast away their inhibitions. I wonder what song these people were singing in Ezekiel's day? I would assert that the Godly person sings spiritual songs during a time of obedience, while a rebellious person sings songs of sinful release when their heart is hardened. If the people of Israel were in great sin, I wonder if their songs were rebellious, or if God was taking away their songs of Godly praise because their hearts were far from Him? Perhaps we will find the answer in later chapters.

Ezekiel 28:5 - "By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches:" Increasing our riches can do a number of things to endanger our spiritual lives. Many have the tendency to trust in the security riches can give, rather than the security the Lord provides. Others find an inferior satisfaction in the things money can buy, instead of finding true and full satisfaction in the Savior. Money has always presented great challenges to the people of God, especially when it has come to us quickly, and in great abundance. Being weak and sinful, we are tempted greatly to love it with an intensity that surpasses our love for the Lord, and cling to it, even when it is drawing us further from Him. If you experience financial blessing, be certain you are not lifted up as these in Israel, because unfortunately you will not be lifted up to God, but rather lifted up in pride.

Ezekiel 30:22 - "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand." Sometimes the strangest passages of scripture will prompt a thought about God's working in our lives. This is one of those verses that makes me think about things that really have nothing to do with its content. It is more that the picture created by its language prompts a remembrance of times God has dealt in a similar way with me. Pharaoh's arm is broken first by God, and it is only at that point he drops his sword. Even though it seems the sword is the real problem, God deals with the arm, which results in the elimination of the problem. I might be stretching in application, but I know God has dealt with me in this same manner on a regular basis. A pastor I knew once said that if a church member decided to skip services regularly to ride his motorcycle, he wouldn't be surprised if that motorcycle didn't break down. The implication was that while the problem was a lack of faithfulness, God may deal instead with the object associated with that act of sin. Further examination may be needed on the

topic, but it is certainly something to think about.

Ezekiel 33:4-5 - "Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul." We have been warned about a number of things in the scripture. We know about the problem of sin and its penalty in Hell, we understand that Christ will soon come back and that we should be ready, and we are also aware that our responsibility is to live according to the things we are taught. Why then, in so many cases, do we not heed these warnings? Is it that we really do not believe the Bible's clear teaching? Do we feel that there will always be time to fit some of these things in? Are we just careless? I think the answer is all of the above, but that we should all understand that disregard for warnings can be a very dangerous thing. Is there anything at all God is warning you about today? Perhaps you should take heed now and not delay.

Ezekiel 33:11 - "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" With our modern society in a battle for its life against fundamentalist Islam, many are making comparisons. Some of the latest observations by liberal "thinkers" compare the Koran to the Bible and declare them equal in their calls for violence. We must totally reject this notion on the basis of the ideas expressed in this verse. Our God is not a God of violence, but a God of great and abundant mercy and forgiveness. He takes no pleasure in eliminating the wicked, but has commanded it only as a last resort. Our mandate as Bible believers is to present the gospel with faithfulness, leaving the results to God. We believe quite strongly in a person's right to reject God, and have only the responsibility to warn anyone who does so. A person who threatens violence against those who reject Christ is not living according to the scripture. God alone will choose to bring judgment, and only after He has provided sufficient opportunity for sinners to embrace Him.

Ezekiel 33:18-20 - "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways." Some will point to a passage of scripture such as this and attempt to convince us how immoral God is. They will call into question His character by pointing out the "unequal" ways He dealt with both righteous and wicked. Their aim is to destroy our view of God, so as to call into question the basis of our faith in Him. Those young or weak in Christ have fallen prey to these arguments; but we should not. Our perspective must be that all God does is righteous, because He is the one and only author of righteousness. Our definitions of goodness and equality cannot bind the Lord. His ways are beyond our understanding, yet we can be most certain in all instances that anything He does is right.

