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Day 230 - August 18

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## Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Ezekiel's Denunciations of Judah*

Readings: *Ezekiel 15:1-8; 16:1-63; 17:1-24; 18:1-32*

### *Reflections:*

- Ezekiel now gives three prophetic messages that focus on three primary allegories. The first is of a useless vine being burned up. The second is that of an unfaithful wife who is a prostitute. And the third is of two eagles and a vine which holds specific insights into how King Zedekiah will ultimately be judged. All of these are very frightful images of judgment that the reader is now getting used to.
- The first image of a useless vine is easy to understand. Israel is often compared to a vine in the Old Testament, dating back to the prophecy about Joseph given by Jacob that indicated that Joseph would be like a fruit vine. In the passage, the vine centers in, not only on Judah, but particularly on Jerusalem. The key about a vine is that it only has value if it bears fruit. It is useless for any other purpose. If another kind of fruit tree doesn't bear fruit, you can at least make something out of the wood but a vine is useless if it doesn't bear fruit. In a sense, God is saying that even the nations of the world, when they are spiritually dead, may hold some value for what they leave behind but Israel is useless unless it bears good fruit. It only has value if it produces the qualities God intended when he called her into existence. If she rejects those purposes God has for her, then she is of no value and is only worthy to be burned up. This is a very frightful image for a nation that has consistently, generation after generation, rejected God's leadership.
- The second image becomes even more graphic and horrifying. It also focuses on Jerusalem as a city. It begins with a story of a baby being born that almost seems to be taken from the script of a horror movie. A baby is born from enemy heritage (Amorite, Canaanite, and Hittite lineage). Its umbilical cord is not cut meaning that it still finds its source in its source, these idolatrous nations. It is connected but still fully abandoned and ugly in its filth. God takes this orphan under his care and cleans up this child and causes her to live. As this girl grows she becomes the most beautiful of all, mature and naked and beautiful (very sexual imagery is used!).
- Then the unimaginable happens once she is taken as a wife. She becomes a prostitute who not only rejects her husband to have many lovers, but she also refuses payment from her lovers and in fact, pays them! This image is shocking. A wife who is so bent and determined

to have sex with every man she can find that she actually takes the money she has to pay them to sleep with her. God had lavished on her every imaginable blessing and she in turn, trusting in her own beauty (a powerful picture of pride), began to hunt for lovers. The children she conceived with her lovers she sacrificed to idols for food. She completely forgot her youth and how God rescued her and she became a monster who victimized and murdered her own children in cold blood. The judgment that is announced to fall on her is basically a slaughter. She will be judged with a vengeance because her sins are worse than those of all the idolatrous nations around her, even Sodom! But there is a twist at the end of this: God will remember his covenant with her in her youth and still bring salvation through a new and everlasting covenant. The nations around Israel are promised to become her daughters (those that will be blessed by her spiritual heritage) and through this new covenant, God will atone for all of the nations sins. This is mind blowing! God's grace goes beyond anything that can be conceived of by the human heart and mind. At the end of this, God declares that the nation will be brought to true humility.

- The third image of an eagle, Babylon, taking the top cedar and planting it in a new land, a land of commerce and trade. This is an image of Zedekiah and his court being taken captive to Babylon. The image of the vine represents the Israelites that were deported to Babylon and yet, became fruitful. Rather than accepting this judgment and being willing to prosper where God had planted them, Zedekiah then started to reach out to a second powerful eagle, Egypt, for help. This lack of submission to God the prophet declares will result in further judgment falling on Zedekiah. Yet there is still hope. A small twig (the Messiah) from the royal line will be broken off and planted on a high and lofty mountain (the mountain of the Lord). It will take root, grow and bear great fruit and will provide shelter for the birds of the air (the nations). This is a very similar image to one that Jesus will use to describe the kingdom of God in the parable of the mustard seed (See Matthew 13:31-32).
- This prophecy ends with a restatement of a principle that is repeated in many different ways and at many different times: "All the trees of the field (kingdoms) will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree (sign of pride and power) and make the low tree (sign of humility and weakness) grow tall. I dry up the green tree (wealthy) and make the dry tree (poor) flourish. I, the Lord, have spoken and I will do it." Ezekiel 17:24
- Ezekiel 18 now moves into an extended section reinforcing this one truth: each person is accountable before God and past sin or past righteousness does not determine one's present standing before God. Each person today must give an account to God of their relationship with him. The sins listed in this section highlight the significance of idolatry, injustice, and breaking covenant. Righteousness is framed primarily in terms of caring for the poor. God makes it clear though: he wants people to be rescued from death. "Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? ...Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" God's heart is always to rescue us. The challenge is whether or not we will turn to him and seek him alone.

- Israel has had a habit of always blaming God and claiming that he is unjust. We as humans have this constant tendency. “Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?” The answer is obvious.
- Ezekiel 18 with one of those key passages where God puts his finger right on issue: “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses...and get a new heart and a new spirit! ...For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone...! Repent and live!” God’s heart is to save but for that salvation to be real and lasting, we as people need a new heart. We need a new spirit, God’s spirit, to change us from the inside out. This will be the promise that the Jesus as Messiah will fulfill!