

The Prophets

Lesson #45

Ezekiel 17:1-24:27

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Notes

Ezekiel 4:1-24:27

- The riddle and the parable of the two eagles (17:1-24).
 - Ezekiel uses a riddle to communicate the fact that they would be judged for their own contemporary lack of trust in the Lord. The historical background for this riddle is found in 2 Kings 24:6-20; 2 Chronicles 36:8-16 and Jeremiah 37:1-21; 52:1-7. The vine represented Israel (cf. Psalm 80:8-9; Isaiah 5:1-7).
 - Much like the rhetorical strategy of Amos against Israel (cf. Amos 1:2-2:16), Ezekiel has his audience commit to the correct perspective before they know they are uttering words of self-judgment. The east wind in the ancient Near East was legendary for its destruction of crops (cf. Genesis 41:6; Jonah 4:8). This destructive power was turned into a metaphor to describe God's acts of judgment (Exodus 10:13; Isaiah 27:8; Jeremiah 18:17).
 - The first great eagle is the king of Babylon. Lebanon stands for Jerusalem. The second eagle is Egypt. The vine's sending out its roots and branches for water is rebellion against the king of Babylon by sending Judean envoys to get horses and a large army.
 - God would spread a net and seize Zedekiah with the Babylonian army and bring him to Babylonia in exile. When Zedekiah is punished for his disloyalty, like the exiles said should happen when answering Ezekiel's rhetorical questions, they will know that God has spoken.
 - The cedar is the Davidic line and the shoot is a Davidic king, newly plucked from the same cedar as Jehoiachin. This was the Messiah whom God would establish as King over Israel in the Messianic kingdom. All the birds would nest in its branches -- perhaps a figure of the nations of the world (cf. Daniel 4:17, 32, 34-37; Matthew 13:31-32). They would submit to the Messiah and His rule.
- Individual responsibility for righteousness (18:1-31).
 - Proverb versus principle (18:1-4).
 - The sentiment introduced in vs. 2 circulated widely in Ezekiel's day (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Lamentations 5:7). The proverb was said with a sigh and a shrug, not a sneer. This resignation keeps them from considering that their exile is due to their own sins.
 - This viewpoint is abhorrent to God because it effectively dismisses His personal care and attention for everyone.
 - Three illustrations of the principle (18:5-18).
 - The principle of individual responsibility shows that a righteous person in a trusting relationship with the Lord will live physically and eternally. First, the Lord must define righteousness according to the Mosaic covenant.

- Five legal areas differentiate righteous acts from unrighteous deeds. Fifteen characteristics of this righteous person, viz., eleven specific actions and four dispositions, appear in vss. 6-9. Ezekiel's list reveals his priestly background, since several have to do with ritual cleanness and uncleanness.
- The second example deals with the unrighteous son of the righteous son. The son demonstrates his unrighteousness and lack of faith by a lifestyle opposite that of his father.
- The third illustration shows that an unrighteous man will not necessarily have an unrighteous son. The son is exactly the opposite of his father and nearly identical to his grandfather.
- The explanation of the principle (18:19-32).
 - Having stated the basic principle of individual responsibility in vss. 1-4 and then illustrated it in vss. 5-18, Ezekiel elaborates the aspects of this principle.
 - Ezekiel first begins with the ability of the wicked to change. This rhetorical strategy hints that Ezekiel is implicitly challenging his hearers to apply the message to themselves. The key is repentance.
 - Israel's refusal to accept that God metes out judgment contrary to their understanding does not alter the fact that He does so. Vs. 30 is the second call to repentance (cf. 14:6); it reiterates the second theme of vss. 21-24: God does not want His people to die.
- A lament for the princes of Israel (19:1-14).
 - The final question raised by the recipients of Ezekiel's messages concerns the trustworthiness of the contemporary rulers of Judah to lead the nation back to prominence. Ezekiel responds with a funeral dirge for Judah's princes.
 - Ezekiel's lament centers first around the imagery of a lioness and her whelps. The lioness here is to be identified as the nation of Israel. Israel had taken her place among the nations. The young whelps represented given kings of Israel, and in historical and biblical context they signified certain latter rulers in Judah.
 - The first whelp was Jehoahaz, who had been placed on the throne by the Judeans following the death of his father, Josiah (2 Kings 23:31). The second whelp was Jehoiakim, Jehoahaz's immediate successor. The two other whelps were Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.
 - In vs. 10, the imagery changes to that of a "vine." Ezekiel has Genesis 49:8-12 in mind as the background for this metaphor (cf. 17:1-24). The vine with strong branches reaching into the sky represents the Davidic dynasty. The strong, multiple branches represents the kings from this stock. The east wind is the Babylonian army. The strong branches and its stripped fruit are Jehoiachin, his sons, and

