

EZEKIEL

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Ezekiel chapter 34 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Tonight we will begin the fourth and final division of this book. We have seen *the sin of Judah and the judgment of God* in Ezekiel chapters 1 through 24. Then we looked at *the judgment of the nations that surrounded Jerusalem* in Ezekiel chapters 25 through 32. From there we looked at *the last call for repentance to Israel* in Ezekiel chapter 33.

And tonight we will be looking at *the future restoration of Israel* beginning in Ezekiel chapter 34 and on to the end of this book, chapter 48. God is not done with His people, the Jews and we see that here in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. There is coming a future restoration and ultimately, ***ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED*** as they come to the Messiah at the end of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

As we will see in our study tonight, God is going to deal with the false shepherds that had led the people away from God. And you may be wondering what that has to do with the restoration of Israel but it is important!

You see, before reconstruction can begin the false leaders had to be exposed and removed and the true shepherd will be leading His people. There is no peace, no safety, no prosperity apart from the true shepherd as well as godly shepherds that are leading the people down the right path.

So with that as our background, let's begin reading in Ezekiel chapter 34 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

EZEKIEL 34**VERSES 1-6**

1. Here God is indicting the leaders, both political and religious leaders in Israel. And we see three points that the Lord makes against these shepherds who were not shepherding His people. First of all we see their **GREED** in that they took advantage of the people for their own gain! Instead of feeding the flocks, caring for them, they were looking out for themselves. They ate well, they had all the clothes they needed while the people they were to be watching over had very little, spiritually and physically speaking!

We also see their **INDIFFERENCE** towards the people they were to be shepherding. They saw the weak, they saw those who were sick, they saw those whose lives were broken, those who were lost and they did not care. They showed no concern for those who were in need. Instead of reaching out in love they ruled them with **“force and cruelty”** or harshness!

And out of that **GREED** and **INDIFFERENCE** it caused the people to **SCATTER**, there was no one to lead them. The picture is that the result of their actions or inactions is that the people were scattered, they were hungry and they went searching for food. And whenever sheep are isolated they become vulnerable to annihilation! They truly don't have any natural defenses! And tragically, the leaders did not care what happened to them.

2. What a sad picture of leaders, both political and religious, in Israel and it is no different today. We have those who try to make a profit off of God by fleecing the flock. We have those who twist the Scriptures for their own gain. They are not interested in the flock that has been entrusted to them but they are more interested in their own gain and their indifference to the flock causes them to scatter looking for someone to care for them or running all over the place for things that will satisfy instead of the leaders bringing them to Jesus where we can find satisfaction.

And this is true for all of us who are Christians because we are caring for people, looking out for them, this is not just for leaders in the church or political leaders even though they are held to a higher standard. Yates, in his description of this section in Ezekiel said that this is “A heart-rending picture [that] is painted of the unfaithful preachers of Ezekiel’s day. The flock are scattered, untended and hungry while selfish shepherds pamper themselves and loll in idleness and luxury without any thought of their responsibility. They are careful to look out for their own food and clothing, and comforts, but no one else is to be considered for a minute.”

You see, this is in stark contrast to what Jesus desires of us. He said in Mark 10:45, “**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**” May that be our heart! And I think we can also see how we do need each other, that fellowship is so important because the enemy wants to bring us down, he wants to destroy our witness. Don’t let him, draw close to the Lord and He will draw close to you! Help each other out, iron sharpens iron and may we keep each other sharp!

VERSES 7-10

1. God again explains what they were doing to the people and He holds them accountable. They had hearts filled with greed and they were not concerned with the people that God had given to them to watch over, to protect, to feed and so on. There was no compassion for the people they were to watch over. And because of that God removes them from their position because they brought God's people to ruin with their lies; they caused them to go into captivity.

Remember what Paul said as he met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20:27-28, **“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

Paul fed them the Word of God that kept them healthy, protected them from false doctrine and it showed them how much he loved them. He gave to them the whole counsel of God and not just what he wanted nor did he pick and choose what he liked and didn't like!

