

Parable of the Boiling Pot and Three Signs

Our study tonight is from Ezekiel 24. It is an extremely important chapter in the book of Ezekiel because it describes the fulfillment of prophecies in chapters 4 to 23. In the first three chapters, Yahweh called Ezekiel to be His prophet and prophesy to the people who were still living in Jerusalem and Judah. Yahweh told the prophet the people were rebellious and would not listen to him and would not repent. What a sad ministry! Earlier the Babylonian army had invaded Judah and taken many Jews captive back to Babylon in 605 B.C. That was the first invasion and deportation. Then Babylon invaded the land again in 597 B.C. and deported more Jews. One would think the people would have understood that Yahweh was punishing them, but they ignored the warnings signs.

Then beginning in chapter 4, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied that the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah would be destroyed. In chapters 6 and 7, Judah's idol worship and great sins were denounced. In chapters 10 and 11, Yahweh announced both the departure of the glory of God (the Shekinah glory) from the temple and the destruction of the temple. From chapters 12 to 21, a wide range of sins were condemned, including rebukes to the leaders, false priests, and the false prophets of the nation. In chapters 22 and 23,

Yahweh summarized the nation's many sins.

Sadly, the false prophets and false priests had lied to the people saying that the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel were wrong. They said the temple, Jerusalem and the nation of Judah would not be destroyed by the Babylonian army. In the last prophecy given in chapter 23, Yahweh declared "you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols. Then He added, "you will know that I am the Lord." That last statement occurs sixty-three times in the book of Ezekiel. Or, Yahweh would say you will remember "I, the Lord, have spoken." In Ezekiel 17:24, Yahweh promised, "I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will perform it." Yahweh promised they were going to be punished for their sins since they refused to repent.

PARABLE OF THE BOILING POT. That brings us to our study. The first verse of Ezekiel 24 gives us the date of prophecy. It says,



And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying . . . Ezekiel 24:1 (NASB)

We learned in Ezekiel 1:2 that the dating of these prophecies

began with the date of King Jehoiachin's exile in 597 B.C. That means this prophecy was given on approximately 15 January 588 B.C.

Verse 2 reveals this prophecy was given on the very day

King Nebuchadnezzar began a siege of the city of Jerusalem. Here is the word of the Lord,

“Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.” Ezekiel 24:2 (NASB)

It is important to notice that the phrase “this very day” is repeated. That reveals the fulfillment of chapters 4-23 had finally started. This means the people did not discover that Yahweh had spoken until after the invasion had started. They should have repented earlier. Their idols were nothing but metal, wood, clay, and stone which could not talk, could not see, and could not hear. They had killed their children and committed abominations, thus defiling themselves, without any benefit. Like a cancer, the invading army began killing them because of their wickedness and unrepentant hearts.

Verses 3- 5 are a parable about a boiling pot.

“Speak a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD,

“Put on the pot, put it on and also pour water in it;
Put in it the pieces,
Every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder;
Fill it with choice bones.
“Take the choicest of the flock,
And also pile wood under the pot.
Make it boil vigorously.
Also seethe its bones in it.”

Ezekiel 24:3-5 (NASB)

Immediately, we are told this is a parable. It is about a parable of the invasion that was already in progress. Since it is a parable, we are not to understand this literally but figuratively. Next, we are told the parable was to the rebellious house. The parable begins with “Put on the pot.” The Hebrew word for pot is “sir.” It refers to a metal pot that can withstand hot, boiling water. The parable continues with, “put it on, and also pour water into it.” Good pieces were to be put into the pot such as the thigh, shoulder, and bones. Verse 5 tells us the meat and bones were from the flock. Wood was

to be put under the pot in order to make everything in the pot boil vigorously. But what do these symbols mean?

FIRST INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE. Verses 6-8 gives us the first interpretation of the parable.

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

“Woe to the bloody city,
To the pot in which there is rust
And whose rust has not gone out of it!
Take out of it piece after piece,
Without making a choice.
For her blood is in her midst;
She placed it on the bare rock;
She did not pour it on the ground
To cover it with dust.
That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance,
I have put her blood on the bare rock,
That it may not be covered.”

