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**Day 244 - September 1**

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**The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE)**  
***Ezekiel's Restoration Prophecies***

**Readings: *Ezekiel 33:21-33; 34:1-31; 35:1-15; 36:1-38***

***Reflections:***

- It has been twenty years since the nation began the process of being taken into captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem has fallen and it will be another fifty years before the exile will finally come to an end. Ezekiel 33:21 begins with Ezekiel receiving an escaped messenger from Jerusalem to let him know that Jerusalem has fallen. On the day the siege began, the same day Ezekiel's wife died, Ezekiel was told that he would not speak until a messenger arrived to report the city's fall. Hours before this messenger arrives, Ezekiel is enabled to speak again and the sign is completed. Here we see that a forced silence from God represents a horrible judgment as Ezekiel is unable to neither grieve for his wife nor intercede for Jerusalem.
- The comparison of Abraham, the man of faith who was free to live in the land although incredibly weak, to the nation of Israel which is living in perpetual sin, shows us again that it is not our strength or wisdom or capabilities that matter to God. What matters to God is our submission to him and our heart of complete trust and faith.
- We see an interesting window into the ministry of a prophet in Ezekiel 33:31-33: "My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. When all this comes true – and it surely will – then they will know that a prophet has been among them." First we see that a prophet was typically consulted by other leaders rather than having to approach them himself. Second, it would seem that this passage is suggesting that Ezekiel would prophecy to music as he played. If this is true, it would suggest that God worked through his creative gifting. Third, we see the importance of not just hearing God's message but living according to it. This very key truth will be repeated by Jesus at the end of the Sermon on the Mount as he affirms virtually the exact same thing (Matthew 7:24-27).

- Ezekiel goes on to judge these hypocritical leaders for their failure to properly shepherd the people of Israel: “You have not strengthened the weak, or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.” God’s judgment falls on the leaders because they have only cared for themselves rather than for those they were to serve, particularly those who were weak and vulnerable. God promises that he himself will shepherd the sheep: “I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down,.... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.” Here we see again how God delights in the humble and opposes the proud. We see also in this section the primary work of a spiritual leader: leading people into spiritual rest (particularly from sin and religion), healing the sick and injured, searching for and bringing home those who are led astray, strengthening those who are weakening.
- God continues this theme with a promise concerning a coming leader: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. The Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them....I will make a covenant of peace with them...” Jesus’ declaration that he was the good shepherd (John 10:11-18) no doubt meant for his hearers that he was boldly declaring that he was the fulfillment of this passage and therefore the awaited Messiah. We should again note that the specifics around this covenant of peace are directly tied to the land and living in peace within the Promised Land. Jesus’ beginning to act like the fulfillment of this promise would happen spiritually, rather than physically. It is easy to see how people didn’t accept this.
- Ezekiel continues his judgment against Edom and the promise of a fully restored Israel. All of this will ultimately bring glory to God’s name.
- As Ezekiel prophesies about the future, we see one of the clearest passages regarding the inner transformation that the Messiah would bring: “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the nations and bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you (an image of baptism) and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people and I will be your God.” This promise is followed up with further promises of God’s blessing. This section is obviously one of the most significant passages in the meta-narrative. We see how absolutely clear God is about the inner transformation of the human heart through the Spirit. It is not the external things that change our hearts but only God working inside us through his Spirit. This inner transformation we will see is ultimately rooted in an overwhelming experience of love. As we are changed to be like God in our character, then it makes it easy for him to be our God

and us to be his people. Inner heart transformation leads to a secure identity before God as he owns us as his own.

- As Ezekiel continues to prophecy, we see again the emphasis on the land: “This land that has been laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden.” We see how the Promised Land was in a sense a symbol of the Garden of Eden. Although it never became a place of security and intimacy as was intended by God in creating the Garden, it was still valued by the people as a place of blessing, fruitfulness and rest. Again, with the coming of Christ, all of this takes on new, symbolic meaning as we enter into new community and intimacy with God, experiencing the essence of what God envisioned in the Garden of Eden. Praise God for Jesus!