

Ezekiel Chapters 23 and 24 – John Karmelich

1. We are now on the 10th and final lesson on "warnings to Israel" about the coming destruction.
 - a) There are 48 chapters in Ezekiel. The first 24 of them cover this topic.
 - b) If you asked me to only teach either the first half or second half of Ezekiel, I would much rather cover the second half. The 2nd half get into sections about restoration of the nation of Israel, its long term survival and eight chapters on what life will be like during the 1,000 years when the Messiah (Jesus) reigns on earth. Before we can discuss God's promises to Israel, first we have to finish the first half of the book on "accountability".
 - c) The fact there is a second half of Ezekiel also shows that God is not interesting in leaving the nation of Israel in this "dead state". There is a future for this nation.
2. Despite my bias opinion, ☺ God decides that "half" of Ezekiel's ministry is to be spent describing the destruction that is to come on the nation of Israel.
 - a) In fact, the next few chapters (after this lesson) focus on the surrounding nations. It is as if the Israelites then wonder, "Yes, Lord, we're bad, but what about those guys!" Before we get to all of that, we still have two more chapters on the topic of the destruction of Israel.
 - b) So, why does God, through Ezekiel, focus so much on this topic?
 - i) Part of it is to remember the principal that "Judgment begins in the House of the Lord". In other words, God primarily focuses on those who are "called to be His". In modern times that is the idea that God focuses on those who have committed their lives to Him and He disciplines those who are His people!
 - ii) God cares about us being a good witness for Him. When we turn from Him, there is a price to be paid, which is the key point of the first half of Ezekiel.
 - iii) Ezekiel so far, is a big lesson to teach us what God expects of those who follow Him. A key word is "obedience". As I've stated many times in these lessons, a Christian cannot lose their salvation by "sinning too much" as long as they are still trusting in Jesus as both Lord and Savior. However, there is still a price to be paid for sin in this lifetime. God forgives us of our sins when we ask Him, but often, there is still a price to be paid for that sin here in our lifetime.
 - iv) If we have faith that God is god, our actions should follow that faith.
3. With all of that out of my system, ☺ we can now talk about Chapters 23 and 24.
 - a) Chapter 23 is a poetic dirge about the destruction of the land. Back in Chapter 20, we had a similar dirge describing the history of the nation of Israel and how its sinful practices were around since the nation first existed in Egypt.
 - b) The dirge in Chapter 23 focuses on Israel since it first split into two separate nations several hundred years prior to Ezekiel's writing.
 - c) The main point of this dirge is about the accountability of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This kingdom was still standing and is the main focus of the first half of Ezekiel. The Northern Kingdom of "Israel" fell one hundred years earlier. Despite the mistakes made by the northern kingdom, the Southern Kingdom should have known better and learned from the mistakes of the Northern kingdom
 - i) The related point of the dirge is that the Southern Kingdom is about to end because they repeated the mistakes of the Northern Kingdom.
 - d) Chapter 24 marks the date when the siege on Jerusalem finally happens. Chapter 24 focuses on the outcome of the siege and the fall of Jerusalem, as the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It describes the fate of those living in Judah. I recently saw a show that recounted this event. Over one hundred thousand Jews were killed by the siege!
 - e) With all that said, my simple title for this lesson is, "accountability". In other words, both chapters focus on the accountability issues of the Jews living at that time.

4. If you only see this lesson as a history lesson about Israel, you are missing the point.
 - a) In fact, one of the reasons for the fall of Jerusalem is they failed to learn from the history of the "northern kingdom" and made the same mistakes.
 - b) God wants us to learn from this history and not repeat the same mistakes. God wants us to read our bibles and know we are accountable. My point is not about the United States or any particular nation, but about individual Christians failing to realize that just because we saved, does not mean that our mistakes have prices to be paid now in this lifetime.
 - c) In other words, we Christians can and do suffer due the sins we cause even though we are forgiven, if we ask for that forgiveness. Forgiveness does not automatically mean there is no price to be paid for that sin. God may eternally forgive us of those sins, but God still wants to "clean us of that sin" if for no other reason then that we don't repeat the same mistakes and be a better witness for Him.
 - i) Sins where we hurt other people must still be dealt with even if we are forgiven. Crimes against society must still be paid even if we are forgiven by God.
 - d) In summary, don't just read this lesson and think, "Oh those poor people who lived about 2,500 years ago". What God wants us to see are the consequences of turning from Him and think about that in comparison to how we are living at any given moment.
 - e) On that happy thought, let's start the text. ☺
5. Chapter 23, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, there were two women, daughters of the same mother. ³ They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed. ⁴ The older was named Oholah, and her sister was Oholibah. They were mine and gave birth to sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.
 - a) Chapter 23 lays out a parable of two women, named "Oholah and Oholibah".
