

Ezekiel Chapters 21 and 22 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "The completeness of God's judgment".
 - a) I have to admit, talking about the judgment of God for lesson after lesson gets boring. You would think that God and Ezekiel would sum it up by now. ☺
 - b) Why does this go "on and on" for so many chapters? The answer is people refuse to accept it and God is making as much of an effort as possible to get it through their heads.
 - i) Many Israelites wrongly thought, "God could never kick us out of the land. It is "His Land" and as bad as we are, He made promises to our ancestors that we would inherit this land, therefore, how could God kick us out?"
 - c) As Christians, one has to remember it is a little different. As long as we believe in Jesus as both our Lord (i.e., in charge of our lives) and our Savior (who saves us from our sins) we can't lose our salvation. We can harm or "ruin" our witness for Him in this lifetime, but we cannot lose our salvation. Like the Israelites of that day, we can be punished for disobedience, but our salvation is secure.
 - i) Am I arguing that we are saved by our works? No. But our witness for God is definitely affected by our behavior. (See Galatians 2:16 and James 2:17).
 - d) So back to the issue at hand: Why go on and on judgment? Part of the reason is for us to remember that our lives are relatively short compared to eternity. Therefore, our eternal fate is always nearby and we need to be reminded that we don't know how long we have in this lifetime. Our salvation as believers is secure, but our rewards in heaven are based on how we act in this lifetime and that is designed to keep us on our toes.
 - e) For nonbelievers, lessons like this are reminders, that God's judgment is coming and (back to the title) is complete. We all have friends and relatives who don't believe in a judgment day and deny what the bible teaches about one's eternal fate. Like Ezekiel, we can preach to them, talk nicely, talk harshly, but still, people's hearts are hardened. The most important thing we can do for their salvation is pray for them and ask God to open their hearts and bring the right witnesses into their lives.
2. Which leads us back to Chapters 21 and 22. The main theme I see is about God's judgment of people and how complete is that judgment. When Ezekiel wrote this section, the Jewish people in Israel have a short time before the Babylonian army would destroy it completely and kill or remove every Jewish person from this land. The main idea is that God completely judges Israel and it is too late for anyone to do anything about this judgment.
 - a) So if this judgment is final, and people can't stop it, why preach about it? The answer is to get people to change their hearts and that affects their eternal destiny. It is too late to prevent the destruction of the country, but it is never too late to pray for one's eternal salvation and change one's way of living in a way that is pleasing to God.
3. For what it's worth, we are coming to an end of the "destruction" section of Ezekiel. We have one more lesson on this topic (Chapters 23 and 24) and then Ezekiel changes topics. Now that we are near the end, one can sense how hard God is pleading with His people to turn, if for no other reason that it affects their eternal destiny.
 - a) One has to get past the false view that one is automatically saved just because they were born Jewish or in our day and age, one was baptized as a child. Salvation is about turning one's life over to God. It is a one-time thing in that there has to be a moment in one's life when we first make that commitment. It is also a continual issue in that we have to monitor our behavior and constantly try to live a life pleasing to God. That was a problem for the people living in Ezekiel's day just as it is a problem today.
 - b) On that happy note, we can start the verses. ☺

4. Chapter 21, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, set your face against Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuary. Prophecy against the land of Israel.
 - a) If you recall from the last lesson, there is a debate about whether the last few verses of Chapter 20 best belong with Chapter 20 or Chapter 21. In fact, the "Jewish" (i.e., non-Christian) bible divides the chapters differently, where they include the last five verses of Chapter 20 as part of their Chapter 21 and Christian bibles make it part of Chapter 20.
 - i) With that said let's review those last few verses of Chapter 20. The main point of those verses is God told Ezekiel to look toward the South. God then described judgment on the land of Israel (yes, I know, the nation of Judah ☺) would be in the southern area and then move north to cover all of the land.
 - ii) I believe the point of those verses is that God will judge the entire "Promised Land" and not just Jerusalem. It was describing judgment in the area to the south of Jerusalem and describing the completeness of God's judgment.
 - b) Here in Verse 1 of Chapter 21, Ezekiel is told to set his face against Jerusalem. Because the words "Word of The LORD" are repeated in Verse 1, this is why Christian bibles believe this is a new vision giving to Ezekiel at this point.
 - i) In the last part of Chapter 20, Ezekiel was told to look to the South. If one looks south from Babylon, one is looking toward Israel. There were clues in the last part of Chapter 20 that Ezekiel was focusing on the area south of Jerusalem, which is why the "South" was emphasized.
 - ii) Here in Chapter 21, Ezekiel is told to look toward Jerusalem. So, I suspect Ezekiel shifted the glaze in his eyes a few inches to the left, ☺ and then he started the speech that begins here in Chapter 21.
 - iii) Notice that Verse 1 tells Ezekiel to preach against Jerusalem and against the sanctuary, which is the headquarters of the Jewish leadership. Verse 2 tells Ezekiel to preach against the land of Israel. That is not a contradiction. The point is true worship should have begun at the sanctuary. Because that was ignored, the spreading of false worship was all through Israel.
