

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Ezekiel the Entertainer”

33:21-33

December 7, 1941.

November 22, 1963.

September 11, 2001.

If you were old enough at the time, those are dates that are impressed upon your mind. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; the assassination of President John F. Kennedy; the co-ordinated terror attacks on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and the White House.

We’ve come to a date like that in our studies through the Book of Ezekiel. A messenger would arrive in Babylon and deliver news to the Jews exiled there that Jerusalem and its Temple had been destroyed and burned by the invading armies of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Life for Jews would never be the same. The times of the Gentiles had come.

Ezekiel 33:21 And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been captured!"

The last chapter of Jeremiah records the end of Jerusalem. When the food supply failed, the siege engines of Nebuchadnezzar also broke

through the city walls, and the siege was over. Most of the survivors were packed off to Babylon, but the poorest of the poor were left in the land.

Listen to these descriptions of the final days of Jerusalem from the Book of Lamentations.

Lamentations 1:11 All her people groan seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food to restore their lives themselves. "See, O Lord, and look, for I am despised."

Lamentations 2:11-12 My eyes fail because of tears, my spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is poured out on the earth because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, when little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, "Where is grain and wine?" As they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom.

Lamentations 2:19-20 "Arise, cry aloud in the night at the beginning of the night watches; pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him for the life of your little ones who are faint because of hunger at the head of every street. See, O Lord, and look! With whom have You dealt thus? Should women eat their offspring, the little ones who were born healthy? Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"

Lamentations 4:4-5 The tongue of the infant cleaves to the roof of its mouth because of thirst; the little ones ask for bread, but no one breaks it for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those reared in purple embrace ash pits.

Lamentations 4:8-10 Their appearance is blacker than soot, they are not recognized in the streets; Their skin is shriveled on their bones, it is withered, it has become like wood. Better are those slain with the sword than those slain with hunger; for they pine away, being stricken for lack of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children; they became food for them because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

We believe the date to be the 9th of Av 586BC. If you consult Jewish resources, they list a number of tragedies that occurred on the 9th of Av throughout history:

1. The sin of the spies caused God to decree that the children of Israel who left Egypt would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land.
2. The first Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

3. The second Temple was destroyed by Titus in 70AD.
4. Betar, the last fortress to hold out against the Romans during the Bar Kochba revolt in the year 135AD, fell, sealing the fate of the Jewish people.
5. One year after the fall of Betar, the Temple area was plowed.
6. In 1492, King Ferdinand of Spain issued the expulsion decree, setting the 9th of Av as the final date by which not a single Jew would be allowed to walk on Spanish soil.

The messenger arrived with the news some months later. Ezekiel was privy to the fall of Jerusalem before the messenger arrived.

Ezekiel 33:22 Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the man came who had escaped. And He had opened my mouth; so when he came to me in the morning, my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

Ezekiel had been a voluntary mute for the past seven years. He only spoke when God gave him a message. But the night before the messenger arrived with the news of Jerusalem's final fall, Ezekiel was relieved of his muteness and spoke six distinct messages from here through 39:29.

In verses twenty-three through twenty-nine he spoke about the Jews back in Judah.

Ezekiel 33:23 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

Ezekiel 33:24 "Son of man, they who inhabit those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, and he inherited the land. But we are many; the land has been given to us as a possession.'

The reference to Abraham is what we call the Abrahamic Covenant. It is the promise to Abraham, recorded in Scripture, that God would make of him a nation that would bless the entire world. The Jerusalem Jews were complaining that God could not expel them from Jerusalem without violating His promise.

I guess they were ignoring the Mosaic Covenant, what we call the Law, in which God explained that they must walk in obedience to Him if they were to appropriate all the blessings promised to Abraham.

They were counting on heredity. God was looking upon the heart.

God had not, and has not, abandoned His promises to Abraham and his descendants. He is not through with Israel as His chosen people. He is dealing with them even as we speak, having brought them back into their land.

During the seven years of the Great Tribulation God will turn the hearts of the Jews back to Him. They will receive Jesus as their Messiah. He will return in His Second Coming and establish the Kingdom of God for a thousand years. Then all those promises will be literally fulfilled.