 - i) This parable leaves no doubt about who this parable is about. Verse 5 says Oholah represents Samaria and Oholibah represents Jerusalem.
 - ii) The way I keep the names straight is the longer name of the two means Jerusalem. If that is of any help. ☺
 - iii) The City of Samaria was the capital of the Jewish Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 - iv) The City of Jerusalem was the capital of the Jewish Southern Kingdom of Judah.
 - a) In this parable, God associated each nation with its capital city.
 - v) Remember that the Northern Kingdom ended about 100 years prior to the time of Ezekiel. That is why Ezekiel does not give a lot of verses about the Northern kingdom except as an example the Southern Kingdom should have learned from!
 - b) The verses say the two women were "daughters of the same woman". The idea is that both were part of a single country called Israel from the days of Moses until Solomon.
 - c) The verse said both women engaged in prostitution from their youth. We will discover in this chapter that prostitution becomes a "code word" for their idolatry.
6. Verse 5: "Oholah engaged in prostitution while she was still mine; and she lusted after her lovers, the Assyrians--warriors ⁶ clothed in blue, governors and commanders, all of them handsome young men, and mounted horsemen. ⁷ She gave herself as a prostitute to all the elite of the Assyrians and defiled herself with all the idols of everyone she lusted after. ⁸ She did not give up the prostitution she began in Egypt, when during her youth men slept with her, caressed her virgin bosom and poured out their lust upon her.
 - a) Verses 5 through 10 deal with Oholah, which represents the "long dead" northern kingdom of "Israel". Verse 11 to the end of the chapter deal with the southern kingdom of Judah or "Oholibah". Remember that the only reason God discusses the northern kingdom is as an example the Southern Kingdom should have, but failed to learn from.
 - b) The first thing to note is that the text is not being "literal" when it talks about prostitution. Remember that Oholah is a nickname for Israel. It is not a literal woman being described.

- c) In these verses, Oholah is described as being engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians. What does that mean? One has to remember that in the bible, adultery is often used as a synonym for idolatry. That is because adultery is about cheating on one's promise to be loyal to one's spouse. Idolatry is cheating on one's promise to be loyal to God. Therefore, the bible often uses adultery or prostitution as a synonym for idolatry.
 - d) The text says Oholah is guilty of prostitution with the Assyrians as she was with Egypt.
 - i) There is a reference in Chapter 20, Verse 8 to this idolatry. When God recounted the history of Israel, He said (through Ezekiel) that Israel as a (whole) nation was guilty of idolatry as far back as their slavery years in Egypt.
 - ii) With that said, the fall of the northern kingdom of "Israel" was to the Assyrians. Prior to the fall, the last king of the northern kingdom made a loyalty oath to the Assyrians. Late, that Israeli king tried to break that commitment by seeking help from Egypt. When the Assyrians no longer received "tribute" payment from the Israelites, then the northern kingdom was attacked and destroyed.
 - iii) This is all covered in 2nd Kings Chapter 17. Remember this is "ancient history" as far as the southern kingdom of Judah was concerned. This event was about one hundred years prior to Ezekiel's writing.
 - e) The other point is that the northern kingdom of Israel, called "Oholah" in this story also started going after the gods of the Assyrians. It wasn't that they were just paying the Assyrians not to attack them, but those Israelites started worshiping the Assyrian gods.
 - f) This is why God brought an end to the northern kingdom of Israel. Like the southern kingdom of Judah, they were guilty of idolatry, again, roughly 100 years prior.
7. Verse 9: "Therefore I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. ¹⁰ They stripped her naked, took away her sons and daughters and killed her with the sword. She became a byword among women, and punishment was inflicted on her.
- a) One of the things I debated in writing this lesson is how much to get into "actual history". One can study Ezekiel, especially a chapter like this and spend a lot of time comparing actual history to Ezekiel's predictions. How I handled it was to, "say enough to explain what the verse means, and then move on". The main purpose of these bible studies is not to give history lessons, but to explain how the text applies to our lives.
 - i) If you are interested in the historical aspects that tie to Ezekiel, the final lesson of my study in this book will give a biography with some good sources.
 - b) Speaking of historical notes: ☺ This verse recounts how the Assyrians attacked and conquered the northern kingdom. The way the Assyrians would prevent future rebellion was to split up people they conquer. In other words, most of the Jewish residents of the northern kingdom were now scattered through the Assyrian empire. Some remained. Eventually, the Babylonians also conquered the Assyrians and the Jews living in the Assyrian Empire also became part of the Babylonian empire.
 - c) When you read the New Testament, the Jews living in Jerusalem in the first century had a built-in hatred of anybody that was "Samaritan". That is because the Jewish people of the northern kingdom became a mixed nation of Jews and other groups that were relocated in that area. The Samaritans (after the Assyrian captivity) were looked down upon by the Jews living in Jerusalem as "second class" Jews to put it lightly.