It is as James says, **“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”** James 3:1. The great Scottish Reformer John Knox was so awed and burdened by the responsibility to declare God's Word faithfully that before his first sermon he wept uncontrollably and had to be escorted from the pulpit until he could compose himself. One pastor reportedly said of preaching what could also be said of teaching, “There is no special honor in preaching. There is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest. . . . To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.” I wonder how many would want to teach if they truly thought of it like that!

2. Now that God has exposed the hearts of the false prophets, the false shepherds, He is going to speak of the True Shepherd!

VERSES 11-12

1. As we have previously seen, the false shepherds were not interested in the sheep that God had given to them, the people He entrusted to them. But here we see the contrast to those false shepherds; we see the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

And as much as God brought judgment upon them, first by the Assyrians for the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then the Babylonians for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God says that He is going out looking for these sheep that have been scattered. And He is not only going to seek them and find them but we are also told that He will deliver them from that “**cloudy and dark day**” that had come upon them!

You see, God wants to restore them, revive them, bring them back into that relationship that He once had with them. God is interested in His sheep and thus, God’s leaders should be interested in them as well! But as we have read, they were not and God removed them!

2. What I also want you to see is how God is working with His people. The phrase, “**I will**” or something similar, indicating that God is doing the work, occurs some eighteen times in verses 11 through 29 of Ezekiel chapter 34! That is our God and what we see spoken of here to the Jews we see spoken of in general, to the people of this world who are lost, who are broken, who have lost all hope. He came to seek and save that which was lost, you and me!

In Luke 15, beginning in verse 3 we are told, **“So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”** Luke 15:3-7.

As I have said, the Lord goes out seeking and saving that which was lost. And when we come to Him, when we receive Him, heaven itself rejoices over this miracle! You can just hear the angels talking, “Joe got saved! Unbelievable! God is so good even Joe got saved!” And there are shouts of joy when a sinner turns to Jesus because that which was lost is now found! And notice, God carries us on His shoulders, the only problem is that many times we jump off, we go our own way, and we get ourselves into trouble. Let Him carry you, let Him guide you, for He has what is best for you, He is our Great Shepherd!

VERSES 13-22

1. First of all, who is God speaking of here in regards to bringing them back to the land? He is speaking of the Jewish people and He will gather them back into the land of Israel and He will watch over them, they will live in safety. And yes, they are back in the land today but not living in safety but that day is coming, we call it the Millennial Kingdom and for those who reject God restoring the Jews, they have to negate a lot of Scripture to do that. God doesn't negate them, He does not forsake them and neither should we!

So I see this as a time of future restoration, as I have said. It is speaking of a time after the Tribulation Period just prior to the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom. It is during this time that the Lord will judge the sheep from the goats. Those that have come to Christ during the Tribulation Period and have survived through the Tribulation Period, the sheep, will enter into the Kingdom Age with Jesus.

Those who have rejected Jesus and make it through the Tribulation Period, the goats, will be cast into Hades until the Great White Throne Judgment and then they will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. And as we are going to see in our study in the book of Ezekiel, many Jews will come to Jesus, they will believe in Him as their Messiah on a national level, and they will enter into the Kingdom Age with Him.

VERSE 23

1. This verse is important because it speaks of Israel being under “**one shepherd**” and not many. And this shepherd will feed them, care for them and we are told that this shepherd is “**David**.” Now here is the question. Is this speaking of David himself being the King in Israel during the Kingdom Age or of Jesus Christ?

I think this is pretty simple but J. Vernon McGee says in his commentary on Ezekiel that, “It is my firm conviction that the earth will be the eternal home of Israel and that David will rule here on this earth throughout eternity. He will be vice–regent of the Lord Jesus.” I do disagree with him and those who feel that it is literally David who will be sitting upon the throne in Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age and I will show you why.

