

When A Nation Distorts The Word of God

The year was 589 B.C. and the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel have been warning the Israelites to repent. If they did not repent, Yahweh would destroy Jerusalem, Judah, and the people. But they refused to hear Yahweh's voice through these two prophets. In our studies of the book of Ezekiel, we have discovered in chapter after chapter that the prophet Ezekiel has warned the Israelites of future judgment. In chapters 4-11, we read Ezekiel explained that judgment was certain because they were not repenting. That is, judgment could not be avoided. In chapters 12-19, Ezekiel told the Israelites why judgment was necessary.

In chapters 20-24, the fourth cycle of prophecies, the prophet Ezekiel was telling the people why judgment was justified and they deserved to be judged. We discovered in chapter 20 that the leaders of the nation had been wickedly rebellious and unrepentant. Therefore, Yahweh refused to listen to their requests.

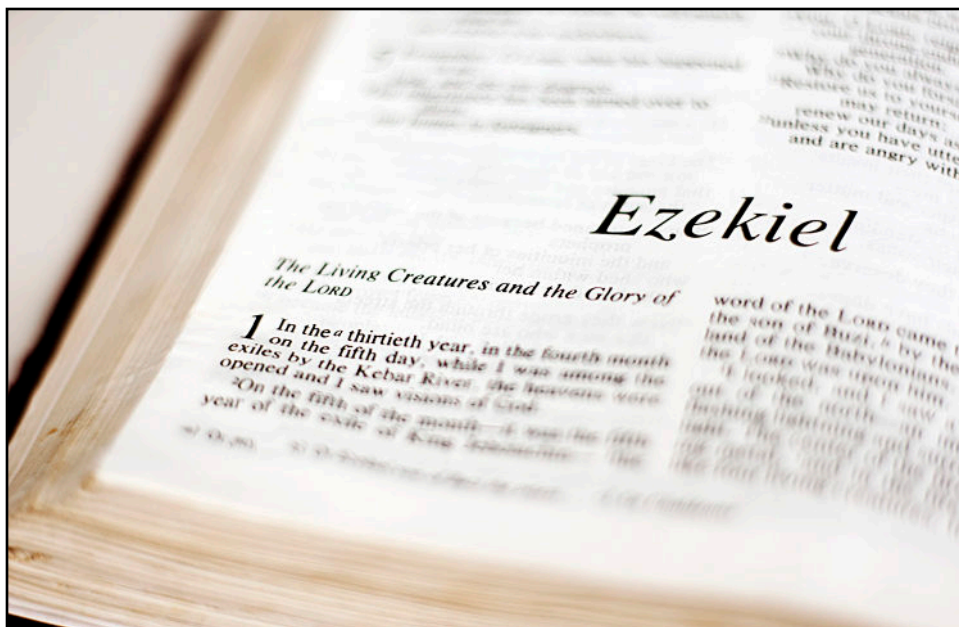
In chapter 21 Yahweh said the sword of the Lord had been removed from its sheath. His sword was sharp and polished and it would glisten in the sun as He swung left and right killing the wicked. The reason Yahweh said this was, they believed the Messiah would deliver them and not allow judgment to occur. It is obvious they had a low view of the power and sovereignty of Yahweh.

In this study from chapter 22, we are about to discover that Yahweh gives many details as to why they deserved judgment.

The people did not know that in one more year, the Babylonian army would invade Judah and surround the city of Jerusalem. We will discover that in chapter 24. Historical data tells us that was when the destruction of Jerusalem began. The city was demolished, the buildings and temple were burned with fire, and a massive slaughter of the people occurred in the city and as they fled for an elusive safety.

THE GUILT OF JERUSALEM. Our study is from Ezekiel 22:1-31. There are three prophecies in this chapter. The first begins with verse 1 and ends with verse 16. The second prophecy is in verses 17-22. The third prophecy is in verses

23-31. Now I do not plan to explain every detail in these verses because I do not think that is necessary to understand Yahweh's message to the Israelites. So, we will begin with verses 1 and 2. The prophet Ezekiel says,



Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then cause her to know all her abominations. Ezekiel 22:1-2 (NASB)

Here we are told that Yahweh asked Ezekiel, "Will you judge? Will you judge? This may imply Ezekiel was weary of repeat-

edly warning the people about judgment. Some of us may be weary with the repeated warnings of judgment and would like for them to stop. But the repeated warnings should teach us that Yahweh was neither quick nor eager to judge Jerusalem, Judah, and the people. Anyone who has actually read the book of Ezekiel should understand that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). So, Yahweh warns before He punishes. He gives us time to repent.

