

Day 231

Ezekiel Speaks to the Elders of Israel

Ezekiel 19.1 – 22.31

Ez. 19.1 – 14 Ezekiel composes a lament for the fallen princes, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakin, who have been exiled, bemoaning how their greatness has been taken from them. They are depicted as cubs of the great lioness, Israel, now caged and taken prisoner, one in Babylon, and one in Egypt. The Hebrew word for this lament is *qinah* (Heb קִינָה), a word meaning to beat or strike, perhaps on the breast, or rhythmically on a musical instrument. It is connected with mourning, a dirge for the dead.

Ez. 20.1 – 29 (590BC) Some of the leaders of Israel come to ask Ezekiel to listen to the Lord for them and communicate His word to them. Ezekiel's response to them is that they will hear nothing from the Lord. They are like Israel in Egypt when they were dallying with the Egyptian idols after the time of Joseph – something not spoken of elsewhere, but which is highly probably, given the length of time the Jews were in Egypt.

Despite the deliverance of the whole people, and the giving of the Law and Covenant to them, they still practiced the worship of these non-gods, which has continued to the time of Ezekiel.

Ez.20.30 – 44 Because of the continual idolatry, there will be no word from the Lord, except the promise of His retribution for their faithlessness and ungratefulness to their deliverer and redeemer. But the day will come when they worship fully and truly as the Lord intends.

Ez. 20.45 – 49 The Lord tells Ezekiel to prophesy fire to the southern forest, which the people interpret as just allegorical. They are not taking seriously the reality of coming judgement.

Ez.21. 1 – 17 Ezekiel's chilling picture of the sword of the Lord drawn out of its scabbard is set against all in Jerusalem; all are implicated in the sin of the nation. It is no matter that it is the place of the throne of the Judean monarchs (21.10) it will cut through the sceptre as though it were a twig!

Ez.21.18 – 24 It is revealed that this sword is linked to the coming of the Babylonian hordes; it seems they will be uncertain whether to attack Rabbah in Jordan or Jerusalem, but the Lord will ensure that their lots lead them to choose the road to Judah, where they will besiege the city and repay the rebellion of the Jews with destruction.

Ez.21.25 – 27 Zedekiah, who has led this rebellion, comes in for special attention. He will lose his crown and his pride, and will be reduced to nothing.

Ez. 21.28 – 32. Although the Ammonites in Rabbah will seem to have escaped the first wave of Babylon's attack, the sword will also fall upon them also, for their time for retribution as also come.

Ez.22.1- 31 Ezekiel receives a word from the Lord which contains the charges against Judah for which she is about to be held accountable and judged. Violence, false worship, faithlessness, bribery, usury, adultery, incest – it is quite an inventory of sin. In their sin, the people of the Lord have turned into garbage, but garbage that is for recycling. Like a collection of tarnished, rusting metal, the Lord will put Judah into the fire, to consume the dross.

The whole of Judean society is corrupt, including the priests, prophets and officials who are caught up in the decadence and profanity.

Sadly (22v.30) when the Lord looks for someone who is able to 'stand in the gap', to be an advocate between the nation and the Lord, to intercede, there is no one upon whose heart is the fallen state of the nation. This is a great indictment on the people of the Lord.

The people of Israel and Judah in this time have completely lost their sense of 'story'; they are completely focussed on their own pleasure and greed, and have forgotten the call of God upon them as a nation that they will be the vehicle of His renewed relationship with all nations. They are slaves of the repetitious cycle of pagan fertility rites, locked into the procession of seedtime and harvest, with no sense of destiny beyond. This is why the Lord has to take such drastic action with them, to purge out the selfishness and degradation. He is looking to a day when Israel will be back on track, dependent on the Lord, a day when the crown of creation, the Incarnate God, Messiah Jesus will come and redeem the world back into the embrace of the Father.

Day 232

The Parable of Two Prostitutes, Oholah and Oholibah

Ezekiel 23.1 – 49; 2 Chronicles 36.13a ; 2 Kings 25.1; Jeremiah 52.4

Ez.23.1 – 49 Ezekiel received a very explicit and intense word from the Lord concerning the story of the betrayal of the Lord by Israel and Judah. In this parable, Israel, with her capital Samaria is represented by the woman Oholah (Heb אֹהֵל־בָּנִים , meaning, 'her tent', perhaps a reference to the sanctuary of a pagan non-god) , while Judah and Jerusalem are signified by her sister Oholibah (Heb אֹהֵל־בָּנִים לִי , meaning, 'my tent is in her', referring to the sanctuary of the Lord in the city.)

