

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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*"There Will Be Blood"*

22:1-31

City nicknames are usually fun and are sometimes informative. Some of them you know quite well:

- Reno: The Biggest Little City in the World
- New York City: The Big Apple
- Las Vegas: Sin City
- New Orleans: The Big Easy
- Detroit: The Motor City
- Chicago: The Windy City

Here are a few you ought to know:

- Clovis: Gateway to the Sierra
- Reedley: The World's Fruit Basket
- Selma: Raisin Capital of the World
- Gilroy: Garlic Capital of the World

Here are a few California cities whose nicknames may not be so familiar:

- Corona: The Circle City
- Huntington Beach: Surf City USA
- Indio: Date Capital of the World
- Pasadena: City of Roses
- Oakdale: Cowboy Capital of the World

Sixth century Jerusalem had earned a nickname. It was given to her by God. You see it in verse two, "The Bloody City." "Blood," or "bloody" is mentioned in verses 2, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12 & 13.

Chapter twenty-two is an indictment against, and a description of, the violence and vileness of Jerusalem. We need to keep it in the context of God's impending judgment upon His covenant people for violating the Mosaic Law, but we can also draw some timeless moral lessons for ourselves.

Ezekiel 22:1 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 22:2 "Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations!

Ezekiel 22:3 Then say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself.

Ezekiel 22:4 You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to the end of your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries.

Ezekiel 22:5 Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult.

The prophet Nahum had referred to the godless city of Nineveh, capital of Assyria, as "a bloody city." Ezekiel was instructed to refer to Jerusalem by the same nickname.

Before I met the risen Savior, I could have gone by any one of several nicknames: Drunkard, Doper, Profane Person, Liar, Thief. So could many of you have gone by some pretty awful nicknames.

Then I got saved! I was a new creation in Jesus Christ. I received new nicknames. I was a Christian, a Believer, Born-Again.

How sad it is for someone delivered so powerfully, so wonderfully, so miraculously, to return to those same works of the flesh and regain the old nicknames. **Don't do it!**

In verse five we read that the Israelites would be mocked. We sometimes forget that the nation of Israel was to be evangelistic. They were to expose the other nations and peoples of the world to the wonder of God's love. Instead of affecting the world, they became affected by it, infected by it. The watching world could do nothing but hold them in derision and "mock" them.

Ezekiel 22:6 "Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you.

Ezekiel 22:7 In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow.

Ezekiel 22:8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths.

Ezekiel 22:9 In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness.

Ezekiel 22:10 In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity.

Ezekiel 22:11 One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter.

Ezekiel 22:12 In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me," says the Lord God.

The leaders were held accountable. The leaders had deliberately violated the specific commands of the Mosaic Law:

- They had misused their position to have people executed unjustly (see Exodus 20:13).
- They treated their own parents with contempt, ignoring the rightful respect and honor due to them (see Exodus 20:12).
- Strangers were oppressed and they did nothing about it (see Exodus 22:21).
- They took advantage of those without any to defend them, the orphans and widows (see Exodus 22:22-24).
- They despised the holy things of God and His Sabbaths (see Exodus 20:8).
- Their government encouraged murder based on slanderous accusations (see Leviticus 19:16).
- They participated in pagan religious rituals (see Deuteronomy 12:1-3).

- They engaged in all manner of sexual perversion (see Leviticus 20:10-21).
- They employed bribery (see Deuteronomy 7:25), and exorbitant taxes and interest rates (see Deuteronomy 24:6 & 10-12).

Those were just examples. The real problem, the root issue, was they had “forgotten Me,” meaning God.

It wasn't a lapse of remembrance. It was them saying to God, “Forget You!” Earlier we've seen how the Jews in general felt they were ultimately safe because they were God's elect nation. The leaders felt doubly secure because, after all, they were the cream of the crop, weren't they?

Leadership in God's economy is always servanthood. It doesn't give you a kind of spiritual ‘diplomatic immunity’ to violate God's precepts and principles. If anything these guys ought to have kept the Law better than those they were called upon to serve.

Leadership has its privileges. In the Christian scheme of things, the privilege is to share the sufferings of Jesus and to stoop to serve others.

Ezekiel 22:13 "Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst.

Ezekiel 22:14 Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it.

Ezekiel 22:15 I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you.

Ezekiel 22:16 You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I am the Lord." ' ' "

Although the Jews would come back for a time after the Babylonian captivity, from the time of Ezekiel forward it is accurate to say they have been dispersed “throughout the countries.” It was for their own good, to discipline them.

God's techniques may sound harsh. Destruction, captivity, dispersion. Was He being unduly harsh?

Let's put it into perspective. Think of yourself raising your kids. Isn't hard at times to discover the appropriate discipline? Beyond the normal things, like saying "No," and spanking, and time-out, it gets dicey. Still, as parents we put our best effort into properly disciplining our kids for the best result for them.