 - d) OK John, all of this is interesting history. What is the application?
 - i) First of all, it is about loyalty to God. To engage in idolatry is as bad in God's eye as engaging in prostitution or any other form of adultery. Committing our lives to serving God is "just that", a full time commitment.
 - ii) So will God punish our church, our town or our country if we collectively turn from Him? First of all, I wouldn't want to test God that way and find out. ☺ The answer is "He can", but it is His decision to make, and not mine. Understand that turning from God has consequences in this lifetime as God demands loyalty.

- iii) There is also a "danger" in that the price of knowing one's bible is we are now more accountable to God as we should know better. The more you know about God, the more accountable God holds you. The early verses about the northern kingdom were to teach the southern kingdom of Judah that they should have learned from the mistakes of the northern kingdom. In a similar manner, God holds us accountable from what we know about Him.
 - a) CS Lewis is famous (among many other things) for referring to the Holy Spirit as the "hound from heaven". The point is one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to "hound us" to keep us loyal and close to God!
- 8. Verse 11: "Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet in her lust and prostitution she was more depraved than her sister.¹² She too lusted after the Assyrians--governors and commanders, warriors in full dress, mounted horsemen, all handsome young men.¹³ I saw that she too defiled herself; both of them went the same way.
 - a) In Verse 11, we start talking about the southern kingdom of Judah. The illustration calls her a prostitute named "Oholibah". The point here is that at the same time the northern kingdom of "Israel" ended, the southern kingdom was also afraid of being destroyed by the Assyrians and they also tried to make peace treaties and pay tribute to them.
 - b) The point is the southern kingdom is guilty of the same sins as the northern kingdom.
- 9. Verse 14: "But she carried her prostitution still further. She saw men portrayed on a wall, figures of Chaldeans portrayed in red,¹⁵ with belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads; all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers, natives of Chaldea.¹⁶ As soon as she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.¹⁷ Then the Babylonians came to her, to the bed of love, and in their lust they defiled her. After she had been defiled by them, she turned away from them in disgust.¹⁸ When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister.¹⁹ Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt.²⁰ There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.²¹ So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.
 - a) Remember that we are reading about the history of the southern kingdom with an emphasis on how they have been idolatrous going back to the days of Egyptian slavery.
 - b) The southern kingdom of Judah was spared from the Assyrians due to a miraculous intervention by God. (See 2nd Kings 19:35 on that point.) One would think that after that miracle, the southern kingdom would stay loyal to God. They did for only a short time, and later started making alliances with the Babylonians.
 - c) The text has references to Chaldea. This is part of the Babylonian empire.
 - d) Long before the Babylonians destroyed the southern kingdom, the Jewish people sought alliances with the Babylonians. There is a reference to the king of the Southern Kingdom giving an oath of loyalty to the Babylonians. (See 2nd Chronicles 36:13).
 - e) What is implied in the text is that the Israelites did more than make a political alliance with the Babylonians. They went after the gods of the Babylonians.
 - f) Verse 20 has a reference to the "genitals of donkeys and the emission of horses". This is not saying the Israelites had sex with animals. It is a colorful way of saying those of the southern kingdom of Judah started worshiping the gods of the Babylonians with "such lust" that they worshipped the Babylonian gods far more than they cared about "God".
 - g) One has to remember that when a person engages in sex with a prostitute, the "customer" rarely stays loyal. The customer understands the prostitute is just that. I state that as there are hints in the text that the Babylonians soon didn't care for the Israelites. It is as if they were thinking, "Well, if you are not loyal to your own God, why should we take you seriously". The point is once one turns from God, it usually goes "downhill" from there.

10. Verse 22: Therefore, Oholibah, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will stir up your lovers against you, those you turned away from in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side-- ²³ the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, the men of Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, handsome young men, all of them governors and commanders, chariot officers and men of high rank, all mounted on horses. ²⁴ They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons and with a throng of people; they will take up positions against you on every side with large and small shields and with helmets. I will turn you over to them for punishment, and they will punish you according to their standards.
- a) The point here is that the Southern Kingdom of Judah started relying on the Babylonians more than God. It was more than just one king making a deal with another king. It is about the people of Judah starting to worship the gods of the Babylonians.
 - b) God is saying in effect, "I am so disgusted by you, I am going to have the Babylonians and their allies attack you". The other nations listed in this paragraph are their allies.
 - c) In a sense, we are now caught up with "history up to the moment". Remember that Chapter 24 begins the actual moment the siege on Jerusalem begins. We are now in Chapter 23 which was a relatively short time span prior to that moment. In these verses, God is describing the weapons of war that are being brought up to attack Jerusalem. Just like God has stated in earlier chapters, the idea here is about the defeat of Jerusalem and the surrounding kingdom of Judah by the Babylonian army.
