

Principles from the Prophet Ezekiel

In 612 B.C., the Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the Babylonian General Nebuchadnezzar, marking the end of Assyrian dominance of the region and beginning the Babylonian control of it. In 609 B.C., Pharaoh Necho of Egypt marched his army north through Judea (killing the Judean King, Josiah along the way, cf. 2Chron.35:20-27) to join the remaining Assyrian forces in battle against the rising newcomer, Babylon. However, at Carchemish in 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians soundly defeated the Assyrian/Egyptian coalition, and was chasing Necho and the remaining forces southward through Judah toward Egypt when he heard his father, Nabopolassar, had died. Nebuchadnezzar gave up the chase to return to Babylon and assume the throne. But he stopped in Judah long enough to take the *best of the best* of Judean young back with him as captives (still in 605 B.C.). This group included Daniel and his friends. A few years later, in 597 B.C., a second deportation of captives was also taken to Babylon. This group included Ezekiel...

As Jeremiah would prophesy to those left behind in Jerusalem (even after the final deportation and destruction of Jerusalem/the Temple in 586 B.C.), and Daniel would prophesy to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians- and even eventually also to the Medo-Perians who followed, God chose Ezekiel to prophesy to the captives in Babylon, Ezk.1:1-3.

The book bearing his name is filled with *political* predictions regarding Judah and the prominent nations of the period. It also has as an aim keeping the sins of Judah, which prompted their punishment and captivity, before the eyes of the exiles. But the prophet also saw and spoke of the then yet future restoration of *the remnant* of Judah to its land. The book is almost devoid of details concerning Ezekiel himself- save that he was of priestly descent, and that his wife died on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem, cf. 1:3; 24:16-18. It is commonly thought that Ezekiel spent the entirety of his prophetic life in Babylon, and thus that his depiction of *pre-destruction* Jerusalem and its fall were visionary rather than from first-hand experience.

But amid these prophet *political* and *messianic* visions, there are also some vital principles of spiritual life that emerge...

1. **God's servant must consume the Word, 2:1 – 3:3.** Though the *scroll* contained *lamentations, mourning and woe*, 2:10, it was *sweet as honey* to Ezekiel, 3:3.

To the true servant of God, His word is always *sweet* whether it speaks of blessings and pleasant promises, or points out sin and its incumbent doom. Its *sweetness* comes not from its pleasantness or predicted doom, but from its absolute truthfulness and reliability originating from God- it *always* comes to pass. In a world where nothing else seems dependable or absolute, God's word is *imperishable, living, and abides forever*; it provides *life-giving sustenance*, 1Pet.1:23.

2. **God prepares us for the purposes He has for us, 3:3-15.** God had a great and terrifying task for Ezekiel in what seemed like impossible circumstances. Though a captive himself, he was being sent to a *stubborn and rebellious people* in captivity for their sins. And yet, God: *sent him to people of the same language, v.5*; to those *who should listen, v.6*; *prepared and hardened him, vv.8-11*; and *encouraged and strengthened him* for the task to which he was being sent, *vv.12-15*.

I am convinced He likewise not only *prepares, strengthens, and encourages us*, but also matches the task to our capabilities, *Matt.25:14-15*. With all this preparation and care, if we fail, it is due to our *fearfulness* or *cowardice* rather than that the task is beyond our abilities.

3. **God doesn't hold messengers accountable for results- only faithful delivery of the message, 3:16-21.** Ezekiel was not held responsible for the *results*- whether or not his intended audience *listen and obeyed* or *rebelled and refused to hear*, but for whether or not he was *faithful to the task*!

Likewise, God does not expect us to *do the saving*, but to *faithfully preach or present the word*, cf. *Rom.1:16*; *1Cor.2:1-5*. This is because, ultimately...

4. **Each is responsible for himself, 18:19-20.** Ezekiel was only responsible for *his* obedience, not that of others. If *anyone* will *listen and obey*, he will *live*, *vv.4-9*. This principle is specifically given to combat a then-common proverb, *vv.1-3*; *i.e.* that God punishes *sons* for the *father's sins*. It wasn't true *then*, *vv.10-18*; it is still true *now*...

While parents exert great influence over the spiritual lives of their children- positively or negatively, ultimately each is responsible for and will be held accountable for himself, *2Cor.5:10*; *Gal.6:3-5*. A *faithful father* is not held accountable for *faithless son*, or vice versa.

5. **One is never once saved- always saved, nor once lost- always lost, 18:21-32.** Grace and forgiveness are provided for those will to *listen, heed, repent and obey, vv.21-23,27-28*. But if the *righteous turns to wickedness, his righteousness will not be remembered, vv.23-25*. Though many may protest, the word and righteousness of God stands, *vv.25,29*!

For us, it is also really just that simple, *1John 3:7-10*.

Conclusion, 18:30-32

- **Judgment is coming, and each will be judged according to his conduct, v.30.**
- **Grace and forgiveness is available, if we will *listen and obey*, v.31.**
- **God wants all to be saved, but the outcome is really up to us, v.32.**

So, what will eternity be for you?