

1. I'm going to start this lesson by discussing the issue of "a sin leading to death". That's a cheerful way to start a bible study. ☺
 - a) Paul said, " Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16 NIV)
 - i) The point is if one turns their life over to anything but God, that eventually leads to eternal death. The reason God gives us rules to live by, is that He knows what is best for our life and following those rules leads to a more satisfying life in this lifetime as well as eternally. At the same time, giving ourselves over to anything other than the true God leads to a "miserable life" and eventually hell itself.
 - b) James said, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:15, NIV).
 - i) James' point is if one turns their life over to sin and if that sin is not dealt with, it will grow and eventually lead to eternal death, let alone a "miserable life" now.
2. On that happy, note, welcome back to this study of Ezekiel. ☺
 - a) In this lesson, God continues to state reasons and gives examples why the nation of Israel is collectively "beyond hope". It is a tough lesson about what can happen to anyone if they continue down the pathway of turning from God with their lives.
 - b) God is stating in effect, why a "mercy killing" is necessary. The same way it is more merciful to shoot an injured horse than to let it live is similar in concept to why the nation of Israel was brought to and end for a set period of time. The point is the idolatry has gotten so bad, there is nothing else God could do in order to rid the Israelites of idolatry.
 - c) OK John, we've been studying this "doom and gloom" message now for a bunch of lessons. I'm getting pretty tired of it. Where is the hope? The "hope" is in the fact that collectively, God has not given up on them! They are still God's people and He will bring them back to the land once they have collectively turned back to God.
 - i) If you need to read something positive, jump to the last few verses of this lesson!
 - ii) The lesson for us is that once we do commit our lives to God, He never gives up on us. He may take us to extreme measures to make a point, but God never stops trying to get us to trust Him, no matter what the situation.
 - d) With that said, my title for this lesson is simply, "Why is God allowing this punishment to occur?" These three chapters give reasons and illustrations on God's planned punishment of the Nation of Israel and how this "mercy killing" is necessary at this point.
3. Chapter 14, Verse 1: Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.
 - a) First, let's review where we left off. Ezekiel has spent most of the book so far describing in one form or another, how all of Israel is going to be punished for the sin of idolatry.
 - i) The reason this prediction goes on for so many chapters is that God is describing through Ezekiel how bad it has gotten and how every Jewish "group" was guilty.
 - ii) The last chapter focused specifically on false prophets. At this time there were false prophets saying that the Babylonians were going to lose and those Jews who were already in captivity would be released.
 - iii) The last chapter ended on the topic of what will happen to these false prophets. To put the last lesson in one thought: It is a bad idea to be a false prophet as it is a short-path to eternal condemnation.
 - iv) One point to get out the last chapter is that God still cares for "His people" and won't allow false prophets to "do their thing" in God's name. Further, it also shows that God is not through with Israel as a nation. Let's face it, if God were done with Israel at this point, then God wouldn't care about the false prophets!

- b) This leads us to Chapter 14. Over the past several chapters, God has described the situation in Jerusalem and the idolatry that has been happening "group by group".
 - i) What we have not discussed so far are the Jews already in Babylon. Remember that Ezekiel was one of about 10,000 Jews that were taken into captivity via the second attack on Israel. The third and final attack on Israel is what Ezekiel has been describing so far, and it is still a future event.
 - ii) With that said, Chapter 14 is God passing a message to those already in captivity.
 - c) Chapter 14 starts with some of the Jewish elders in captivity approaching Ezekiel.
 - i) Think about that fact for a second. That tells me Ezekiel was respected as a prophet of God. It doesn't mean they all believed him, but at the least we know that Ezekiel and his message was respected among those in captivity.
4. Verse 2: Then the word of the LORD came to me: ³ "Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? ⁴ Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. ⁵ I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'
- a) So what is the question these men are asking Ezekiel? In effect, the question is "what about us?" While that exact question is never stated, it appears to be obvious by the text.
 - b) With that in mind, now look at Verse 3. It says, "Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts". It goes on from there, but one gets the idea with that half a sentence.
 - i) Remember all of Israel collectively was guilty of following other gods. In previous chapters, we have seen the guilt of "various groups" turning from God.
 - ii) The idols they worshipped included physical statues that represented these gods as well as drawings of other things that represented those false gods.
 - iii) With that said, look what God says to the Israelites living in the Babylonian empire, "These men have set up idols in their hearts". In other words, it is not the physical idols that were set up, but what was in the hearts of the Israelites.
 - c) This leads to the first application of this lesson: Just because we don't bow down to a statue or a drawing, does not mean we have other idols in our heart.