Ezekiel 24:6-8 (NASB)

Then Yahweh interpreted the parable and said, “Woe to the bloody city.” That helps us understand the pot is the city of Jerusalem. Why? First, the immediate context is about the rebellious house. Second, because Ezekiel 11:3-11 told us that Jerusalem was like a pot. Just as a pot is made of metal, the people believed that Jerusalem would protect them from any invasion. But that was a lie from their false leaders and false prophets. Therefore, Yahweh used their words about a pot and flesh in this parable. Rather than the pot providing protection, the boiling pot would kill everything in it. At this very moment, the Babylonian army had surrounded the city. This helps us understand the “pieces” of meat were the citizens of Jerusalem. The reason the invasion was occurring, was because of Jerusalem’s great abominations and that it was a bloody city. Ezekiel 22:2 had already called her a bloody city, and Ezekiel 22:3 called her a “city shedding blood.” That message was repeated in Ezekiel 23. Jerusalem was a bloody city! This is an important warning to our nation, since we are killing the unborn in massive numbers, and allowing criminals to commit murders.

Next Yahweh said the pot had rust. In verse 7 the rust

referred to the people's wickedness, which included the sin of murder. The phrase, "whose rust has not gone out of it" reveals they had not repented of wicked abominations.

In verse 7 Yahweh said her blood had been poured on the bare rock and not on the ground. This would have reminded the people of the command in Leviticus 17:13 which told the Israelites to cover blood with the dust of the ground. The message is their killing was not hidden. So Yahweh would make sure everyone knew about their murders. Jerusalem was a bloody city! This gives us the first principle in this study. In some situations, God may allow our sin to become known to others if we continue sinning and do not repent. That is part of the punishment.

SECOND INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE. Verses 9-13 give us a second interpretation of the parable. Beginning in verse 9, Yahweh called Jerusalem a bloody city again and said,

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

"Woe to the bloody city!

I also will make the pile great.

Heap on the wood, kindle the fire,

Boil the flesh well

And mix in the spices,

And let the bones be burned.

Then set it empty on its coals

So that it may be hot

And its bronze may glow

And its filthiness may be melted in it,

Its rust consumed.

She has wearied Me with toil,

Yet her great rust has not gone from her;

Let her rust be in the fire!

In your filthiness is lewdness.

Because I would have cleansed you,

Yet you are not clean,

You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again

Until I have spent My wrath on you.

Ezekiel 24:9-13 (NASB)

Now Yahweh called for the pot to be destroyed! Verse 10

calls for spices to be added to the pot and the meat to be boiled. After the pot was empty, then it was to be melted and destroyed. That refers to the city of Jerusalem being burned. 2 Kings 25:8-17 describes the destruction of the city.

Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 2 Kings 25:8-10 (NASB)

During the invasion, the Babylonian army burned the temple and all the homes. It tore down the walls. At that point, the city was rubble. If we continued reading, we would discover that the people who were alive after the conquest were taken into exile, except for the poor people. Verses 18-21 of 2 Kings 25 tell us the top officers of the temple and the civil leaders were killed. Finally, the rust, the wickedness, was completely removed. Yahweh caused that to happen. This gives us a second principle. Wicked civil and religious leaders of a nation must be removed before a wicked nation can become a righteous nation.

Ezekiel 24:13 tells us that sexual sins were also included in the rust. So, Yahweh condemned all of their wickedness, especially their killing and sex sins in this parable. The rest of verse 9 means that Yahweh had already punished them with the first two Babylonian invasions, but they did not repent so as to be cleansed. So since they were still filthy, He would have to pour out His wrath in order to cleanse them.

Then verse 14 gives us the summary. Yahweh said,

"I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you," declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 24:14 (NASB)

As the invasion is in process, Yahweh told them it was too late to stop the punishment. They had not repented. They

were like rust that cannot be removed. So the pot must be destroyed. Yahweh was acting. He would not change His plan. He will not respond to pleas for safety and protection. He would not be sorry. They would be punished according to their deeds. What they sowed, they would reap (Galatians 6:7). Their evil deeds revealed the evil of their hearts (Matthew 15:18-20). This gives us a third principle that is not found or repeated in the New Testament. When we do not repent of our sins, sometimes God will continue punishing us until we stop. Eventually, He may take your life in order to stop your evil. I have found that this principle exists by personal experience. When God disciplines me, I have not always immediately stopped my sin. He at times has given me another opportunity to learn that I should stop.

TWO SIGNS — EZEKIEL AND HIS WIFE. Verse 15 now introduces a sign. The sign is Ezekiel's wife. The following verses will explain the sign,

And the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache and do not eat the bread of men."
Ezekiel 24:15-17 (NASB)

Who is the desire of Ezekiel's eyes? It was his wife. Verse 18 explains,

So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.
Ezekiel 24:18 (NASB)

In order to understand what is being described in verses 15-18 I want to read a quote from Ralph H. Alexander's commentary in Ezekiel from the Expositor's Bible Commentary. He writes this about the culture of Ezekiel's time,

In the funeral rites of the ancient Near East, the mourner normally would tear his garments and put on sackcloth (2 Sam 3:31). He would remove his shoes and headdress (2 Sam 15:30;

Mic 1:8), shave his head, and put earth on his head (1 Sam 4:12). The lower part of the face (from the mustache down) would be covered with a veil of some sort (2 Sam 15:30; 19:4). The mourner would roll his head or his whole body in dust and then lie, or sit, among a heap of ashes (Isa 58:5; Mic 1:10). He would fast for a day (2 Sam 1:12; 3:35), after which friends would bring "mourning bread" (Jer 16:7). Funeral lamentations — repeated shrill cries — would be made by the family, relatives, and professional mourners (2 Sam 1:17; 11:26; Mic 1:8).

