

## Lesson 15 – Ezekiel 6:1-10:20 – “Visions”

Well, wasn't today's reading a real up-lifter!! All kinds of warm and fuzzies from Ezekiel, right? Wow! Anybody here feeling a little heavy right now? Well, you should! I know for some of you the messages of judgment and calamity in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are getting old. It's not a lot of fun, is it? Look, I like to have fun as much as any of you, and I believe so does God. However, there are things in life that come along that are not pleasant, they're not fun, and they are painful. Here's the thing – all these not pleasant, not fun, and painful things are all tied to one thing – sin. Whether it is our own sins of commission or omission, sin committed against us, or just the ever presence of sin in this fallen world, sin is a VERY serious issue to God, and He is going to respond to it – even to His own people. The key thing we need to remember as we trudge our way through these messages of judgment, calamity, doom, and despair – kind of sounds like a good name for a law firm doesn't it – Judgment, Calamity, Doom, and Despair. We need to remember with God, there is always hope. I'm going to remind you of this as we get to the end of the lecture.

Ok – let's get into today's reading. I want to begin with a quick refresher as to where we are in history with the Nation of Israel. After King Solomon, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms: The Northern Kingdom known as Israel and The Southern Kingdom known as Judah. Jerusalem was located in Judah. In 721 B.C. the Northern Kingdom was destroyed and taken into captivity by the Assyrians. In 605 B.C., the Babylonians conducted their first siege of Jerusalem and took Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Now in 597 B.C., because of the rumors that the Jews were showing signs of a rebellion, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem a second time and took Ezekiel into captivity. This would be 11 years before Jerusalem was destroyed and the southern kingdom

of Judah ceased to exist. Ezekiel's prophecies began about 6 years before the burning of Jerusalem's destruction and continued 16 years thereafter. Finally, we remember Jeremiah chose to remain in Judah until he was forced to go to Egypt with the remnant.

Last week, Lyn spoke of the heavenly visions that Ezekiel was granted, and she gave a helpful table of the "creature features" and their potential interpretations. In today's reading we get into the judgments of God beginning with the land – specifically the mountains of Israel. We learned in Leviticus that the land belonged to the Lord, and the Jews could use it as long as they don't defile it. If the Jews obeyed the Law, the Lord would bless them in their land. So in chapter 6, we learn the Jews did not obey the Law. They had constructed the "high places" – places of idol worship – idolatrous shrines – under every green tree. These high places were groves or little gardens built by the Canaanites in which they would worship their gods in garden-like settings. Many of these idols were dedicated to the pagan worship of Baal, Molech, and Ammon.

To God, worship of idols was adultery. As Warren Wiersbe said, the nation had been married to Jehovah at Sinai, and the worship of any other god was an act of adultery. This concept of God being married to the Jews is proven in verses in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea. What are we, as the church, known as in the New Testament? The bride of Christ. Whether it's the Jews in the Old Testament or us in the New Testament, God looks upon His relationship with us as a marriage. He sees this marriage as something sacred – something to be tended to and cared for. When we "step out" on God with our sin or our devotion to our fleshly desires instead of Him, God's heart is broken.

When He said He hated divorce in Malachi 2:16, He was thinking about His marriage relationship with His people. God knows more than anyone the pain of divorce. This is not to say that divorce is unforgivable, nor is it a judgment to those

who have been divorced. It is a simple statement that God cherishes His marriage relationship with us, and He hates the thought of being separated from us.

The jealousy of God over Israel, His adulterous wife, is often mentioned in Ezekiel's prophecy. Here in chapter 6, we see the results of God's jealousy – the wasting and devastation of the land and of most of the people who were worshipping the idols. Jon Courson said it well in his commentary, "We will either die sacrificing our lives to our idols or die as a living sacrifice to our Lord." Even amidst all this judgment and wrath, though, we learn of a remnant that will be spared. There it is again, with God, there is always hope.

Getting into Chapter 7, we are reminded of one of God's many names, ehovah-Makkeh – the Lord Who smites. We like the names of God that remind us He is our provider, He is our banner, and He is our peace. J. Vernon McGee said it well in his commentary, "While it is true God is love, it is only half the story. We need to look on the other side of the coin: God is holy, and God will punish sin." As we come to know God, we see that His character has many aspects to it. Some are easy to draw close to, but some are, frankly, intimidating. The Lord Who smites – well that is kind of scary, right? Hold onto that thought – I'll get back to it in a little bit.