 - d) The last part of Verse 24 says the Babylonians will punish the Jewish people according to "their standards". We'll read in a moment how brutal that is. The point is God will not allow the Babylonians to "lighten up" just because they are attacking His people.
11. Verse 25: I will direct my jealous anger against you, and they will deal with you in fury. They will cut off your noses and your ears, and those of you who are left will fall by the sword. They will take away your sons and daughters, and those of you who are left will be consumed by fire. ²⁶ They will also strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry.
- a) In these verses, we get into some of the actual results of when the Babylonians attacked the kingdom of Judah. The graphic details of what happened come across, even in the English translation. The point is that this is not a pleasant event. It is not like the Jewish people were quickly killed or captured. There was a lot of suffering involved.
 - b) Let me comment on the reference to "cut off your noses and ears". There was a common practice in the ancient Middle East to cut up the faces of prostitutes. That was the punishment for that crime. The idea of cutting up the face is "no one would ever want to be with them again". The Babylonians did this to many of the Jewish women who they suspected were involved in the worship practices of the pagan gods.
 - c) Part of the punishment was "taking away your sons and daughters". In other words, parents would be killed and the children would be taken away as slaves to Babylon.
 - d) The last punishment mentioned is the loss of clothes and jewelry.
 - e) If all of this sounds scary and disgusting, that's the idea. Warfare is not civil. It is brutal and deadly. This is why the Jews rightly feared being conquered by anyone. When God threatened to bring this nation to an end, it was in a painful way so the survivors remember it!
12. Verse 27: So I will put a stop to the lewdness and prostitution you began in Egypt. You will not look on these things with longing or remember Egypt anymore.
- a) As bad as all of this was, one good thing happened to the Israelites after the 70-year captivity in Babylon: They no longer followed idols. The reason God picked this specific punishment for the Israelites is that it cured them of their desire to worship idols.
 - b) When the Israelites returned the land 70 years later, they still had lots of problems, but they were never again guilty of corporate idolatry against the true God. That is God's point here in Verse 27.

13. Verse 28: "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to hand you over to those you hate, to those you turned away from in disgust. ²⁹ They will deal with you in hatred and take away everything you have worked for. They will leave you naked and bare, and the shame of your prostitution will be exposed. Your lewdness and promiscuity ³⁰ have brought this upon you, because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols.
- a) God, through Ezekiel is summing up what is going to happen to Jerusalem and Judah in these verses. The Babylonians will kill the Jewish people or leave them naked.
 - b) If some of the text sounds repetitive, remember that this is written in a poetic style and make a strong point about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judah.
 - c) The "real crime" is the nation of Judah's failure to be loyal to the true God. The nation of Judah turned to Babylon for protection, as opposed to asking God for protection. Further, the Jewish people started worshipping the Babylonian gods. Now "the God" is getting revenge in the sense that He is saying, "You want to go after the Babylonians, let me show you what that disloyalty is going to cost you!"
 - d) Let me make a related point: Does this mean a nation today that collectively trusts in God cannot make a treaty with other nations? The nation of Israel was unique in God said that they were to trust in Him alone for their protection. That does not mean Israel cannot have an army. God has worked through their own armies for their protection. It means they should not trust in other nations for help and ignore God.
 - i) Does this apply to other nations today? Not really. Christians are a "united" nation spiritually, but we are not called to be united in a single land. If anything Christians are called to spread out over the world to "spread the gospel". There is no single country that "collectively" all worship God. The land of Israel was unique in that accountability aspect.
14. Verse 31: You have gone the way of your sister; so I will put her cup into your hand. ³² "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You will drink your sister's cup, a cup large and deep; it will bring scorn and derision, for it holds so much. ³³ You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. ³⁴ You will drink it and drain it dry; you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts. I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.
- a) In these verses, God compares the punishment to a "cup" to be drunk. The idea is God's fury is being compared to a liquid in a cup and the whole cup is being poured out.
 - b) Verse 33 says they will be filled with "drunkenness and sorrow". I don't believe the drunkenness is literal. The idea is this punishment is going to come upon them and they will realize that in a sense it is their own fault for turning away from God.
 - i) There are other places in the bible where God compares His wrath to a liquid in a cup that is poured out. See Revelation 14:10 and 16:19 as a cross-reference.
 - c) These verses are saying that the southern nation of Judah is as bad, if not worse than the northern kingdom of Israel that died roughly a hundred years prior.
 - d) OK John, I get the idea that Jerusalem was doomed. Why should I care? The one lesson to remember is that God cares for us too much to leave us alone! If we commit our lives to follow Him and turn away, the "Spirit of the Hound" (again, CS Lewis's term for the Holy Spirit) will stay on our case and work toward getting us back on the right path.
 - i) How does God get us to turn back to Him? Usually by making our situation so undesirable without Him that eventually we "can't stand it any longer" and want to turn our lives around to please Him. That's what He is doing with the Israelites and that is what He does with our lives as well.