Let's trust that God knew the best disciplines for Israel and that He does for us, too. When we are in times of discipline, let's see them as God's severe mercies, designed to draw us either closer to, or back to, Him.

It's been a while since we had an illustration so here comes one.

Ezekiel 22:17 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 22:18 "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver.

Ezekiel 22:19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 22:20 As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you.

Ezekiel 22:21 Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst.

Ezekiel 22:22 As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have poured out My fury on you.' "

"Dross" is the waste product taken off molten metal during smelting. God was going to use Babylon, it's invading armies, as His smelter, and the Jews would be left wasted.

Lots of fire is in the future for the human race:

- The Great Tribulation that is coming upon the world is a fiery judgment.
- While the Great Tribulation is unfolding on the earth, resurrected and raptured believer from the church age will have their works tried by fire.
- After Jesus returns, and after the one-thousand year kingdom of Heaven on the earth, all the nonbelievers from all time will face the Great White Throne Judgment resulting in being cast alive for eternity in the Lake of Fire.

- Then the heavens will be dissolved as by fire and God will create new heavens and a new earth for believers to enjoy forever.

Meantime we face fiery trials, do we not, that refine us. In our case, God sees us as gold needing the dross removed.

The Jews were a people identified with their land and their city. God would treat the land as an extension of them. It, too, would undergo a kind of judgment.

Ezekiel 22:23 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,  
Ezekiel 22:24 "Son of man, say to her: 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.'

This would seem to indicate a drought upon the land, especially during the years of Babylonian captivity.

God had laid a lot of blame on the leaders. In the remaining verses of the chapter He spreads it out to everyone.

Ezekiel 22:25 The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

The false prophets demanded payment for the Word of God. It was OK to be supported in the ministry of a prophet, and the priests were cared for by offerings. But this was something different. This was withholding the Word until sufficient money was received. This was a con job and, besides, the prophecies were false.

Because of the false prophecies, men went to war, assured of God's victory, only to be killed and leave widows behind.

False prophesy and false teaching leads to death. It can still lead to real, physical death, as in the case of too many cult groups that end up committing mass suicide. But even short of that it is death to your spiritual growth and can keep others in a place of spiritual darkness leading to eternal death and separation from God.

Ezekiel 22:26 Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

The priests did not maintain separation from the world. They brought the world, with its ideas, ideals, and practices, into the Temple.

We always want to remain flexible, and we want to be contemporary. I admit it can be hard to draw the line. Give you an example: A lot of churches are introducing purely secular songs into their worship sets. The songs aren't evil, but they weren't written by believers for the Lord.

Someone I follow on Facebook was all excited because his church introduced a *Black Eyed Peas* song. It's mostly for the shock value, to be able to say there are no boundaries.

I'd say "No" to that. That is something very different from adopting a different style of music, or using a certain instrument.

I've reported before that a handful of popular preachers have started inserting cuss words and expletives undeleted in their sermons. Again, that is not necessary in order to be relevant.

Separation needs to be prayerfully maintained.

Ezekiel 22:27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain.

The "princes" are the leaders we already discussed earlier in the chapter. They are included here because God is listing everyone. We see in verse twenty-eight they were in cahoots with the false prophets.

Ezekiel 22:28 Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord had not spoken.

"Plastered them with untempered mortar" means they gave the princes a false spiritual credibility with the people by not being independent, by not

speaking God's truth, by not holding them accountable. How often do you read in the Old Testament of a prophet coming to rebuke one of the kings? Not these guys.

Ezekiel 22:29 The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.

Like leader, like follower. The peeps followed the spiritual example of the priests and the social example of the princes, all of whom were bolstered by the prophets.

Ezekiel 22:30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.

If you've been a Christian any length of time you've heard someone, either in a prayer or a sermon, talk about "standing in the gap." The idea portrayed is to plug the spiritual void and thus deliver those you are ministering to.

I think that's a fine illustration; nothing wrong with it. In the case of sixth century Israel, there was "no one."

What about Jeremiah? Or Ezekiel? Technically, Jeremiah was in custody, and Ezekiel was in captivity.

What about someone in the remnant God would spare? I'd say that they realized their fellow Jews, those not part of the remnant, were not going to respond to the message of repentance.

You see, standing in the gap wasn't just taking upon yourself the pressure that was created by the breach. It was pointing out the breach, calling those responsible for it to repair it - in this case, through repentance. And that just was not going to happen.

Ezekiel 22:31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.



The Lord speaks of future actions as already having been fulfilled. God can talk like that, with certainty about the future.

So many people, sometimes myself included, are worried about the future. I may not know the details of the immediate future, of my future. But I know that everything God has promised me, and everything He's said He'll do for the human race, are already fulfilled as far as He is concerned.

He is faithful, and He will do it. I trust in that.