Ezekiel 36:27 - "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." The gift of God's Holy Spirit gives us such great advantages. In our age of grace we have God's principles written upon our hearts by that member of the Godhead that indwells us. While the law was an external tool of conformance to God's will, the Spirit is our internal guide, which also enables us to perform that which God intends. Those receptive hearts in Israel that believed this promise must have longed to see our day. To know that they would no longer have the law only for the revelation of their sinfulness, but also be given the ability to do right must have fascinated them. Unfortunately, we rarely give thought to our privilege, and it sometimes serves as no great motivator for us. Think of the wealth a saved man has to experience the very nature of God through the indwelling of the Spirit. Let's not reject His leading today and go back to a legalistic conformation to the letter of the law. We have much more in Christ that these in Israel could only look forward to.

Ezekiel 37:4-5 - "Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:" As we read this Old Testament passage, we are reminded of New Testament reality. These dry, dead bones are a good representation of a man without Christ. The contrast of God breathing life into the bones makes clear what occurs when Christ takes that dead man and makes him alive. By this we are reminded what state we were in before Jesus quickened us in Him (Colossians 2:13). We can also identify with Ezekiel here as he faced the task of speaking to dead things. It may sound like a joke, but our work of witnessing to the lost is sometimes just as intimidating. A dead man cannot hear or understand unless God intervenes, just as He did in this situation. We should remember that our job is to speak "Thus saith the LORD God" and let Him do the work of bringing that which is dead to life.

Ezekiel 38:23 - "Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD." If you read through the preceding verses in this passage you wonder at all God has to do to get the attention of the world. We are such a sinful and rebellious people that even death and war and ruin cannot wake us up to the fact that God is trying to get our attention. God demands our recognition of His glory and goes about reminding us

of it by any means necessary. In the end every knee shall bow, but some will do it at such a great cost both in their life on earth and in eternity. Logically it doesn't seem like it should have to go this far, yet man is so often not ruled by logic, but rather by their fleshly lusts. We understand why the world would need such a drastic awakening, but it should not be so among the born-again. We ought to be so well acquainted with God's ways that we respond immediately and without great drama.

Ezekiel 39:22 - "So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward." Sometimes we can see God's power and glory with clarity on one day, but fail to recognize it in the future. God intended for Israel to know Him and His methods both in this specific instance, and "forward". A real danger for each believer is that we will have a victory today, giving God all the praise for it, and then fail to do the same in a future victory. Often when we come through a difficult time of trial, when God has shown himself mighty in our behalf, we can dwell on that sense of triumph, failing to remember we also need God for the next trial. God's grace for one situation will not carry over into the next. We must rely on Him moment by moment, hour by hour. If we fail to do this we may find ourselves on a spiritual roller coaster that's destination can be only that of confusion and defeat.

Ezekiel 43:25 - "Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish." The pictures that we see in the Old Testament are so wonderful for helping us to understand God's plan from the beginning. During this day Ezekiel certainly didn't understand all God would do through Christ so many years later, but he did get a picture of the spotless sacrifice God would make for the sins of all mankind. This sacrifice needed to be made every day, yet the later sacrifice of Christ was made once for all. This reminder of Old Testament routine made me aware again of how wonderful our age of grace really is. Not only was this animal sacrifice incomplete, being only a covering for sin, it was also a difficult and time-consuming process. Thank God today for the gift of Christ's spotless sacrifice for our sin, that is so much better (Hebrews 8:6-7) than the system of the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 44:9 - "Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel." Many verses catch my attention in some special way during my reading, but very few actually surprise me. Today when I read that "no stranger" could enter into God's sanctuary I was surprised by its similarity to Matthew 7:22-23 where Jesus says to those calling upon Him "I never knew you". These people were strangers to Christ, and therefore had no right to receive His blessing. God has never shown favor to those who were not personally acquainted with Him. His desire is that we come to know Him. It is at that point we can understand the obedience He demands, because we understand the character of the one who demands it. Determine to know God better today, or come to understand that no stranger can be a recipient of the blessings in His presence. If you are reading this today as a stranger to God, I would encourage you to trust Him today .