5. Verse 3: and say to her: `This is what the LORD says: I am against you. I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked. ⁴ Because I am going to cut off the righteous and the wicked, my sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north. ⁵ Then all people will know that I the LORD have drawn my sword from its scabbard; it will not return again.'
 - a) I should say right now, that bible scholars call Chapter 21 "The sword" chapter. That is because the term "the sword" is used all through the chapter. This chapter makes a lot of interesting "points" using the sword as an illustration. (Yes, I know, it is a bad joke. ☺)
 - i) Verses 1 to 7 are considered the first of these visions.
 - ii) Years from now, you will probably remember that Ezekiel spent a lot of time describing the destruction of Israel, but odds are, you will forget that there are separate "sword visions" being described in this one chapter. As I've stated many times, the main purpose of these studies is not to explain every detail of the text, but to emphasize how these verses apply to our lives today.
 - iii) With that said, you can remember that this chapter involves the "sword" as an analogy, both figuratively and literally used for God's judgment, but don't panic if you can't remember how many "sword judgments" there are in this chapter.
 - b) In these verses, God starts by saying He is "against you". That does not mean God no longer cares about their salvation and eternal fate. It means the planned judgment is now set and it is too late to try to change God's mind about this. It is a "done deal".
 - c) Verse 3 says that God will cut off "the righteous and the wicked". In other words, if a Jewish person at that time was a God fearing person, they will still be cut off. It means they will be executed, and some were transported to other parts of the Babylonian empire.

- i) The idea is no person will be spared, if they are good or bad. The point is that idolatry has gotten so bad in the land God has no choice but to do this.
 - d) The other point of these verses is that everyone there will know that God is behind all of this. Remember that Jeremiah was preaching a similar message at this time in Israel while Ezekiel was preaching to those already taken captive in the Babylonian empire. In other words, the Jewish people collectively cannot say they were not warned this will happen.
 - e) OK John, let's get back to us. So the Israelites were about to be killed and the punishment is final. How does that event, several thousand years ago, affect my life today? Can God still punish a whole nation today for disobedience? Yes, if that whole nation, collectively agreed to follow Him as God. Today Christians are a united kingdom, but we are spread out over many lands. However, God can still judge Christians for failing to be a good witness as we have discussed now for many lessons.
6. Verse 6: "Therefore groan, son of man! Groan before them with broken heart and bitter grief. ⁷ And when they ask you, 'Why are you groaning?' you shall say, 'Because of the news that is coming. Every heart will melt and every hand go limp; every spirit will become faint and every knee become as weak as water.' It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign LORD."
- a) These verses end the first of the "sword visions". The first seven verses have this tone that God is coming to judge, it will be complete and it will affect everyone who is living in Israel. The other point is that it is too late to prevent this from occurring.
 - b) In Verse 6, God tells Ezekiel to "groan". The idea is to show emotion. The idea is if people see Ezekiel groaning, those people may stop and ask Ezekiel what is the matter and he can then use that groaning as an opportunity to preach.
 - i) Does this mean God wants us to get emotional as we preach? The short answer is if we do get emotional every time, no one will take us seriously after awhile. The other idea is that God wants us to take seriously the idea of being a witness for Him and use whatever resources we have available to preach on His behalf.
 - ii) Does this mean that we all have to quit our jobs and go preach for God? No. God calls each of us into different ministry rolls. God may want you or me to be a witness to people at our work or school. Being a witness for God is usually about letting people see our behavior and see how we live a life differently for God. If people are interested in the topic of God, words and even emotions can be used.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to Ezekiel's groaning. ☺ The other point here is because of the judgment "every heart will melt and every hand go limp". It goes on from there, but one gets the idea. One reason God asked Ezekiel to get emotional is that emotions will be open and deep once the destruction actually happens.
7. Verse 8: The word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'This is what the Lord says: "A sword, a sword, sharpened and polished--
- a) One can see the "break" between the first and second sword vision here. Some people wonder if Ezekiel actually stopped and preached between each sword vision and when Ezekiel wrote all of this down, it is "more combined" for us to read. We don't know.
 - b) The idea of the "sword, sharpened and polished" is that the sword is ready to be used.
8. Verse 10: sharpened for the slaughter, polished to flash like lightning! "Shall we rejoice in the scepter of my son Judah? The sword despises every such stick.
- a) Verse 10 continues with the idea of the "sword" being ready for judgment. The main idea is the Babylonian army will be like a sharp sword, ready to be used and kill.
 - b) Notice the word "scepter" in the second sentence. The word "scepter" itself refers to a sword, but it is broader in its meaning.
 - i) Back in Genesis 49, when Jacob was on his deathbed. Jacob made a series of promises to each son. Remember each son became the figurehead of each tribe.

