

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“A Thorn in Your Sidon”

28:20-26

God made unconditional promises to Israel that must yet be fulfilled. One of the Bible's greatest predictions about Israel has already come to pass. In 1948 Israel was reborn as a nation. The rebirth of the Jewish state should have put aside any doubts that God had abandoned the apple of His eye.

What makes Israel important to end-time prophecy are the many Scriptures that indicate that Israel will be the main setting for key tribulation events.

Zechariah 12:2 "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:3 And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

Revelation 11:7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.

Revelation 11:8 And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

Matthew 24:16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Jesus said that Jerusalem would be “trampled down until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

The Times of the Gentiles are those times when Israel is oppressed by the Gentiles, years when they are without a king and dominated by Gentile powers.

The Times of the Gentiles began in 586BC and will not end for Israel until their rightful king, Jesus Christ comes to reign on the throne of David, and Jerusalem will be the center of His world wide kingdom.

The prophecies we are reading in Ezekiel were being given right around 586BC, just before the final siege against Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Ezekiel is in a section describing the rise and fall of various Gentile powers. Always it is with an eye to the eventual restoration of Israel.

In this short section Ezekiel pronounces a quick judgment upon the city of Sidon, then reminds us in the closing verses of the chapter that it's all about Israel.

Ezekiel 28:20 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
Ezekiel 28:21 "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her,

Sidon was a seacoast city about 20 miles from Tyre. The two are often mentioned together.

Ezekiel 28:22 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon; I will be glorified in your midst; And they shall know that I am the Lord, When I execute judgments in her and am hallowed in her.

God "will be glorified" one way or another.

- He can be glorified in the repentance and faith of a city, like He was in Nineveh after the preaching of Jonah.
- If no repentance is forthcoming, He will be glorified in judgment against sin., like He was in Sodom and Gomorrah.

I vote for repentance and faith! Let's keep praying for revival.

What is revival?

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the great preachers of the twentieth century. Trained as a physician, between 1921 and 1923 he underwent a profound conversion. It was so life-changing that it brought with it a passion to preach that completely outweighed his call as a physician. He felt a deep yearning to return to his native Wales and preach.

Lloyd-Jones studied the great revivals through history. He spoke and wrote extensively about them.

Lloyd-Jones equated revival the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which he believed was a separate work from salvation. He wrote:

I am asserting that you can be a believer, that you can have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit... The baptism of the Holy Spirit is something that is done by the Lord Jesus Christ not by the Holy Spirit... Our being baptized into the body of Christ is the work of the Spirit... as regeneration is his work, but this is something entirely different; this is Christ's baptizing us with the Holy Spirit. And I am suggesting that this is something which is therefore obviously distinct from and separate fro becoming a Christian, being regenerate, having the Holy Spirit dwelling within you.

He often told this story to illustrate what he meant by the baptism with the Holy Spirit:

A man and his little child [are] walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand, and the child knows that he is the child of his father, and he knows that his father loves him, and he rejoices in that, and he is happy in it. There is no uncertainty about it all, but suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of the child and picks him up, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him, and then he puts him down again and they go on walking together.

That is it! The child knew before that his father loved him, and he knew that he was his child. But oh! the loving embrace, this extra outpouring of love, this unusual manifestation of it - that is the kind of thing. The Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Thus revival occurs when a large number of people have this experience at the same time.

D.L. Moody was a successful minister but by his own admission later, he lacked the power in his ministry. One day two women came up to him after a service. They said, "We have been praying for you."

"Why don't you pray for the people?" he asked.

"Because you need the power of the Spirit," they said.

"I need the power! Why," said Mr. Moody, in relating the incident years after, "I thought I had power. I had the largest congregations in Chicago, and there were many conversions."

Moody also said that in a sense, he was satisfied. He was in a comfort zone. But these two praying women rocked the boat. They told him that they were praying for an anointing by the Holy Spirit for Moody to have a special service to God. He could not get this off his mind and he said, "There came a great hunger in my soul. I did not know what it was and I began to cry out to God as never before. I felt I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service".

A day came that Moody described like this:

Well, one day, in the city of New York - oh, what a day! - I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world - it would be as the small dust of the balance.

R. A. Torrey gave this testimony:

After I had been a Christian for some years, and after I had been in the ministry for some years, my attention was strongly attracted to certain phrases found in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles, such as "baptized with the Holy Spirit," "filled with the Spirit," "the Holy Spirit fell upon them," "the gift of the Holy Spirit," "endued with power from on high," and other closely allied phrases. As I studied these various phrases in their context, it became clear to me that they all stood for essentially

the same experience; and it also became clear to me that God has provided for each child of His in this present dispensation that they should be thus "baptized with the Spirit," or, "filled with the Spirit."

