

October 16

Scriptures: Read Ezekiel 34 & 35

Key Verse: "... Indeed, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out." (Ezekiel 34:11)

Overview

Now that the Lord's judgment had been executed on Jerusalem and all of Judah, and His just wrath had been appeased, we can see a marked difference in the prophecies of Ezekiel (beginning with chapter 34). Rather than prophecies of doom, those found in the latter part of the book of Ezekiel are prophecies of comfort and consolation to the afflicted and captive people of God, and there are many promises of restoration to their homeland.

Using the common biblical analogy of the sheep, signifying the children of Israel, Ezekiel strongly condemns the leadership of the people (the corrupted and selfish kings, elders, false prophets, and priests), who are represented as the bad shepherds (cf. John 10:8; Jer. 23:1-4). Not only did they not take care for the needs, both spiritual and physical, of the people, but they grew fat at their expense (34:3-4). Instead of fulfilling their obligation to lead the flock closer to God, they led them astray and the flock went to "every high hill" (34:6; Jer. 50:6-7), which were the sites for idol worship (cf. 2 Kings 17:9-12). Their idolatry was a major reason for the Lord's chastisement upon them, and for this He scattered His flock amongst the pagan nations so they might see the evils of their sin and forsake it. The second solution to the problem was to destroy all the false, bad shepherds and thereby deliver the flock from their negative influences (34:10). The greatest answer to the problem would be for God Himself to become their Shepherd and take care of them (Ps. 23; Isa. 40:9-11). In sharp contrast to the false shepherds, the Lord, the True, Good, and Great Shepherd, promised to save, gather, feed, seek, heal, strengthen, and give peace, safety, and showers of blessings to His sheep (34:11-16).

How could the vast chasm be bridged so that the transcendent God might be all these wonderful things to His flock? The Lord gave the answer, saying it was to be through "My servant David" who was a type of the Messiah (34:23; cf. 37:24-25; Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5;). Indeed, the Messiah Jesus makes clear in the New Covenant of His peace that He is the Good Shepherd who came to seek the lost sheep and who "gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:9-11, 28; cf. Matt. 15:24; Mark 6:34; Heb. 13:20-21). The ultimate fulfillment of all these blessings upon those judged to be of the flock of the Lord will be at the time when the Messiah Jesus reigns over all the earth (34:27-29).

To reassure the Israelites in exile that the Lord's plans for them were not yet finished, Ezekiel gives a contrast between the fate that would befall Edom (ch.35) and the restoration that would come to Israel (ch. 36). Again, Ezekiel pronounces a judgment of doom upon Edom (Mount Seir), but here he gives many more prophetic details (compare 25:8,12-14). Among the neighbours of Israel, the nation of Edom was especially guilty; therefore, many of the prophets gave utterances against them (cf. Amos 1:11; Obad. 10-15; Isa. 34:5-15; 63:1-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Lam. 4:21; Joel 3:19; Mal. 1:2-4). Edom was located southeast of the Dead Sea and extended to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the older twin of Jacob (Gen. 32:3; 36:8; Deut.

2:12). They and the Israelites had been long-time enemies and had often engaged in warfare (cf. Num. 20:14-21; 1 Kings 11:14-16).

The reasons given in this chapter for the coming destruction of Edom are: (1) their intense hatred toward the Israelites, (2) they had rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of Judah (35:15; Ps. 137:7), and (3) they had gladly assisted in killing some of the inhabitants of Judah after she had fallen (35:5). They selfishly desired to possess the inheritance that God had given to Israel, which they called “these two nations”, meaning the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (35:10). They were jealous and envious of Jacob’s inheritance, which they felt should have been theirs, because Esau was the elder brother and Jacob had bribed him out of his birthright and tricked him out of his father Isaac’s blessing; yet all this was in the plan of God, and by opposing it the Edomites were defiantly opposing God (Gen. 25:22-23, 29-34; 27:27,41).

Although the Lord’s presence had left the Temple in Jerusalem, He was still present in the Land of Israel. He had not relinquished His claim to the land. With His omniscience, He was watching and listening to the blasphemy of the Edomites, and with His omnipotence, He would bring His wrath against them. Since the Edomites did not show respect for the sanctity of life, having ruthlessly spilled the blood of many Israelites, their blood would likewise be spilled when the sword would pursue them. Since they mocked and rejoiced over Judah’s desolation, their land would likewise be desolate, but unlike the promised restoration of Israel, the land of Edom was doomed to lie in perpetual desolation.

Prayer

Holy Father, we recognize that all sin is against ‘You. Forgive us and grant us the strength to take the way of escape from temptation that You always provide.