- ii) Here is what Jacob said to his son Judah about the tribe of Judah: "The scepter will not depart from Judah...until he comes to whom it belongs". The idea is that the nation of Israel will have the right to determine whether a criminal will live or die until the Messiah comes. With the exception of the 70 years in captivity, the Israelites always had the right to execute its own criminals. It wasn't until the Romans came along, that this right was taken away. Remember the Messiah (Jesus) came soon after the Romans were in power. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah.
 - iii) Which leads us back to Ezekiel: God is reminding the Israelites of the "scepter" of Judah at this point. Even though the captivity would begin, the fact that the "scepter" (i.e., the promise to the tribe of Judah) is still in effect, but that promise won't be of any help with what is about to happen in the land.
 - iv) Remember the "Southern Kingdom" is mainly the descendants of "Judah".
- 9. Verse 11: "The sword is appointed to be polished, to be grasped with the hand; it is sharpened and polished, made ready for the hand of the slayer. ¹² Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against my people; it is against all the princes of Israel. They are thrown to the sword along with my people. Therefore beat your breast.
 - a) We're back to "destruction" again. In these verses, God is again describing the planned destruction of Jerusalem, its leaders, and all the Jewish people still living there.
 - b) One also has to get the idea that the term "the sword" does not literally mean that everyone will die by being thrust by a sword. While many people will die that way, the main idea is the "sword" is symbolic for the coming judgment.
 - c) The final line of Verse 12 is God telling Ezekiel to "beat your breast". God is still telling Ezekiel to show some emotion as he preaches as a sign of the coming judgment.
- 10. Verse 13: "Testing will surely come. And what if the scepter of Judah, which the sword despises, does not continue? declares the Sovereign LORD.' ¹⁴ "So then, son of man, prophesy and strike your hands together. Let the sword strike twice, even three times. It is a sword for slaughter-- a sword for great slaughter, closing in on them from every side. ¹⁵ So that hearts may melt and the fallen be many, I have stationed the sword for slaughter at all their gates. Oh! It is made to flash like lightning, it is grasped for slaughter. ¹⁶ O sword, slash to the right, then to the left, wherever your blade is turned. ¹⁷ I too will strike my hands together, and my wrath will subside. I the LORD have spoken."
 - a) If these verses appear to be repetitive, one has to remember that this is a poetic style of message. It is God pleading over and over again for Israel to repent. It is God saying in effect, judgment is coming and it is too late to stop it, but you can always repent and it affects our eternal salvation.
 - b) This leads to another question: Why does "The judgment day" have to come? In other words, why is the book of Revelation necessary? Why can't life go on forever as it is, with all of us being judged based on how we live our lives? The answer is "sin exists" and it contaminates the world. God wanted a world without sin, and that is how it was first created. Just as Israel is being cleansed of its sins in Ezekiel, so the whole world itself must be cleansed of sin one day. Why is God waiting so long to do it? The answer is God wants to save as many as possible before that final judgment must occur.
 - c) On that happy note, we can get back to the verses. ☺ Notice the correlation between the word "strike" and the word "sword" in these last verses. The idea of striking the sword is to make the visual point that the sword of destruction is coming and it can't be stopped.
- 11. Verse 18: The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁹ "Son of man, mark out two roads for the sword of the king of Babylon to take, both starting from the same country. Make a signpost where the road branches off to the city. ²⁰ Mark out one road for the sword to come against Rabbah of the Ammonites and another against Judah and fortified Jerusalem.
 - a) OK, we now begin the third section of this chapter.

- b) A little background note may help here. If you recall from a few chapters back, the king of Judah made an oath to be loyal to the Babylonian Empire. (See Ezekiel 17:13-19).
 - i) God was angry because the Jewish king broke that oath with the Babylonians and tried to go to Egypt for help. God was angry because "His name is at stake" when we give our word to do something. If people know we are believers in God and then we go back on our word, it affects our witness for God.
 - ii) Which leads to a point in these verses. Apparently, the king of Judah also tried to seek help from the Ammonites. This is a tribe of people that lived east of Israel and was also threatened by the Babylonians. A point of these verses is that an alliance with the Ammonites won't help and the Babylonians will conquer not only Israel but the Ammonites as well.
 - iii) The fate of the Ammonites will be discussed later in this lesson.
- 12. Verse 21: For the king of Babylon will stop at the fork in the road, at the junction of the two roads, to seek an omen: He will cast lots with arrows, he will consult his idols, he will examine the liver. ²² Into his right hand will come the lot for Jerusalem, where he is to set up battering rams, to give the command to slaughter, to sound the battle cry, to set battering rams against the gates, to build a ramp and to erect siege works. ²³ It will seem like a false omen to those who have sworn allegiance to him, but he will remind them of their guilt and take them captive.
 - a) Let me summarize these verses. The king of Babylon and his army will march toward the territory of the Ammonites and toward Israel. This king will stop at the fork in the road, use some methods to consult false gods, and then based on the outcome of those decisions, turn toward Israel.