15. Verse 35: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you have forgotten me and thrust me behind your back, you must bear the consequences of your lewdness and prostitution."
- a) This verse ends this section with the reminder that Jewish people living in Jerusalem and Judah now have to bear the price for the sins they have committed.

16. Verse 36: The LORD said to me: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then confront them with their detestable practices,³⁷ for they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them.³⁸ They have also done this to me: At that same time they defiled my sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths.³⁹ On the very day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered my sanctuary and desecrated it. That is what they did in my house.
- a) From Verse 36 to the end of the chapter, we still are telling this parable of Oholah and Oholibah, but the emphasis shifts from their fate to what was their particular sins. Most English bibles will switch the text style here from "poetic format" to straight text.
 - b) Verse 37 has another reminder that the Jewish people went after other gods. It was more than just bowing down to these gods. They would sacrifice their children to them!
 - c) The idea of this false worship is that in order to show their loyalty to these false gods, they would sacrifice their children to show how much they trust these gods to provide for them in the future. The sacrifices were also a form of abortion in that the sexual acts were results of the rituals to these false gods.
 - d) Verse 38 and 39 teach that the Israelites had "mixed loyalties". They would worship the false gods and then they would go to "The Temple" to worship the true God. That is what the text meant by defiling the sanctuary and desecrating my Sabbaths in Verse 38.
 - i) I heard an interesting story from a policeman who went on to become a pastor. He was in attendance at a church and saw a man raising his arms to God in the front row. The policeman told his wife that he arrested that same guy for beating his wife the night before. (Source Bob Davis). It is possible that sinner asked for forgiveness. The point is just because someone is "good in church" does not mean their lifestyle is acceptable to God.
 - ii) God does not tolerate mixed loyalty. That's the underlying message here. Serving God is not just a matter of showing up to church once a week. The Israelites still did that to "cover all their bases". Trusting God is about accountability and living a life pleasing to God all the time and not when we just come to church. That's the point of these verses and my little story of the policeman and the man he arrested.
17. Verse 40: "They even sent messengers for men who came from far away, and when they arrived you bathed yourself for them, painted your eyes and put on your jewelry.⁴¹ You sat on an elegant couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed the incense and oil that belonged to me.
- a) These verses continue to describe idolatry going on the Southern Kingdom. The idea is that the Jews living there not only had sexual intercourse in order to honor foreign gods, but they would fix themselves up like prostitutes and offer sex to others.
18. Verse 42: "The noise of a carefree crowd was around her; Sabeans were brought from the desert along with men from the rabble, and they put bracelets on the arms of the woman and her sister and beautiful crowns on their heads.⁴³ Then I said about the one worn out by adultery, 'Now let them use her as a prostitute, for that is all she is.'⁴⁴ And they slept with her. As men sleep with a prostitute, so they slept with those lewd women, Oholah and Oholibah.⁴⁵ But righteous men will sentence them to the punishment of women who commit adultery and shed blood, because they are adulterous and blood is on their hands.
- a) Verse 42 mentions Sabeans and "men from the rabble". Both terms refer to various residents of the desert area to the east and south of Jerusalem. The point is these men heard about the "free sex" available in Israel and would come to satisfy themselves.
 - b) Way back in Chapter 16 (Verses 31 to 34) Ezekiel said that the sexual idolatry was so bad, that the Israelites were not accepting payment for their sexual advances, but were paying strangers to have sex with them. That is similar to what is being described here.

- c) By the way, don't think the men of Judah were innocent and the women were guilty. Remember that God is comparing Israel to a prostitute for its idolatry. Yes, God through Ezekiel is describing literal prostitution as a symptom of the bigger problem, but the main point is the whole nation is guilty of turning from God.
 - d) Verse 45 says that "righteous men" will sentence the Israelites to the same punishment given to those who commit adultery and shed (innocent) blood. In other words, some of the face-cutting we read about earlier as well as murder will occur.
19. Verse 46: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Bring a mob against them and give them over to terror and plunder. ⁴⁷ The mob will stone them and cut them down with their swords; they will kill their sons and daughters and burn down their houses. ⁴⁸ "So I will put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not imitate you. ⁴⁹ You will suffer the penalty for your lewdness and bear the consequences of your sins of idolatry. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD."
- a) God is saying in effect that the Israelites living in the land will be maimed and killed for the sin of turning from Him. All of the Israelite effort of trying to appease foreign gods will not help them in the day of destruction.
 - b) The chapter ends with another reminder that the Israelites will know God is behind this.
 - c) OK, I know this is a tough chapter. The language is rough, and it's even rougher if you do a word by word study of the original Hebrew. What is really going on is God is trying to plead with people to individually repent of their sins even though the planned punishment is already set.