Apparently, Ezekiel said that he would do it. So, Yahweh said, "Then cause her to know all her abominations." It is not hard for us to understand that Ezekiel was probably also grieving about the situation. He may have been like the prophet Habakkuk who prophesied to the same people before the first Babylonian invasion in 605 B.C. Just read Habakkuk's words of anguish due to the wickedness in Habakkuk 1:2-4,

How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.
Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause me to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.
Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted.
Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NASB)

This gives us our first important principle to remember. That is, when the righteous see evil in the church and the nation, they will grieve.

Then in Habakkuk 1:5-6 Yahweh announced that His solution to an evil nation was to bring the Babylonian army to destroy the nation. That was also Yahweh's solution in the book of Jonah for the city of Nineveh. That is also the solution in the book of Ezekiel. This gives us an important principle. The only solution to evil is to eliminate it either by the people being saved, or by destroying them. If they refuse

to repent, then they will never change. Then our holy and just God will destroy them. But only God knows when an evil people will refuse to change, and consequently, must be destroyed. In Ezekiel 22:3 Yahweh explained why He must destroy them,

"You shall say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'A city shedding blood in her midst, so that her time will come, and that makes idols, contrary to her interest, for defilement!'" Ezekiel 22:3 (NASB)

His words are against the city of Jerusalem (v. 2). Yahweh singled out the two most common sins in the city: killing people and making idols. The killing revealed they did not love others. The idols revealed they were fools (Romans 1:22-23). This judgment is repeated in verses 4-5. They say,

You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a mocking to all the lands. Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you of ill repute, full of turmoil. Ezekiel 22:4-5 (NASB)

Now we must not miss the word "guilty" in verse 4. Yahweh told them they were guilty of killing people and have been defiled by idols. When we think about idols, we must realize that in ancient times people believed these idols or false gods provided them with benefits and pleasure. They believed the god or goddess represented by the metal, wood, or clay provided benefits. We have discovered that temple sex, orgies, and feasts were a major part of the worship of so many idols. Colossians 3:5 reminds us that an idol is really anything that becomes a substitute for our God.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Colossians 3:5 (NASB)

Yahweh says these things defile a person.

Notice that at the very beginning of verse 5, Yahweh said they had brought defilement, shame, mocking, a horrible

reputation, and turmoil upon themselves. They were the guilty ones.

EVIDENCE OF JERUSALEM'S GUILT. Verses 6-12 introduces us to a long list of the sins the rulers of Judah had committed. The most recent evil rulers were Manasseh, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. Because of their sins, the whole nation was guilty. Here are verses 6-12.

Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood. They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you. You have despised My holy things and profaned My sabbaths. Slandering men have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood, and in you they have eaten at the mountain shrines. In your midst they have committed acts of lewdness. In you they have uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual impurity. One has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me," declares the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 22:6-12 (NASB)

If we took the time to examine each sin, you would discover the sins violated the fourth, fifth, and sixth commands of the Ten Commandments. They also violated the keeping of the Sabbath, and a long list of horrible sexual sins described in Leviticus 18:6-22. I would encourage you to read the chapter. The rulers also oppressed orphans and widows (Exodus 22:21-24). They hired hit men to murder people, took financial bribes, and exploited people for financial gain. Sounds like our country today.