 - b) In these verses, the king of Babylon cast lots among other methods. This is like rolling a couple of dice over and over again, and seeing if there is a pattern. The idea is that if the number "five" on the dice appears lots of times, it is a sign God is guiding Him. It is not exactly that method, but it is similar.
 - i) The verses also say this Babylonian king consulted his idols. I don't know how the idols answer him and told him which way to go. ☺
 - ii) The final method is this king examines the liver. It involves sacrificing an animal to his gods and cutting out the liver. I don't know how one consults a liver. Could it be based on the way it is shaped, or is it the way it points when one spins it? ☺
 - iii) The point of all of this is not that God condones any of these methods. The point is the Babylonian king uses these methods for guidance, and therefore God "guided" these methods for His desired outcome.
 - c) Verse 23 says in effect that some people in Israel or Ammon were already loyal to Babylon. They will think this is a "false omen". Those people will be taken captive as well. The point gets back to the idea that it is too late to stop this judgment no matter who's side one is on at this point.
- 13. Verse 24: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: `Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do--because you have done this, you will be taken captive. ²⁵ "O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, ²⁶ this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. ²⁷ A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it.'
 - a) In these verses, God is again announcing His planned punishment. If you ever want a motivation to avoid the sin of idolatry, the book of Ezekiel will get you to think otherwise.
 - i) Hopefully, that has sunk in by now. ☺
 - b) Verses 25 and 26 focus on the leader of the Jewish people and says in effect it is time to end his reign as the time of punishment has come and he will not be a king anymore.

- c) Verse 26 also has an interesting phrase. It says, "The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low."
 - i) That phrase has a "biblical ring" to it. Jesus taught in effect that to have great rewards in heaven, one must be lowly in spirit and put others before oneself. (For example, see: Proverbs 4:6, Mark 10:43).
 - ii) The idea as it applies to Ezekiel, is that some people who were loyal to God will be "raised up" (i.e., saved for eternity), while the leaders will be brought "low".
 - d) One has to remember that this section of Ezekiel has a poetic style to it. That does not mean one verse "rhymes" with the next. It means it is written in a way where key ideas are repeated over and over again about the coming destruction. In other words, God is doing all He can, through Ezekiel to get the word out that this is about to happen.
 - e) Verse 27 has a messianic overtone. Every now and then Ezekiel throws in something positive to help the reader get through the book. ☺ The verse is saying in effect that the king of Judah will fall and there will not be another king "until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs". After this time, there was no other king in Israel, even up to the present time. There will not be another king until "the king" rules the world from Israel. In other words, it is a hint of the Messiah, or as Christians say, it is a hint of the second coming of Jesus when He rules the earth from Jerusalem.
14. Verse 28: "And you, son of man, prophesy and say, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says about the Ammonites and their insults:
- a) This chapter finishes with a few comments to the Ammonites. Remember that this is a neighboring tribe of Israel that existed from before the time Moses brought the Israelites into the land of Israel. They too, were being threatened by the Babylonians.
 - b) The reason God is focusing on the Ammonites is that they tried to make a treaty with the Israelites so they could both focus on stopping the Babylonians. God is addressing this issue not for the sake of the Ammonites, but for the sake of the Israelites who were trusting in the help of the Ammonite people.
 - c) So what is the text saying about "their insults"? If you recall from a few verses ago, Ezekiel predicted that the Babylonian king and his army had to decide whether to attack the Ammonites or the Israelites. The king consulted his gods through various methods and turned at that point toward Israel. The Ammonites were spared destruction at this point. The Ammonites started firing off insults at the Jewish people. It's kind of like someone saying, "Well, your fate is sealed and now you will get hurt!"
15. Verse 28 (cont.): "A sword, a sword, drawn for the slaughter, polished to consume and to flash like lightning!
- a) Like I said, this chapter focuses upon a "sword" as the common illustration. In this sentence, we have the mention of the sword conquering the Ammonites.
 - b) For what it is worth, this time in history also marked the end of the Ammonite nation. They became part of the Babylonian empire and never existed again as an independent people. Where are their descendants today? Many are part of "Jordan" today but some got scattered through other nations in that area. The point is there has never been a separate Ammonite nation since the Babylonians conquered them.
16. Verse 29: Despite false visions concerning you and lying divinations about you, it will be laid on the necks of the wicked who are to be slain, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax.
- a) God is saying to the Ammonites that their own time for destruction is coming soon.
 - b) If you recall from earlier chapters, in Israel at this time, there were false prophets who said in effect, "Everything is going to be ok". Well, there were false prophets among the Ammonites as well. God is saying these false prophets will fall as well.

17. Verse 30: Return the sword to its scabbard. In the place where you were created, in the land of your ancestry, I will judge you. ³¹ I will pour out my wrath upon you and breathe out my fiery anger against you; I will hand you over to brutal men, men skilled in destruction. ³² You will be fuel for the fire, your blood will be shed in your land, you will be remembered no more; for I the LORD have spoken."
