

October 15

Scriptures: Read Ezekiel 32 & 33

Key Verse: "...I will judge every one of you according to his own ways." (Ezekiel 33:20)

Overview

Chapter 32 consists of two distinct prophecies given two weeks apart about one and a half years after the destruction of Jerusalem. With them, the prophecies against Egypt and other foreign nations come to a close. Ezekiel likens the Pharaoh to both a young lion, signifying royalty, and a monstrous water creature (possibly a crocodile) that stirred up trouble among the nations (32:2). This uncontrollable and unruly creature, however, was to be captured by the Lord's net with the help of the Babylonians, just as Zedekiah had been caught (32:3; 12:13; 17:20). In a graphic illustration of the plunder and desolation that would follow Pharaoh's death, Ezekiel describes the Nile River and its irrigation channels as being clear and gently flowing (like oil), no longer stirred up and made muddy by Pharaoh, his people, nor any beasts (32:12-15).

His downfall would cause all the smaller heathen nations to greatly fear, for if Egypt, the nation that would have dominated them, had fallen, they would have no chance of escape (32:9-10). The general doom and deep despair of the wicked because of the Day of the Lord (judgment) is illustrated by the darkening of the celestial lights (32:7-8; cf. 30:18; Amos 5:18, 20; Isa. 13:9-10; Joel 2:2,10, 31; Zeph. 1:15).

In the second prophecy of chapter 32 (v. 17-32), Ezekiel gives one of the most detailed descriptions of Sheol (the Pit or the abode of the dead). Pharaoh and his army are pictured as descending into the depths of the earth, where they are welcomed by those of other prominent, fallen nations. Pharaoh takes comfort to know that he is not alone in his fate (32:31). The manner of their deaths was reflective of the violent ways they had lived their lives. The common expression, "they that live by the sword shall die by the sword" is well illustrated in this oracle. Some of the nations mentioned, such as Sidon and Edom, had yet to fall, but with his prophetic insight, Ezekiel saw their ultimate condition in Sheol. Any worldly power that opposes itself to God will go down into the Pit and suffer the judgment that was due Egypt.

Although the Egyptians practised circumcision, it made them no different, just as it made the Jews no different from the violent and wicked uncircumcised nations. They would all lie together in death, and they would all feel the guilt and shame because of the way in which they conducted their lives, for even in the grave they would have to bear their iniquities (32:27). The only difference comes when one's heart is circumcised in consecration to the Lord and when one's iniquities have been removed by the Lord Jesus, who takes away our guilt and shame.

With chapter 33, Ezekiel's prophecies are once again directed to his own people of Israel, and he receives a fresh charge from the Lord to be their spiritual watchman (33:7; 3:17). This new prophecy is an amplified version of chapter 3:16-21, and it also has many similarities to chapter 18. The Lord stressed the responsibility of Ezekiel, as His called servant, to warn the wicked. Believers today who are called by God out of darkness into His marvelous light have this same responsibility toward the lost (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). We need to give them the simple message of the

Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 14:8), as did the Apostle Paul who could say with confidence that he had faithfully fulfilled his task in warning all the people with whom he came into contact (including us through the written Word). He was therefore innocent of their blood (Acts 20:26-27, 31). If we do not witness for Jesus Christ, we will be called to account for it.

This prophecy was given almost one and a half years after Jerusalem had been destroyed and some of the exiles had been saying that God was not fair and just. Ezekiel again stressed to the people that the Lord was indeed fair and His judgments were righteous, for He demanded true repentance, that they might have life (33:17-20). Although during the conflict with the Babylonians some righteous people had died and some of the wicked remained to dwell in the land of Judah, the Lord's justice would yet be executed. The righteous would have eternal life and the wicked would perish. The wicked remnant who remained in the land were soon to leave the land desolate (33:28) and flee for refuge in Egypt after the slaying of Gedaliah. In Egypt they would meet the sword of the Lord (cf. Jer. 42:14-22; 43:7). When they were still in the land of Israel, they claimed it as their own on the basis of God's promise to Abraham and because they were Abraham's descendants. But this was (and is) not a valid claim (33:24). Because of their unrepentant hearts, hypocrisy, idolatry, adultery, pride, and shedding of innocent blood, they had not lived up to the necessary conditions wherein they were to enjoy the land (cf. Matt. 3:8-9; John 8:33-44). Sadly, those in the exile were also hypocritical, for even after the prophecies of Ezekiel had been fulfilled and they had recognized him as a true prophet, God's words still made no difference in their lives (33:30-33).

Prayer

Lord, may our hearts be true and pure before You, for You know even the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Enable us to hide Your Word in our hearts, "that we might not sin against You", just as David once prayed.