First of all Barnes' Notes states this about the David spoken of here, "David was a fit type of the True King because he was a true and faithful servant of Yahweh. That which David was partially and imperfectly, Christ is in full perfection." Absolutely, this is speaking of the Son of David or Jesus!

Also, David Baron, who is a Hebrew Christian, explains it like this,

Even the Jews explained the name "David" in these passages as applying to the Messiah – the great Son of David in whom all the promises to the Davidic house are centered. Thus Kimchi, in his comment on Ezekiel 34:23, says; "My servant David – that is, the Messiah who shall spring from his seed in the time of salvation": and in the 24th verse of chapter 37 he observes: "The King Messiah – His name shall be called David because He shall be of the seed of David." And so practically all the Jewish commentators.

- David Baron, The Shepherd of Israel, pp. 8-9

I realize that these are the words of men, so what does the Word of God have to say about this? First of all in Matthew 22:41-45 we are told, "**While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?' They said to Him, 'The Son of David.'**" **He said to them, 'How then does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord," saying: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'?" If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?' And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.**"

Jesus asks these Jewish religious leaders, these Pharisees a question about the Messiah, whose Son is He? And they rightly say, “**The Son of David.**” That was a title for the Messiah. You see, they felt the Messiah was going to be just a man, like Moses, not God. But Jesus is going to show them their error. Keep in mind that they are seeing the Messiah as the Son of David and not David himself. But let me show you how much more than just the Son of David Jesus is!

David, in speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 110, called his son Lord. That would never happen in that culture. That is a big no, no! And these religious leaders knew that, you see, in a patriarchal society the father is always treated with respect and honor, no matter how old the son was, the father would never call him Lord or ADONI. On the other hand, the son would call his father Lord, ADONI, master, but it would never be the other way around.

So Jesus asks them, “**How can this be?**” What a great question that is and the answer is very simple. What it means is that the Messiah has to be much more than just the Son of David and Paul picks up on this in Romans 1:3-4 where he writes, “**Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be *the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.***” You see, not only the Son of David but also the Son of God! So David rightly called Him Lord!

And Peter in Acts chapter 2 speaks of this same thought, that the Messiah who sits on the throne of David is not going to be David but Jesus! I think that is pretty clear but let me show you how Jesus is the Shepherd and not David.

In John 10:11, 14 we read, “**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep . . . I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.**” Jesus is the *Good Shepherd!*

In I Peter 5:4 we read, “**and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.**” Jesus is the *Chief Shepherd!*

We are also told in Hebrews 13:20, “**Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.**” Jesus is the *Great Shepherd!*

And in John 10:16 we are told, “**And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.**” Jesus is the *One Shepherd!*

So our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is the *Good Shepherd*, the *Chief Shepherd*, the *Great Shepherd*, and the *One Shepherd* and one day He will rule and reign over this earth! I think that is pretty straight forward!

2. Let’s read on and see what our Shepherd is going to do.

VERSES 24-29

1. Now here it says, “**And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them . . .**” Isn’t that saying that David is going to be the King in the Kingdom Age? I see this as God the Father, Yahweh and David as Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep! I again don’t see David literally ruling and reigning but Jesus ruling and reigning.

2. And as much as God has blessed His people, bringing them into the land of Israel once again, this has to be speaking of a future time when they will be restored and live in safety. Keep in mind that when Ezekiel is writing these words the Southern Kingdom of Judah has been brought into captivity, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed. Jerusalem was a wasteland at this point and yet, God said He was not only going to restore the people but also the land!

3. And listen to how this chapter closes.

VERSES 30-31

1. Remember why they went into captivity, they were in rebellion against God! And in spite of all of this God is saying to them, ***“I love you! I will restore you! I will feed you! I will set up My Shepherd over you!”***

Remember that the phrase **“I will”** or that idea that is mentioned some 18 times in verses 11-29 of Ezekiel chapter 34 and the idea is that God is going to do it; He will accomplish this work in the heart and in the lives of His people! And folks, that day is drawing closer. What God has promised will come to pass!

