
Day 237 - August 25

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Ezekiel's Prophecies During Siege*

Readings: *Ezekiel 25:1-17; 29:1-16; 30:1-26; 31:1-18*

Reflections:

- At the same time that Jeremiah is prophesying in Jerusalem about the coming Messiah, Ezekiel is bringing his words from God to the Israelites in captivity in Babylon. His messages address the immediate crisis and God's perspective on the many oppressive enemies that stand against Judah. What we see over and over is that the enemies can be both used by God as instruments of judgment against Israel but at the same time face their own judgment from God for their arrogance, pride, and incredible sin and evil.
- The judgment against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia was going to be a practical demonstration of the authority, power and righteousness of God. In his judgment, God declared to his enemies, "then you will know that I am the Lord." The existence of God would be clear and undeniable. Yet, it wasn't until Christ came and the revelation of God's love for all people, even his enemies, that we would see the depth of his mercy, love and grace.
- The judgment against Egypt is far more extensive and involved. In Ezekiel 29, Pharaoh is compared to a monster of the sea, coming up from the Nile. He is pictured as being captured mercilessly and put to death in the desert. The monster of the sea, similar to the story of the Jonah, was considered the most feared creature in creation. This is a good reminder that the things, people or situations that we fear the most are easily dealt with by God. Israel could not deal with Pharaoh's power. They were terrified by him. But for God, he was no problem at all.
- Ezekiel then goes on to compare Egypt to a staff that breaks in your hands, drives splinters into your hands, and calls you to fall and injure yourself. Israel had turned to Egypt for help rather than trusting in God completely. This is a good reminder that the plans and schemes we come up with to save ourselves or rescue ourselves out of a difficult situation will most likely cause us more harm than good. We should only trust in God and see him as our only rescuer.
- The image of Egypt being desolate for forty years is a picture of the nation being wiped out completely. Forty was the number of completion.

- Here in this judgment of Egypt we see some parallels to the tower of Babel. Egypt is declared to be so powerful and great and beautiful (and it was) that in its pride and self-sufficiency (“The Nile is mine; I made it.”) God judged it and determined to bring it low. “I will make it so weak that it will never again rule over the nations. Egypt will no longer be a source of confidence for the people of Israel but will be a reminder of their sin in turning to her for help. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” God declares that he will have no competitors in our hearts. Those other plans and rescuers and loves of our lives must be completely removed. God alone is our savior and the only one worthy of our trust, confidence and worship.
- “A day of clouds” is an expression that occurs also in Joel 2:2 and Zephaniah 1:15. It recalls the appearance of God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:9, 16, 18). God will appear in power and glory to deal decisively with Egypt.
- The images of judgment against Egypt are severe. Fire, slaughter, broken bones, the list goes on. Again how grateful we should be for the mercy we receive in Christ Jesus and how careful we must be with arrogantly declaring that we are our own saviors and gods of our own lives.
- Ezekiel 31 gives us a final and powerful image regarding Egypt. Egypt is compared to the incredible beauty of Assyria. They are pictured as beautiful trees that out do the trees of Eden, nourished with waters of life as in the garden. The birds of the air and the creatures of the ground all were blessed by the beautiful trees. And yet as these trees grew, they grew tall in their pride. They spread out with arrogance and self-sufficiency. This is a powerful image of how beautiful and wonderful community can become. These two great nations portrayed the incredible glory of how people can live together in community and create together incredible expressions of intelligence, creativity and industry. Yet in their accomplishments (as with Babel) they became proud and wanted to lift themselves up to dominate and lord over others. In their pride, they are then judged and brought low. This is a powerful lesson for the reader. Can humans create awesome community? YES. Can they create great governments, organizations and churches? YES. God has given humans the inherent ability to work together in community to do amazing things. And yet we must be warned. Beware of becoming proud as you grow. Beware of trying to raise yourself up to lord it over others. Beware of arrogance and pride. Rather, look to how you can stay low and care for those that are seeking your help (the birds of the air and the animals of the field). Work together as servants of others, not as rulers or experts. The kingdom of God expressed in community can recreate the wonder of the garden of Eden but even in that beautiful community the human heart can still become proud. As we make ourselves low, God will then raise us up.
- It will be almost sixty years before this judgment actually finds its fullest expression and Egypt is ruled by a foreign power. In 525 BCE though, Egypt under Pharaoh Amasis will become a part of the Persian Empire under Cambyses II. This is a reminder that God’s timing is not always our timing.

