

Two Groups of People Who Will Not Be In Heaven

Our study in the book of Ezekiel has been a serious warning to the people of Israel and the surrounding nations. We have learned that our God does not enjoy the death of the wicked. He does not take pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezekiel 33:11). So repeatedly, He warned the people of Israel to repent and stop being rebellious and wicked. He urged them to believe in Him, to believe He had spoken, and to devote themselves to Him. But almost everyone in Judah and Jerusalem rejected His warning. Consequently, Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were attacked by the Babylonian army. Ezekiel 24:1-2 reports,

And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to

Jerusalem this very day. Ezekiel 24:1-2 (NASB)

Here we were told the attack upon Jerusalem had started in the ninth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, in the tenth month, and on the tenth day. That is, the attack started on January 15, 588 B.C.

Then the description of the attack was interrupted by

chapters 25-32 which describe a series of prophecies against seven nations that surrounded the nation of Israel. These prophecies said that Yahweh was going to destroy these seven nations because they had cursed Israel in various ways. In addition, they were excessively wicked nations.

Jerusalem Has Been Destroyed. Then we discovered in our last study, which was from Ezekiel 33:1-20, that the prophet Ezekiel was commissioned by Yahweh a second time to speak for Him. Ezekiel's first commission was a series of warnings to repent or else Jerusalem would be destroyed. This second commission is about the restoration of Israel.



This study is from Ezekiel 33:21-33. Immediately in verse 21, we are told that refugees from Jerusalem had reached Ezekiel, who was living along the Chebar canal near Babylon. They gave Ezekiel the terrible news that the Babylonian army

had destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month, the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been taken." Ezekiel 33:21 (NASB)

The date given in this verse is the date that the refugees reached Ezekiel. It corresponds to January 9, 585 B.C. But the date on which the city of Jerusalem was destroyed was on July 18, 586. If we compare this date to the date that the attack on Jerusalem started, we discover the attack lasted about 30 months. Then the refugees traveled for about six months to reach the exiles who were living at the canal Chebar. This helps us understand that the trip probably took about two months since the distance from Jerusalem is about seven hundred miles or 1,100 km, or it could have been six months.

Verse 22 tells us that Ezekiel and some of the exiles, who lived near the prophet, had gathered for a morning meeting. That is when the refugees found Ezekiel.

Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless. Ezekiel 33:22 (NASB)

The verse also tells us that just as the meeting was starting, Yahweh spoke to Ezekiel. What follows now for the rest of the chapter are two messages from God through Ezekiel to two different groups of people.

Message to Those In Jerusalem. The first message is for the people who were still living in Jerusalem after the Babylonian army had started the attack on the city. Verses 23-24 are directed at these people,

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.'" Ezekiel 33:23-24 (NASB)

Here we are told the people in Jerusalem had remembered that Yahweh had promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and possess a great land. They remembered the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional and unilateral. They knew that God had made the promise to just one man,

Abraham. For some reason they believed that since they were more than one, God would give them the land after the invasion ended. Most commentators admit this was very strange logic.

But we should not be surprised as today men and women read Scripture and conclude that it means many very strange things. Maybe they read Scripture allegorically. When they do, they can make Scripture mean anything they desire because there are no constraints to symbolic language.

Some people just open their Bible to a chapter or paragraph and read it as part of their devotions. They might read in Genesis 4:8 that Cain killed Abel, and then turn to Luke 10:37 and read, "Go and do the same." Whatever the approach the Israelites in Jerusalem used to find meaning in Scripture, they did not interpret Scripture accurately. Somehow, they violated some of the basics of biblical interpretation.

This reminds me of some people who have asked where they can find a certain quotation in the Bible. For example, some have wanted to know where they can find, "God helps those who help themselves." We had to disappoint them by saying that it does not exist in the Bible. Others have asked where can I find "the lion shall lie down with the lamb"? That does not exist either. Instead, Isaiah 11:6 and Isaiah 65:25 say the wolf will graze and dwell with the lamb.

For whatever reason, those who were left in Judah thought they would possess the land and enjoy its blessings. But they were wrong. Yahweh warned them from the beginning in verse 25,

"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"' Ezekiel 33:25-26 (NASB)

So, Yahweh told Ezekiel to tell these people why they would not possess the land. He said, "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. You

rely on your sword, you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife." Each question is about some sin they had committed. Twice Yahweh asked, "Should you then possess the land?" The answer was, "No!"

Yahweh's message was that they were wicked people. They had murdered people, sacrificed their children, and committed adultery. Therefore, why should they possess the land? They missed the fact that in Genesis 15:6 Yahweh tells us that Abraham believed in God. Therefore, he was declared righteous. But these Israelites did not believe the Word of the Lord through His prophets, including Ezekiel. They were not students of the Word of God, nor did they believe the prophet who was in their midst. So, why should they receive any special blessings intended for the believing descendants of Abraham?

Yes, the land was promised to Abraham and his descendants, but it was promised to those who were righteous descendants, or to those who believed in and obeyed Yahweh. Now watch what Yahweh said next.

"Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence. I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate so that no one will pass through. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.'"
Ezekiel 33:27-29 (NASB)

Earlier, Yahweh told them that He would completely destroy the nation using a foreign invasion and wild animals. So once again Yahweh said He would completely destroy them and use animals to finish the task.