 - i) Examples would include trusting in a government to get us out of a troubled situation, or trusting in our financial resources or even our own ability to work out a problem. Let me start by saying that governments have their place and God provides financial resources to help us through situations.
 - ii) The question is, "What are we really trust in?" We can be grateful for resources that God provides, but the question comes back to what do we "trust" in?
 - d) With that said, we can get back to the Israelites in this lesson. God is saying they still have idols in their hearts. What are those idols? While it is not specified, I suspect it those things named in previous chapters: This includes believing in other gods that were common in the area and/or trusting in the messages of the false prophets!
 - e) Now let's look at a line from Verse 4. It says, "I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry".
 - i) This implies a couple of things: Those already in captivity are no less guilty of idolatry than those who were still in the land of Israel.
 - ii) The next thing it implies is that "God works on our level". Those men coming to Ezekiel were still guilty of idolatry. Their idolatrous ways won't just change based on a few words from Ezekiel. The point is the idolatry is still in the hearts of these men and God has to work on them on that level.
 - iii) It does not mean that God has given up on these people, but just that God has to work on their level. It means that God has to work to eliminate their dependence upon such idols before God can answer any of their questions.

5. Verse 6: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!
 - a) In other words, God's first message to those Jews living in Babylon is to "repent". Before God can deal with any other issues and questions, He needs people to turn their hearts to them and "then" God can deal with other issues in their lives.
6. Verse 7: " `When any Israelite or any alien living in Israel separates himself from me and sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet to inquire of me, I the LORD will answer him myself. ⁸ I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people. Then you will know that I am the LORD.
 - a) The point here is we can't live for other gods and then inquire as to God's opinion as if we can then choose which one to believe. God wants us to turn to Him, and Him alone. We can't worship some other god and then, out of curiosity wonder what the God of the bible thinks in comparison to other gods!
 - i) What about someone who is new to Christianity and is genuinely interested? The point is the same. If one is to turn to God, one must be willing to reject all others that claim to be the true God. What about the sinful state of new believers? They sin, just as you and I commit sins. It is still a matter of approaching God sincerely and not with a "mixed heart".
 - ii) What about situations like in the Old Testament where Elijah built an altar to God while the priests of Baal also built an altar to their god and essentially, everybody watched to see who is the real god? That is similar to this situation where God asks people to choose who they are to worship. (Source: 1st Kings 18.) The point is God asks us to choose Him and Him alone for our lives.
 - b) This leads back to the text. God announces that anyone who seeks a false god and then tries to seek God will be cut off. Again, the point is God wants us to seek Him alone.
 - i) OK John, I don't worship other gods that I know of, but I do deal with sin and sometimes want to do things my way versus God's way. Is that the same thing? No. The issue here is worshipping another god and then saying, "Well, wait a minute, what does the God of the Bible have to say in comparison?"
7. Verse 9:" And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the LORD have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. ¹⁰ They will bear their guilt--the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults him. ¹¹ Then the people of Israel will no longer stray from me, nor will they defile themselves anymore with all their sins. They will be my people, and I will be their God, declares the Sovereign LORD."
 - a) The focus here is on false prophets. The idea is if a false prophet wants to declare some sort of false prediction (e.g., the war is about to end and Israel will win), it is God who is behind that false prophecy.
 - b) Does this mean God can cause people to lie? The answer is that God allows demonic influences to happen, including the giving of false predictions, ultimately for His glory.
 - i) God allows false prophecy, among other reasons, to keep us on our toes and keep us close to Him. The lesson for us is not to trust just anyone who utters some prediction even if they say, "It is the word of the Lord" or something like that. The key is to test such predictions against the Word of the Lord and yes, against time!
 - c) The text says the prophet will be as guilty as the one who consults the prophet. In other words, God is interested in protecting His people from turning to false prophets. God will punish the false prophets as well as the one's trusting in their advice.
 - i) Remember that while the siege is going on, there were false prophets in Israel giving "fortunes" to people and telling them how they will survive. (Ezekiel 13:18.)
 - ii) In today's time, we can see a building sign announcing "fortunes told here" or something like that, we know it is something for those who trust in God to avoid.

- iii) The other danger is the more subtle type of false-prophet. This is the kind that comes to church and tells us to follow them and not what the bible teaches.
 - iv) The point is we are not only to avoid such false prophets, but also avoid even listening to (i.e., paying for advice) of such prophets.
