

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Ezekiel's Denunciations of Judah*

Readings: *Ezekiel 12:1-28; 13:1-23; 14:1-23*

Reflections:

- After the previous vision Ezekiel is now called by God to enact some prophetic messages for the people in exile. These no doubt cause the onlookers to think he is crazy. We are reminded again that obedience to God can at times leave us looking like lunatics.
- “Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear...” This first verse of Ezekiel 12 gives us insight into the clearest indication of spiritually hardened people: an inability to perceive what God is saying and doing. This reminds us the centrality and importance of being in true relationship with God.
- Ezekiel's two enactments are: 1) being captured and taken into exile; and 2) being filled with fear all the time. Again these public actions must have made him look like a crazy man.
- He then receives two clear words that underscore the fact that God will complete every prophecy that he has spoken. The fulfillment of these judgments are not empty warnings and not for the distant future. They are certain and they are eminent. We should remember this when we feel like promises we have received from God are taking longer than we had hoped.
- In Ezekiel 13, the prophet launches into an attack on the false prophets and prophetesses within Israel that are proclaiming peace. Their messages are a part of the reason Israel continues to disbelieve the judgment they are under. “Woe to you the foolish (or wicked) prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing.” “...set your face against the daughters of your people who prophecy out of their own imaginations.” One of real dangers in seeking to hear God speak is the possibility of our own imaginations causing us to create images and pictures and words that we convince ourselves is from God when really this is not the case. The New Testament pattern of testing the prophets is critical to a person growing in their ability to hear God speak. God at times will say things that are completely outside of the box of our preconceived ideas and so that isn't the best test. Has God confirmed the prophetic word with another witness who has no vested interest? Does it align with Scriptural principles, particularly the principles of love and truth? At the end of the day, there is no guaranteed proof because everything God speaks it requires faith. At

the heart of hearing God is a humble, believing heart – like a child – that is able to see and hear God at work and is willing to trust God even when it looks crazy. There is no magic formula and no preset rules to follow. In fact, many times when we want God to speak, he doesn't. Therefore, we are brought back to seemingly elusive invitation of God: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart."

- What do the false prophets say? "Peace when there is no peace." What do they do? The prophets (men) cover in whitewash what needs to be fixed and repaired. The prophetesses turn hearing God into a form of religious magic using charms to appear magical and veils to cover their faces. This again gives us insight into the dangers of false prophecy. Does the prophecy constantly appeal to your sense of comfort or pride? Is it distracting you from really digging into the key issues God wants you to address and fix in your life? Is it clothed in a sense of magic and super-spirituality rather than simplicity and humility? These are some of the signs to look for based on what we read here in Ezekiel.
- Ezekiel 14:1-11 gives another insight into our relationship with God. Ezekiel confronts those that want to hear God speak (seeks out the word of the prophet) and yet has set up an idol in their heart that causes them to stumble. Here we see the danger of divided loyalties where on the one hand we want what God wants and yet on the other, we set up an alternate option for getting our needs met. In the case of Israel, they actually were turning to the fertility gods of that region as a source of hope for getting their material needs met. God points out that these idols were not just in their homes or places of worship, these idols were in their hearts. This challenges us to ask, "Does God have sole ownership of our heart? Do we only seek God's will and purpose or do we have our own back up plans for our lives?" These back up plans or alternate options become a stumbling block to our relationship with God. They cause us to trip and fall down over and over in our spiritual journey. God still loves the people of Israel and so he gives a great promise: He will answer these people himself! He will confront them directly, in this case through Ezekiel, to call them to repent and renounce their devotion to these other gods. What is God's goal? "...to recapture the hearts of the people..." What mercy God shows. He just wants to have a people who truly love him. Like a lover, God is looking for hearts that are completely devoted to him and in love with him. This again reminds us that the main issue God is worried about is our hearts. When our hearts are fully devoted to God, everything else falls in line.
- The second half of Ezekiel 14 outlines the different kinds of judgments or wake up calls God sends on nations who turn away from him. Famine, wild beasts, enemies who attack (the sword), and plague are listed as being instruments of God. God will use creation or the natural order as an instrument of judgment. We saw this clearly in his dealings with Egypt during the exodus. He may use a ruthless, evil empire. We see this now in how God raised up Babylon as an instrument of his judgment. This shows us that God has ultimate rule of all things and is comfortable to use any means necessary to bring people back into relationship with him in the completion of his ultimate purpose.

- Now in this passage, Ezekiel declares that even if Noah, Daniel (may or may not be the prophet Daniel), and Job were in Israel at that time, that the nation would not be saved. This statement parallels the dialogue Abraham had with God over Sodom and Gomorrah. If there is a small remnant of truly faithful people, many times God will spare that community because there is still hope. If the circumstances are so bad, nothing can save that community, then normally the righteous are rescued out before judgment falls (as with Noah and the flood or Lot and his family escaping Sodom). Therefore, this reminds us of the importance the people of God play in bringing hope to the most broken and evil parts of the world. The active presence of God's people helps preserve and bring hope (Jesus uses the images of salt and light to describe the impact his followers have on the communities they are part of).
- One last thought. The reference to these three leaders, Noah, Daniel and Job, raises some questions. First, it is clear from our understanding of dating the various texts, that Noah and Job were ancient patriarchs. Both were righteous and endured incredible life circumstances. Now the Hebrew spelling of Daniel raises the question of whether this is the same Daniel as recorded in Scripture. There is no other Daniel in the Old Testament story and in light of this fact it would suggest that Ezekiel is referring to the Daniel that was his own contemporary. It is possible that even at the writing of this part of Ezekiel, Daniel was so well known that Ezekiel could put him in the category of Noah and Job. This would be remarkable to say the least. It challenges us to ask the question: would we recognize in our own generation those men and women who are the great leaders God is using to change history? Are we able to see God at work in our own days? It is far easier to see God at work in history because we have the benefit of hindsight. Now another thought comes to mind. Ezekiel and Daniel are both present and judgment is still falling. It would appear that Ezekiel is too humble to put himself in that category of spiritual leader but is happy to do that with his contemporary Daniel. Again, this shows us the humble heart of a true leader of God. May God grow that kind of humility in our hearts!