- a) In Verses 30-32, we finish the comments on the Ammonites. God is effectively saying to them, "Your time for judgment is coming soon." They were spared (due the Babylonians decision to focus on Israel) does not mean they are spared judgment for their sins.
 - b) In a sense, these verses are a preview of what is coming up in Chapter 25. As I stated in the introduction, there are only two more chapters where God focuses on the coming destruction of the Israel. The next topic at hand is the nations surrounding Israel.
 - i) Imagine the Israelites thinking, "Yes Lord, I know we are bad and have sinned against you, but what about those people over there!" God gets to the subject of the surrounding nations beginning in a few chapters. Ezekiel takes a few verses here to talk about the Ammonites because they tried to work with the Israelites here and not only did they not help them, but insulted them when the invading armies came.
 - c) This ties back to my opening theme of the "completeness of God's judgment". Yes, all of Israel will be judged and eventually, the world as well. God will also judge nonbelievers and that will be the focus beginning in Chapter 25. So why focus so much on "believers" through Chapter 24? The answer is Peter's statement of "Judgment begins in the house of God". (1st Peter 4:17). The concept is that God focuses first on those who should know better and then comes people of "other nations" who are less familiar with God.
18. Chapter 22, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, will you judge her? Will you judge this city of bloodshed? Then confront her with all her detestable practices ³ and say:
- a) Now we begin Chapter 22. Notice this begins a new vision by Ezekiel.
 - b) The topic is still the same, which is the "complete" judgment by God. The focus in this chapter is on the specific sins. In other words, Chapter 21 said in effect, "The judgment is coming soon, you are all doomed and there is nothing you can do to stop it". Chapter 22 lists some of the specific sins the Israelites were guilty of committing.
 - c) Chapter 22 goes back to the city of Jerusalem. Remember that many Israelites falsely thought God would never destroy this city based on His promises the Messiah would rule one day from Jerusalem. While that promise is still true, it does not prevent God from the option of destroying Jerusalem and all of Israel for disobedience.
 - i) The lesson for us is while our salvation is secure, we are always living witnesses for God and He can judge us now with some other sort of punishment for failing to be a good witness for Him.
 - d) Chapter 22 continues the theme of the necessity of God's judgment. This chapter is going to get into the issue of the specific sins they were guilty of committing.
19. Verse 3: `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O city that brings on herself doom by shedding blood in her midst and defiles herself by making idols, ⁴ you have become guilty because of the blood you have shed and have become defiled by the idols you have made. You have brought your days to a close, and the end of your years has come. Therefore I will make you an object of scorn to the nations and a laughingstock to all the countries. ⁵ Those who are near and those who are far away will mock you, O infamous city, full of turmoil.
- a) First remember that the first sixteen verses of this chapter are about Jerusalem.
 - b) With the pronouncement of "doom" upon Jerusalem, here comes the "why":
 - i) Verse 3 says Jerusalem "shed blood" in her midst. What I suspect happened is because of the worship of Molech, babies were killed. The other idea is due the impending danger of the Babylonian army, there was murder within the city in order to steal people's stuff.

- c) Verse 3 also says that Jerusalem is guilty of idols. This is a good summary word for the first half (24 of the 48 chapters) of Ezekiel. Essentially, all of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, was guilty of worshipping other gods, which is what idolatry is.
 - d) Verse 4 emphasizes the "end of days" for Jerusalem. This does not mean it is destroyed forever, but only in that it will be destroyed as a center of Jewish worship. It was the end of the line of Jewish kings, other than the Messiah Himself ruling one day in the future.
 - i) It does refer to the "end of days" as the current residents of Jerusalem know it. Remember that they (collectively) refused to believe God would allow Jerusalem to fall. Therefore, life as they knew it, for that generation, was officially over.
 - ii) This ties to my lesson theme of "The completeness of God's judgment". The idea is that God has reached a point where warnings are no longer effective and God must bring Israel to an end as a collective witness for Him, until a day where the nation, collectively would focus on Him and not on idols.
 - e) Verse 5 says that Israel will be a "laughing stock". The idea is that the surrounding nations will hear of the fall of Israel and mock them and their fate.
 - i) Nothing much has changed today. Most of the "world" mocks devout Jews and devout Christians. The point is the fall of Israel will not cause sorrow for other nations, but as occasion for laughter at their failures.
 - f) OK John, this is all interesting. Tell me again why should I care? ☺
 - i) The idea is that a judgment day is coming for all people today as much as it did back then. We may not have our city or country destroyed, but God will reward and judge believers based on how we have lived our lives and God will judge nonbelievers based on what they did or did not do with the information given to them about Jesus.
 - ii) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, keep in mind the idea of judgment day is coming for all people, including believers. Even if Jesus does not return to rule for many centuries, the point is we never know when our lives on earth will end, and the most important thing we can do with our lives is to fully live for God.
 - a) That does not necessarily mean we quit our jobs or change our lives. It does mean we are living witnesses for God in all that we do. If you are not sure how to please God in one's life, let the bible be your guide. Ask God in prayer for guidance.