The parable has these two sisters born in Egypt, where from youth they are used as prostitutes. Surprisingly, they are both daughters of the Lord.

Oholah goes after Assyrians – a reference to Israel’s importing of Assyrian idolatry. The upshot of this disgusting behaviour is that the Assyrians attack her and kill her. Israel is no more, her cities are ruined and gone.

Yet even though her sister, Oholibah sees this, she becomes even more decadent in her excess. She goes after the Babylonians, and sleeps with them, for their excessive sexual prowess which she lusts for. Because of this, the Lord is turning away from Judah, and will leave her to her fate, and to the Babylonian hordes and their allies, who will do the same to her as the Assyrians did to Samaria. The cup from which Oholah has drunk will be filled again for the destruction of Oholibah.

2 Chron.36.13a (mirrored in 2 Kgs 24.20b and Jer.52.3b) **The Siege of Jerusalem, 588 BC** Remarkably, King Zedekiah rebels against the Babylonian might, breaking his oath of fealty to the northern empire.

2 Kgs 25.1 (mirrored in Jer. 25.1) ; Jer. 52.4 Thus, Nebuchadnezzar himself leads his army to Jerusalem, and builds siegeworks against it, a siege which would last two years.

Day 233

A Strange Stew, A Grievous Loss (588 BC)

Ezekiel 24.1 – 27

Ez.24.1-2 The same day it happens, the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of King Zedekiah’s reign in Jerusalem, the Lord reveals to Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar has besieged Jerusalem, and it is the beginning of the end.

Ez.24. 3 – 14 The siege of Jerusalem is depicted to Ezekiel as a great stewpot, with a slowly simmering stew in it. It is a powerful depiction of the relentless decline imposed on a city by siege. Not only will the stew be cooked, but the pot will be cleansed by fire, to remove the sins of Judah in her disobedience to the Lord.

Ez. 24. 15 – 24 In a terrible enactment of the Lord’s Word through Ezekiel, Ezekiel’s wife, who is called ‘the delight of his eyes’ dies, but he is told not to mourn openly for her, (although he is allowed to ‘groan quietly’). When the exiles see Ezekiel behaving as though nothing had happened, they want to know what this is all about.

Ezekiel explains that the Lord is about to destroy the Temple, and his beloved people, and like him, they are not to mourn over the loss. For the destruction is because of shameful failure on Judah’s part and the absence of mourning is a sign of agreeing that God’s justice is right and pure.

Ez. 24.25-27 The Lord says that when the end comes for Jerusalem, a messenger will come to Tel Aviv and find them. Then Ezekiel will be able to express openly what he is

now holding in, for the sign will be accomplished. Until then, Ezekiel is the sign for the exiles, a painful and heart-breaking calling.

The yieldedness to the Lord's purpose this shows in Ezekiel takes our breath away. We sense it is unreasonable, it is inhumane for the Lord to ask this of Ezekiel, not to mention the seeming injustice of taking his wife from him. What we do not see here is the depth of the Lord's grief over His prodigal people; this terrible event gives us a glimpse of the gut-wrenching pain which is going on in God, as His beloved people, His spouse, refuse and deny Him, forgetting their story and destiny of blessing the nations. Only the heart fully intimate with the Lord would be free to accept this burden without doubting the goodness of God. Ezekiel knows Him this deeply, and yields His all to His master, in the midst of his bereavement.

Day 234

Jeremiah's Words in the Siege of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 21.1 – 22.9; 34.1 – 7; 32.1 – 33.9

Jer. 21. 1 – 14 King Zedekiah comes to consult Jeremiah and to hear the Lord's word through Him; the king is hoping that there will be some chance of a miracle, with Nebuchadnezzar at the door.

But Jeremiah makes it clear that this is the promised moment of disaster, and not only is there threat from outside the walls of Jerusalem, but inside there will be terrible scenes of plague and hardship. The only way to survive is to surrender.

The Lord also calls the King to reverse the corruption, and stop oppressing the people. #I am against you, Jerusalem' the Lord tells them. (21.10,13)

Jer.22.1- 9 Later, Jeremiah is told to go to Zedekiah's palace and deliver a further word, repeating the call for justice and righteousness, to stop the bad conduct of this government. There is a small hope given for the future, that David's dynasty could be revived, if the rot is reversed.

The issue that is bringing down Jerusalem, that will leave her in ashes, is the breaking of the covenant with the Lord; for this, she will become a marvel of destruction among the nations.

