

God Does Not Take Pleasure In the Death of the Wicked

The book of Ezekiel should shock us. It should make us concerned for our own spiritual condition. Israel was Yahweh's chosen people. He loved them, gave them land, and great kings in David and Solomon. Then the leaders and people abandoned Him. The priests and prophets were wicked and indifferent to Yahweh and taught error, except for a few such as Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. Sadly, the worship of the people of the nation was filled with ritual. They loved to hear the Law taught. Their religion was filled with ritual, and their hearts were far from Him. So, they loved the world and became rebellious and wicked.

Yahweh responded by influencing the Babylonian army to attack and destroy the beloved city of Jerusalem and the temple, and to remove all of the surviving people, except for the very poor. The wicked nation was then scattered among

the nations. The prophecy in the book of Ezekiel gives us the essence of these facts. It is sad to say that modern Christianity in the world today is much like the ancient people to whom the book of Ezekiel was written.

In our study we are going to discover what these people were like during the Babylonian army attack on Jerusalem. Then we are going to discover what they were like after

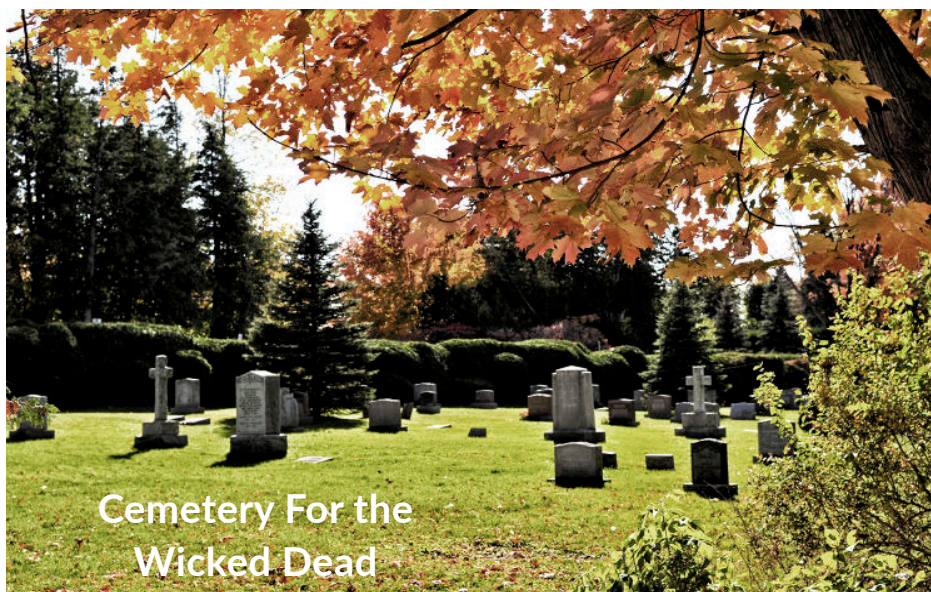
the Babylonian army successfully defeated the city and slaughtered almost everyone.

Before we dig into our study, I need to briefly review. We should remember that we were first introduced to the prophet Ezekiel in chapters 1-3. Then chapters 4-24 contain warnings to the people of Israel to repent before the Babylonian invasion occurred. God warned His prophet, Ezekiel, that the people to whom he would be speaking were rebellious and would not listen or repent even though he would be speaking Yahweh's messages. So, Ezekiel was to not take their rejection personally. In time, the Babylonian invasion did occur. Jerusalem and the temple would be

burned to the ground. What was not burned would be torn down.

The second section of the book of Ezekiel, chapters 25-32, is a series of prophecies about seven nations surrounding Israel. Six nations had rejoiced when Judah was

attacked. One nation refused to believe that Israel was God's nation. So, Yahweh destroyed these nations because by their words and actions, they had cursed Israel. The prophecies and history reveal that after the Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem, these seven nations were destroyed. These seven prophecies revealed to Israel that Yahweh was just because



Cemetery For the Wicked Dead

He had punished other nations for also being wicked. In His timing, He punishes every rebellious and wicked nation. No one escapes, unless they repent of their sins.

The third section of prophecies were given after the defeat of Israel. They catapult us into the future regathering of the people back into the land of Israel, into the tribulation, and into the millennial kingdom. The chapters in this section are 33-40. This section is about the future restoration of the nation of Israel, the arrival of the Messiah, and His Messianic kingdom.

This study is the first one in this third section, and it is from Ezekiel 33. The chapter can be outlined as follows: the second commissioning of Ezekiel (v. 1-20), news of Jerusalem's capture (v. 21-22), warning to the people in Israel (v. 23-29), and a warning to the exiles in Babylon (v 30-33). We will only be able to cover the first section.

Ezekiel's Second Commission (v 1-9). Ezekiel 33:1-9 introduces us to the second commissioning of the prophet Ezekiel. This commissioning is very similar to the first one given in Ezekiel 3:16-21. Once again, Yahweh begins with an illustration. The illustration is about the responsibility of a watchman for a city.