- the other deportees. The consuming fire suggests the depopulation. They are planted in exile, in Babylon's dry and thirsty land.
- The defective leadership of Israel (20:1-23:49).
 - The history of Israel's rebellion and the Lord's grace (20:1-44).
 - Rebellion in Egypt (20:1-9).
 - As they had before, the elders of Israel came to seek a word from God through Ezekiel. They do this almost a year after Ezekiel's announcement that God was leaving His temple because of rampant sin (cf. 8:1).
 - Their exact questions are left unmentioned because God does not intend to give them an answer in any case. Their sin is too blatant. Their hearts are divided.
 - Israel's history as a nation began in Egypt where God chose her. He made Himself known to Israel and swore that He would be her God (Deuteronomy 7:6-11).
 - Ezekiel tells us what the book of Exodus does not. Even before they left Egypt, God determined to punish them severely. Nevertheless, "for my name's sake," God changed His mind.
 - Rebellion in the wilderness (20:10-26).
 - Israel did not want to be different. They rebelled against God and they utterly desecrated what God had given them. Because of this, God suspended the blessings of His promise. This response applies to the first generation; He holds out greater hope for their children.
 - That God would give Israel "statutes that were not good" means that Israel would choose to live according to the world's ordinances that brought misery and death. The "gifts" in vs. 26 referred to religious sacrifices (cf. Exodus 28:38; Leviticus 23:38).
 - Rebellion in the conquest and settlement of the land (20:27-29).
 - The Lord describes the sins of Israel's first generation as blasphemy and unfaithfulness (Numbers 15:30-31). When a person despises God's word, that person slanders (or blasphemes) God.
 - Israel had not learned from the mistakes of their forefathers. The generation of Hebrews who entered Canaan began practicing the Canaanites' heathen rituals they observed.
 - Rebellion of Judah in Ezekiel's day (20:30-44).
 - Ezekiel's historical review now includes his own fellow Israelites. Their present actions ratify the rebellion of their ancestors all the way back to the beginning.
 - Although they are already like the nations who serve wood and stone, God will never permit them to do so without conse-

quence. His election for them is irrevocable (cf. Romans 11:29). God will always be their God, whether they choose to acknowledge Him or not.