As I studied the subject still further, I became convinced that they described an experience which I did not myself possess, and I went to work to secure for myself the experience thus described. I sought earnestly that I might "be baptized with the Holy Spirit." I went at it very ignorantly. I have often wondered if anyone ever went at it any more ignorantly than I did. But while I was ignorant, I was thoroughly sincere and in earnest, and God met me, as He always meets the sincere and earnest soul, no matter how ignorant he may be; and God gave me what I sought, I was "baptized with the Holy Spirit." And the result was a transformed Christian life and a transformed ministry.

Articulate men of God seem to struggle talking about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They can't seem to nail it down in terms we are totally satisfied with. But many agree it is real, and essential, and they are not content until they receive it by faith.

May we see in our hearts a renewed hunger for God and the things of God. May we, in our walking with Him, feel His special embrace as His children.

Sidon chose judgment over revival:

Ezekiel 28:23 For I will send pestilence upon her, And blood in her streets; The wounded shall be judged in her midst By the sword against her on every side; Then they shall know that I am the Lord.

This was literally fulfilled in Sidon at least twice in history:

- Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army which besieged it on every side.
- Artaxerxes the Persian later took it and destroyed it.

It will be fulfilled again during the future Great Tribulation when the vials shall be poured out upon them (Revelation 16:1).

"Then they shall know that I am the Lord." God works in and through history to make Himself known. His desire is to save. But if they will not be saved, God must still judge sin and will be known that way.

Ezekiel 28:24 "And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all who are around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord God."

The Sidonians exerted a wicked influence on the Israelites. According to First Kings 16:31, the sinful practices of Baal worship had entered Israel through "Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians."

Jezebel means *Where is the prince?* The prince is the god Baal. The Sidonians believed that winter was when Baal was in the underworld or Land of the Dead causing vegetation on the earth's surface to die. Baal's followers chanted *Where is the prince?* as a prayer to encourage the onset of spring and the return of vegetation.

In keeping with this theme the Sidonians would recognize, their wicked influence is compared to "a pricking brier or a painful thorn." They might think themselves a beautiful flower but God said they were nothing more than the thorn.

I think it's pretty amazing that God stoops to put things in ways that the people He was addressing can understand. Think you are a flower? You're a thorn.

We need to try really hard to meet people right where they are at. Paul the apostle said he would become all things to all men. Among Jews, he respected Judaism without being stumbled by it, without embracing it as needful for salvation. Around Gentiles, he was like them, only not crossing any boundaries into sinful behavior. The goal of it was to win them to Christ.

No matter how many times I get pricked, I still try to pick roses without gloves. It's just stupid.

The world is like that. I know better than to reach for it, to take it in my hand as it were. No matter how cautious I think I'm being, I almost always get stuck by its briars or thorns.

Maybe we should learn something from the death of gardener Jeanne Harris.

Her husband Norman told how she complained of a burning sensation while at work ing cleaning a house. She said her left elbow was swollen as if she had been stung.

Their son Geoffrey said: "She told me she'd pricked herself on the finger with a thorn.

"I don't remember which finger, but it was on the left hand. It seemed to be getting worse with the swelling going down her arm."

Surgeons at Cheltenham General Hospital tried to cut away the infection, but Jeanne... died within days.

She... died from a flesh-eating infection after pricking her finger on a rose.

Reach for the world, prick yourself, and your flesh will be like a malignant infection in your walk with the Lord.

I'd say, too, in light of our discussion on revival that we are not going to experience much of the baptism with the Holy Spirit so long as we are reaching for the world and being pricked by its thorns. It's not a matter of making ourselves holy and deserving the baptism, but if we are walking away from God, walking at some distance from Him, reaching for things along the path instead of holding His hand, no embrace is forthcoming by our own behavior.

Ezekiel's attention turns to Israel in the remaining two verses.

Ezekiel 28:25 'Thus says the Lord God: "When I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and am hallowed in them in the sight of the Gentiles, then they will dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. Ezekiel 28:26 And they will dwell safely there, build houses, and plant vineyards; yes, they will dwell securely, when I execute judgments on all those around them who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God." ' ' "

Israel is in their land but certainly not the way these verses mention. The land promise made to Abraham (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:17-21) and renewed to Jacob (Genesis 35:11-13) has not been revoked. Israel will live in her own land because God has given it to Jacob.

After the Babylonian Captivity, some Israelites did go back to the land but they did not live there in safety. There has been a Jewish presence in the land continually through the centuries, albeit small.

From the destruction of Sidon the Lord has jumped past our own time, past the Great Tribulation, past the Battle of Armageddon, to the Second Coming of Jesus.

It's at His coming to establish the kingdom on the earth that the Times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.

It may be the Times of the Gentiles, but that only further emphasizes God's love for Israel. Keep looking to Jerusalem; keep following the trends of fulfilled Bible prophecy.

Mostly, keep looking up!