 - d) One thing to get across from the big picture is that it took the Babylonian captivity to bring an end to false prophets among the Israelites. The religious Jewish people today are loyal to their God. The non-religious Jews like non-religious Christians turn to other things. The point is the Babylonian captivity worked in that it took that level of extreme punishment in order to eliminate the worship of false-gods on a massive scale.
8. Verse 12: The word of the LORD came to me: ¹³ "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, ¹⁴ even if these three men--Noah, Daniel and Job--were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) Notice in Verse 12, it says, "if a country". In other words, God is getting a principal across here and it is not just about the nation of Israel. These verses are saying that if any group of people or nation claims to be loyal to the God of the bible, and then collectively turns their back on God, that nation or group will suffer. The punishment includes a cut off of food supply, famine, and death of both humans and animals.
 - i) What is the specific sin? Being unfaithful. The point is if a nation claims to be loyal to God and collectively turn from Him, punishment from God comes.
 - b) In Verse 14, three famous Old Testament men were mentioned: "Noah, Daniel and Job". The main point is that even if these three men were living in Jerusalem at this time, only those three would be saved and not anybody else. Why mentioning these three men?
 - i) The Israelites understood God's promise about destruction of a location. There is a story in Genesis where Abraham is "haggling" with God. Abraham asks in effect, "Would you destroy a city if there were 50 righteous people?" God answers no to the "50" question. Abraham then tries 45, and 40. Abraham got down to "10" before he was too afraid to go any further. (Genesis 18:22-32.)
 - ii) The point is the Jewish people understood God's principal of not destroying a city if there were still righteous (i.e., loyal to God alone) people in that location.
 - c) This leads us back to these verses and these three men. God is saying that things are so bad in Jerusalem that even if these three men were living in it, those three would be saved, but no one else. The point is the Jewish nation has gotten so bad that even if some great preachers were among men, the city would not turn from its wicked ways.
 - d) Why did God mention these three men? Why not Moses or Abraham or others?
 - i) God picked Noah as he is associated with the flood. The point is Noah preached as he built (either literally, or by the ark being built in Noah's driveway for over hundred years). Still, no one wanted to get on the ark despite that preaching!
 - ii) God also picked Job for this illustration. Job is associated with suffering. Yet, Job was never privileged as to why he was suffering through most of the book. At the end of God's test with Job, his health was restored and he got new "stuff" after Job confessed that he is not worthy to even ask why God tested him! I believe Job was picked for this illustration because despite his suffering, he still trusted in God.
 - iii) Third, God picked Daniel. He was a contemporary of Ezekiel. Daniel was with the Babylonian emperor and saw the destruction from the "kingly" perspective. Daniel was respected among the Israelites, as the Jewish people knew they had one of their own in a high place at this time. Even having one of their own (Daniel) in a high place is "not good enough" to save the Israelites from this fate
 - iv) The main point is these three men couldn't make a difference, and neither could any other famous person of Jewish history, let alone any good preacher living in Israel. The idolatry had grown to a point where drastic measures were needed.

9. Verse 15: "Or if I send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no one can pass through it because of the beasts,"¹⁶ as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate.
 - a) The point here is if God allows wild beasts to roam through Jerusalem, even the three famous men listed could not save their own children. Only these three alone would be saved. The point again, is the idolatry has gotten so bad, that collectively, Jerusalem was "beyond hope". The "cleansing process" is unavoidable at this point! ☺
 - b) God is trying to get the idea across that even if the best Israelites were living in Jerusalem, they would not be able to help as it has gotten too bad to fix.
10. Verse 17: "Or if I bring a sword against that country and say, 'Let the sword pass throughout the land,' and I kill its men and their animals,"¹⁸ as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved. ¹⁹ "Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals,"²⁰ as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness.
 - a) In these four verses, we have two more examples that essentially say the same thing.
 - b) In Verses 17 and 18 God is saying that if an army attacks, even if "Noah, Daniel and Job" were there, those three could not save anyone but themselves as again, the idolatry has grown to a point that cannot be stopped.
 - c) In Verses 19 and 20 we have a very similar two-line parable. Instead of a "sword", the illustration changes to a plague.
 - d) What Ezekiel is trying to get across is just how bad things have gotten in Israel and it is beyond repair, no matter what illustration or example is used. It leads back to my opening comments about collective sin (i.e., a group sin) can get to a point where it is so bad that the most merciful thing God can do is "kill it off" as it is beyond saving.
 - i) It does not mean God hates people and wants them dead. The idea is sin can grow in a person so badly, that is more merciful to kill them than to let them keep living in that state of being. Their death becomes a visual demonstration for others about what happens in one's life when one gets to a point of "no return".
