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Day 233 - August 21

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

Readings: *Ezekiel 24:1-27*

### *Reflections:*

- Ezekiel 24 is a relatively short chapter but it has within it an event that is very problematic. It begins with Ezekiel being told prophetically of the siege against Jerusalem. Now this is incredible as he is hundreds of miles away from the event and he is apparently told of this event on the exact day it happened. His message is again outlining clearly God's judgment against the evil of the nation. In what may be one of the clearest articulations of God's perspective in judgment, Ezekiel writes, "I, the Lord, have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign Lord." These are more frightful words for a nation bent on evil in its worst form.
- The next sign given is one that is hard to reconcile. Ezekiel's wife is apparently taken by God to be a sign to the nation of judgment that is falling. They will watch those they love the most die and they are called not to mourn because they are simply getting what they deserve. Is it possible that Ezekiel's wife is just an innocent by-stander that happened to marry the wrong guy and ends up being used as an example? Was she already dying and sign is more focused on Ezekiel not mourning? Was this a terrible time of death and judgment and we are to read this as yet another casualty of the evil of the nation and that in some way she had done things deserving of judgment? We are given no insight into why she died. A straight reading of the text would simply suggest that she died as a sign. This is hard to accept because it seems to make God look incredibly cruel and heartless. Now this story reminds us that children and elder people are being killed during this time. That the nations that are destroying Israel are not being compassionate. So what do we do with this?
- First, we know God's character of being one of mercy and truth. When we don't have all the details of a specific event, we are ok to believe the best about God. This type of event is a rare exception where we can't understand exactly what is happening within his wife's heart or even her health. Second, in a period of judgment where many innocent people are dying in war, we are also reminded that this nation had many, many chances to repent and there was no desire among the nation to turn away from their evil. They were already killing some of their children in sacrifices. This part of the "story of what doesn't work" should slap us in

the face and remind us that no amount of punishment or consequence will ultimately change the human heart. Third, we can be reminded that physical death is not ultimate death in God's world. It is simply a transition from this life to the next where those that die in innocence are welcomed into paradise. Finally, we are moved again to be so grateful for the coming of Jesus where judgment is swallowed up in mercy.

- If I had to guess why Ezekiel's wife died, my guess is that God is using a natural event (she was already going to die) but controlled the timing to weave it into a sign for the nation. That is what feels like the most likely scenario, especially in light of Ezekiel's apparent acceptance of the events. Leaders of God who feel God has acted unjustly have a pattern in Scripture of complaining against God for such events. Here Ezekiel accepts it and moves on and so it seems to me more likely that Ezekiel knew this was coming. That is my personal perspective.