

October 4

Scriptures: Read Ezekiel 4, 5 & 6

Key Verse: "... you shall know that I am the Lord." (Ezekiel 6:7)

Overview

In chapters four and five we read of four symbolic actions which depicted the future siege and fall of Jerusalem and the following hardships and captivity. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel employed these dramatic demonstrations to add force to his verbal prophetic message which would follow these signs. Knowing that visual aids are effective teaching tools, the Lord firstly had Ezekiel sketch the city of Jerusalem upon a clay tablet, build models of the siege works around it, and put an iron plate between the city and himself. This no doubt symbolized that the Lord, whom Ezekiel represented, would be far removed from Jerusalem at the time of the siege — their sins having built a wall between them. He would not hear their prayers nor take pity on them and come to their aid (5:11). By this, the exiles were to know that if Jerusalem revolted against Babylon, they could not expect God to intervene as He did years before under godly King Hezekiah, but they would surely suffer defeat. They were, therefore, not to entertain hopes, as the false prophets had encouraged, concerning a soon return to Judah, nor of a successful rebellion (cf. Jer. 27:9-15). About four years later, the actual siege ramparts were erected against Jerusalem by the Babylonians, just as Ezekiel's model had illustrated.

In the second sign, Ezekiel was to sleep on his left side behind the iron pan, which symbolized his bearing the iniquity of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) for the period of time that God specified (390 days, representing 390 years). Just as he was constrained and did not have the freedom to do as he pleased (3:8), so too Israel lacked freedom as a punishment for her iniquity. The period of iniquity for Judah, the Southern Kingdom, which Ezekiel bore by lying on his right side (forty days representing forty years) was much shorter than that of Israel. The Northern Kingdom had been idolatrous from the onset, but in Judah there had been a few godly kings under whom the nation had served God.

At the same time, Ezekiel's daily consumption of food and water was to be carefully measured in small amounts and the bread was to be baked in not only a revolting manner, but in a way that would cause it to be ceremonially unclean (4:12-14; Lev. 5:3; 7:21). Ezekiel had always observed the dietary regulations in accordance with the Law of Moses, so with his interjection, the Lord permitted him to bake his bread in yet another polluting manner — by using cow dung (a method still employed in many parts of the world). This sign had a two-fold meaning: it symbolized the defiled food that the exiled children of Israel (from Judah) would eat in the heathen lands, and the scarcity of food (5:16) and rationing of water in Jerusalem during the future siege (4:9-17).

As a priest, Ezekiel was not to shave his head or beard (Lev. 21:5), but in order to show the coming severe, drastic, and unbelievable judgments, God instructed Ezekiel to do these drastic and unheard of things. Like Ezekiel's sheared head, Jerusalem was to be swept clean. One third of his cut hair was to be burned upon the clay tablet which depicted Jerusalem, thus symbolizing the great number of inhabitants that would die of the famine and pestilence within the city during

the siege. Another third was to be cut with the sword around the model city, symbolizing those that would be slain while trying to escape from the conquerors. The last third represents those who would be scattered in the captivity and then chastened further, illustrated by Ezekiel throwing this third to the wind. The Lord in His mercy, however, would preserve a remnant, symbolized by those few hairs that Ezekiel sewed into the hem of his garment; yet even these few would be purged through chastisement (5:4).

The Lord explained that this unparalleled punishment would befall Jerusalem and the people of Judah because of their rebellion against Him in playing the harlot by worshipping idols and being more wicked than the surrounding heathen nations (5:7-9; 6:9). The children of Israel had been granted a privileged position, and they had a greater knowledge of the Law of God than any other people. Therefore, they were all the more responsible toward God, and deserving of greater punishment.

The Lord never does anything in vain, for the punishments would ultimately work out for the good, as chapter six makes clear. The destruction of all the idols in Judah and the defilement of all the idolatrous high places with the dead bodies of the idol worshippers would show to all that these idols were useless and that the Lord had accomplished His will. The remnant who would escape would come to understand this and be grieved and ashamed of their sin of idolatry and their past rejection of God (6:9). The key phrase in chapter six is the Lord's repeated declaration: "You shall know that I am the Lord" (6:7, 10, 13, 14). There will come another day when those who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ will likewise lament their rebellion against God, for at the time of God's judgment all will know that Jesus is indeed Lord of all! (Zech. 12:10; Matt. 23:37-39).

Prayer

Lord, we know that 'You are a just God and that 'You must punish sin. We thank You for Your great mercy in providing Jesus to bear our sins upon Himself that through Christ we can have eternal life.