11. Verse 21: "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments--sword and famine and wild beasts and plague--to kill its men and their animals!"²² Yet there will be some survivors--sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you, and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem--every disaster I have brought upon it. ²³ You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD."
 - a) Remember God (through Ezekiel) is speaking to the Israelites living in captivity. The main point is that there will be survivors of this disaster. Those survivors will come to the Israelites living in the Babylon Empire and they will all know that God is behind this disaster and God did it in order to discipline His people.
 - b) Remember that everything Ezekiel is saying is predictions. As of the time of this writing the City of Jerusalem had not been captured by the Babylonians. Ezekiel is saying that the Jews living around him will see that everything will happen just as he said it will happen and the survivors will come to the Babylonian Empire to verify all of this.
 - c) God is explaining to these Jews that they will understand that all of this was necessary, as horrible as it is to read about or to experience. It gets back to the point where the idolatry was so bad, there was nothing else God could do, other than the horrible punishments described so far in Ezekiel!
 - d) I could go into more gruesome detail here, but I think you get the point.

12. Chapter 15, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? ³ Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? ⁴ And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? ⁵ If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred?
- a) Chapter 15 is only eight verses. The main point is that compares the nation of Israel to "vine branches". This is the type of wood that grows grapes.
 - b) If you know anything about "vine wood" it is not good for anything other than growing grapes. You can't use that wood to make houses or tables, nor can you even use it to make "pegs" to hang things. It is only good for growing grapes and that's it.
 - c) So why is the Nation of Israel compared to vine wood? The idea is that God wanted them to "produce fruit" for Him. He wanted Israel, collectively to be a witness for Him, and all the other things they worshipped were false gods. When the Israelites were more focused on worshipping false gods, then they were no longer producing "fruit" for God. They had become like the "worthless wood" of vine braches that were not producing any fruit.
 - d) This "tree wood and bearing fruit" is an illustration in the New Testament too:
 - i) Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5 NIV).
 - ii) The idea is the only way we can bear fruit is through Jesus. We can't do it on our own strength or will. This is what the Israelites had to learn the hard way!
 - e) This leads us back to these four verses. God's point is that the Israelites had become like "useless vine wood" in that they are not bearing any fruit for God.
13. Verse 6: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem. ⁷ I will set my face against them. Although they have come out of the fire, the fire will yet consume them. And when I set my face against them, you will know that I am the LORD. ⁸ I will make the land desolate because they have been unfaithful, declares the Sovereign LORD."
- a) God continues to compare the Israelites to "useless vine wood" and that the only solution for them is to be thrown in the fire.
 - b) While this makes for a nice illustration, stop and think about what is behind that story: It meant death and destruction to many, many people. It meant the end of a civilization for a time being that were supposed to be loyal to God. The lesson for us is to be aware of the danger of turning from God and the price to pay if we do turn our hearts from Him
 - c) Does all of this sound cruel? What choice does God have? It leads back to those New Testament verses quoted in the beginning of the lesson: If a person or a group gets "beyond hope" it is more merciful to kill them than to let them keep living that way!
14. Chapter 16, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices ³ and say, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. ⁴ On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. ⁵ No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.
- a) If Chapter 15 was mercifully short with only 8 verses, Chapter 16 makes up for it with 63 verses. Why break it up that way? The answer is each chapter is a separate illustration and Chapter 16 requires 63 verses to explain this illustration.
 - b) Chapter 16 compares the City of Jerusalem to a woman. It is no woman in particular, but it is describing a woman from birth to full maturity. Like Chapter 15, it is meant to be an illustration to show how bad Israel has become as a nation in terms of its idolatry.

- c) It might help to describe some of the actual history of the "land" that became Jerusalem.
 - i) The City of Jerusalem is much older than the Jewish people. There were other groups that existed in that area before the Jewish people settled there. The city was founded by several Canaanite tribes. In particular were the Amorites and the Hittites. There is a lot of historical evidence for their existence as well.
 - ii) The City of Jerusalem itself was not in Jewish control until David conquered it. Even when the Israelites first came into land roughly 500 years before David, they never conquered this city until David pulled it off. (2nd Samuel 5:6-7).
 - iii) It's probably important to mention at this point why God picked this particular piece of real estate to be the "Promised Land". If you think about it, God could have picked anywhere on earth to be the "Promised Land". Why this spot? If you look at a map of the world, Israel is a natural land bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa. If God wanted to pick a location where "His people" could be a witness for Him, there is no better place than this spot.
