

Ezekiel's Furnace of Judgment

Ezekiel 22

Ezekiel 22:1-16 – *“Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²“Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations! ³ Then say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself.” ⁴ You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to the end of your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries. ⁵ Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult.*

⁶“Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you. ⁷ In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow. ⁸ You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. ⁹ In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness. ¹⁰ In you men uncover their fathers’ nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity. ¹¹ One commits abomination with his neighbor’s wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father’s daughter. ¹² In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me,” says the Lord God.

¹³“Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst. ¹⁴ Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it. ¹⁵ I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. ¹⁶ You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I am the Lord.””

Background Notes

In Ezekiel 21 we discussed four messages that could all be entitled “The Sign of the Sword.” Ezekiel probably presented these messages through drama, perhaps even using a polished sword as a prop in his preaching.

In Ezekiel 22, three more messages of judgment were pronounced on Jerusalem and Judah. Notice that each message began with the words, *“And the word of the Lord came to me saying”* (v1, 17, 23). The Lord zeroed in on the sinful behavior that was still continuing in Jerusalem. Even though some of the people had already been taken away into captivity in Babylon, the remaining people still did not heed the warnings! They refused to turn back to the Lord, and would not listen to the word of the Lord. What more could God do but bring further judgment on the wayward and disobedient people? Thus Israel would be scattered among the nations (v15). Looking at the history of Israel, the fulfillment of this prophecy is quite evident.

In the second message in this chapter, that the Lord said that he would treat Judah as refiner melts metal in a crucible.

Ezekiel 22:17-22 - *“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹⁸ ‘Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰ As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. ²¹ Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. ²² As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have poured out My fury on you.’”*

Judah was about to be refined as precious metals are refined, and the crucible would be Jerusalem. The refining heat was turned up as the fire of the Babylonian armies surrounded and besieged the city of God’s Temple that had been profaned by the sins of the people. Just as a refiner heats the crucible until the impurities and dross is burned off and removed, so God was about to deal in judgment with Jerusalem and the nation of Judah. The sinful people would be removed from the land: they would be killed in the siege and invasion or taken into captivity.

Doctrinal Points

1. Jerusalem was judged because all categories of sin were committed.

The first two sermons of judgment cataloged Israel’s sins. “Shedding innocent blood” was mentioned several times, along with “idolatry” (v3-4), “oppression of the needy” (v7), “sacrilege” (v8), “immorality” (including incest) (v9-11), and “extortion” (v12). Judah was guilty of all these categories of sin, and therefore she would be judged.

The bloodshed that is mentioned several times in these sermons almost certainly included child sacrifice, as well as acts of violence. The books of Kings and Chronicles record that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah both sank to the level of sacrificing their children to the pagan gods. For this heinous sins, the nation of Judah experienced God’s judgment.

What about our own nation? Are we not guilty of this same sin? Some of you might say that we have not yet sunk to the level of child sacrifice, but think again. Can the label “pro-choice” hide from God the horrible sin of taking the innocent lives of the unborn? Often these lives are sacrificed to the “god” of “parental convenience.” God would be untrue to His own moral character if He did not judge our nation, just as He judged Jerusalem. Jerusalem was judged because all categories of sin were committed.

2. Jerusalem was judged because all classes of society sinned.

Ezekiel 22:23-31 - *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²⁴“Son of man, say to her: ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’ ²⁵ The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. ²⁶ Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.*

²⁷Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. ²⁸ Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ when the Lord had not spoken. ²⁹ The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.

³⁰ So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. ³¹ Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord God.

This third sermon of judgment revealed that all classes of society in Judah were guilty of the sins of spiritual apostasy and social injustice – the prophets (v25&28), the priests (v26), the princes (v27), and the rest of the people (v29). Therefore God had to judge the entire nation (v31). Notice that the land was not receiving rain (v24). This was one of the consequences given Deuteronomy 28 if the people turned away from the Lord.

A sin that greatly characterizes our own nation was described in verse 26. They made no distinction between the holy and the unholy, or between the clean and the unclean. Many present-day illustrations could be given here. One example would be how joking about God can blur the lines between the holy and unholy, and jokes about sex can lower the boundaries between the morally pure and impure. We all need to be careful here, because a lack of sensitivity about “holy and unholy” is rampant in our culture. It is fed by a desire to lower God’s standards of holiness and morality. It is constantly infiltrated into our culture’s mindset by the entertainment and advertising industries.

The false prophets were not telling the people the truth about the coming judgment. They were whitewashing the facts, and telling lies about a “coming peace” - because they knew that was *what the people wanted to hear*. And the false prophets told these lies in the name of the Lord (v28)!

Does that sound familiar? Think of the lies that are spoken in many churches or on religious TV shows in our own nation - and all are told under the guise of Christianity and in the name of the Lord. God must judge these sins as He judged Jerusalem. Jerusalem was judged because all classes of society sinned.

Practical Application

Be a gap person!

Our practical application comes from verse 30: *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found no one.”*

God searched for someone among the people who would be willing to make a wall and stand in the gap. Here are some excerpts from an essay that I wrote several years ago. It is based on Ezekiel 22:30 and is entitled “Gap Persons.”

“Gaps in the walls of any Christian fellowship are critical potential danger points. The Bible teaches that the enemy of our souls is always prowling around looking for gaps. Satan would love to get a foot into any gap he can find in a Christian fellowship, and then proceed to tear down the whole wall. Gaps never repair themselves automatically, and unrepaired gaps have a tendency to widen.

“God uses people to repair and close gaps. Regardless of whether the gaps in a church or Christian fellowship are associated with programs or positions, they can be repaired and filled by godly individuals. True gap persons are people who are more than just ‘Show up on Sunday Morning Only’ Christians! They are men and women who are willing to rise up and get involved - to take on responsibility in spite of discouragement and opposition and ridicule and hard work. Ezekiel 22:30 indicates that God is searching for this kind of ‘gap person.’ Maybe you are the gap person that God wants to use to fill that special need in your fellowship.

“God is still searching for ‘gap persons.’ Whether it’s a gap in the testimony of your fellowship group or a breach in what remains of the moral defenses of our country, the call goes out for individual believers who will ‘build up the wall’ and ‘stand in the gap.’ Gap persons can greatly affect the outcome of the situation. Let us muster up the moral courage to stand up and be a gap person.” (You can read the whole essay on our website, growingchristians.org.)

You can make a difference - if you’re willing to be a gap person. Be a gap person!