

Ezekiel's Prophetic Sermon – part 1

Ezekiel 6

Ezekiel 6: *“Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ²“Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, ³and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys: “Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. ⁴Then your altars shall be desolate, your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. ⁵And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars. ⁶In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, your idols may be broken and made to cease, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. ⁷The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord.*

⁸“Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. ⁹Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations. ¹⁰And they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.’ ¹¹Thus says the Lord God: “Pound your fists and stamp your feet, and say, ‘Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. ¹²He who is far off shall die by the pestilence, he who is near shall fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged shall die by the famine. Thus will I spend My fury upon them. ¹³Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols all around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every thick oak, wherever they offered sweet incense to all their idols. ¹⁴So I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land desolate, yes, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their dwelling places. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.”

Background Notes

In chapters 4 & 5 Ezekiel performed a series of object lessons or dramas to convey the fact of the coming fall of Jerusalem. At this time Ezekiel was already a captive in Babylon, but the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple had not yet taken place. However, it was only a matter of time before Jerusalem would fall completely to the Babylonians. The rest of the people of Jerusalem would be killed or taken into captivity because of the idolatry and immorality of God's people, Israel.

In a series of dramatic signs, Ezekiel portrayed God's coming judgment upon Jerusalem to his fellow captives in Babylon. He built a model city representing Jerusalem. Then he built a miniature siege wall and ramp against the model city, and placed miniature battering rams and battle camps all around the model city. If you liked playing with toy soldiers and toy firearms you would have liked this part of Ezekiel's vision - but you wouldn't have enjoyed the next stage of the drama. Ezekiel had to lie on his side beside his model city for over a year, and he had to go hungry and thirsty. He had to eat the rough bread of poor people that had been baked over a fire using dung as fuel. All this symbolized the coming famine and the harsh conditions that would exist when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem.

Then Ezekiel had to shave his head and beard and divide his hair into different categories to illustrate how God would allow the people to be cut down and destroyed in various ways - because of their sins and disobedience.

Back in Ezekiel 3:26-27 God told Ezekiel that some of his ministry would be unspoken and some of it would be spoken. These dramas were part of Ezekiel's silent ministry. It was like "mime," and it was very effective for communication.

In chapter 6 God opened Ezekiel's mouth, and he pronounced God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem in a prophetic sermon.

Doctrinal Points

1. Because of His holiness, God judged the idolatry of Israel.

In this sermon of judgment, why were the mountains of Israel so important? Verses 2-3: *"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys: 'Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places.'"*

Ezekiel was told to prophesy against the mountains because altars and shrines to many pagan deities had been built atop most of the mountains in Israel.

The downward slide of Israel into idolatry went in stages. Under the Old Testament Law, sacrifices to the Lord were to be offered only at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem - at the Temple. Over the years, although Israel continued to sacrifice to the Lord at the Temple, they also began to sacrifice to the Lord throughout the land on the mountaintops. These were the so-called "high places" that are mentioned so often in the history of Israel.

At first the people sacrificed only to the Lord at the high places, but gradually, as idolatry infiltrated all of Israel, altars and shrines and idolatrous images were made for the foreign gods, and sacrifices to these pagan deities increased. Besides altars for sacrifice, incense altars were built on the high places, to offer up incense to the pagan gods. Furthermore, the

grossly immoral practices of fertility rites were carried out at the shrines on these high places, including idolatrous “religious” prostitution. Even the trees and ravines and valleys of the land were used for idolatrous practices.

This idolatry and immorality would be judged when God brought in the Babylonians to conquer Judah. Verses 3-7: *“Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. Then your altars shall be desolate, your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars. The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”*

And verse 13: *“Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols all around their altars, on every high hill, on all the mountaintops, under every green tree, and under every thick oak, wherever they offered sweet incense to all their idols.”* Notice that the pagan deities were powerless to rescue their followers. The people would be killed among the idols of the very “gods” they worshiped.

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Pound your fists and stamp your feet, and say, ‘Alas, for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence’” (v11). This was the response of the godly remnant. In this context, pounding fists, clapping hands and stamping feet was not a sign of joy - it was a sign of derision, because of the foolishness of the nation’s idolatry. It signified relief that God’s righteous character would be vindicated, and His righteous standards maintained.

“So I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land desolate, yes, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their dwelling places. Then they shall know that I am the Lord” (v14). In the Law God had said that if the people forsook Him, all these judgments would surely follow.

Notice that there is a recurring phrase in this chapter: *“You shall know that I am the Lord.”* This has been well-called the “holy and royal monogram.” It is used more than sixty times in the book of Ezekiel. In this chapter alone it’s used four times (v7,10,13, & 14). In other words, through this judgment for their great sin, the people of Israel would come to know that God is a holy God who must judge sin. Because of His holiness, God had to judge the idolatry of Israel.

2. Because of His grace, God preserved a remnant in Israel.

Verse 8: *“Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries.”* In His great grace, God promised that He would spare a remnant of His people. They would be scattered among the nations, but they would not all be killed. But the greater news here is that during their captivity and dispersion, they would remember the Lord and acknowledge that God had rightly judged them and disciplined them, and they would repent of their sins.

Verses 9-10 applied not only to the godly remnant that returned from the Babylonian captivity – these verses also apply to the godly remnant in Israel of the future, in the last days. Despite persecution and dispersion, there has never been a complete end to the Jewish people, as there has been with many other nations and peoples. God has always preserved a godly remnant of Jewish believers. In Romans 11:5, the apostle Paul said: *“Even so then, at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”*

This godly remnant in Israel will increase in number as we draw closer to the End Times. In fact, *“they shall know that I am the Lord.”* A significant portion of the Jewish people will come to acknowledge the former sins of their nation, as verses 9-10 indicate. Because of His grace, God preserved - and will preserve - a remnant in Israel.

Practical Application

Fathers - let's lead our families by a strong faith!

Verses 8-10 predicted that the godly remnant of Jews would be people who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem, because they would realize that God was speaking. And that's the way it should work. Escape from a desperate situation can be the means of coming to know the Lord.

Has the Lord allowed you to escape some accident or tragedy, or a terrible situation that could literally have taken your life? Have you turned to the Lord as a result? Maybe you've escaped from some bad habit or addiction. Have you acknowledged your sin before God and come to know the Lord as a result? Maybe you're trapped in some situation right now. God is able to deliver you from that situation, in His right time and in His right way, if you turn to Him.

But now comes the big question: will you turn to the Lord when you escape - or will you use your escape to continue in your life of selfish interests and self-indulgence? Let your escape be the means of coming to know the Lord!