 - iv) With that said, what is so special about Jerusalem? Why make it the capital? It is up on a hill and difficult to conquer. It has no natural resources, yet this city has been the center of controversy for the whole world for millennia! Jerusalem is where Jesus was crucified and where He will return to when He comes back.
 - d) With that history lesson out of the way, re-read these verses and come back to this spot!
 - i) Welcome back. ☺ The point of these verses is that when Jerusalem was first formed as a city it was used by the Amorites and the Hittites. The reason God called for the Israelites to utterly destroy those people when they first came to the Promised Land is not because God wanted all people to die. The punishment was upon certain specific nations (i.e., "those guys"). (See Deuteronomy 7:2 as an example on this issue.)
 - ii) This is why God is saying when Jerusalem was born, they were not "washed" etc. The idea was the city's birth was associated with "unclean" people.
 - iii) There is a reference to salt that needs explaining. Before the modern era of baby lotions and powders, mothers would rub salt on baby wounds. Salt is a natural way of healing infections. That is why the text says, "no one put salt on you".
 - iv) The reason the text says the City of Jerusalem was "despised" comes back to the Canaanites life style. I remember reading of one archeologist report in "Halley's Bible Handbook" that said in effect, "When you study the lives of the Canaanite people it is amazing that God waited as long as He did to judge these people!"
 - e) The main point is God is trying to get across how disgusting was the origins of the city of Jerusalem before it became the headquarters for God's chosen people.
15. Verse 6: " `Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" ⁷ I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare.
- a) Remember that this entire chapter is an illustration. It is analyzing the nation of Israel through the history of the City of Jerusalem. God is saying in these verses that he took a city that was fairly wicked and changed it into a beautiful city by making it the capital for "His Chosen People".
 - b) Describing the nation of Israel in its early years is being compared to a young girl growing up. It is like watching a young girl grow up and developing breasts and long hair. The essential idea is a "young beautiful maiden" starting to blossom.
 - c) The point is God picked a city that was wicked and He called on the Israelites to destroy all the residents when they first came to the Promised Land. That city is now to flourish with God's chosen people who understood what God required of them.

16. Verse 8: " `Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.
- a) Some argue this verse is when the Israelites first came out of Egypt. The view is Verse 8 represents the time God made the covenant ("contract") with them at Mt. Sinai to give them the law. If this view correct, then the Israelites were not yet occupying Jerusalem.
 - i) This argument is based on the fact that Verse 8 mentions the "covenant".
 - b) I believe the point is God is comparing the history of the Jewish people with the change and growth (and destruction) of the City of Jerusalem itself.
 - c) The other view (I hold this view) is that this verse is referring to the time when the Israelites actually occupied Jerusalem and God still expected the new Jewish residents of this city of remember the vows of their forefathers to stick to their covenant (contract) relationship with God.
 - i) No matter which view you believe, the point is God made this contractual agreement with the Israelites and they were guilty of breaking that agreement.
 - d) I better review the "covenant" a little at this point. When God gave all the laws (not just the 10 Commandments) by Moses, the Israelites agreed to obey them. This is a "two-way" contract by God. That is what the "covenant" is a two-party contract between God and the Israelites. The idea is that God promised to bless the Israelites if they would obey these laws and God promised to curse the Israelites if they disobeyed these laws.
 - i) Where did the Israelites say they would agree to this deal? The best verse that indicates this is Deuteronomy 26:17.
17. Verse 9: " `I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you.¹⁰ I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments.¹¹ I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck,¹² and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.¹³ So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.¹⁴ And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) To summarize these verses, God is saying He blessed the Israelite people. The benefits of being obedient to God included the fact that God blessed them physically and financially. In these verses we read of the Israelites having beautiful clothing and fine food.
 - b) So the question is, "Is this blessing literal or figurative"? Let's face it; the history of the Jewish people in the land was mixed. There were long periods of wars. There were periods of oppression and yes, there were some good times in between. By the time David conquered the city and by the time his son Solomon was king, Israel was at its peak of power and had more wealth than any city in the surrounding region.
 - c) I believe these verses refer to the time era after David conquered the city and the time when David ruled and then his son Solomon ruled when the city was at its peak in power. At this point in history, the residents of the city did enjoy great prosperity including financial blessings and all the benefits that go with that financial prosperity.
 - i) Does this mean God "guarantees" financial prosperity if we fully obey all of the Old Testament laws all of our lives? History would argue otherwise! If that were true, people would obey God for the material blessings and not for the fact He grants us eternal life. With that in mind, I don't believe the main point is that God wants us to be financially blessed as a prime motivator in life.