On March 14, 1948 Israel became a nation. In June of 1968 they recaptured the old city of Jerusalem. And God is going to breathe life back into this once dead nation - they will be reborn! We will see that played out in Ezekiel chapter 37, life to a nation that was once dead, lifeless!

It is just as Paul said in Romans chapter 11 regarding the Jewish people coming to their Messiah, Jesus Christ, as a nation one day. Beginning in verse 25 of Romans chapter 11 we read **“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’”** Romans 11:25-27. We have seen them gathered back in the land of Israel and one day we will see Israel ***REBORN!***

2. As we move into Ezekiel chapter 35 we will see the Lord speak against the nation of Edom. I think that this is speaking of Edom literally but I also believe God is using Edom as an illustration of what will happen to all nations, all people who come against Israel, God’s chosen people! And we know that during the Tribulation Period all the nations of the world will come against Israel, the Jews and we are seeing the rise of Anti-Semitism even today!

EZEKIEL 35

VERSES 1-9

1. The Edomites occupied the area of land to the south of the Dead Sea. They are the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. And it seems that all the deceit, all the conniving that Jacob perpetrated upon Esau resulted in anger and bitterness towards Jacob and ultimately the Jewish people.

And what Esau felt was passed on to his people, the Edomites. They had an “**ancient hatred**” or an “**everlasting hatred**” towards the children of Israel. As that hatred and bitterness continued to grow it was passed on to future generations and in 588 B. C. the Edomites sided with the Babylonians in her assault upon Judah, never letting go of that anger, that bitterness, but just trying to get back at them for what was done to Esau, their father! And now God was holding them accountable for their actions against His people.

We see this spoken of in Obadiah 11-14, “**In the day that you stood on the other side - In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, When foreigners entered his gates And cast lots for Jerusalem - Even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people In the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction In the day of their calamity, Nor laid hands on their substance In the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads To cut off those among them who escaped; Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained In the day of distress.**”

We see that they joined the Babylonians in the plundering of Jerusalem. They watched the enemies besiege Jerusalem and they rejoiced over what they saw. They gloated over their destruction. And as some of the people of Judah tried to escape from the enemy, they cut them off and handed some of them over to the enemy!

2. What can we learn from this? We can let hatred, bitterness grow in our lives to the point where we rejoice in the destruction of our enemies. And as we do it will obviously affect the way we treat others. The solution is to repent and give it to the Lord or it will eat at your life.

Let me show you a beautiful picture of what we are to do. In Exodus chapter 15 as the children of Israel are wandering in the wilderness, we read beginning in verse 22, **“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet . . .”** Exodus 15:22-25.

These waters were bitter and they needed that to be dealt with so they could drink. The only solution to this problem was given by the Lord as He told them to cast a tree in the midst of it and those bitter waters will be made sweet, and they were!

I know, you are thinking, “What in the world does that mean to me today?” Simply, as you are going through bitter times, difficult situations, instead of murmuring, instead of complaining, instead of retaliating, place a tree, or should I say a cross right in the middle of the situation you are in. As you do you will be refreshed.

You see, it is only Jesus who can take a bitter situation and make it better, make it sweet. It is as Paul said in Hebrews 12:14-15, **“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”**

The choice is ours, but there are consequences to our choices, as the Edomites found out and as the people of this world will find out as they come against the Jewish people with this **“ancient hatred”** or this **“everlasting hatred”** that comes from the pit of Hell!

VERSES 10-15

1. What does it mean when we read in verse 10, **“... ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,’ although the LORD was there.”**? Edom was claiming ownership for Judah and Israel, two nations and two countries or the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And even though the LORD was there, they sought it for themselves and the Lord was not going to let them get away with it. This was His land and He gave it to the Jews and they will occupy it again no matter what man may say or do!