Earlier in Scripture we saw that the previous judgments of the Nation of Israel offered mercy and the potential for restoration for all who would turn back to the Lord. In the first 9 verses of Chapter 7, this judgment was going to be different. Verse 4 tells us, "I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will surely repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you." The terrifying phrase, "The end" is used 5 times in these 9 verses. Yes, there will be a small remnant, but there's a clear escalation of God's indignity with His peoples' relentless sin.

Beginning in verse 10, Ezekiel offers some pictures of what this judgment is going to look like. He begins with “the rod has budded, the arrogance has blossomed”. In our homework, Carol asks a couple of great questions: “Do you think the world today believes that it will ever come to “the end?” and “Why do you think people are reluctant to heed warnings?”

I would suspect many of you answered the first question something like – not everyone believes the world will come to an end. For those who might think it’s possible, I would guess few believe there is virtually no immediacy to the potential of the world coming to an end. They likely chalk it off as something that is going to happen in the future, so they don’t need to worry about it now. That is the likely answer to the second question about heeding warnings. How long have we been hearing about the “big one” – the huge earthquake that the seismologists have been proclaiming for the last several years? Anyone in hear losing sleep over this warning?

This image of the budding rod and the blossoming arrogance is a picture of a people who have been deceived for so long about the truth of God’s attitude regarding the seriousness of sin, that they are now in the full bloom of their denial of the certainty that God will indeed deal with unrepented sin. Carol asked in her lecture a couple of weeks ago if we could grasp the idea that the United States might collapse and fall from its position it’s in now – that there could be an end to the United States. You don’t have to look far to see the blossoms of our country’s arrogant actions as we push God and His statutes further and further out of the nation’s consciousness. These blossoms of arrogance are ones that are not pleasing to see, and unless the church rises up and makes its voice clear of the need to repent and return to God, then we can expect to see more and more of bouquets like these – at our nation’s funeral.

The second picture Ezekiel presents is in verses 12-13 where he is dealing with the economy of Israel. In chapter 25 of Leviticus, we learned of the concept of the “Year of Jubilee”. Every seventh year was set apart for rest – for the land to lay fallow, or untilled, and debts were cancelled. After seven of those seven years of rest – or 49 years – the 50<sup>th</sup> year was set apart as the Year of Jubilee when the land lay fallow, debts were cancelled, servants were set free, and the land was returned to the original owners. The price of a parcel of land was determined by the number of years to the Year of Jubilee and the amount of crops that could be grown and sold during that time.

With the Jews about to go into captivity for 70 years, the value of the land would decline significantly, and for the bottom fishing rich folks looking for a deal, they wouldn’t even know if they could have ownership in it when they got back or what kind of condition it would be in. This picture is the judgment of God upon the hearts of the people and their wealth. Are they sharing it and being compassionate to those less fortunate, or are they hoarding it and lifting up their lifestyles at the expense of helping others?

According to GlobalIssues.org, I found the following statements regarding the financial condition of the Earth’s population (as of January 2013).

- At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10/day
- More than 80% of the world’s population lives in countries where income differentials are widening. The U.S. has the widest gap between rich and poor of any industrialized nation in the world
- The richest 20% of the world’s population accounts for 75% of world income

I'm not providing these statistics to make us feel guilty for what God has blessed us with. However, Jesus did say in Luke 12:48, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." God had abundantly blessed the Nation of Israel – much had been given to them. They didn't honor God by obeying the Law or adhering to His statutes, and He was now going to judge their economy because of it. We are kidding ourselves to think this won't happen to the U.S. if we don't return to God and give Him the honor and gratitude He so richly deserves for all His blessings on us as a nation.

The third picture of judgment Ezekiel uses is in verses 14-15. We learned back in chapter 3 that Ezekiel was to be a watchman, and it was his responsibility to warn the people when danger was at hand. If an enemy army approached, the watchmen on the walls would blow their trumpets and summon the soldiers to man their posts and protect the city. At this time in history, this was a futile exercise as there was no Jewish army available.

How does that apply to us today? Who is our enemy? Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*." Who are supposed to be the watchmen on the walls today? Us – you and me. God, through His Word and His Holy Spirit, has enlightened us to the truths and realities of spiritual warfare. It is our responsibility to first prepare ourselves for battle – that is what we are doing here – studying God's Word and strengthening ourselves in truth.