 - d) The application is, "Did God bless us when He saved us? Are our lives better now that we are saved? Are we showing gratitude for that fact?"

18. Verse 15: " `But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. ¹⁶ You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. Such things should not happen, nor should they ever occur. ¹⁷ You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. ¹⁸ And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them. ¹⁹ Also the food I provided for you--the fine flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat--you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) So when did the national "idolatry" start? After King Solomon, the Israelites split into two nations. The northern kingdom was called the "Kingdom of Israel" with Samaria as its capital. The southern kingdom was the "Kingdom of Judah" with Jerusalem as its capital.
 - i) The Northern kingdom went downhill much faster than the southern kingdom and those residents were taken into captivity (by the Assyrians) over hundred years prior to the time of the end of the Southern Kingdom.
 - b) With that said, remember the focus of this chapter is on the history of the City of Jerusalem. It is an analogy to the rise and fall of the Jewish people to this date and it is also a literal view of the city's rise and fall from God's perspective.
 - c) The point of these verses is that the Jerusalem started to go downhill spiritually after it was at the peak of prosperity. The residents took the financial blessings that they had and used them to worship other gods.
 - d) The Israelites living at that time probably thought it was their own ability to work hard as to why they received their financial blessings. God is saying He is behind their success. Then the Israelites started using some of their material blessings to worship other gods.
 - e) Remember there was a several hundred-year period of time from the era of King David and King Solomon to the time of destruction when Ezekiel was alive.
 - f) This is a good spot for a personal application. Just like the Israelites, God saved us from "nothingness" and all we have belongs to Him. The question is, do we give God the credit or do we, like the Israelites use our gifts to turn against Him.
19. Verse 20: " `And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? ²¹ You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols. ²² In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood.
- a) Just when you think it can't get any worse, it does. ☺
 - b) One of the local gods of the Canaanite people was "Molech". In order to show one's trust in Molech, people would sacrifice their new born babies alive as to say they trust that Molech will provide them lots more children.
 - c) The practice of sacrificing children to Molech was specifically listed as forbidden. (Leviticus 18:21). As bad as abortion is today, it is "a few steps worse" to actually take one's live children and offer them to gods in hopes of future blessings!
 - i) God is saying that the Israelites directly violated His law by sacrificing their children to false gods.
 - d) God is saying in effect, "Is it not bad enough that you honored idols with your possessions, but that you also took the children that I blessed you with and offered those children as "food" to these idols.
20. Verse 23: `Woe! Woe to you, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) Whenever the bible says "woe", it is God's way of saying that somebody is in big trouble.
 - b) Jesus himself used the same type of analogy when he pronounced a number of "woe's" on the Pharisee's for their lifestyle. (Example, see Matthew 23:13-16). Revelation also speaks of "woe's" in the destruction of the world. (See Revelation 9:12 and 11:14.)

21. Verse 23 (cont.): In addition to all your other wickedness, ²⁴ you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square. ²⁵ At the head of every street you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, offering your body with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. ²⁶ You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and provoked me to anger with your increasing promiscuity.
- a) The verses here are alluding to "spiritual fornication". In the bible, the term "fornication" is a synonym for idolatry as both idolatry and fornication are about turning from the one we are committed to in exchange for something else.
 - b) The point here is the Israelites turned to "every god of the local culture" and turned from the God who gave the Israelites all their blessings in the first place.
 - c) The idea of these verses is that it wasn't bad enough that the Israelites rejected God, but that they made shrines and "places of false worship" to other local gods. The details of the text teach us it is actually worse than this, but you get the general idea!
22. Verse 27: So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. ²⁸ You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. ²⁹ Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied.
- a) In the years between King Solomon and Ezekiel, the amount of territory in control by the Israelites decreased. The nation of Israel split into two. The northern kingdom of Israel fell over one hundred years ago and became part of the Assyrian Empire.
 - b) The decline of Israel started with the loss of some territories to the Philistines. Verse 27 says the Philistines were "shocked" by your lewd conduct. The point is the religious behavior of the people of Jerusalem was so bad, even the Philistines were shocked.
 - c) Verse 28 says the Israelites engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians, which means the Israelites accepted and started worshiping their gods. Finally, the Israelites were going after some of the gods of the Babylonians.
 - d) Again, there is more in the details of the text, but the key point is the Israelites turned their collective backs to God and are now paying the price of turning to other gods.
23. Verse 30: "How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! ³¹ When you built your mounds at the head of every street and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment.