Remember what the Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, **“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** The Edomites will never rise again; they will not have a place in the Millennial Kingdom. As they rejoiced in Israel’s judgment so too will the earth rejoice in what happens to them! And what the Lord is saying to Edom He is saying to those who come against His people!

It is as Psalm 122:6 says, “**Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you.’**” If you don’t believe it then just look at the object lesson God has given to us, the Edomites. And like I have said, they represent all nations, all people who come against the Jewish people, God’s people! May we as a nation and a people learn the lesson!

2. As we move into Ezekiel chapter 36 this portion of Ezekiel has been called “*the Gospel according to Ezekiel*” and when we get to verses 25 through 30 of this chapter you will see why.

EZEKIEL 36

VERSES 1-7

1. Keep in mind that the focus here is the restoration of the land of Israel, not the people, at least not yet! The land of Israel had become very fruitful, so much so that the surrounding nations desired it. And now that the children of Israel had been removed from the land, taken into captivity by the Babylonians, the other nations were preparing to move in. The problem is God gave this land to His people, the Jews.

And even though they were judged for 70 years for their idolatry, God was going to bring them back. And this land, if you think about it, belongs to God and He gave it to the Jews. And yet, even today we see Gentile nations fighting over this little piece of land the size of New Jersey. The Gentiles occupy the world except for Israel, and they long for it also! Things haven’t changed much have they? And because of this attitude God is going to come against them and judge them for it.

2. It is interesting to me that as you get to the New Testament, and your read of the judgment of the nations in Matthew chapter 25, as Jesus returns to set-up His Kingdom here on the earth, He said in verses 45 and 46, **“Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

Those that did not care for the Jews, minister to those in need, will be kept out of the Kingdom of God. Now as you read that it almost seems like Jesus is teaching a works salvation. But He isn't. He is teaching of a salvation that works!

You see, what Jesus is saying is that what flows from the heart of someone who is not saved is selfishness, no concern for others. What they believe will be manifested in the way they treat others and they will be judged for it. And the same thought is seen here in Ezekiel chapter 36. Judgment was coming upon those nations that surrounded Jerusalem for the way they treated the Jews as well as those nations of the world who will come against Israel, the Jewish people and try to destroy them, wipe them out! They will not succeed!

VERSES 8-15

1. When God says, **“For indeed I am for you . . .”** that has to give anyone great hope, great comfort as it did for the Jewish people. Keep in mind that when this was written the Jews were in captivity in Babylon and the land, the land of Israel was destroyed. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the city and the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians and there was not much hope except, **“For indeed I am for you . . .”**

In other words, the best years are still ahead, God is in control and He knows what He is doing. What a great lesson for us. We may not always see it, we may not always feel it but we can know it because God has said it! But let's face it; if we are honest with ourselves it is easy to become discouraged, to lose hope. What can you do about it? Like the Jews in captivity did.

We need to cling to the Word of God, trust in His promise. Romans 15:4 says, "**For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**" There are many promises that God has given to us in His Word, promises that He wants us to hold onto. There is comfort, there is hope as we read God's Word and apply it to our lives.

You can read in the Word, "*It came to pass . . .*" not "*It came to stay . . .*" It is as David said in Psalm 23:4, "**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**" You are passing through those dark times and as you do the Lord is with you, guiding you, comforting you and teaching you. Learn those lessons! Remember it is always darkest before the dawn, don't lose hope just look to Jesus!

It is as Paul said, "**. . . If God is for us, who can be against us?**" (Romans 8:31) and this is a rhetorical question, no one can stop the work of God in our lives except us. God is not against us, He is for us, because He loves us unconditionally! He loved those stiff-necked, rebellious Jews, and He loves us stiff-necked, rebellious Gentiles.

2. Let me share this view with you regarding who this is speaking of and this idea seems to be growing in the church today, even though it is not correct. We are told,

From the perspective of the New Testament, these promises all apply to the church as the new Israel. How could such seemingly materialistic images have relevance for God's people who are not a single earth nation farming in a single part of the world? The answer is that they apply literally but not literalistically [adherence to the exact letter or the literal sense, as in translation or interpretation].