For those of you who are struggling with going through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, please try to find comfort that you are studying the truth of human history and God's dealings with humanity – to those who choose to turn to Him; and to those who are deceived, believe the lie, and turn to Satan. You are obtaining value, strength, and a defense against the lies of the enemy when you study the truth of

God's Word. With the strength of the Word of God with us, we are then to tell the world the truth of what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen if it doesn't repent and turn to God before it is too late.

The fourth and final image is that found in verses 16-18 - comparing the fugitives who escape as mourning doves. It is from this group that God would form His remnant. Isaiah said in 59:11 that instead of rejoicing over their escape, they were mourning over their sins. They were feeling convicted. This was a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 6 verses 9-10. They have reached a point of grief and remorse and realized they can't continue in their sins, but they are too weak to fight against the temptation to continue in their sins. They have no choice but to throw themselves on the mercy of the Lord.

Please know that is God's desire for every human He creates. He takes no pleasure in the lost. For 35 years, He patiently and sorrowfully watched me live without either a knowledge of or, worse, with at least some knowledge of Him but acting no less arrogant than the Jews who are getting judged in this reading. Had it not been for the grace of God and bringing Vickie into my life, I would be on the wrong side of the Lord. It's easy to develop a disdain for people who are publically against the Lord – I get that way sometimes. However, we need to remind ourselves who the real enemy is. It is our job, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit to see through their actions and recognize the tools of deception Satan has used to get them to this place of lostness. It is our job to lovingly but firmly reveal to them the truth of God and the peril they are living in by not turning to the truth – to Jesus.

For the remainder of chapter 7, we see God promising judgment on the wealthy who find their sense of worth and value in their money and things. Again, there's nothing wrong with accumulating wealth. It only becomes a problem when we divert our love for God to our love for our money and our possessions. That is

what has happened here, and God is going to wipe it out. Their wealth would be God's payment to Babylon for their services in chastening Israel.

Verse 25 of chapter 7 is one worth taking a moment to discuss, "When terror comes, they will seek peace in vain." When the walls are closing in; when the fear and anxiety are gripping you; when the noise of this world is just too much; what do you seek? Peace. We don't seek peace when things are going well, do we? We get lulled into the notion that this is the way life should be all the time. The truth of the matter is that was the original design for us – for us to live in peace with God. That's the way it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden until sin entered the world. Since that fateful moment, every human who has been born is a vessel of wrath according to Romans 9:22. We are not born in peace – for those of you ladies who have given birth, is there anything peaceful about childbirth?

Jesus tells us where we find real peace in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." True peace is only found in the Lord Jesus. His title "Lord" comes with a responsibility to take care of all your needs – ALL of them. The first need we all need is forgiveness from God, and He accomplished that at the cross. Luke 12:24 tells us the birds who neither reap nor sow are fed by God – we're of much more value to Him than they are. Not because of anything we've done to earn God's blessing but because of His love for us, He extends us grace through His only begotten Son, Jesus, to be our sacrifice and our advocate. That is why Paul began most of his letters with "Grace and peace". You can't have the peace of God until you receive the grace of God. Amen?

In chapter 8 we are getting into a series of images of the glory of the Lord in the temple and its eventual departure from the temple in chapter 10. Chapter 8 begins with Ezekiel seeing the image of a man. Verse 2 tells us that from what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up his appearance was as bright

as glowing metal. Many Bible commentaries suggest this is the preincarnate Jesus Christ.

Now here is one of those details in the Bible that make this book so extraordinary. Ezekiel is caught up in a vision, which is pretty cool. But why does the man grab Ezekiel by the hair to take him to the vision? What is that about? Why do we need to know this? Does this sound like a gentle, loving, and merciful God? Truly weird.

In chapter 11, Ezekiel will share this vision along with two other visions with the elders of the people of Israel. It won't be an easy sharing because it represents one of three great tragedies in the life of the Jewish nation. Here in chapter 8 we're learning of the defiling of the temple. Ezekiel is spiritually taken to the temple to observe the defilement of the temple. He first sees "the idol that provokes to jealousy". It was likely called this because idolatry provokes the Lord who is jealous over His people.

So the man asks Ezekiel to dig into the wall and see what has been written/painted on the walls. He saw every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel portrayed all around the walls. He then sees Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among the 70 elders. They make the sad statement in verse 12 that, "the Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land." Think about the level of deception. They are in the temple where the glory of the Lord resides, but He doesn't see them? They're in His house! It is staggering how easily deceived we can be. We must be on guard at ALL times against the temptations of the enemy to deceive us – to cause us to question the truth of who God is.