- a) The idea is that "everywhere in the land" the Israelites built shrines to other gods. This included the concept of having sexual intercourse with strangers in order to entice those other gods. That is what is behind this concept of "mounds" and "lofty shrines".
 - b) The Israelites were worse in that prostitutes demand payment from their customers. God is saying the Israelites did the reverse, which is to pay their customers for sexual sins.
 - c) The point of all of this is when one turns from God, it leads to lower and lower points in one's life and that is the state of the Israelites at this point in their history.
24. Verse 32: "You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! ³³ Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. ³⁴ So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.
- a) These three verses continue the point that the nation of Israel had sunk so low, that they were engaged in sex with strangers and were paying those strangers.
 - b) Notice the phrase, "You adulterous wife". The point is God considers the nation of Israel "spiritually speaking" His wife in that God formed the covenant relationship with this nation to be his witnesses. God calls them adulterous because they have collectively turned their back on God, and turned to other gods. This point becomes important later as God will restoring His relationship despite their sins.

25. Verse 35: " `Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the LORD! ³⁶ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your wealth and exposed your nakedness in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, ³⁷ therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness.
- a) This is God announcing an end of the nation of Israel is coming. God is saying that people of all the surrounding nations will see the fall of this city and this country.
 - b) The text says because of Israel's sins, they will be left naked. Is this literal or figurative? It is literal in the sense that the attacking armies will take everything. It is literal in the sense that they will have "nothing to worship" as even their gods will be gone.
 - c) The point is the fall of what is left of Israel will not be done in secret. The people living in the area will watch the fall and will know the reason for the fall.
26. Verse 38: I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. ³⁹ Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. ⁴⁰ They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. ⁴¹ They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. ⁴² Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.
- a) In the book of Leviticus there were specific penalties laid out for adultery and for the sin of idolatry. They were both death sentences. God is saying that the surrounding nations will get whatever "valuables" the Israelite people have left. The punishment is more than just the death of most of the people. Even their possessions will be gone.
 - b) God's point is "this is what it will take" in order to end the idolatry of Israel. It will require the end of the nation for a time being and to "clean" the land itself.
 - c) Again, I can go into far more details about the subtleties of the text, but the main point is the Israelites were collectively guilty of turning from God to false gods and now have to pay the price. This gets back to my opening quote in this lecture about when "sin" fully manifests itself, this leads to death. That is what we are witnessing here.
 - d) Remember also that God cannot learn. None of this is a surprise to God. The Israelites became a living, collective witness of what happens when one turns from God.
27. Verse 43: " `Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?
- a) Even though the Israelites of Ezekiel's day were not the ones that made the actual contract with God in the days of Moses, they were still held accountable as their descendants. God's relationship with those who follow Him is a "perennial" relationship that continues from generation to generation.
 - b) For Christians, it is an individual acceptance that God is in charge. The danger is to make such a commitment and then turn away from it with one's life.
28. Verse 44: " `Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: "Like mother, like daughter." ⁴⁵ You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.
- a) The original inhabitants of Jerusalem were the Hittites and the Amorites. God is saying the Israelites have become as bad (if not worse) than those original inhabitants.
 - b) God inserts a proverb at this point: "Like mother, like daughter". The Israelites have become as their "locational" ancestors, the Hittites and the Amorites.

29. Verse 46: Your older sister was Samaria, who lived to the north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you with her daughters, was Sodom.⁴⁷ You not only walked in their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they.⁴⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.
- a) Ezekiel now uses another illustration: Imagine if Ezekiel were facing to the east as he was talking. If that were the case, then to his left (the north) would be the former location of the northern Kingdom of Israel with Samaria as its headquarters. There are clues in the Gospels how those in Jerusalem thought of the Samaritans, which became a mixed breed of Jewish people and foreigners after their fall over one hundred years earlier.
 - b) Again, imagine if Ezekiel was facing to the east. To the south was the area that was originally part of Sodom, which God destroyed a millennium ago. The city of Sodom was located by the Red Sea and is now. Ezekiel is saying the sins of Jerusalem are as bad as the sins of Sodom, which God had to destroy a millennium ago for its wickedness. In fact, Ezekiel is saying the Israelites became even more despicable than the Sodomites!
 - c) Now imagine you are an Israelite hearing all of this. First God compares your behavior to the "half-breeds" that is those living in Samaria at this time. Next, God compares your behavior to the city of Sodom that was destroyed by God over a thousand years ago!