- The concluding verses present a complete reversal of Israel's idolatrous history. What had characterized Israel's worship before would do so no longer. This language refers to the location of the renewed temple described in chapters 40-48.
- Judgment on Judah's contemporary leaders (20:45-21:32).
 - The burning of the southern forest (20:45-21:7).
 - For the third time in the book, Ezekiel is told to "set thy face" against something (6:2; 13:17). This idiom describes hostile intent. The object of God's ire is the south, described by Ezekiel with three different words.
 - Vs. 49 provides a transition between the parable and its interpretation. Ezekiel's hearers were frustrated, so God would provide the interpretation.
 - The fire is God's wrath against the people in the land. The explanation now substitutes metaphor for metaphor, sword for fire.
 - Rather than tell the people the "tidings" that is coming, he describes its effects in terms that recall the announcement of the coming day of the Lord in 7:15-18.
 - The slaughter of the sword (21:8-17).
 - Ezekiel was to weep and wail, for the Babylonian sword of judgment was against Judah, God's people, especially her leaders.
 - The people of Judah had been tested and found wanting. Since the nation had failed the testing, the solemn question was whether Judah and her rulers would continue to exist.
 - Ezekiel clapped his hands in approval of the judgment but with scorn and contempt for the iniquity that had brought about God's wrath.
 - The imminent judgment by Babylonia (21:18-27).
 - Ezekiel, in another dramatic action, is to play the role of Nebuchadnezzar's forces at a crossroads signpost near Damascus. To make this decision, Nabuzaradan, the army commander, will seek an omen through three separate means.
 - The choice will be for Jerusalem to be attacked first. In typical siege fashion, the city will be the target of battering rams, vicious vocal attacks from the soldiers outside, an earthen ramp and other siege works.
 - Vss. 24-27 place the responsibility for Jerusalem's fate squarely on the shoulders of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The same re-

bellious disrespect the populace has shown God, it has also shown to its Babylonian ruler.

- The greatest guilt, however, lies with Zedekiah. Ezekiel singles him out by a scathing direct address. The removal of the priesthood and the kingship from Judah are pictured in the removal of the high priest's diadem (Exodus 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; et al.) and the king's crown.
- Postponement of judgment on Ammon (21:28-32).
 - Apparently the Ammonites learned that Jerusalem was chosen over them by Nebuchadnezzar and gloated about it (cf. 25:1-7). However, Ammon's gloating was premature.
 - God would judge Ammon by the sword in their own land, where He would pour out indignation on them with the fire of His wrath, delivering them to men skilled in destruction who would devour them. God ultimately judges all who delight in harming His people (cf. Isaiah 10:5-19).
- The cause of judgment: Judah's idolatrous rulers (22:1-31).
 - Deliberate disobedience to the Mosaic covenant (22:1-16).
 - Though Israel's history of wickedness demanded discipline, it was the abominations of contemporary Israel and her rulers that had ignited the punishment. Since the people had failed to see this fact, God directed Ezekiel to deliver three judgments to make this clear once more.
 - Ezekiel identifies fifteen sins amid three refrains about shedding blood (vss. 6, 9, 12). The first set of sins is related to attacks on the authority foundations of society by the power of the princes of Israel.
 - The second set of sins is related to attacks on the morals of society by "men that carry tales." The seven sins noted in this section are all arguably violations of proper sexual boundaries.
 - The third set of sins are attacks on the legal foundations of society by men who accept bribes to shed blood. The four sins described here have to do with one person officially acting on behalf of another.
 - The purification of judgment (22:17-22).
 - No sins are mentioned in this section; instead, the general corruption and irredeemable nature of Judah's inhabitants is in focus. The "dross" represents those left in the land after the deportations of 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.
 - This fire of God's wrath would literally be executed by the Babylonians when they burned and sacked Jerusalem. With this fiery trial, God desired to make Himself and His justice known.