But the worst sin of all is given in verse 12. Yahweh said, "You have forgotten Me," The literal Hebrew is powerful. It reads this way, "Me, you have forgotten!" That is, Yahweh was the one they forgot. Because they enjoyed their sin, they forgot Yahweh. Their desires and sins lured them away from Yahweh. The Hebrew word for "forgot" can mean forgot or ignored. That means they also violated Deuteronomy 8:11-14

which says,

Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Deuteronomy 8:11-14 (NASB)

Notice that Yahweh explained why they forgot Him. He said "your heart became proud." Pride is what keeps us away from God. When our pride is in control, we do not desire to suppress our desires and please God. When that happens, we have forgotten Him. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, the greatest idol in my life is me! Here is our third principle: without the help of the Holy Spirit, the greatest idol in your life is you! We are the guilty ones! When we allow our desires to control us, they have become our idols.

GUILTY NATION WOULD BE SCATTERED. Now in verses 13-16, Yahweh told the Israelites how He would judge them.

"Behold, then, I smite My hand at your dishonest gain which you have acquired and at the bloodshed which is among you. Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong in the days that I will deal with you? I, the LORD, have spoken and will act. I will scatter you among the nations and I will disperse you through the lands, and I will consume your uncleanness from you. You will profane yourself in the sight of the nations, and you will know that I am the LORD." Ezekiel 22:13-16 (NASB)

Yahweh said He would strike at their dishonest gain and bloodshed with His hand. When He asked if their heart could endure it, a strong negative answer is implied. That is, they would not be able to endure it. Yahweh asked in order to make them think.

It appears that Yahweh's strike would be an act of judgment. Yahweh would defeat the nation and then scatter the

people among the nations. The act of scattering the people among the nations would cleanse the people of their wickedness and they would despise themselves. Zechariah 12:10-11 is a prophecy about the second coming of Christ. It reveals that they will eventually despise themselves in the future at the second coming of Christ. They will mourn for themselves and the rest of the chapter reveals they will repent. The passage says,

“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. Zechariah 12:10-11 (NASB)

We are told the Spirit of grace will be poured out on the people of Jerusalem when they “look on Me whom they have pierced.” Notice two important things. First, Yahweh said they will see Me. Second, Yahweh called Himself “Me.” Yahweh is the One whom they pierced. Since Christ is the One they pierced, this reveals Christ is Yahweh. Jesus Christ is God. This is about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Further information is given to us in Zechariah 14. When they see Christ at His second coming, they will mourn and repent. They will despise themselves, repent, and finally be clean. Romans 11:25-26 says that all Israel will be saved at the end of the times of the Gentiles. The end comes at the second coming of Christ.

HOW THE GUILTY NATION WAS JUDGED. Now verses 17-22 describe how Yahweh would accomplish this.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you

there and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.” Ezekiel 22:17-22 (NASB)

The key to understanding this passage is to know that metals are heated in an extremely hot furnace in order to remove impurities and waste. This process is called smelting. Smelting results in pure metal and the waste is called dross. So, when Yahweh said that the people of Israel were dross, He meant they were worthless. He could not use them in ministry. They were not good for anything. So, He was going to put them through the smelting process once again. The Babylonian invasion would be the smelting process. Dr. Charles Dyer states that when the Babylonian invasion occurred in 588-586 B.C.,

Judah retreated to Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land. The city became the crucible as God’s fiery blasts of wrath and judgment blew on the people.¹

His point is that history says the Israelites fled to the city of Jerusalem for safety when the Babylonian army invaded the land. But they discovered that the army simply surrounded the city, starved the people, eventually destroyed the buildings, and then burned it to the ground with fire. The city literally became a smelting pot. The result was a massive slaughter of the wicked, unbelieving Israelites (Ezekiel 9) and those who were not killed were scattered around the world.

HOW GUILTY NATION WAS JUDGED. In the final verses of this chapter, Yahweh describes what He discovered in the land of Israel. Verses 23-24 give us a summary,

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’” Ezekiel 22:23-24 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for “cleansed” has the idea of pure. That is, Yahweh had searched the land and found it was not pure.

¹ Charles Dyer, Ezekiel. The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985. p. 1270.

It was a filthy nation. Now in the following verses, Yahweh shares with us His discoveries.

In verse 25 Yahweh described the prophets.

There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. Ezekiel 22:25 (NASB)

Yahweh says that He found the prophets to be like lions. When I read this, I thought about the false teachers of today who exploit people, always asking for money while they themselves are living in wealth. The false prophets were responsible for the death of many people because they gave bad counsel, saying the Lord is with you when you go to battle, when in fact, He was not.

