

Ezekiel Chapters 14-16 - John Karmelich

Title "When God is NOT a God of love!"

There's an old joke among religious Jews: They know when they are talking to a religious Christian as it's the view of religious Jews that God is one of justice and Christian's view is God's one of love! Yes, we know both are true! The key point of this section of Ezekiel is, God has limits of what He tolerates with the behavior of believers! If you just read this section and think "too bad for them", you've missed the point! As I have said for years God uses the "carrot and the stick" as motivational tools. That refers to horse or mule training, where they reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. Remember we're not saved so we can go about our lives and do what we want! We're saved to use our lives as a witness for God! When we fail to do that, God can and does "apply the stick"! I bet most of us know of at least one person who ruined their lives by being a bad witness for God. A Jewish religious person will argue the worse sin is doing evil in His name! That's what taking His name in vain is about! In these chapters we get dealings with Israel's leaders and false prophets and a sermon on why judgment against Israel is so hard! There are also a few hints of hope here to remind us that it's never too late to change our ways as God is a forgiving god and His unconditional promises are well, unconditional!

OK with that tough little speech out of my system, there's a lot to cover in these three chapters. I know I'm going at a fast pace through this part of the book, but it's necessary for even us devout Christians to grasp both the "carrot and the stick" aspects of our relationship with God. We last left Ezekiel chewing out false prophets in Jerusalem. Yes, Ezekiel is in the Babylonian Empire (Iraq today), so the point he's making is preaching in His name and for His audience, it's not good for their health! As I state way too often, I realize there are no chapter breaks in the original text, but Chapter 14 does begin a new section. Remember Ezekiel's in that empire, and he's being "inquired" by some of the local Jewish community.

Don't know if the locals are bored or they are wondering if he is really a prophet. Let's just say Ezekiel used this moment to preach the truth about messing with God. Again, God's not in a good mood (from the audience's perspective). At that moment God's had it with Israel as a nation, turning their collective back on Him and worshipping other gods. It leads to a series of speeches that goes through all three of these chapters! Before you say, "too bad for them", you miss the purpose here! A good way to describe it is, "God wants to be #1 on a list of 1, not 10". It just means if we go do any "thing" we are always on the clock for Jesus in terms of how we act as a witness for Him. The Israelites at that time worshipped all sorts of deities! God got to a point where He's saying, "I wish I could go easy on all you, but you've reached a point where I (God) must take measures in order to make you live as I desire you live!" This is a New Testament principle as well. As the apostle John said when he was old, the final phrase in 1st John was "keep yourself from idols"!

Anyway, after God chews out Ezekiel's audience in the first part of the chapter, Ezekiel speaks for God about repenting. Captivity can't be avoided at this point! It's about being a good witness to others as it is what we are ALWAYS called to do! God's still "had it up to here" with His people still in Israel so a separate tirade is launched through the end of the chapter.

Ezekiel gives an interesting illustration: He mentions Noah, Job, and Daniel, and says in effect if those three were there, they'd be spared but everyone else "is pretty much burnt toast"! Neither Noah nor Job were part of Israel but obviously associated as righteous heroes of the faith and it shows that their story was known to those Israelites. Daniel was a top official at the Babylonian headquarters. Listing Daniel shows he was known to his fellow Israelites in captivity! Some argue it might be a different Daniel, but

I'd argue the Israelites would know who "the" Daniel was! Anyway, God is ticked off because they are at a point historically where the Israelites can't live in peace in their land due to ignoring God!

Chapter 15 is short. Don't worry, Chapter 16 is the longest in the book and makes up for it! Chapter 15 is essentially an illustration about a vine that failed to produce grapes. The point is such a vine can't be used for any other purpose other than kindling for a fire! It's too flimsy to be made into something. He is stating, "Israel isn't bearing fruit for God, so the only thing that can be done with them is in effect the same thing one does with a useless vine." He's telling the Israelites in Babylon the Israelites still living in the land would be killed for not listening to God and the Babylonians are God's chosen instrument to carry it out! Again, the lesson for us is if we fail to use our lives as a witness for God, I'll just add we're then also "Playing with fire!" I realize people get away with lots of stuff, but I am also aware that once we know what God expects from us, again we're playing with fire, if we don't live as we're called!

That leads to Chapter 16: It's 63 verses so it'll be a challenge to summarize in half a page. In short it is an illustration of the history of Israel (the land and the people) from before the Israelites came there 'till God keeps His promise of preserving the nation one day in the future! I'd argue God's main point is He is the one responsible for making them into a great nation and "this is how you treat Me?" Again, don't think this is only for Jewish people! In short, "don't mess with God"! It starts off describing the people who lived in Israel before the Israelites got there! God through Ezekiel goes on to describe Israelites as if they were abandoned and would be a trivial note in history, if it wasn't for the miracles done to make them a great nation! Ezekiel compares this situation to an orphan baby who is taken in, fed & clothed.

Ezekiel is using an orphan as an illustration to describe Israel as an entity from before they got there to a point in the future where God will rule the world from there! The shorter version is God changed the nation of Israel from (again an illustration) a helpless orphan to a grown woman covered in jewelry! It is designed to make the point how Israel collectively abandoned God. This illustration starts listing all the nations in the area the Israelites trusted in (including worshipping their gods) and forsake what they were called to worship! The point was made stronger by saying in effect, "normally a prostitute will be paid for their services, but you desired those other entities so much you (Israel) paid them!" It refers to other gods they worshipped, but it also trusting in other governments, as opposed to trusting God as the source of not only their salvation but also providence! I'll add that most of the nations in that area were mentioned. Even the Philistines (a nation that lived in that area for centuries), is listed with a comment of how ashamed they were by the Israelite behavior!

If you are familiar with the Old Testament books on the history of their kings, you'll see an occasional reference to "groves". Think of it as trees carved into phallic shaped symbols and think the worst! It is a reminder that there's "nothing new under the sun", and pornography existed then as well! We get the implication that the Israelites sacrificed their own children to honor those gods. If you know the history of the land of Israel, one reason God called the Israelites to kill the previous occupants, is they engaged in similar horrible things and now the Israelites are acting no better. A classic saying applies, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander!" It's another reminder that if we live as if God does not care about our behavior, there are horrible consequences.

Anyway, this goes on through most of the chapter. It's pretty ugly stuff but hopefully you get the point by now! In fact, God even compares the Israelites to the Samaritans (the Israelite half-bred nation who existed after another nation conquered the northern part of Israel roughly a century earlier). To make it worse, Ezekiel also compares them to Sodom (yes that one!) Both of those places were wiped out as an illustration point of the danger of not being a good witness for God. The fact that Sodom wasn't Jewish

is a point that God holds ALL nations accountable to Him! OK enough of that! Most of us get that we are accountable to God or else!

The chapter ends on a positive note. In effect God says despite all these sins, I promised that Israel will be a great nation that God will rule from Himself. That's what Christians call Jesus Second Coming. It is a reminder that despite all the horrible thing we go through in life, there's still hope for those who do trust in Jesus for our salvation! OK, I know this is tough sledding and hopefully you get the key point!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on that link on the same page! It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks for reading all this!