The church may take great comfort in the fulfillment of the sort of greatness, confidence, certainty of success, and ultimate victory over all its foes that such a compound oracle (i.e., 35:1-36:15 guarantees. Mere farming success would be a pittance if that were the actual total fulfillment of these chapters. America's farm belt so far out produces anything ever grown in ancient or modern Israel that literalistic fulfillment of these promises would impoverish them. We may instead rejoice that God has had in mind for us things that the eye had not seen nor the ear heard (1 Cor. 2:9) – things that the present description of the abundance of the mountains of Israel is intended only to symbolize.

- Douglas Stuart, *The Preacher's Commentary*, p. 323

All I can say to that is this person who wrote this commentary on Ezekiel needs to read the end of the story, or even just read Ezekiel chapter 37. That vision of the dry bones is not speaking of the birth of the church but the re-birth of the nation of Israel! And this is looking towards the Kingdom Age and Israel will be the focus of the nations of this world, not America or any other nation because that is where the Lord will be. This is not speaking of the church, not at all. It is speaking of the land of Israel, literally and as we will see, the Jewish people!

VERSES 16-22

1. What God is saying to the Jewish people He is saying to us in that we are His representatives! We are not Israel but we represent the Lord before people just as Israel was to do. And thus, by their actions, by their worship of idols, they polluted or defiled the land, they made it unclean!

People are watching what we do and they are coming to conclusions about our God by how we live out our faith! Let me give you this example and there are many out there, showing how what we do can honor God or dishonor Him. This is from Time Magazine and we are told,

“Darva Conger is an intensely private woman. We know this because she told every television reporter who asked after she went on national television to compete for, and win, a husband on *Who Wants To Marry A Multi-Millionaire?* She is also a Christian woman. We know this because she took part in an Easter egg hunt at the Playboy mansion. In fact, Conger’s been hanging out a lot at Hugh Hefner’s house, and is now in talks to pose nude for the magazine.”

- Time Magazine, May 8, 2000

She tells people she is a Christian woman and yet she is doing things that dishonor God and the world looks at this and they just shake their heads. They mock us and they mock the God we say we love. Do you see how our land, this nation is being defiled by people who call themselves Christians but their actions speak differently. May we be true representatives of God! And yes, we are not perfect but may we desire to live holy lives. When people see us may they see the love of Jesus flow through us!

2. For Israel, judgment came upon them for the innocent they killed, the children they sacrificed to the god Molech. All the blood that was shed, the violence that filled the land because their relationship with God was off and it was manifested in the way they treated their fellow man!

And God kept warning them to turn from their wicked ways and return to Him. He sent them prophet after prophet but they refused to listen. They did not heed the warning. They refused God's grace and thus, they did receive His judgment! Instead of grace, they got justice. I will tell you that I don't pray for God's justice in my life, but His grace, getting what I don't deserve, because I deserve death as I stand before a righteous God in my own righteousness. But in His grace, the righteousness of Christ has been given to me by faith and thus, I don't stand in my own righteousness but His!

3. Now when God brings His judgment upon His people for their sin the unsaved tend to mock God for what has happened. And that is what we see here in Ezekiel, the other nations were mocking God because God could not prevent them from going into captivity like any other nation with their gods.

Remember David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. As Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin David finally recognized the wrong he had done. And in II Samuel 12:13-14 we read, **“So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.’”**

You see, by David's actions he gave the enemies of God a chance or opportunity to mock God. Keep that in mind the next time you are going to do something that is wrong. It will not only affect you, but those around you. And your sin is ultimately against a holy God. And it does not end there, you open the door for the enemies of God to come charging through and mock, put down, make fun of our Lord. I am not trying to lay a heavy trip on you but that is the reality of sin!

