

The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE) *Ezekiel's Restoration Prophecies*

Readings: *Ezekiel 32:1-32: 33:1-20*

Reflections:

- Ezekiel now turns his attention to Egypt. Egypt as an oppressive empire that brings about evil is compared to a lion of the nations, a monster of the seas. The prophecy is that God's judgment will fall and they will go down to the grave, a sign of death and judgment, along with Assyria, Elam, Meshech and Tubal. These nations will die as slain warriors even as they have used their power to slay others. This is a reminder that we reap what we sow. Those that sow violence and death will reap violence and death.
- Ezekiel is then reminded of his own leadership accountability of doing exactly what God tells him to do and to say exactly what God tells him to say. If a leader sees what God is going to do and then abdicates his responsibility, God will hold that leader accountable, not just for his own failure, but also for the consequences that come to God's community because of that leader's unwillingness to lead. This is a good reminder that those who are called by God into leadership must take seriously the requirements that come with that calling. To whom much is given, much is required.
- Ezekiel 33 goes on to make a clear statement about God's heart for all people to repent. Although judgment falls on evil, this is not God's heart for people. God's desire is for true repentance and reconciliation. "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways and live!" We see that God's heart is to rescue people, not judge them. Yet, his holiness and perfection cannot be ignored. If a person who has a history of doing terrible things repents, he or she will be saved. But if a person who has a history of doing what is right then decides to rebel against God, their past righteousness will not save them. Each person must maintain that humble and contrite heart that is easily led by God to continue in a close relationship with him. Now, this passage sometimes makes people feel like if they do one thing wrong then they are in big trouble with God. We shouldn't understand it this way. God knows we fail, make mistakes and blow it sometimes. The person who walks away from God no longer cares what God thinks. If a person cares about their relationship with God, they haven't rejected God, have they? All God looks for is a humble heart. As James writes in James 3:2, "We all stumble in many ways." God's grace covers this kind of daily struggle to live a loving life.

God wants us to be secure. This warning though is for the person who wants to completely walk away from God. Their past life doesn't give them chips for the future. The question is, "Where am I right now before God?"

- Ezekiel 33 ends with a great insight into humanity. "Yet your countrymen say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just." (33:17) People often complain, "How can God allow evil in the world?" They somehow claim that the horrors of this planet are all the fault of God. And yet the vast majority of the suffering in the world is completely the fault of humans. Starvation, war, poverty, the things that take the most lives and cause the most suffering, are the direct result of human greed and violence. If we lived the righteous life God wanted, would all suffering end? Of course not, but the things that we all complain about so bitterly are truly and completely in our camp. And yet we want to blame God. The fact is God is loving and just, we as humans are the ones that must look in the mirror and take responsibility for the mess this planet is in.