

The Prophets

Lesson #47

Ezekiel 33:1-39:29

Outline

I. ***The Announcement Of Future Blessings (33:1-48:35)***

- A. The use of Ezekiel as a prophet (33:1-33).
 1. Warnings from the watchman (33:1-9).
 2. Israel argues with its watchman (33:10-20).
 3. The restraints of God removed (33:21-23).
 4. Responses of survivors after Jerusalem's fall (33:23-33).
- B. The messages of blessing for the house of Israel (34:1-39:29).
 1. Shepherds false and true (34:1-31).
 - a) The accusation against the false shepherds (34:1-6).
 - b) God's verdict concerning the leadership of Israel (34:7-31).
 2. Prophecies about the mountains (35:1-36:15).
 - a) A prophecy for Mount Seir (35:1-15).
 - b) A prophecy for the mountains of Israel (36:1-15).
 3. Prophecies about the people of Israel (36:16-39:29).
 - a) The restoration of the people of Israel (36:16-38).
 - (1) Israel exiled for her sins (36:16-21).
 - (2) A new heart and a new spirit (36:22-32).
 - (3) The effects of Israel's restoration on the Gentiles (36:33-38).
 - b) The valley of dry bones (37:1-14).
 - c) The reunion of Judah and Israel (37:15-28).
 - d) A prophecy against Gog and Magog (38:1-39:29).

Notes

Ezekiel 33:1-48:35

- The use of Ezekiel as a prophet (33:1-33).
 - Warnings from the watchman (33:1-9).
 - Literally, this chapter acts as a hinge: it closes out the messages of doom announced to the exiles, and opens up the possibilities of God's work for His people in the future.
 - Ezekiel uses a familiar parable to comment on his own work among the exiles. Ezekiel had been appointed by God (not chosen by the people) as a watchman for Israel (cf. Acts 20:26-27).
 - The Judeans could only blame themselves for failing to heed the warning. Therefore, Ezekiel gives one final warning to the exiles: Turn now to the Lord!

- Israel argues with its watchman (33:10-20).
 - Each individual is personally responsible for his or her righteousness or wickedness. If one is declared righteous, it was because he or she has decided personally to follow the Lord. If one is judged wicked, it was because he or she personally has decided to reject the Lord and to live according to his or her own desires.
 - To some Judeans it did not seem that God's ways were fair and just. However, God's ways are always fair and just, for He does not blame one person for another's sin. The Lord fairly judges every person according to his or her own actions.
- The restraints of God removed (33:21-22).
 - The fall of Jerusalem, prophesied for years by prophecies and actions recorded in chapters 4-24, is announced as accomplished fact in 33:21.
 - In 24:26-27, Ezekiel is told to expect a survivor of Jerusalem's fall to come bearing the news to the exiles. That announcement occurs at 33:21, almost five months after the temple was destroyed.
 - Ezekiel's imposed silence was to keep him from interceding for his people and from announcing blessings before their time (cf. 3:24-27).
- Responses of survivors after Jerusalem's fall (33:23-33).
 - Nebuchadnezzar's forces did not deport everyone living in Judah. The poorest were left to tend the fields (Jeremiah 39:10). Yet, after all of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's preaching, the people living in the ruins of the land still harbor an arrogant attitude. The smug belief of Jerusalem's leaders had filtered down to the bottom of society (cf. 11:14-15).
 - Their appeal to Abraham leaves out the most important aspect; they did not follow Abraham's faithful ways. Instead, they participate in at least six different types of sin against God.
 - In an all-out attempt to communicate in memorable contemporary ways, the message got lost on the spiritually dull. They had ears to hear the music, but not the message.
- The messages of blessing for the house of Israel (34:1-39:29).
 - Shepherds false and true (34:1-31).
 - The accusation against the false shepherds (34:1-6).
 - "Shepherds" borrows from a common ancient Near Eastern view of a king as the shepherd over his people. The plural, however, suggests that this prophecy is not simply aimed at Zedekiah or his predecessors. Instead, all those charged with leading Israel are in view.
 - Israel's leaders had thought only of themselves and material gain. They had not cared for the "flock." Instead of feeding the

flock, they fed on the flock, taking food and clothing for themselves instead of providing for the people. They had failed to provide for the needy -- those weak and sick.

- God's verdict concerning the leadership of Israel (34:7-31).
 - God promises to remove the leaders from their position so that the flock of Israel might no longer be devoured by these wolves in shepherds' clothes. The Lord would hold each "false shepherd" accountable.
 - The Lord encourages the flock of Israel by declaring that He would personally assume the responsibility for "shepherding" them.
 - The Lord would deliver Israel from all distress, whether from poor leadership or from the nations. He would do so by appointing one true and responsible Shepherd for His people: the Messiah.
 - God's blessings will include more than a new leader, it will bring a new phase of relationship with His people -- a covenant of peace (cf. Isaiah 54:7-10). The return to "ye my flock" is a fitting conclusion to the chapter.
- Prophecies about the mountains (35:1-36:15).
 - A prophecy for Mount Seir (35:1-15).
 - Edom, perhaps more than any other nation, had continually detested and resented Israel. The first reason for God's retribution was Edom's willingness to assist the Babylonians against Israel during the siege of Jerusalem and afterward (cf. Psalm 137:7; Lamentations 4:21-22; Joel 3:19).
 - God would punish Edom. Since Edom had not refrained from bloodshed in her hatred of Israel, the Lord would bring unbridled bloodshed on Edom. Edom's land would be filled with inhabitants slain by the sword.
 - The second reason for judgment on Edom was threefold: Edom desired to control Israel and Judah; Edom, in her desire to devour Israel, had defamed her with contempt and had spoken boastfully against the Lord; and Edom had failed to recognize the God of Israel as the only true God.
 - As Edom had done to Israel out of her anger, jealousy and hatred, so God would do to Edom. Such a display of God's vindication against Edom would cause Israel to recognize that truly this was her God who was intervening on her behalf.
 - A prophecy for the mountains of Israel (36:1-15).
 - The Lord vindicates His righteousness and His people. God declares that Israel has had enough scorn and shame from the

nations. His fiery jealousy will come against those who had scornfully invaded Israel for spoils.