In verse 26, Yahweh described His findings about the priests.

“Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.” Ezekiel 22:26 (NASB)

This is truly sad. We are told the priests did violence to Scripture. The Hebrew word for violence is *hamas*. It is a very strong word that could be translated as “injured.” That is, they distorted the meaning of the Scriptures. They did not teach what Yahweh said. The priest changed the meaning of Scripture. They did it intentionally. As a result, they blurred the meaning of the Law in so many ways and did not treat Yahweh as holy. We are told in Malachi 2:7-9 that about 160 years later, the priests did not preserve the truth of Scripture and intentionally changed the meaning apparently to please the people. The message for us is that when the clear meaning of the words in Scripture are distorted or changed, our red flags should pop up. Either the teachers are untaught, wicked, or as the prophet Jeremiah tells us the priests did not even know God (Jeremiah 2:8). Jeremiah 23:11 wrote that both the priests and prophets at this time were wicked. They were unbelievers. I am sorry to

say that is true even today. There are many unbelieving men and women who love to teach the Bible. There are too many preachers today who call themselves Christians but they are not Christians. That would explain one reason why so many people leave church feeling spiritually empty. The priests of Ezekiel’s time were unbelievers, except Ezekiel who was a priest.

In verse 27, Yahweh said,

Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. Ezekiel 22:27 (NASB)

This is a short summary of what we have already discovered. I believe Yahweh is just quickly giving us a summary of His findings.

In verse 28 we read,

Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken. Ezekiel 22:28 (NASB)

Yahweh revisits the prophets and reveals they deceived the people by telling them they had received a message from the Lord when that was not true. Worst of all they say, “The Lord has not spoken.” Yahweh had never spoken to them. I am sorry to add that there are too many false doctrines today that cannot be logically supported by Scripture if we follow a literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation of Scripture. Thomas Ice wrote an article titled, “Literal vs. Allegorical Interpretation.” In it he wrote that there is a growing movement among conservative Christians colleges and seminaries to not interpret Scripture literally, but allegorically. He said,

Historically when people do not like what a document says or they want to make it fit their philosophical bent they allegorize that document.²

In verse 29 we read,

² Thomas Ice. Literal vs. Allegorical Interpretation. Liberty University. Unpublished work. May 2009.

The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. Ezekiel 22:29 (NASB)

Now Yahweh tells us what He found among the people.

CONCLUSION. I believe verse 30 reveals why Yahweh shared the results of His findings in verses 23-29 about the prophets, priests, princes, and the people, four different groups of people. Here is verse 30,

“I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.” Ezekiel 22:30 (NASB)

Yahweh said He had searched for a man. He looked for a spiritual leader who could call the nation to repent and rescue the nation from the judgment, so that He did not have to destroy the nation. But He did not find anyone. You might ask, “What about the prophets Jeremiah or Ezekiel?” Ezekiel was also a priest. Yahweh had commissioned Ezekiel to prophesy for Him. That reveals he was a godly man.

We should remember that in Ezekiel 3:17-21, Yahweh had told the prophet Ezekiel that he had been appointed as a watchman to the nation. So, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were not like the other unbelieving prophets and priests. As soon as we say that, we must remember that Yahweh had warned him that the people would not respond to his messages. That means that these two great prophets could not turn the wicked nation around. That means someone greater than either Jeremiah and Ezekiel was required. There is only One who could have saved the nation. He is called the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. But He would not come and finally turn the nation around until His second coming!

The message is that when a nation is incredibly wicked, no human prophet, priest, or ruler can turn the nation around. It must be judged in order to remove the evil. Israel had forgotten Yahweh. But later after the judgment, Yahweh promised that they would understand He had done it, and they had invited judgment to themselves. Therefore, Yahweh spoke these words with certainty about the future judgment that occurred in 588-586 B.C.

Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 22:31 (NASB)

This gives us our fourth and final principle. When the clear words of the Scriptures are twisted and butchered by those who teach and preach, the people are destroyed. Hosea 4:6 says,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.
Hosea 4:6 (NASB)