

Review

The first section of Ezekiel was basically 24 chapters of God warning the Jews in Jerusalem what would befall them if they didn't repent. They didn't, and the city was put to siege.

Then, for the last eight chapters, He was telling Ezekiel about the judgments which would befall the seven nations surrounding Israel.

Now, the book begins a third and section - one in which the Lord will spend time focusing on the future of Israel. But there are some matters to take care of first...

33:1-6 A Watchman

Two days ago (02/01/05), Connecticut state emergency management officials began running a routine test of the Emergency Broadcast System. Unfortunately, someone pressed the wrong button, and television and radio stations all over the state broadcast that the entire state of Connecticut was to be evacuated immediately. No one did. As a matter of fact, the state police reported that they didn't receive even one single call about the alert.

Now, in the days before the Emergency Broadcast System, the people responsible for alerting people to danger were the watchmen. The job of the watchman was to stay up on the city wall (2Sam. 18:24) and look (1Sam. 14:16), keeping his eyes open (2Sam. 13:34), and staying awake (Psa. 127:1).

As he made his rounds (Song 3:3), he was to tell what time it was when people inquired of him (Isa. 21:11). He was also supposed to blow the trumpet (Jer. 6:17) and alert people when something eventful was going to happen (2Sam 18:25), telling what they saw (2Kings 9:17), and continue to explain what was happening to those who didn't have his vantage point (2Kings 9:20).

It was a vital job - lives were depending on him.

The Lord told Ezekiel that whoever was appointed as a watchman

for a people was responsible to sound the alarm when he saw a sword coming upon the land. (This is usually a figure of speech for an attacking enemy.)

Whose Responsibility?

The Lord said that if the watchman was faithful to blow the trumpet when he saw the approaching danger, then the people were responsible for themselves. If those people - like the citizens of Connecticut - disregarded the warning, their blood would be upon their own heads.

However, if the watchman saw the sword approaching and didn't warn the people, God would hold him personally responsible for their deaths. Their blood would be required from his hand.

33:7-9 Ezekiel Appointed A Watchman

God told Ezekiel that He was appointing him as a watchman for the house of Israel. If that sounds like a familiar command, it is because God perviously said these words to Ezekiel back in chapter three, verses 17 through 19.

Why is God "re-assigning" him with the exact same job? Actually, there is a bit of a difference. In chapter three, God had said that He was appointing Ezekiel as a watchman. But here in chapter 33, He says...

Ezek. 33:2 "...the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman"

God had appointed Ezekiel as Israel's watchman, but they wouldn't listen to Ezekiel. They wouldn't acknowledge him as a prophet. They didn't believe he was speaking for God. But they were about to believe. By the time this chapter ends, the people will acknowledge that what he prophesied had come true. They will essentially take him as their watchman.

When I Say

In the same way that the watchman on the wall was to sound the alarm and keep people informed, Ezekiel is to warn and inform the people about God's actions. He will be absolutely responsible to let them know what God is saying. If they don't pay attention, it's their problem. But if he isn't faithful to tell them, it will be his problem - a life-ending problem.

33:10-11 Turn Back

Previously, the Jews had been complaining that they were being punished for the sins of their fathers (Eze. 18). But now they understand it is their own sin which has brought about God's severe judgments.

Unfortunately, they are beginning to despair. They're beginning to think that there is no way they'll survive. And so the Lord clarifies for them: "What I want you to do is repent. Turn away from your sin, and you'll live. It's as simple as that." If they choose not to turn back, they will be foolishly choosing their deaths.

I love what God says here:

Ezek. 33:11 ..."I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live..."

That's what Peter told us as well. He said the Lord is...

2Pet. 3:9 ...not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Many people have died because of their sin. And unfortunately, God is often accused of enjoying it. Of smiting people by the thousands, like some sadistic, hatred-filled, demonic deity. But God says His pleasure comes not from smiting sinners, but from seeing repentance.

33:12-20 Righteousness And Wickedness

Having trouble keeping track of what's been said? Well, from verses eight through 20, the word "righteous" shows up 12 times, and "wicked" appears 14 times. Combine that with all the variations of circumstances

in these verses, and anyone could understand your confusion. We'll take it piece by piece.

Here are the various circumstances:

1) If a righteous man falls into sin, his previous righteousness won't save him.

2) If a wicked man turns from wickedness, he won't be brought down by his previous wickedness.

3) If God says to a righteous man, "You're going to live," there is a chance that the man will think he's got a "get out of jail free card." But if he falls into sin, he'll find out he didn't have one.

4) If God says to a wicked man, "You're going to die," the man still has an opportunity to repent and live.

Some people disagree with the way God has decided these rules. But, as He addressed back in chapter 18, when there is a disagreement about righteousness between God and man, it is always man who is not right. In a nutshell, God repeats something that He has told us throughout the entire Bible:

Ezek. 33:20 ..."I will judge each of you according to his ways."

33:21 The City Has Been Taken

For 12 years, this group of Jews from the second Babylonian attack had been in exile. But all that time, the false prophets in Jerusalem and in their own midst had been telling them everything was going to be fine.

But then refugees from the third and final attack had come straggling their way into Babylon. On that day, the Jews learned that Jerusalem was taken, just as Ezekiel had told them would happen. All the words of their false prophets had been proven wrong, and he had been vindicated as a true prophet of God.

33:22 No Longer Speechless

This is the fifth time that Ezekiel has made mention of the hand of

the Lord being upon him (1:3; 3:14; 3:22; 8:1; 33:22). We discussed the meaning of this in our very first study. God had been imparting blessing, authority, and empowerment on Ezekiel the evening before the refugees arrived from their long trip from Jerusalem. He was prepared to speak His Word and do His work when they arrived the next morning.

When the morning came, and the refugees arrived, Ezekiel's mouth was opened. Remember, he had been rendered speechless by the Lord back in chapter three:

Ezek. 3:26-27 "...I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth..."

For all this time, Ezekiel was only able to speak on certain occasions. Now, his tongue is loosed, and he is able to communicate freely again.

33:23-29 Should You Possess The Land?

The Jews had been mostly killed or removed from the Promised Land. However, there was a handful of them left, scattered around various parts of Israel, in the areas that had been trashed, ruined, and destroyed by the Babylonians.

Some of them began to think, "Our ancestor Abraham possessed this land, even though he was only one man. We've got more than that already, so we're going to maintain possession of it." But God was quick to point out that they were living in sin, so why did they think He would allow them to have it? No, He would insure that they would be removed - one way or another.

It is discouraging to me when I hear people "claim" the promises of God while while at the same time neglect the commandments of God. You don't get to pick and choose. These guys were holding to the Abrahamic covenant, while neglecting the Mosaic covenant. In other words, God

had made an unconditional promise to Abraham, that his descendants would inherit this land. However, God had also commanded the Jews that if they did not follow His Law, they would be removed from the land. Essentially, they were remembering Abraham, but forgetting Moses. God is not going to let them.

33:30-33 They Will Know

Now, God focuses on Ezekiel himself. He asks Ezekiel, "Did you know that everyone is talking about you now? They finally believe that you're My prophet. They're all fired up to hear what you have to say."

Unfortunately, while the people wanted to hear the words of God, they had no intention of acting on them. While their minds regarding Ezekiel had changed, their hearts for sin had not.

And so the Lord tells Ezekiel that he's going to have an audience, but they're going to be coming for the wrong reason. It's just like people nowadays who come to church because the music is rockin', the coffee is good, the pastor is funny, or the single girls are pretty. God isn't fooled. He sees the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, and knows why we're here.