

Ezekiel Chapters 23-24 - John Karmelich

Title The Bad Funeral!

As I read these chapters a few times, I thought of an old joke about the death of a notorious mobster: It starts with his brother wanting to bribe a priest to say something nice about his brother. The priest gave a quick sermon at the funeral: "Joe was a rotten, horrible person, but compared to his brother he was a saint!" In effect, that joke summarizes these two chapters well! The good news is these chapters bring an end to Ezekiel's long section condemning Israel for turning from God. If the previous 2 chapters had an "It is Too Late" message, these two chapters read like a "I'll insult the deceased with a horrid funeral eulogy"! In fact, the last part of this text describes the death of Ezekiel's wife, (never mentioned he was married 'till now!) In effect it is a time for sorrow for the surviving Israelites! It requires a long funeral dirge for the surviving Israelites (and us) to understand what God won't tolerate by believers!

Chapter 23 is a long illustration condemning the nation of Israel as an entity. It insults their heritage as well as that specific generation. In effect, God was saying, "Every way that the Israelites were tempted they gave into that temptation!" The underlying message is God allows temptation to test to see what's the reaction of His people to such temptations! Their history speaks volumes of their failures! Keep in mind God is speaking to the Israelites in captivity. The message in effect is "You've agreed that you're My people! I as God promise eternal salvation and blessing in this life for being My people. You must agree to be a witness for Me!" In effect the condemnation of this "funeral sermon" is against Israel as a people and it applies to Christians as well. Obviously, it doesn't require being perfect all the time, but it does require us to live our lives with Jesus as the center of it! Ezekiel's basically lecturing the Israelites that survived that destruction to act better! Of course, that applies to us as well! OK then, let's focus on the details!

Ezekiel starts off by giving nicknames to the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel. When Ezekiel wrote this, the Northern Kingdom ended about 100 years earlier. The point is he's teaching the Israelite in captivity with him what God won't tolerate. He calls the dead Northern Kingdom Ohalah. It means "her tent". Then God through Ezekiel refers to the Southern Kingdom that still existed at that moment as Oholibah. It means "God's in that tent!" Don't worry, that is not on any entrance exam to get saved! The point is the Temple was located in the Southern Kingdom of Israel. God didn't want the split in the first place plus every one of the "North Kings" turned from God!

To understand the section, understand the similarity between adultery and worshipping a fake god. For the Israelites to worship another god, that is direct idolatry. Adultery is cheating on one's marriage vow so in that sense they are similar as it is about going back on our commitments. Ezekiel makes the point that the Israelites sought other gods in Egypt before God got them out of there. The Northern Kingdom got conquered by the Assyrians (another place also based out of Iraq) about 100 years earlier. What He is implying is the Israelites tried appeasing the Assyrian fake gods to avoid capture. By Verse 9 there's a punishment that was common for women of that time who committed adultery. Let's just say it is not pretty! Then he talks about the Southern Kingdom who witnessed the fall of the North, and the South's crime was in effect worse. They saw the sins of the north and should have "caught on". Like I said, in the beginning, "The dead brother was horrible but compared to his living brother he was a saint!"

In effect Chapter 23's a condemnation not only of the long dead Northern Israel Kingdom but the one's who came from the South, which includes all the refugees with Ezekiel living in what is Iraq today! In effect this is God declaring once again, "I must destroy the Southern Kingdom (despite the fact that the

Temple stood there) because the Israelites are no better than the way people acted who lived there prior to the Israelites coming there! The message to us Christians is we're also called to be a witness for God in this life. Failure to do so can mean the loss of our lives! It may not affect our salvation, but God's in "the business of having believers be a witness for Him". Failure to do in whatever capacity He's called us to serve Him can mean a death penalty! As I mentioned in the last lesson, a married couple died for lying to the apostles! (Acts 5). Short version: Don't mess with God! So why isn't God that tough on a non-believer? Because unless they repent, this is the only joy they'll have for eternity!

Therefore, think of Chapter 23 as 48 verses condemning "the living brother" (in my opening joke) as it was not his nature to be a living witness for God despite the fact, he (or she) is called to do so!

Now for the good news: Chapter 24's the last chapter on this condemnation section. Thanks for putting up with this long section. The reason it's so long is God wants us to grasp how important it is we'll use our lives for His glory and the price to ignore than can be costly! Chapter 24 has some interesting little twists to it, so let me cover it quickly: It may help to realize God called Ezekiel to be a "drama major"! If you've read earlier chapters, he laid on his side daily for over a year! He also had to eat limited food to demonstrate how the Israelites would be starved out of Jerusalem! Realize God will use a variety of methods to get his point across including drama actors!

Speaking of drama, Ezekiel was told to get a cooking pot! He was told to get wood to make the fire hot and to put all sorts of choice meat in the pot. Then Ezekiel got "at it"! He refers to all the meat there in the pot as those in Jerusalem. Chapter 24 is dated. It's the exact date the siege against Jerusalem began! Remember Ezekiel is hundreds of miles from there! So how do we know Ezekiel did not learn the date and then claimed it to be so? For starters, the Israelites accepted him as a prophet since the time of the return of the Israelites to the land seventy years after captivity! Just saying if he was fake the Israelites never would have accepted his prophecy!

Anyway, most of the chapter is one last set of insults to the Israelites living with him in captivity. Yes, I know he's talking about the Israelites about to die horribly in Jerusalem, but the point is to those he is talking to as well as to us, that God isn't to be messed with!

Then of all things we learn the Ezekiel's wife died. The text never mentioned he was even married. I've got to admit I was thinking about this from her perspective! I can see her thinking, "I put up with all of my husband's strange visions about heaven. I stood by him when he did all those weird demonstrations as well as condemnation of our fellow Israelites, and this is my reward, an early death?" Remember it's not about how long we live, it's about whether or not we used our lives to glorify God. My hunch is she was in her own way a witness for God as He used her death to make a point.

The point is God wanted Ezekiel to relate to the pain that God felt about the death of the Israelites. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, especially those He calls to be a witness for Him! I've seen God put me through a lot of things as a witness for Him, and every time those things hurt! It also was a way for me to be a better witness for God, and that's the case here! God told Ezekiel he's not to mourn in the usual Jewish fashion. The point is God wanted the Israelites to understand by how he is acting, that no one will be spared pain! That death of the nation of Israel wasn't meant to be a permanent ending of that nation! The fact Israel exists today is proof it was not permanent. Remember God's dilemma: He needs to show the world He isn't to be messed with and that means punishing the people called to serve Him when they fail, which is a key point here, despite how painful this was even for God Himself!

I'll end with the simple reminder let's not be like the living brother the priest was condemning. None of us are perfect, but we must remember why we were saved in the first place!

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!