20. Verse 6: "See how each of the princes of Israel who are in you uses his power to shed blood
- a) The idea of the "princes of Israel" refers to the political leadership.
 - b) Beginning in Verse 6, and running through most of the chapter, we are going to have a list of the specific sins committed in Jerusalem.
 - c) Remember that we are two chapters away from wrapping up this long section on the condemnation of the Jewish people. God, through Ezekiel, is wrapping it up by reminding them of the specific sins committed.
 - d) Verse 6 focuses on the sin of the leaders of the Jewish people using their power to "shed blood". How have they done this? It is not stated, but there is a logical guess: They probably wrongly accused people of crimes and falsely convicted them and killed them.
 - i) Remember that this was a time of panic in Jerusalem as they knew the Babylonian army was coming. Some or all leaders may have been taking advantage of that panic by falsely accusing and killing people for crimes they did not commit in order to take their stuff.
21. Verse 7: In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the widow.
- a) Beginning here in Verse 7, we are going to have specific violations of God's laws being listed with the focus on the laws they have violated.

- b) If you recall from the first lesson, Ezekiel was raised and trained to be a priest. Therefore, he would be familiar with the Jewish law and understand what the laws meant.
 - c) An underlying point is God held these Jewish people accountable to keeping His laws and now they are being punished for a failure to keep these laws. If they are about to be punished it is fair of God to let them know which laws (sins) they have violated.
 - i) A few chapters back God gave through Ezekiel a "negative history of the Jewish people". (Ezekiel Chapter 20). The idea is that their whole history was filled with idolatry. In this chapter, the focus is on the current generation.
 - d) The first sin listed in Verse 7 is "treating their father and mother with contempt". Remember that one of the 10 commandments is to show respect to one's parents. The idea of "contempt" is that one does not care about the lives of one's parents.
 - i) Which reminds me of another point: If one is saved and one's parents are not, that does not get a Christian out of the duty of caring for and supporting one's parents.
 - a) That's a whole separate topic and is discussed in 1st Timothy Chapter 5.
 - e) The next sin listed is "oppressing the alien". One of God's commandments is based on the fact that they (their ancestors) were once slaves and given that fact, the Israelites are to treat aliens (non-Jews) well who lived among them. It is a violation of the principal to "love one's neighbor as one's self" (Leviticus 19:18), which Jesus said is one of the two great commandments along with loving God with all one's heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5).
 - f) The final sin listed is "mistreatment of the fatherless (i.e., orphans) and widows". The idea is to pick on somebody not powerful enough to defend themselves. There are a number of verses that point out this principal. See Deuteronomy 24:17 as an example.
22. Verse 8: You have despised my holy things and desecrated my Sabbaths.
- a) God told the Israelites to set apart certain things as Holy. That means whatever is separated for God's use, is not to be mixed with "everyday" things. This includes all the objects that are part of the Temple worship as well as the structure itself.
 - b) The second thing mentioned is "desecrating my Sabbaths". The idea is the 7th day, the day of rest, should be a day focused on God. When people spend the 7th day doing what they normally do other days (i.e., work) it is a violation of the Sabbath principal.
 - c) Let me pause here and talk about how all of this affects us as Christians.
 - i) First of all, if our trust is in Jesus as both Lord and Savior, we can't lose our salvation. If we mess up, the remedy for us is the same as for the Israelites. It is about confessing sin as wrong and desiring to turn toward God.
 - ii) The mistake of these Israelites is they refused to turn from their sins. If we refuse, we can live a life on earth that is displeasing to God and be a "bad witness".
 - d) Does this verse mean we Christians are to worship God the exact same way they did? The short answer is no. As Christians, we are accountable for our lives to God so our behavior does matter, but our salvation is based on our trust in Jesus as our sin payment.
 - e) OK, back to the sins of these Israelites. ☺
23. Verse 9: In you are slanderous men bent on shedding blood; in you are those who eat at the mountain shrines and commit lewd acts.
- a) To slander is to make false accusations against someone. The idea of shedding blood as it is used here is to hurt or kill someone based on false accusations. It ties to the slander where first one makes false accusations and then that person is killed based on false accusations of crimes not committed.
 - b) The second part of the verse mentions, "eating at mountain shrines and committing lewd acts". The idea is that of worshipping false gods at designated spots that were usually at mountain (or hill) peaks. There are lots of mentions in "1st and 2nd Kings" of mountain top shrines to false gods. (E.g., 1st Kings 3:2, 12:31, 13:32 15:14).

24. Verse 10: In you are those who dishonor their fathers' bed; in you are those who violate women during their period, when they are ceremonially unclean. ¹¹ In you one man commits a detestable offense with his neighbor's wife, another shamefully defiles his daughter-in-law, and another violates his sister, his own father's daughter.
- a) In these two verses we have various sexual acts that were forbidden. This includes having sex with one's wife during their menstrual period. (See Leviticus 18:19).