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head.'" Ezekiel 33:1-4 (NASB)

In ancient times, it was common to have a wall surrounding a city for the purpose of protecting it against an invading army. The wall would have gates to allow people to enter and leave. If an invading army approached the city, the watchman was to alert the people of the approaching danger by blowing a trumpet. When the people heard the trumpet, then they would prepare for the battle.

The Old Testament tells us that a number of cities were surrounded by walls. Maybe the most well-known of these cities were Jerusalem (1 Kings 3:1) and Jericho (Joshua 2:15; 6:1-5). 1 Kings 4:13 tells us that there were sixty great cities with walls and bronze bars. So, the practices of walled cities and using watchmen were common.

Verses 5-6 give us the rest of Yahweh's illustration.

"He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand." Ezekiel 33:5-6 (NASB)

Yahweh's point is if a watchman does not warn the people of approaching danger and they are subsequently killed, then the watchman will die.

Then Yahweh applied the illustration to the prophet. He said,

"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life." Ezekiel 33:7-9 (NASB)

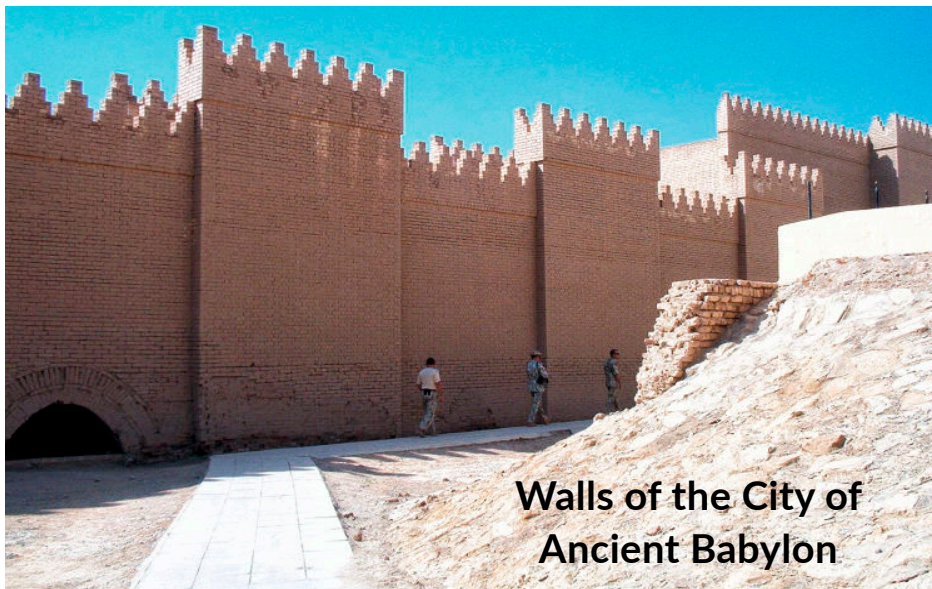
Now Yahweh tells Ezekiel that he is like a watchman and he must give Yahweh's messages to the people. If he fails to do that, then Ezekiel would be held responsible. Yahweh did not mean spiritual death, but physical death. So, Yahweh gave Ezekiel a warning to accurately and faithfully communicate His word.

This gives us an important principle. Every Christian is a watchman who needs to warn the wicked to repent and believe in Christ. Just as Christ commissioned the apostles to share the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-48; Acts 1:8) and to teach new believers to keep all that He had commanded them, so we are to share the gospel with others too! Also, every preacher and teacher is to teach the Word of God accurately and faithfully including both encouragement and warnings (2 Timothy 2:15-17). Jesus did both in John 3:16 when He hinted that a person can perish and promised eternal life. The Holy Spirit did that in Romans 6:23 and in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, when He warned that those who sin deserve hell. The message of Scripture is that we are to teach all of God's Word.

Ezekiel's First Message (v 10-16). Since Ezekiel is now commissioned again, Yahweh tells him what he must say to those who were still alive while the attack on Jerusalem was in process. This included people in Jerusalem and those in captivity beside the Chebar canal. Yahweh says in verse 10,

“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying, “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?”” Ezekiel 33:10 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for transgressions has the idea of a revolt. Here, the people admitted they had revolted against God and sinned. That is, they acknowledged their guilt. They said they were rotting away like old wood.



They were wondering if the nation would survive the Babylonian attack.

So, Yahweh said,

“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’” Ezekiel 33:11 (NASB)

This verse is similar to verses 23 and 32 in chapter 18. In verse 23 Yahweh had said that He would prefer that the wicked repent and live. Then in verse 32, He added that He did not have pleasure in the death of anyone. But back to chapter 33:11 says much more. It is a very important verse for Yahweh discloses what pleases Him. First, He says that He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Hebrew word that is translated as “pleasure” is hapes. It can also be translated as “delight” or “desire.” That is, Yahweh is telling us that He does not enjoy, delight, or have pleasure when wicked people die. That is the first important point in this verse.

Second, Yahweh says that He is pleased when they turn from “his way.” That is what brings Yahweh joy. He is pleased when the wicked turn away from sin. So He calls, “Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!” He warns and warns before He punishes. No man or woman can honestly

claim that Yahweh did not warn them to flee some sin through His Word or through their conscience. Why? Romans 2:14-15 teaches that God has written His law into our conscience. So, Yahweh has pleasure when

the wicked turn from their sin.