- As the nations had brought shame on Israel, so the Lord will cause them to bear shame and disgrace. He will emphatically lift up His hand against the nations in a symbol of strength and wrath.
- Prophecies about the people of Israel (36:16-39:29).
 - The restoration of the people of Israel (36:16-38).
 - Israel exiled for her sins (36:16-21).
 - These verses reveal to Ezekiel God's thoughts on how bad the Israelites' defilement of their own land had become.
 - The surrounding nations were not aware of the severity of God's punishments for Israel's sins. They thought Israel's loss of members and land necessarily implied that God was powerless.
 - A new heart and a new spirit (36:22-32).
 - Israel's punishment jeopardized God's honor before the watching world and He intended to reverse that problem. His intent to fulfill His covenant obligations was more than a matter of faithfulness to His word, it defined the essence of His holiness.
 - "Sprinkle clean water upon you" symbolizes cleansing through divine forgiveness by the blood of Christ. Under the New Covenant, people will obey Christ, through whose death all sin has been once and for all forgiven (cf. Acts 22:16; Hebrews 10:22; 12:24; 1 Peter 3:21).
 - The new heart will not simply be the old one circumcised, it will be a pliable heart of flesh that replaces their disobedient, calloused heart of stone. This speaks of God's transforming spiritual renewal of His people and echoes the language of 18:31 and Jeremiah 31:33-34.
 - The effects of Israel's restoration on the Gentiles (36:33-38).
 - God's resolute "I am against you" (13:8) is replaced by the willingness to hear their cries for help. Throughout Ezekiel to this point, God has refused to listen to Israel's pleas (cf. 8:18; 14:3; 20:3, 31). He had even gone so far as to prevent Ezekiel from interceding for sinful Israel.
 - The nations will unequivocally know that Israel's God has accomplished this great restoration. They will know that He is not weak, but is the only God who does exactly what He says.

- The valley of dry bones (37:1-14).
 - This vision has two distinct sections: (1) Ezekiel recounts what he sees and does (vss. 1-10) and (2) the vision is interpreted (vss. 11-14).
 - Ezekiel does exactly as he is commanded and proclaimed the Lord's words to the dead, dry bones. While he was speaking, all the bones come together and take on themselves tendons, flesh and skin, but no breath is found in them.
 - Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy again, this time for the breath to come from the four winds so that these slain ones might live. On doing so, Ezekiel sees this army of people come alive.
 - Although premillennialists see this as a great gathering of Israel at the end of time, God speaks of a spiritual restoration under the New Covenant. Because of the preaching of the gospel, we are "revived" or "born again" and become a part of the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).
- The reunion of Judah and Israel (37:15-28).
 - This prophecy begins with the final dramatic enactment of the book. Ezekiel took two sticks. He wrote the names of Judah and her companions on one and those of Ephraim and her companions on the other. When Ezekiel put these two sticks together in his hand, they became one stick.
 - The Messiah will be the only King, Shepherd and Prince that spiritual Israel will ever have. This united people of God will be cleansed from their former idolatry and transgressions through the complete forgiveness provided by the Messiah's death and the ministry of the Spirit promised in the New Covenant.
- A prophecy against Gog and Magog (38:1-39:29).
 - These two sections form a unit. Continuing the figurative application of this section, this unit demonstrates that not even the world's strongest enemy and his allies would be able to harm God's people. Since one of God's purposes is to demonstrate His might, He choose to battle the best-equipped army. Not only is it well-equipped, it is a "worldwide" coalition.
 - The identity of Gog from Magog, if the name refers to a historical person and place, will likely never be known with certainty. Adding to the uncertainty, John reappropriates Ezekiel's words and makes both "Gog" and "Magog" geographical place names (Revelation 20:8).
 - Ezekiel 38:10-13 provide the rationale for God's vengeance against this enemy. Ezekiel uses the rhetorical device of recording a character's inner thoughts to inform his audience of God's plans.

- The “foe from the north” in 38:15 were the enemies brought in judgment against Israel’s sin. Gog would indeed have served as one instance of a type of Israel’s foes who will be destroyed by God for His own name’s sake and for the preservation of His people. This would be ultimately fulfilled in the “principality, and power, and might and dominion” of our age (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Ephesians 1:21; 6:12).
- In 39:3, the enemies are unevenly matched; the confrontation is not even a battle, and it is over before it begins. Fredenburg uses a photography analogy by saying that the account in 38:3-22 is shot with a wide-angle lens; the picture in 39:2-5 uses a telephoto lens.
- In the segment of vss. 17-24, Ezekiel describes the complete demise of Gog and his allies under a separate figure from vss. 11-16. The final segment (vss. 25-29) parallels vss. 21-24 in reverse. Just as the nations will come to a new realization of God’s power, so God’s people will come to see the great love God has for them.
- In Revelation, John pictures Satan gathering his forces from all sources, from nations in all quarters of the earth. Gog and Magog symbolized all the heathen enemies of God’s people from the time of the prophets to the Roman Empire, all who sought to thwart His purpose. This battle was not a physical conflict; it was a moral and spiritual one. As God brought Ezekiel’s Gog of Magog to an end by His judgment, so He brings this last enemy to an end. Whenever and wherever the battle and whatever be the nature of its enemies, the church can be assured that in all ages and at all times God will fight for His own and give them victory.