 - i) Why was this forbidden? The idea is that blood is symbolic of human life. Therefore, sex during that time frame is a disrespect of the loss of human life.
 - b) In Verse 11, the focus is on men who have sex with women other than their wives, including neighbor's wives, daughters in law, and their sisters. One can find references to all of these sins in Leviticus Chapter 20.
25. Verse 12: In you men accept bribes to shed blood; you take usury and excessive interest and make unjust gain from your neighbors by extortion. And you have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) The next category of sin violations includes bribery prior to "shedding blood". The idea is that judges or jury are paid off so people can be falsely punished of crimes.
 - b) The final category is that of usury and excessive interest. This is not about conventional bank loans. This is about taking advantage of someone who is poor and desperate and then charging them say, "100% interest per day" to pay you back.
 - i) Let me "modernize" this: What about "low interest, teaser loans" that are the focus of the current foreclosure market? There is possible guilt if the lender failed to disclose the long-term consequences of committing to these types of loans.
 - c) The final thing God says in this list is "You have forgotten me". The idea is the evidence of all these sins is proof that one no longer cares about pleasing God.
 - d) One thing to catch from the last five or six verses is the "variance" of the sins. In other words, it is not just one category like false gods or sexual sins or harm against another. The sins committed fall into most, if not all the categories listed as sins.
 - i) An underlying lesson is when one stops caring about God, it usually makes a person go downhill in "every" category! It is almost as if people go out of their way to sin in every possible way one can imagine.
 - ii) That also reminds me of how to witness to such people. If one simply focuses on cleaning up one sin or another, it misses the big picture. It is best to teach others to have a healthy fear and respect of God and then let God work on the aspects of their lives as opposed to us trying to clean the symptoms and not the root cause.
26. Verse 13: "I will surely strike my hands together at the unjust gain you have made and at the blood you have shed in your midst. ¹⁴ Will your courage endure or your hands be strong in the day I deal with you? I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.
- a) The nation of Israel is collectively guilty of turning from God. Ezekiel gave examples of sins committed and the idea is the Jewish people have gotten so bad it is time for the "ultimate" punishment of banishment.
 - b) Now God is simply saying "I will deal with you for the sins you have committed". The idea is the punishment is a "done deal" and is well deserved.
 - c) It is almost as if God is taunting them by asking, "Will you be strong enough to resist the punishment I'm about to inflict". The idea is to teach how thorough is this punishment.
27. Verse 15: I will disperse you among the nations and scatter you through the countries; and I will put an end to your uncleanness. ¹⁶ When you have been defiled in the eyes of the nations, you will know that I am the LORD.' "
- a) God has stated in Leviticus 26 that the ultimate punishment for disobedience is banishment from the Promised Land. That was part of the chapter where God said four times He would make their punishment "seven times worse" if the Israelites continued to disobey Him. The final set of punishments is banishment from the land.

- b) Notice the final punishment is not "a complete end of the nation". The idea of banishment is to put the Israelites out in the world to remind them of the consequences of their sins.
 - i) Let me put it this way: The Babylonians have lots of gods and lots of idolatry. For the Israelites to live among the Babylonians was a way for them to realize how bad it is to turn from the true God.
 - c) Remember my theme for this lesson is "final punishment". What I'm noticing is that the concept of "final punishment" is not so much about hell as it is the idea of banishment from God's presence. Don't get me wrong. If one rejects God all their lives, they are sent to hell, which is eternity without God's grace.
 - i) To explain what I'm getting at, let me review what is the concept behind the term "Promised Land". Yes, it does refer to the literal land of Israel. The idea of the Promised Land also refers to a state of mind where one is fully trusting in God for one's life. If one turns from God, the "final state of punishment" is to be "banished" from God's presence.
 - ii) The Israelites were being punished by being sent to Babylon. It is a land full of idolatry. It is God saying in effect, "You want idols, I'll give you idols".
 - iii) The interesting thing is after this 70-year period, the Israelites still had lots of problems and issues, but they were never again collectively guilty of idolatry.
 - d) One more thing about these verses and I can move on. Prophecy often has "double-fulfillment". There is often a short-term fulfillment to show that the speaker really is a prophet of God and a long-term fulfillment as well. Many suspect these verses have that type of double fulfillment. Verse 15 says God will "scatter you through the countries". The word countries is plural. For the Babylonian captivity, those Jews that survived were sent to Babylon. The "double fulfillment" refers to the second time the Israelites were kicked out of the land in 70 AD and then scattered around the world.
28. Verse 17: Then the word of the LORD came to me:
- a) Verse 17 appears to be the start of a separate vision and a separate speech by Ezekiel.
29. Verse 18: "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are the copper, tin, iron and lead left inside a furnace. They are but the dross of silver. ¹⁹ Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem. ²⁰ As men gather silver, copper, iron, lead and tin into a furnace to melt it with a fiery blast, so will I gather you in my anger and my wrath and put you inside the city and melt you. ²¹ I will gather you and I will blow on you with my fiery wrath, and you will be melted inside her. ²² As silver is melted in a furnace, so you will be melted inside her, and you will know that I the LORD have poured out my wrath upon you.' "
- a) In these five verses, the Israelites are being compared to "dross". If one has ever worked with silver, in order to purify silver, one heats it very high and then separates the dross which is a worthless byproduct attached to silver.