4. Now as you read this you may be wondering how is God going to restore His great name? How is He going to reverse all the evil that is being said of Him? This attack against Him was unjust but that did not matter. How will He accomplish this? He goes on to tell us in the next several verses.

VERSES 23-30

1. This is not speaking of their return from Babylon nor is it speaking of them returning to the land of Israel as a nation in 1948! Some may try to say that it does but look again at verses 25 through 30 and you will see what some have called, "*the Gospel according to Ezekiel*" in these verses.

Yes in verse 24 we see the Jews coming back into the land of Israel and we can see that happening today but then we have to read on. God is going to cleanse them, give them a new heart, put a new spirit within them, put His Spirit in them, give them a heart of flesh and not of stone, and they will walk with Him and He will make them fruitful. And if you still are not sure, verse 29 says, "**I will deliver you from *all* your uncleanness. . . .**"

That is only possible through the shed blood of Christ because the blood of bulls and goats could never take away a person's sins but the shed blood of Christ can and does!

Today most of the nation of Israel is filled with unbelievers and there are only a small number who are zealous for the Lord but they too are without knowledge because they are trying to approach God through the sacrificial system instead of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ!

Thus, this is speaking of a future time of restoration, which I believe is getting close, that they will return to the Lord and receive Jesus as their Messiah! Jesus said to the nation as He lamented over their rejection of Him, **“for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”** Matthew 23:39.

I like the way that Keil describes this portion of Scripture. He says, “Cleansing from sins, which corresponds to justification, and is not to be confounded with sanctification . . . is followed by renewal with the Holy Spirit, which takes away the old heart of stone and puts within a new heart of flesh, so that the man can fulfill the commands of God, and walk in newness of life.”

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 5:17, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** And in I John 3:5 we are told, **“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”**

The picture here is that they are in the land of Israel, the land has been restored, and they are born again or spiritually revived as they come to Jesus. Keep in mind that these chapters all the way to the end of the book of Ezekiel deal with the future restoration of Israel!

VERSES 31-35

1. Notice how the land will be restored and it will be fruitful once again. Back in 1948, when they returned to the land, the land was a barren wasteland. Nobody really wanted it. The Turks cut down many of the trees and they taxed the people by the number of trees they had, so the people themselves cut down their trees so they would not be taxed so heavily.

Things were just a mess, but today they have planted millions of trees all over Israel. And the land is blooming once again. The latter rains have returned. They have pineapple trees, citrus trees, olive trees, grape vines, banana trees, and-so-on. They are the fourth largest exporter of fruit in the world and yet the land they occupy is only the size of New Jersey! But as much as that is happening today, in the Kingdom Age it will even be greater.

Isaiah 35:1-2 tells us, **“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God.”**

2. Verse 31 is important because we see them recognize their sin and the idea here is not only recognize their sin but they have repented of their sin and come to the Messiah, their Savior, Jesus Christ because in Him alone is there the forgiveness of sin!

3. Now so they do not get a big head about how great they are or we get a big head thinking how great we are, the Lord says in verse 32 that He is not doing it because of their greatness or our greatness but because of His! They did not deserve it, they did not earn it, but God’s reputation was on the line and He wanted to show the people who He is and what He can do.

VERSES 36-38

1. This land that was once desolate, destroyed, will once again be filled with people. The deserts will blossom. Life will overflow this land. All of creation will live in peace and harmony. And as the nations of the world look at Israel, as they look at the Jewish people they will see the hand of God upon their lives, **“Then they shall know that I am the LORD.”**

Israel was to be a witness of the Lord but their light went out but it will come back as God is going to be dealing with His people, the Jews once again as the church age comes to an end and the Tribulation Period will begin, leading into the Kingdom Age!

For Israel, their brightest days are in the future. For us, each day should be bright, not because there is an absence of storms but because we have the *SON* shining in our lives as we are going through these storms. Keep in mind, even when the skies are the darkest, the sun is still shining. And that is so true in our own lives, as I have said, not the *SUN* but the *SON OF GOD, JESUS CHRIST!*