Third, verse 11 reveals that Yahweh must punish the wicked when He says, “Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” That statement reveals each individual person must make a decision. Failure to repent results in death. It also reveals that Yahweh must punish them for sinning. He is not referring to spiritual death, when He warns them to repent and stop being wicked. He was referring to physical death, for a person is rescued from spiritual death only by faith in Jesus Christ.

This reveals that Yahweh does not have pleasure when the wicked physically die. Therefore, He always urges the wicked to repent in order to rescue them from physical as well as spiritual death. He urges unbelievers to repent in order to avoid eternal punishment.

This also reveals that Yahweh operates on the principle that His holiness cannot permit evil to go unpunished. That is our second principle. Yahweh operates by holy standards, not by feelings.

Then Yahweh says in verses 12-16,

“And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.’ When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.” Ezekiel 33:12-16 (NASB)

This is a repeat of the message in Ezekiel 18 about individual responsibility. In that chapter, Yahweh told the people that they were not victims of the sins of their forefathers unless they had rejected Him. The message was that each one of us is responsible for our own sins. But the message here in Ezekiel 33:12-16 must be connected to the context of verse 11. The resulting message is that we are not just personally responsible for our own sin. We are also held responsible for not repenting of our personal sins. Those who repent will not be punished. This gives us our third principle which is that if we refuse to repent, we and we alone will bring punishment upon ourselves.

It is important to notice that this principle will result in the wicked being sent to hell. But for believers or Christians, we should remember Romans 8:1-2 which says,

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. Romans 8:1-2 (NASB)

These two verses teach that those who are in Christ are no longer condemned. The Greek word for “condemnation” is katakrima. It means “to judge someone as being guilty.” The Greek word that is translated as “no” is oudeis. It has the sense of “no more.” Now, if we combine oudeis to katakrima, that means those who are in Christ are no longer judged to be guilty.

Who is in Christ in Romans 8:1? The answer is those who are repentant of their sins (Luke 5:32; 13:5; 2 Corinthians 7:10), believe that Christ was crucified and was resurrected three days later for the forgiveness of our sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, and call Him Lord (Romans 10:9-10). It is these individuals, Christians or believers, who are no longer judged as being guilty.

Then Romans 8:2 gives us the reason. The reason is not that Christians or believers are great individuals, but that Christ Jesus has set them free from sin and death. Therefore, this helps us understand why Jesus urges us to share the gospel with others. It gives us a fourth principle in this

study, which is that wicked people can have their past and future sins erased by repenting, believing, and yielding to Christ as Lord. When this happens, they are legally declared by God Himself to be righteous forever because of Christ.

We must remember that Hebrews 12:4-11 warns believers will be punished if we sin and turn back to our sins. God the Father will discipline His children as a loving father disciplines his own children. Unrepentant believers will be disciplined, but they will still enter heaven.

Ezekiel's First Message (v 17-20). Now we will return back to Ezekiel 33 and verse 17. Verses 17-20 are an explanation from Yahweh to Ezekiel about the heart attitude of the people.

“Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them. Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.” Ezekiel 33:17-20 (NASB)

Yahweh reminds Ezekiel that the people of Israel had not changed since Ezekiel 18. In that chapter we discovered that the people were saying, “The way of the Lord is not right,” before the Babylonian army attacked Judah and Jerusalem.

It is amazing that after the attack on Jerusalem had started, the people of Israel were still thinking their way was correct. They believed they were not responsible for their own sins. So, they accused Yahweh of being wrong. But Yahweh said, “O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.” That gives us a fifth principle. God holds every man responsible for his own sins, for not repenting of their own sins, and choosing to not to believe in Christ.

They should have read King Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 12:14 which says,

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything

which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NASB)

Conclusion. When Jesus walked this earth, He said this,

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. Matthew 16:27 (NASB)

When a wicked person stands before God on judgment day, he or she will not be judged for the deeds of their mother, father, a wife, a husband, or a pastor. God will hold each person responsible for their own sins and for not repenting and believing in Jesus Christ. Unbelievers will be sent to hell, and they will suffer different degrees of punishment according to their sins. But believers will be judged and rewarded for their good works.

The message of our study was that Ezekiel had a mission field. Yahweh had called him a second time to be a watchman in order to warn the survivors of the Babylonian invasion that they were still in danger of being punished for their own sins. Just as Yahweh said in verse 11, they needed to “Turn back,” or, more was coming! He did not want them to die physically or spiritually.

Today we need to warn the wicked people that they are not righteous. They think they are! They think that God will ignore their sin because He is a God of love. They believe He will ignore their wickedness and let them into heaven. But as Yahweh said, their way was “not right.” They cannot blame anyone, the environment, their health, their race, or their government. When unbelievers stand before God on judgment day, they will hear the horrible list of sins they committed in this life that will justify God sending them to the lake of fire. There they will spend eternity for not believing in Christ.

So, God has called believers or Christians to be watchmen and to warn them. Are you sounding the trumpet?