In verses 16b-17, the Lord instructed Ezekiel not to use any of these normal procedures to mourn the loss of his wife. In fact, he was not to mourn at all, not even to shed a tear. He was only to groan silently. This was certainly an unnatural response to death for a man who loved his wife, especially in the culture of Ezekiel's day. Priests mourned the death of a family member (Lev 21:1-3), but Ezekiel would not even be allowed that privilege.¹

Verse 18 tells us that Ezekiel did in the morning as Yahweh had commanded. He told the people his wife would die and she died in the evening. Then Ezekiel did not mourn, weep, shed tears, or do the other things.

Next, verses 19-24 tell us the people wanted to know the meaning of the prophet's wife's death and his behavior. Verse 19 states,

The people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?" Then I said to them, "The word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword. You will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache and you will not eat the bread of men. Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another. 'Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am

¹ Ralph H. Alexander. Ezekiel. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Regency Reference Library. 1986. p. 862.

the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 24:19-24 (NASB)

The meaning of the death of Ezekiel’s wife is that Yahweh’s temple or sanctuary would be destroyed. Verse 21 indicates the people were proud of the appearance of the temple. They loved to look at its white marble and gold exterior trim. The temple was the desire of their eyes just as Ezekiel’s wife was the desire of his eyes! Yet, Yahweh burned down His own temple. But actually, it was the Babylonian army that burned down the temple and killed their sons and daughters. The army was His tool. So Ezekiel’s wife died in order to teach the people an important truth. Ezekiel remained faithful and did not stop serving Yahweh. This reminds us of a fourth principle that we have discussed before. Yahweh may want us to suffer, even die, for the spiritual benefit of others. This is a test of our love and desire to please Yahweh.

Verses 22-24 tells us that Ezekiel was a sign also, not just his wife. The people would do just as he had done. But when they mourned, it would reveal they did not want anything to change. They were not eager for the “rust” to disappear. But 2 Chronicles 36:19 tells us that the army did burn down the temple, destroy its utensils, and tear down the city walls. These unrepentant people did not want their wicked lives to change! But the rust was removed.

THIRD SIGN — KNOW I AM THE LORD. Verses 25-27 concludes this prophecy.

“As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes and their heart’s delight, their sons and their daughters, that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears? On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.” Ezekiel 24:25-27 (NASB)

Now Yahweh tells Ezekiel that on the day when the destruction of Jerusalem is completed, the prophet will no longer be mute. When someone told Ezekiel the invasion was successful, then he would be able to speak freely. Ezekiel 3:25-27 told us that at the beginning of his ministry, he would only

be able to speak when Yahweh had given him a message. So this would be another sign that Yahweh had spoken.

The last part of verse 27 gives us our fifth, and last principle. It is not new. It has been occurring repeatedly through chapters 4-23. It is the most important principle. The principle is that when God speaks, we will know that He has spoken. Yahweh has given us prophecies, principles, and warnings in Scripture. When the prophecies are fulfilled, and when the principles and warnings are proven to be true, then we know the Lord has spoken. They are another proof that He loves us.

Both Ezekiel and his wife suffered for Yahweh. Ezekiel is an incredible example to us. Ezekiel was mute during his entire ministry, except when he spoke by command from God. I wonder how he communicated to his family for four years? When Ezekiel did prophesy, the people refused to listen and repent. From a human perspective, that is not a very successful ministry. Then he lost his wife in order to teach the rebellious people that because of their sins, the temple would be destroyed. Then Ezekiel was not allowed to mourn. Sadly, the ministry that most believers want is a positive and encouraging one. But that was the ministry that God gave to Ezekiel.

But he had the thrill of seeing the fulfillment of Yahweh’s prophecies because Yahweh burned down His temple, destroyed His city Jerusalem, and exiled His people, except for the poor, because they refused to believe God and repent.

We can thank God for Hebrews 11:5-6. For in these two verses He has told us how we can please Him. It says that we can please God when we believe He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him. We please Him when we desire to know Him. The search is a lifelong journey as we search the Scriptures in order to know Him.