 - b) The idea of these verses is that all of Israel has become like "dross" to God. The idea is God is going to heat things up (i.e., the Babylonian army is about to attack) and the Israelites will lose as the entire nation has become like "dross".
 - i) This means that Israel, collectively as a witness for God has become "worthless".
 - c) This is all another colorful way of saying God will allow Jerusalem and all the Jewish people still living in the land to be destroyed, conquered and taken to Babylon. It is a cute analogy saying in effect there is no "good" left in the Jewish people and God needs to treat the entire nation like "dross". I could go into more details, but that is essentially "it".
30. Verse 23: Again the word of the LORD came to me:
- a) From Verses 23 to 29 we have another vision. The idea of this chapter is that it has a number of visions, but the end result is the same: The destruction of the Jewish nation and its capital, Jerusalem.

31. Verse 24: "Son of man, say to the land, 'You are a land that has had no rain or showers in the day of wrath.'
- a) One has to remember that the land of Israel is desert climate and needs rain to survive. There is a possibility it refers to literal rain during the time of the siege, but more likely, it is a picture of the "desolation" of Jerusalem at this time. The point is the land will be so empty, it will be like a land that doesn't get any rain.
32. Verse 25: There is a conspiracy of her princes within her like a roaring lion tearing its prey; they devour people, take treasures and precious things and make many widows within her. ²⁶ Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. ²⁷ Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain. ²⁸ Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says'--when the LORD has not spoken. ²⁹ The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.
- a) From Verses 25 to 29, we get more condemnation of the leaders of Israel.
 - i) Verse 25 focuses on the "princes", which are the civil leaders.
 - ii) Verse 26 focuses on the priests.
 - iii) Verse 27 focuses on the "officials", who would be the leaders under the "princes", which would include judges and local leaders.
 - iv) Verse 28 focuses on false prophets.
 - v) Verse 29 focuses on the "regular" people.
 - b) The underlying point of each verse is that each group carries its own guilt of violating God's laws and there is no one innocent left who does not deserve God's judgment.
 - c) I could get into specifics of each group, but the text does a pretty good job all by itself and it covers categories and issues we have already discussed.
 - d) The main point is that there are no "innocent" people left in the land if the planned punishment of banishment is well deserved at this point.
33. Verse 30: "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.
- a) I have to admit, I rushed through the last set of verses, as I wanted "space" for Verse 30.
 - b) I have attended a Christian seminar where Verse 30 is the key verse of that seminar.
 - c) First, let's explain the verse in context of the surrounding verses. It is saying God looked for a man among the Israelites who would be a good leader (in whatever capacity). If that leader lead the Israelites in right direction, this judgment would not be necessary.
 - d) This verse makes one think: What about Ezekiel or Jeremiah? They were God's witnesses at this time. Why didn't they "count" as man who would stand for God?
 - i) Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were called to preach against the current practices of the Israelites and were calling the people to repentance. These two don't count in the sense that no one followed their lead and the people continued to live their lives by ignoring God.
 - e) What God was looking for was a "good man (or woman)" to step up among the people and lead the Israelites back along the right path. God found none, and thus this punishment is necessary.
 - f) This leads me to back to "Christian seminars" and this verse. The idea is to convey God is always looking for leaders to step up and lead people to follow Him. It can apply to pastors, but it can easily apply to lay people as well. The essential idea is to lead a life pleasing to God and have others follow because they see that living for God is the highest calling in life and greater than anything we can live for in this lifetime!
 - g) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but I still have one more verse to cover! ☺

34. Verse 31: So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD."
- a) Verse 31 is God saying in effect, "no one has stepped up to the line for me" and it is time to bring down my wrath upon the people and this land. OK, enough said on that.
35. I could spend another page summarizing these two chapters, but if one read the last few pages, I believe one gets the general idea. Remember that Ezekiel has now gone for about 22 chapters describing the necessity of the destruction of the Jewish homeland. If you think about it, with chapters 23 and 24 finishing this topic, half of Ezekiel (48 chapters total) is spent on why the destruction of Israel is both deserved and necessary.
- a) There are lessons for us on the dangers of turning from God in our life and that it is the focus of this lesson. God's judgment does come and all of us will be judged based on how we live our lives. His judgment will be final and complete in that aspect. Yes, there will come a day when God will judge the earth, but for us the believers, that judgment should always be on our mind in that God wants us to glorify Him in all that we do in our lives.
- b) On that pleasant note, I'll wrap up this lesson.
36. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for these lessons on judgment. While these lessons are tough reminders for us, they are necessary to keep us on our toes and keep our focus on you. Help us to live a life that is pleasing of You in all that we do. Help us to be good witnesses for You in all aspects of our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.