As if what Ezekiel saw wasn't bad enough, he's taken to the north gate of the temple. There he sees to his dismay women weeping for Tammuz. Tammuz was as Sumerian fertility god similar to the Greek god Adonis. Instead of going to the God

who gives life, they went to a god who was not even alive. Things then go from bad to worse – he’s taken into the inner court of the temple, and he sees 25 men with their backs to the temple facing towards the east – they were worshipping the sun.

Romans 1:24-25 speaks of this terrible thing, “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” People who claim to be “spiritual” are really worshipping the creation as opposed to the Creator. Whether it is the sun, money, Allah, or anything other than Jehovah God, people are worshipping the creation, or the creature, instead of the one God Who is worthy to be worshipped – the true and living God of the Bible. God will honor the choice to worship something other than Him. But by turning them over to their lusts, they are headed for destruction. Notice what the problem is – they exchanged the truth of God for the lie.

God concludes this vision with a terrifying statement in verse 18, Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them.” If that verse doesn’t cause you to sit up straight, I don’t know what will. Warren Wiersbe makes a great statement in his commentary, “When people lose their fear of God, they do as they please and don’t worry about the consequences.” When it has reached that point in someone’s life, Satan has won.

Are we having fun yet??? This is heavy, isn’t it? Well, we have a little more to go, and then I’ll try to offer something from the Lord that I hope will pick you up.

In chapters 9 and 10, we see the very sad accounting of the Shekinah glory, the glory of the Lord preparing to depart from the temple. It has been the glory of the Lord that has made the temple what it was. Without it, it was just another building. In verses 9:1-3a Ezekiel describes beings that are no doubt angels. Angels serve many purposes, but they serve a primary purpose – to be used by God in judgment of the world.

Matthew 13:41 says, “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,”

Matthew 16:27 states, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 promises, “<sup>7</sup> and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The man in linen is ordered by the Lord to go throughout Jerusalem and to put marks on the foreheads of those who were grieving and lamenting over the abominations done in the temple. Then the Lord orders the angels to follow the man and wipe out everyone in the city without a mark on his/her forehead.

Ezekiel, showing remarkable compassion for these sinful people, asks the Lord if He is going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel. The Lord’s chilling reply was, “Yes”. He is going to prove the claims of the false prophets saying the Lord does not see are in fact, lies. The Lord does see. He sees everything. There is no hiding from God. Don’t waste your time with cultivating a secret life because with God, there are no secrets.

Ecclesiastes 12:14: “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

Mark 4:22: For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

Psalm 44:21: would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart?

Upon completion of the slaughter, the man returns and informs the Lord, “I have done as you commanded.” Jesus said in John 8:29 that He always does what pleases the Lord. The homework exhorts us to do the commandments laid out in Luke 24:46-47 and Matthew 28:19-20 – they both can be summed up by telling the world the truth of the gospel.

At the beginning of chapter 10, the Lord orders the man clothed in linen to scatter burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city. Coals are a symbol of judgment, and it won’t be long that Jerusalem will be laid to waste. Verse 4 tells us the beginning of the glory of the Lord’s departure, “Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD.”

In verse 14, Ezekiel describes the cherubim, “Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a human being, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. Again, Lin gave a great table offering the parallels of these faces to the four gospels. Verse 18 describes the final point of the glory of the Lord in the temple – stopping over the cherubim.

Ezekiel acknowledges these are the same beings he had seen earlier by the Kebar River. As they went, so did the glory of the lord.

Ok – we’re almost done. I want to point out a key phrase that is used 62 times in Ezekiel, “They will know that I am the Lord.” In most cases, this statement of assurance is tied to judgment. Without offering a “spoiler alert” to Ezekiel, not all of these statements of assurance apply to judgment. They offer hope. They offer hope to the Nation of Israel, and as joint heirs with Israel, we share in their hope. Our friends at the law firm we learned of earlier, you remember them: Judgment, Calamity, Doom, and Despair, have no place to accuse, prosecute, assail, or any other attack to those whom are in Christ Jesus. Remember, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. How can we know this? That’s what God’s Word says. See what Jesus says Himself in John 14:20, “At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

Folks, if you have received the gift of salvation by confessing your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then all this judgment, all this wrath, all this anger that we are reading about that we deserved every bit as much as these people we’re reading about – it was taken care of at the cross. There is no more judgment for you. Jesus tells us that we have God in us. Is God going to judge Himself? Remember, because of the grace of God by Jesus Christ, you have the peace of God. Please join me as I pray this truth over all of us now.