 - d) Finally, what is the application? The application is that it is never too late to repent of one's sins as long as one is breathing. It may be too late to stop planned punishments, but it is never too late to ask God for forgiveness.
 - i) The related point is to not let it get this bad before we turn back to God.
 - ii) It comes back to my lesson title of "accountability". We are all accountable to God. Yes, He does forgive us of our sins if we sincerely turn to Him when we mess up and try to turn from that sin. If one is struggling with a long term issue, the answer is to keep praying about it and seek the help of other Christians. Yes God forgives us, but we are still accountable and yes, we can still suffer the consequences of those sins in this lifetime.
 - e) The good news is we only have one more chapter on the topic of the nation of Israel sinning and having to pay the price for their sins. Let's finish the front "half" of Ezekiel:
20. Chapter 24, Verse 1: In the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day, the word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, record this date, this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.
- a) Ezekiel gives another date here. This date is when the siege began against Jerusalem. A siege is where an army surrounds a city and then starves it out. The date generally regarded as January of 587 BC or 588 BC. We are certain of the January part, but scholars argue over the year. The siege lasted 18 months (see 2nd Kings 25:1-2).
21. Verse 3: Tell this rebellious house a parable and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Put on the cooking pot; put it on and pour water into it. ⁴ Put into it the pieces of meat, all the choice pieces--the leg and the shoulder. Fill it with the best of these bones; ⁵ take the pick of the flock. Pile wood beneath it for the bones; bring it to a boil and cook the bones in it.
- a) We have here the beginning of another parable. Ezekiel is told to take a cooking pot. In the pot, Ezekiel is to put in the best pieces of meat, add water and bring it to a boil. The best meat refers to the (combined) nation of Israel and the fact they were called by God. Ezekiel is then told to bring the pot to a boil and cook the meat.
 - b) Since the chapter started with the fact the siege in Jerusalem has just begun, the obvious but sad fact is that the meat represents residents of Jerusalem being "trapped" in the siege. Remember what a siege is: an army surrounding a city and starving it out.

22. Verse 6: "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Woe to the city of bloodshed, to the pot now encrusted, whose deposit will not go away! Empty it piece by piece without casting lots for them.
- a) If you have any doubts the picture of the boiling pot is not about Jerusalem, then Verse 6 makes it real clear. Over the last couple of chapters, there have been a number of references to Jerusalem being called a "city of bloodshed". (Ezekiel 7:23, 9:9, 22:2-3).
 - i) In case you've forgotten, the idea of the "city of bloodshed" is that a lot of innocent people have already been killed in Jerusalem. It is most likely a reference to the idolatrous practice of offering babies to false gods. It could also refer to innocent people being killed in order for others to steal their stuff.
 - b) Meanwhile, back to the boiling pot. The pot is described as being "encrusted". The idea is that the pot represents Jerusalem itself and is "dirty" due to all of its sins.
 - c) In the final line of the verse, Ezekiel is told to take the meat out of the pot "piece by piece" without casting lots for them. The idea is that no one in the city will be spared.
 - d) The text does not say whether or not Ezekiel actually did this as a visual demonstration. It may have just been a story to be preached, or Ezekiel could have acted it out.
23. Verse 7: "For the blood she shed is in her midst: She poured it on the bare rock; she did not pour it on the ground, where the dust would cover it. ⁸ To stir up wrath and take revenge I put her blood on the bare rock, so that it would not be covered.
- a) God is making it real clear here that one of the reasons for this siege is due to all of the innocent bloodshed cast in Jerusalem. This is about "revenge" for the dead.
 - b) OK time, for another "how does this apply to us" break. ☺ Sometimes people do get away with hurting and killing innocent people. Why does God allow that? You can start by saying, "We do we allow it" in the sense that we as a society often let guilty people go free. God can just as easily blame our societies for a lack of justice.
 - i) I've stated every now and then that the only way I can sleep at night is knowing that there is a God and He will judge people fairly one day for their deeds.
 - ii) Back to the issue: Why doesn't God "do something" about all the people who get away with evil today? Why aren't cities wiped out like Jerusalem was back then?
 - a) The first answer is sin exists in the world and God allows free choice. If an angel stepped in every time somebody was about to commit some sort of sin, we would be complaining God never allows free choice.
 - b) The second answer is "Maybe God does judge some places." There have been cities in history that have come to an end. We don't know all the reasons, but we have to keep the thought open as a possibility.
 - iii) The one thing I do know is that God is in the "judging business". All people will be judged one day. Sometimes God allows some places (e.g.: churches, cities, and nations) to be destroyed (or just come to an end as an effective witness for Him).
 - iv) The fact that God is in the "judging business" should keep us on our toes in terms of watching our behavior. In that sense, we are back to the "accountability" issue.
 - v) As I've stated many times, we are saved by faith, but if we have faith, then our "works" should just naturally follow that faith. (See James Chapter 2 on this topic.)