30. Verse 49: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.⁵¹ Samaria did not commit half the sins you did. You have done more detestable things than they, and have made your sisters seem righteous by all these things you have done.⁵² Bear your disgrace, for you have furnished some justification for your sisters. Because your sins were more vile than theirs, they appear more righteous than you. So then, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.
- a) Ever wonder why God destroyed Sodom? Verses 49-50 give the answer. Essentially the idea was Sodom was blessed with stuff, but all the people cared about was their own self-interest and not being of help to anyone else. Apparently, that city got to a point where it was "beyond hope" and the most merciful thing was for God to "kill it".
 - b) The verses are saying as bad as Samaria was, Jerusalem is worse. Further, Jerusalem has more guilt because the residents of Jerusalem saw the fall of the Northern Kingdom (which included Samaria) and should have learned by their mistakes.
 - c) The sins of Jerusalem were so bad, it made Samaria look "righteous" in comparison!
31. Verse 53: "However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them,⁵⁴ so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all you have done in giving them comfort.⁵⁵ And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before; and you and your daughters will return to what you were before.⁵⁶ You would not even mention your sister Sodom in the day of your pride,⁵⁷ before your wickedness was uncovered. Even so, you are now scorned by the daughters of Edom and all her neighbors and the daughters of the Philistines--all those around you who despise you.⁵⁸ You will bear the consequences of your lewdness and your detestable practices, declares the LORD.
- a) Verses 53-55 mention the return of both Samaria and Sodom. Does that mean the residents of those cities will be saved for eternity? No. Remember this story is about the "cities themselves" and not the residents. What it most likely means is that in the "millennium" both cities will be thriving again and full of people.
 - i) Revelation Chapter 20 speaks of a 1,000-year period ("the millennium") where the Messiah (Jesus) will reign over the world. I believe these verses indicate that the cities of Samaria and Sodom will be alive and thriving at that time.

- b) The point is that even though God calls Jerusalem "my adulterous wife" earlier in this chapter, God is saying He is not done with Jerusalem as a city and Israel as a nation.
 - c) The point as it relates to this story is when Jerusalem is "fully" restored with the Messiah reigning from that city, Jerusalem cannot brag it was any superior to Samaria or even Sodom. During the time of Jesus, the Israelites did brag of their superiority, so it does not refer to any past time. Even the "present time", does not fit this story as the location that was Sodom is still covered in salt!
32. Verse 59: " `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. ⁶⁰ Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.
- a) These are my favorite verses in the chapter. For those who have stuck with me through all of this "negative" destruction, here is your reward, some positive verses! ☺
 - b) It is God saying in effect, "Yes, the current residents of Jerusalem will get what they deserve, but still God promised to keep an "everlasting covenant" with His bride! In other words, when Jesus reigns from Israel over the world one day, the "covenant relationship" with the City of Jerusalem and the Israelite people will be in force. How will this happen? We're not sure of all the details, but I suspect it is the fact that the Israelites (collectively) will recognize their failure to see Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus will forgive that nation and then the "millennium" period begins.
 - i) Like I said in the last lesson, it reminds me of the story of Joseph. When Joseph's brothers came to him the second time, Joseph forgave them and blessed them. That is a model of the Jewish people at the time of the return of the Messiah.
33. Verse 61: Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. ⁶² So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. ⁶³ Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD.'
- a) This lesson is now way too long to get into specific details of these predictions. The main idea is that one day "Jerusalem" will be ashamed when they realized the errors of their ways. That includes their history of idolatry and the fact collectively, they failed to recognize who was the promised Messiah. This restored nation of Israel will also include the cities of Samaria and Sodom.
 - b) One of my favorite verses in Ezekiel is Verse 62 where it says, " So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD." This is God's way of saying that despite the nations disobedience He is still committed to Israel as a nation, just as He is still committed to growing us in our faith through Jesus!
 - c) When I wrote this lesson, I had to decide whether or not to have a short lesson on two chapters or a long lesson on all three chapters. I'll try to lighten up a little next time.
34. Here's the main application of this lesson for us: Just as God cannot "divorce" His promises to the Nation of Israel, so God cannot go back on His commitment to eternally love those of us who have committed our lives to Him. Can God punish us for disobedience? Yes, and that is a scary reminder that underlies much of Ezekiel!
35. Let's pray: Father, thank you for these lessons about the danger of idolatry. Help us to apply them to our own hearts, so we don't have to learn them the hard way. Like the Israelites, we can easily be led astray and turn from You. Help us to remember that You are always willing to welcome us back if we simply confess our sins as wrong and agree to turn to You. Guide us in our lives and help us to draw close and stay close to You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.