- The void of righteous leaders (22:23-31).
 - Judah was an impure nation mainly because the people had failed in their responsibilities, especially those appointed as leaders. The “princes” had conspired against the people for the purpose of personal prosperity.
 - The Lord was unable to find anyone who would stand defensively, through spiritual leadership and intercession, for the nation against the impending judgment.
 - Like Ezekiel, God must make the choice between what He does not want to do and what He must do. He does not want to destroy the land. However, the land will be cleansed of its defilement and the city will fall.
- An allegorical summary of Israel’s political prostitution (23:1-49).
 - Israel’s sordid youth (23:1-4).
 - Ezekiel concludes his discussion of Israel’s sinful leadership with a summary allegory of the political adultery into which Israel’s corrupt rulers had led the people.
 - The two sisters are named. Samaria, the older in the sense of initiating perverted relations with other nations and in receiving her punishment first, was named Aholah, which means “her tent.” Jerusalem, the younger of the two sisters, was called Aholibah, meaning “my tent is in her.”
 - Samaria’s prostitution (23:5-10).
 - Not only has Aholah not been changed by her marriage, she disregards her obligations. Instead, her craving was for Assyrian lovers. Her depravity knew no boundaries.
 - Extrabiblical sources indicate that in 840 B.C., Jehu was a tribute-paying vassal of Shalmanezar III. One obligation of vassalage was the recognition and worship of the surzerain’s deities.
 - The description of her fate fits Israel’s national dissolution from the Assyrian deportation of 721 B.C. All of these measures caused Samaria to become a byword among other nations allied with Assyria.
 - Jerusalem’s prostitution (23:11-35).
 - God turned to deliver His accusation against Jerusalem. Though Jerusalem observed the consequences of Samaria’s prostitution in her fall to Assyria in 722 B.C., she did not learn from the experience.
 - Like Samaria, Jerusalem’s first major “lover” was also Assyria (cf. vs. 5; 2 Kings 16:8; Isaiah 7:7-9). Judah then extended her prostitution to the Babylonians. She had inordinate affec-

tions for the Babylonian rulers (cf. Jeremiah 22:21), seeing images of them on walls.

- Having found relationships with Assyria and Babylon unsatisfying, Jerusalem looks back upon her wanton single days with fondness. God attacks Aholibah's desire to return to the same Egypt from which He had delivered her in extremely crude and graphic language.
- Having accused Jerusalem of crass prostitution with the nations, the Lord announces His judgment or verdict in four short speeches (vss. 22-27, 28-31, 32-34, 35).
- Judgment for prostitution (23:36-49).
 - These verses provide a formal indictment for the crimes previously discussed. Up to this point, Ezekiel has tried to win the support of his audience for the calamity about to come upon the adulterous wife.
 - These two "cities" were condemned for their adulterous political desires because they had sought out relationships with foreign nations for alliances (cf. Deuteronomy 17:14-20). These two cities seduced foreign nations as a harlot lures lovers with her cosmetics and clothing.
 - Assyria and Babylonia would judge Samaria and Jerusalem with the judgment prescribed for an adulteress and murderer: death, normally by stoning (cf. Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22).
- The execution of Jerusalem's judgment (24:1-27).
 - The parable of the cooking pot (24:1-14).
 - Ezekiel understood that the fulfillment of his prophecies had begun, two years and five months from the date of his last series of prophecies (cf. 20:1).
 - The interpretation immediately makes it clear that this parable is one of judgment, not salvation or fellowship. Ezekiel suggests that the cooking pot is now contaminated beyond repair, and the meat cooked in it ruined.
 - God had tried to cleanse her through the words of His prophets and righteous kings, but to no avail. His efforts met with monumental resistance. The Lord's fire of judgment would now accomplish a complete work so that Jerusalem would be purified, but not until God caused His wrath on Jerusalem to cease.
 - Signs to the exiles (24:15-27).
 - The death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-24).
 - The Lord informs Ezekiel that shortly he would take Ezekiel's wife from him "with a stroke," a phrase that normally refers to a plague or disease (cf. Exodus 9:14).

- He faithfully responded to her death according to God's command, though undoubtedly this was one of the most difficult things he ever did.
- Ezekiel explains that his wife's death and his own response was an allegorical enactment of a more profound reality. Ezekiel's wife represented Jerusalem. Her death indicates that God is about to desecrate His sanctuary and his unemotional response will be a sign to the exiles.
- The removal of Ezekiel's muteness (24:25-27).
 - The Lord announces that Ezekiel's muteness (cf. 3:25-27) would be removed when the siege of Jerusalem was completed.
 - On the day that "he that escapeth" arrived in Babylon, Ezekiel's mouth would be opened; he would have the freedom to move among his people and proclaim the message of hope for the future. This fulfillment is described in 33:21-22 (cf. 2 Kings 25:8), on the very night in which Ezekiel delivered his great message of hope for Israel (33:31-39:29).