 - c) Meanwhile, back to Ezekiel. God is stating in these two verses that He is "taking revenge" on behalf of the innocent people that have been killed in Jerusalem.
 - i) Notice one again, that a location like Jerusalem should have known better. Jerusalem has a higher standard of judgment (for Jewish residents) than other cities where I'm sure similar sacrifices of human life were given to false gods.
24. Verse 9: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Woe to the city of bloodshed! I, too, will pile the wood high. ¹⁰ So heap on the wood and kindle the fire. Cook the meat well, mixing in the spices; and let the bones be charred.
- a) The illustration says God Himself will "pile the wood high". The meat inside will burn.

- b) The illustration being portrayed is God Himself is heating things up so that this will not be a pleasant meal, but a picture of something "burned to a crisp".
 - c) The reality of the siege is that it lasted about 18 months, after which time the army actually came in, conquered the city and killed (estimated) over 100,000 people.
25. Verse 11: Then set the empty pot on the coals till it becomes hot and its copper glows so its impurities may be melted and its deposit burned away. ¹² It has frustrated all efforts; its heavy deposit has not been removed, not even by fire. ¹³ "Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided.
- a) God is ending this section with a very visual picture of meat being cooked in a hot pot and even after the meat is taken out, the pot is kept at a very hot temperature. The purpose of the "hot pot" is to clean out the impurities, which is another reference to the fact that Jerusalem is "beyond hope" and will now get the full amount of God's wrath.
 - i) Let me give you a visual picture: Ever taken a leftover out of the refrigerator and it turned green? You have to throw it away as it is beyond saving. Now imagine that "green thing" in a cooking pot. Some of "the green" stuck to the pot, no matter how hot one got that pot. That's the visual picture of how bad the sins got.
 - b) Remember that we are coming to the end of a "24 chapter" section describing the sins and the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of an independent Jewish nation. While the nation did exist again in 70 years, it was not under self-rule. Israel existed subject to other countries until it officially ended in 70AD. In 1946 is when Israel became an independent nation for the first time since this siege occurred.
26. Verse 14: "I the LORD have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign LORD."
- a) This is the last line tied to the "cooking pot" illustration. God's point here is that it is time for God to act as the Jewish nation is beyond hope. Remember all the negative pictures about what happens to the people during this siege. God is saying in effect, "I wish I had another choice, but I don't and now it is time for me to act.
27. Verse 15: The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁶ "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. ¹⁷ Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners." ¹⁸ So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.
- a) OK, here are my favorite verses in the lesson. For those of you who have stuck through reading this far, these four verses make a great point about being a witness for God.
 - b) In these verses, God announces to Ezekiel that his wife is going to die that evening. God then told Ezekiel not to do the usual Jewish customs of mourning. Ezekiel could still weep, but he could not do the Jewish equivalent of how we prepare for a funeral today.
 - c) With that said, let's discuss this a little more. Let's start with the fact Ezekiel is married. This is the first reference to his wife in the book. Apparently she traveled with him to Babylon as she died the same day God warned Ezekiel she would die that evening.
 - i) Ezekiel's ministry in Babylon began roughly 5 years earlier. Was she supportive of him? The answer is probably yes, given the fact she was still living with him.
 - ii) Think about all the things God has asked Ezekiel to do over the last 24 chapters. This included laying on his side for over a year. It includes visual demonstrations of making a model of Jerusalem, including surrounding armies. It included lots of preaching about the coming destruction of the Jewish people.
 - iii) Despite all of what God asked of Ezekiel, she stood by her man. In fact the text calls her "the delight of his eyes". That is a clue that Ezekiel loved her.

- d) Now here's my point. Just because one is saved and just because one is called by God, does not mean one is exempt from suffering. Let's face it; it must have been tough enough for Ezekiel to preach against his own people. Now that the siege has finally begun, God "rewards" Ezekiel by taking away the love of his life.
 - i) The purpose of God taking the life of his wife was for a further demonstration to the Jewish people about the tragedy that is about to happen.
 - ii) Still, stop and think about all the times we ask God for "things" in our lives. Here, God takes away the one person Ezekiel really loves after spending the last five years doing exactly what God told him to do. If it were me, I would be angry at God. Give Ezekiel credit. He still did what God told him to do the next day.
 - a) On a related note, without the loving support of my wife, I would have a tough time completing these bible studies.
 - iii) Does this mean God wants us to suffer in this lifetime? No. My point is God is under no obligation to grant us any material benefit including someone to love. We are here to do God's will and not vice versa. If it was God's desire to end the life of Ezekiel's wife in order to make another point, Ezekiel had to accept it.
 - iv) Given that, is it ok to ask for material things? Yes it is, but one has to accept that God can say no to any request we make of Him.
