

October 5

Scriptures: Read Ezekiel 7, 8 & 9

Key Verse: "... 'I have done as You commanded me.'" (Ezekiel 9:11)

Overview

In chapter seven, Ezekiel continues his pronouncement of doom upon Jerusalem that he began in chapter six (6:2). With the indignation of the Lord (cf. 6:11), Ezekiel repeatedly proclaimed as an already completed fact: "the end has come!" (7:2, 3, 6). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Ezekiel vividly foresaw the inevitable, but it was this very thing that the people refused to accept. They superstitiously believed Jerusalem to be indestructible, because of the Temple of the Lord in her midst. They were soon to learn, however, that because of their abominations and defilement of the Temple with idolatry, the Lord had abandoned it and would give it up, even His secret place — the Holy of Holies — which housed the Ark of the Covenant. Invading enemies would rob it and bring further defilement (7:20-22). The idolatrous shrines would also be broken down and defiled with the dead bodies of those who had worshipped there (7:24). Many of those who survived would be fastened to each other, like a chain, and carried away captive. One reason given for this calamity is because Judah was full of "crimes of blood" and "violence" (7:23). As well as killing many prophets and other righteous people, they also practiced child sacrifice to the idol Molech (cf. 2 Kings 21:6, 16; 24:4).

In Ezekiel's proclamation, the Lord stressed that He would repay the people for their wickedness, for truly whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. The burning wrath of God was soon to come without pity (7:4, 9) upon all the unrepentant, be they within the city or without (7:15). His holiness and justice demanded this retribution, yet He was then, and still is, a God of love. His love was evident in His sending numerous prophets with messages of warning. If He had not punished sin, He would not be holy, and then His love would be without significance.

In the midst of the pronouncement of coming doom, we read that in God's mercy some would escape and repent of their iniquity, thus fulfilling God's purpose in their chastisement (7:16-18). They will also come to know that the God of Israel is the Lord — the Sovereign Ruler and Master over all the earth. The gold and silver upon which they had depended, which had led many to fall into sin, will be worthless (7:19). The leaders (king, princes, priests, elders, and false prophets) upon whom they had also depended, who led them astray, will be silent; they will be the first to perish (7:26-27; 9:6b).

The vision recorded in chapters eight through eleven is dated in the autumn, fourteen months after Ezekiel's call (8:1; 1:1; the first month of their year was mid-March to mid-April). The elders of Judah had come to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord (8:1; 11:25). As they sat before him, he was transported by the Spirit of God in a vision to Jerusalem where, with shock, horror, and indignation, he saw the people's apostasy and idolatry, and he interceded for the remnant with sorrow and weeping (9:8). The inhabitants of Jerusalem had adopted many forms of idolatry from the surrounding heathen countries which they practised, falsely believing that God did not see them, possibly because the visible cloud of His presence had long since left the Temple. Their open defiance is evident in the turning of their backs from the Temple of the Lord and

worshipping the sun (8:16), and their secret rebellion is evident in the worshipping of the various grotesque deities in the dark room by the seventy leaders and judges of the community who acted as cultic priests (8:11). Even at the gate of the Temple, women were mourning for Tammuz, possibly the god of certain vegetation who was supposed to die in the autumn and resurrect in the spring. In their idolatry (playing the harlot) they provoked the Lord to jealousy and fury. By ignoring the first and greatest commandment (Ex. 20:3), their society quickly became full of iniquity, perversity, and violence (9:9), as is the case in societies today.

Chapter nine outlines the way in which the Lord was directly involved in the punishment upon Jerusalem. The six men with weapons would have been the angelic beings who had been placed over the city but were now commissioned to be the executioners of the wicked. The seventh was a man clothed with linen, signifying sanctity and eminence, like the garments of the high priest. Since this divine being was given the authority to judge (cf. John 5:22, 27) and was all-knowing in marking the righteous, we understand Him to be none other than the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, our great High Priest. In obedience to the will of God, He mercifully safeguarded the righteous who had been sealed by His mark (9:11; John 5:30). Jeremiah was one such person whom the Lord preserved from the slaughter in Jerusalem (Jer. 40:1-4). Even today, those who are marked as belonging to Jesus Christ will escape the wrath of God (Rev. 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4).

Prayer

Thank You Lord, that Your mark is upon those who love and respect Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Saviour and Lord. Through Him we have been reconciled to You.