Now we read the often repeated message to the unbelieving Israelites in Judah and Jerusalem, "Then they will know that I am the LORD." This reveals that this group of people did not believe in Yahweh. So, they were going to

eternal punishment unless they repented and believed as Abraham did. This group of people were unbelievers who had a shallow and twisted understanding of Scripture. They were like many today who can quote Scripture, but they do not really know what it means.

Word of the Lord to the Exiles. Verses 30-33 introduces us to the second group of people to whom Ezekiel was to communicate the Word of God. These people are the exiles who are living along the canal of Chebar. Some of them were sitting before Ezekiel in the meeting. As they sat, Yahweh told Ezekiel,

"But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.'" Ezekiel 33:30 (NASB)

Imagine being Ezekiel, Yahweh has opened your mouth so that you can speak to the people. Yahweh tells you that these people have been gossiping about you. They have been talking about you in different places. Some are urging people to come and listen to you. Now, they are sitting before you.

Verse 31 tells us why they came to hear Ezekiel. We could say, "Why did they go to church?" Yahweh said,

"They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain." Ezekiel 33:31 (NASB)

We are told they came to hear the prophet. We could say they came to hear the preacher. So, why did they come to the prophet's house, to sit, and to listen to him? They came to hear the words of Ezekiel, not the Words of the Lord. They came to Ezekiel's home for the same reasons some people today go to church.

The last part of verse 31 is difficult to interpret. But in a general sense, it reveals the people were motivated by their emotions. They came to please themselves. Their hearts

were seeking some benefit from the messages. Maybe they wanted to be encouraged for the week. Today some people go to church because it is their ritual or it is their cultural activity. They want to meet friends, enjoy the music, or have their children taught about God. Maybe one or more of these reasons explains why the people at Chebar came to the meeting.

Verse 32 gives us more insight.

“Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.” Ezekiel 33:32 (NASB)

Now we learn that Ezekiel was a great speaker. Maybe they loved the tonal quality of his voice. I know some people in our country love the British accent. Maybe he was sensational, entertaining, or dynamic. Maybe they loved his style of teaching.

Then we are told about a major problem. The people did not practice what they heard. A more accurate statement was that when they heard the words of Yahweh, they were not interested in doing or obeying them.

If we combine all their responses together, it becomes clear their hearts were far from God, for they did not respond in obedience to what they heard. This reminds me of a church that was started years ago called the “Sunday Assembly.” Hundreds of atheists attend the church. They followed a code of conduct, gave donations, and heard a speaker on Sunday mornings. Then other atheist churches were started in the United States and in Australia. Now why did they go? They went for emotional reasons. They went to hear the speaker. They said the church offered a sense of community. Christians might call that fellowship. It is clear these atheists were not interested in pleasing God by obeying Him. Maybe this second group of people who were in exile were like today’s atheists.

Then verse 33 concludes with,

“So when it comes to pass — as surely it will — then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”

Ezekiel 33:33 (NASB)

So, what kind of people were these people in exile? We are told that they did not believe Ezekiel was a prophet. That means they were unbelievers. They were like the people who attend the atheists’ church.

Conclusion. If the people in Ezekiel 33:30-33 were in a church today, they would be called tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The Parable of the Tares explains that a tare is a plant that looks like wheat. They are an imitation of the real thing. Then the parable explains that a tare is someone who acts like a Christian, but is not a real believer. So, James 2:18, 20 gives us one way we can determine if a person is a tare. It says,

But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” James 2:18 (NASB)

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? James 2:20 (NASB)

This reveals that since tares do not believe in God, they do not have any works. This means they are going to hell.

Unfortunately, some people cling to James 1:22-24 which says,

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. James 1:22-24 (NASB)

After reading this passage, a tare might conclude they are believers, even though they do not have works. The verse might motivate them to prove they are believers by doing some works. But it is sad to say that many will be disappointed on judgment day, for salvation is by believing in Jesus Christ and not by being a good person. They will

be disappointed when God proves that they never believed in Jesus Christ, accepted Him as their Savior and followed Him. If someone still claims to be a Christian after many years of no works, they have deceived themselves.

The message of the Parable of the Tares is that the devil sows tares in churches. He places unbelievers in a church who love the church environment. They love to hear the preacher. They love the songs and the ritual of the church service. Every church has a ritual to their service. But the message of the parable is that they have learned to only act like true Christians. They may be like the Pharisees and Sadducees. They are just good, moral people to whom Jesus will say,

I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS. Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB)

Our study today was about two groups of people who did not believe the messages that were sent by Yahweh through Ezekiel. Both groups were unbelievers. The first group were those who did not worship God. The second group looked like real followers of God, but they did not obey what they heard. Consequently, they did not have any works. They had only learned the culture of the church.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said in on one occasion,

A young preacher having trouble in his congregation came to me about it. I told him about my experience when I was a boy. When I would go to the barn at night to feed the horse or the cow, I would light a lantern and carry it with me. When I would open the barn door and step in, two things would happen: The rats would scurry and run for cover, and the birds which were roosting on the rafters would begin to sing. Light had those two very different effects. And when the Word of God is preached, you will see the rats run for cover and the birds begin to sing.¹

The rats in this illustration are like this first group of

unbelieving Israelites. They run. They do not respond to the Word of God. The second group of people, the singing birds are like true believers! The unbelievers will be sent to hell for eternity. The second group of people, the singing birds, heard the Word of God, enjoyed, and responded in obedience. This group of people are the true Christians who will go to heaven and live there for eternity.

The question is, “Are you a singing bird?” Are you a real Christian?

1. Zuck, Roy. B., The Speaker's Quote Book. Kregel. 1997, p. 310.