 - v) Here is where one has to keep the eternal perspective in mind. Ezekiel will live forever in heaven. I suspect his wife has the same privilege. Do you think Ezekiel's wife was complaining about heaven once she got there? No. If we are to live for God, one has to accept that our rewards are primarily in heaven and anything we get in this lifetime is a "short-term" bonus.
 - e) I think God taking away Ezekiel's wife had another purpose: It is one thing to preach about the destruction of one's country. It's another thing when it really hits "home". I think God wanted Ezekiel to understand the pain that Israel would go through, so God took away the love of Ezekiel's life, his wife.
28. Verse 19: Then the people asked me, "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us?"
- a) In other words, the Jews living in Babylon were asking Ezekiel, "Hey, why aren't you mourning for your dead wife like it customary to do in our country."
29. Verse 20: So I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me: ²¹ Say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary--the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword. ²² And you will do as I have done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners. ²³ You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. ²⁴ Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.'
- a) Here, Ezekiel uses the occasion of his wife's death to preach.
 - b) Ezekiel started by saying that God was going to destroy "The Temple" in Jerusalem. I believe one of the reasons people didn't believe Ezekiel (or Jeremiah) is that as long as the Temple stood, the Jews believed God would never abandon them.
 - c) Ezekiel went on to say that just as he did not mourn for his wife, neither will the Jews living in Babylon have the ability to mourn for the soon-to-be-dead they still know living in Jerusalem. So why won't the Israelites mourn their normal way? I suspect it is because they will believe Ezekiel is right.
 - d) I believe Ezekiel was a "sight" to the Jews living in Babylon. He was probably a source of local entertainment for the past five years. Jews would go to hear him preach or watch him do his visual demonstration. The problem is they didn't believe him or change their ways and repent. The real "mourning" comes when the reality finally hits the Jews living in Babylon of how Jerusalem is destroyed along with most of the residents.

- i) The Jews living in Babylon did not accept Ezekiel as a sign to them. Once the Jews living in Babylon saw the Jewish survivors of Jerusalem being brought back and hear of the destruction, at that point they will act like Ezekiel is acting right now. Then they will mourn in sorrow for not believing Ezekiel or changing their ways.
- 30. Verse 25: "And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well-- ²⁶ on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news. ²⁷ At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD."
- a) The last thing Ezekiel is told to do is to be silent until a witness comes back from Jerusalem to report that everything has happened just as Ezekiel said it would. Remember that Babylon is several hundred miles away. It would take a messenger many days to travel from Jerusalem to Babylon.
 - b) God ends this 24-chapter section by telling Ezekiel he will be a sign to the Jewish refugees living in Babylon. Once this messenger gives Ezekiel the news, he will speak again.
- 31. Let me say a few words about the first half of Ezekiel versus the second half.
 - a) The first half of Ezekiel is a message of "coming destruction". It is a message explaining how the Jewish people are collectively guilty of turning from God and He has no choice but to banish them from the land.
 - b) The key word of this lesson is "accountability". That is also the over-riding theme of the first half of the book. The Israelites were accountable to their relationship with God. When they turned from that relationship, there is a heavy price to be paid.
 - c) To those of you who have made it through the first half of Ezekiel, let me say the "second half" is a message of hope. Now that Ezekiel is finished describing how the Jewish people are accountable and have to pay for their sins, now it is time for a new set of messages which are that of hope for a new future for the nation.
 - i) Given the fact that Ezekiel preaches the second half of the book without the moral support of his wife is another example of how God can use people!
 - d) The next few chapters focus on the fate of the surrounding nations. The reason judgment on the surrounding nations is a message of hope is God is going to explain to the Israelites the fate of those surrounding nations that never turn to the "true" God despite all of the evidence of God's existence.
 - e) In many ways the judgment in Ezekiel is a model of the great judgment in Revelation:
 - i) In Revelation 20, there are 2 judgments. The first is for believers and we get our eternal rewards based on our lives here on earth. Later is a second judgment for nonbelievers. Let me put the second judgment this way: God says, "Blessed and holy is he who has a part in the first judgment. Over such, death has no power". (A quote from Revelation 20:6, NKJV).
- 32. Finally, a few final words about Christians and accountability.
 - a) A key point of this lesson is that Christians, like the Jews are accountable to God. Yes we are saved by faith alone. If we have faith, our works should just "naturally" follow. Like the Israelites, God loves us too much to leave us alone. God will constantly work in the life of the believer to draw us closer to Him. God forgives our sins, but God may also allow situations in our life due to the consequences of our sins.
 - b) Does the bible teach of forgiveness and grace? Of course. One has to have a good balance between God's grace and God's accountability for our lives!
- 33. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, Help us to remember we are accountable to You. Help us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to You in all that we do. Guide us and help us to remember that You are always there in whatever situation we are in. Help us, through good and bad times to always be a good witness for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
- 34.