Jer. 34. 1 – 7 With Jerusalem and Judah in the throes of conflict with Babylon, Jeremiah delivers a further word to Zedekiah that he will not die in battle during this conflict, but he will survive this turmoil. He will see the King of Babylon, though what is ironic, and unmentioned here, is that Zedekiah's eyes will be put out – in fact, the King of Babylon may be the last thing he sees!

Jer. 32. 1 – 5 Jeremiah angers Zedekiah with his predictions of doom, and is placed under arrest and put in the palace guardhouse. What is significant is that Zedekiah is able

to recount back to Jeremiah the words he has delivered to him from the Lord, meaning that the words have hit home at the king's heart, even though he is rejecting them.

Jer. 32.6 – 25 The Lord reveals to Jeremiah that his cousin Hanamel is coming to offer him to redeem the piece of land at Anathoth belonging to his uncle Shallum, to keep it in the family. The Lord encourages Jeremiah to buy it as a sign of hope for the future return of the people to the land after exile. The deeds are to be kept in a clay pot so that they do not perish, because normal commercial life will resume. Jeremiah's response is a hymn of praise to the Lord, who is able to make the impossible achievable. Jeremiah sees this as part of the unfolding story, begun in Egypt, of the Lord's relationship with Israel. But at this point, they have reached a low point – Jerusalem is about to be overrun by Babylonians.

Jer.32.26 – 44 The Lord now speaks a devastating charge against Jerusalem, that since its establishment, it has been an offence to Him, because idolatry has gone on in it, from the very time that Solomon allowed his pagan wives to set up their non-gods in it. Even child-sacrifice has been carried on the Hinnom Valley (known to us as *Gehenna*), a detestable practice to the Lord.

Yet the Lord's heart is still to restore and to see through the promise He made to Abraham. Although they will be banished, the Lord will restore Judah to the land, because He says 'I will never stop doing good to them' and His heart is so committed to their long-term wellbeing.

Therefore, even though the land will look like a desert after the Babylonians have finished with it, the promise is that, unlike Babylon, Jerusalem will be restored and rebuilt, with the surrounding country, and commerce will resume.

Jer.33.1 – 9 The Lord shows Jeremiah an awesome paradox. He invites Jeremiah to call on the Lord to hear Him speak and shows the prophet both the horror of the devastation that is coming to Jerusalem, the slain in the streets, and the future prosperity and peace which is yet to come many decades hence. The promise is restoration, forgiveness, and joy, so that all nations will be awe of the Lord's nature and ability to take hopeless situations and transform them utterly.

Day 235

Jeremiah is Encouraged by the Hope of Restoration

Jeremiah 33.10 – 13; Jeremiah 30.1 – 31.26

Jer. 33.10 -13 The Lord underlines to Jeremiah that although terrible events are now unfolding around him in Jerusalem, when the pain is over, joy and song will again be present in the city, and pastoral peace and prosperity in the surrounding countryside. It is a sign of hope at the darkest moment.

It says much to us that Jeremiah is able to hear these words from the Lord in the midst of being captive by an angry king in a city about to be destroyed by the enemy. Faith and hope are of most value in the days when nothing hopeful or faithful is visible.

Jer.30. 1- 24 Jeremiah is to record in poetry the promises of return . In the midst of shocking pain, like childbirth, the Lord will turn around the story of Judah and break her chains. This will come when Babylon is defeated and the Medo-Persians, who will pursue a policy of resettlement will invite them to return to Judah.

The Lord therefore encourages Israel not to be afraid, in spite of the ordeal ahead. He is going 'to discipline, but only with *mishpat* (30.11 - right-wising and just judgement) – only to set things to rights, to expunge the poison of evil which has corrupted the nation, because the Lord cannot allow the gangrene of evil to threaten the rest of the body.

This is why the wound is incurable, and the pain so great. This is the remedial suffering God is permitting, but with the end in view of bringing the nation back to health and prosperity. There will be a return to thriving and closeness to God.

31.1-14 The vision is the same as it has always been, the story of God's risky love to bring to Himself a people to be the vehicle of His blessing to all the nations of the world. Despite this horrible ordeal, the Lord remains held by His *chesed* obligation, and His paternal love for His virgin daughter, and they will once again come back, with joy and weeping. For these are the Lord's children (31.9) and He will redeem them from their loss and oppression.

The image is one of wild joy and partying, of celebration to come, but only after the purging and purifying of captivity.

31.15 – 25 The mention of Ramah refers to the tomb of Rachel which was there, a place of great significance as being the burial place of Israel's beloved wife. Here, Rachel is depicted as weeping over her offspring who are being carried off in captivity and killed in the attack on Jerusalem.