In the mean time, Israel is a blessing to the nations of the world in that through the Jews the Savior has come to offer all men everywhere eternal life.

Ezekiel 33:25 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "You eat meat with blood, you lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood. Should you then possess the land?"

Ezekiel 33:26 You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and you defile one another's wives. Should you then possess the land?"

The Jews in Jerusalem were openly breaking God's Law. Their heredity put them in a privileged position, for sure, to have the Law. But it was always the heart of obedience God desired.

Ezekiel 33:27 "Say thus to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "As I live, surely those who are in the ruins shall fall by the sword, and the one who is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and caves shall die of the pestilence.

Ezekiel 33:28 For I will make the land most desolate, her arrogant strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through.

The inhabitants of Judah refused to repent. Jerusalem would fall. In fact, by the time Ezekiel spoke these words, it had already fallen.

So why speak to Judah as if they could hear, as if the fall was imminent not over?

Well, Ezekiel was speaking to the exiles in Babylon by the River Kebar as if he were delivering a final message to their relatives and countrymen back in the land. In just a few hours the exiles would hear that Jerusalem had fallen. They would remember Ezekiel's message to Judah and it would put the ruin of their homeland into perspective.

Ezekiel 33:29 Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed." ' "

The people left in Judah refused to obey the Lord. He had no alternative but to discipline them. In their case, since God was dealing with them as a nation, discipline meant being besieged and finally overrun by another nation.

It was the only way they would ultimately, finally turn to God.

We have the benefit of hindsight and history. What should absolutely amaze us is that God has kept His people a distinct ethnic group and that they are back in their land. It is nothing short of a miracle. Or a series of miracles.

In verses thirty through thirty-three God speaks to Ezekiel about his fellow exiles.

Ezekiel 33:30 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.'

Ezekiel was all the rage! Everyone was talking about him to their neighbors. They were encouraging one another to “come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.”

Don't get too excited yet!

Ezekiel 33:31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain.

We would summarize this by quoting the Book of James and say they were hearers of the Word but not doers of the Word.

The exiles heard the Word through Ezekiel. They talked about themselves as if it made a difference in their lives. Yet on a day-to-day basis their “hearts pursue[d] their own gain.”

The phrase, “pursue their own gain,” is translated by some, “covetousness,” and by others, “all they care about is making money and getting ahead.”

In other words, they were pursuing materialism, living a material life. If you looked at their goals and their plans, they were all worldly. The only thing spiritual they were doing was listening to Ezekiel.

We certainly do not want to be hearers and not doers! Are we? Take a look at your goals and your plans. Are they material, or spiritual? I mean your life goals, not just your goal everyday to read the Word and pray and get to church.

Ezekiel 33:32 Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

Ezekiel was religious entertainment for them!

This sounds like a checklist for choosing a church to attend:

- The instruments are played well. In other words, How's the worship team? Are they super-skilled, and do they play the songs I like?
- The pastor, how's his "voice," meaning his delivery?
- Is his message "pleasant" in the sense I'm not really being convicted to do anything?

Let's not go overboard, however. It's easy to criticize a church for being "entertainment" when they are simply being contemporary and asking folks to be excellent in their serving. It's not more spiritual to be lame!

The solution is to be standing on the Word, to be presenting Jesus, to seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit, to go with gifting rather than talent, to wait for the leading of the Lord.

Ezekiel 33:33 And when this comes to pass - surely it will come - then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

In just a few hours they would receive the news Jerusalem had fallen. It would vindicate everything Ezekiel had been preaching and prophesying. They would realize that entertainment was not sufficient. They needed real instruction, real discipleship, for the long haul of the seventy-year captivity.

God has blessed us here at Calvary Hanford. The Word is taught. We have amazing worship. We never want for volunteers. The next generation has been raised up and they are raising up the next generation after them. Evangelism is taking place, and not just in the church but out in the trenches. New ministries are being established that are reaching out beyond our walls.

I hope you are a part of all that beyond its entertainment factor, beyond it being a pleasant place to come to church. If you are not, then seek the Lord, set spiritual goals instead of material ones.

Let the Lord live through you to touch those around you.