But the weeping will cease, because repatriation will come; the Lord has heard the prayers of His people in their captivity, and has compassion on them (like a mother, feeling deep in her inward places the cry of a child, the Hebrew word *rechem* Heb רֶחֶם, meaning guts, or womb.)

The Lord will make a way back for the outcasts, will set up waymarks for them to follow, as they return to their homelands. The reference in 31.22 to a woman compassing a man is almost inaccessible to modern understanding, and may have been a proverb widely understood in Jeremiah's day, but seems to indicate that the Lord is able to do something new and creative which is beyond people's ability to imagine it.

Jer.31.26 It seems that Jeremiah has received the latter words in his sleep, for he awakes to his continuing captivity in the palace guard-house, but refreshed by the pleasant dreams he has been having of the Lord's promised deliverance.

Day 236

The Promise of a New Covenant

Jeremiah 23. 1 – 8; 33.14 – 26; 31.27 – 40

Jer.23.1 – 8 The Lord speaks a word through Jeremiah to the shepherds (Heb רֹעִים *ro'im*) of Judah, who have not taken care of the people and led them in the ways of the Lord, the Great Shepherd. God will dismiss them and take charge of the people Himself.

Jer.23.5- 6 The Lord still has in His sights a King who will rescue Israel and Judah, one whose name will be *Adonai-Tzidkenu* (Heb אֲדֹנָי צְדִקְנוּ) , the Lord our Righteousness. There is something of a play on words here, for the present King, the one who has imprisoned Jeremiah, is called Zedekiah (Heb צְדֵקְיָהוּ *Tzedeq-Yahu*), which means Righteous is the Lord. But the coming One will set to rights what the latter has neglected.

23.7-8 Further, the deliverance of returning captives will be as familiar in the folk memory of Israel as the exodus from Egypt., so great will be the impact of it on the consciousness of the people of God.

Jer. 33. 14 – 26 The Lord repeats this promise of a new King through Jeremiah a few chapters later, and He will be the guarantee of God's promise for there to be also perpetual priesthood and sacrifice to the Lord.

In v.19, there is a reference to the covenant of God with the natural order, mentioned in no other place – this is a commitment to bring day and night without fail; and thus dependable is the covenant made with David, even in spite of the turmoil Judah is going through.

Jer. 31. 27 – 30 There is a promise, as surely as the Lord has acted to uproot and amputate the evil from Israel, there will be a rebuilding and planting for His people. The Lord will raise up a new generation who will walk free of their forefathers' sins, so that the vicious circle of sin will be broken.

Jer.31.31 – 34 Here is the Lord's explicit promise of *Berit Chadashah* (Heb בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה) a New Covenant, not like the old one which is broken but one where the Lord will internalise His rule of life, His *Torah*, and people will not need to be constantly reminded of their relationship with the Lord, because they will all just know Him, in intimacy, and their sins will be forgiven. Jesus in His last supper explicitly declares the new covenant in His blood, the fulfilment towards which this promise is pointing. (see Matthew 26.28 *et al*)

Jer.31.35 – 37 The Lord again says that this promise is as dependable as the sunshine and the sea-tides. Israel can rely on the Lord's promise.

Jer. 31. 38 – 40 God's promise goes beyond just restoring the city; He will even make the places where the rubbish and the dead were placed holy to Him, completely sanctifying everything to Himself.

Day 237

Ezekiel Prophecies to the Exiles About the Siege of Jerusalem

Ezekiel 25.1- 17; Ezekiel 29.1- 31.18

Ez. 25. 1 – 17 Ezekiel speaks a series of words of judgement against the neighbouring nations of Judah, who are taking advantage of her oppressed circumstances. Ammon, with its capital Rabbah, Moab and its towns, Edom and Philistia are all under God's censure for their exploitation of Judah's woe. The people of God may be suffering, but He will not allow other nations to triumph over them.

Ez. 29.1 – 16 Egypt also comes in for God's anger, because of their idolatry and jingoistic pride. They too will suffer devastation, though after a time they will also be returned to their territory, as Judah will be.

Ez. 30.1 – 19 The judgement against Egypt and her allies continues; Nebuchadnezzar is going to come their way also, and lay waste to their territories.

30.20 – 26 The image of this destruction against mighty Egypt is that of Pharaoh with a broken arm, while the arms of Babylon are strengthened.

31.1-18 Ezekiel compares Egypt to Assyria, once a powerful empire, now destroyed by Babylon, although it seemed as strong as a tree, the envy of all other trees in the forest, but is now reduced to a stump.

In the same way, Egypt will fall and be subject to foreign rule, which came about some sixty years later, when Pharaoh Amasis was forced to yield to the might of the Persians under Cambyses II.