

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 36: Ezekiel 13-30, *Prophesying From A Distance*

Welcome to Week 36 of the Bible Reading Coach Podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we will be reading Ezekiel 13 through 30 and then the following week we'll be reading in Ezekiel as well. It's a big book with a whole lot of stuff going on. We started it last week reading the first 12 chapters. So we only gave you a short introduction to Ezekiel. Let's finish that introduction today before we get into the passage. First of all, remember from last week that while Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Obadiah were prophesying about Jerusalem in Jerusalem and in the areas around Jerusalem and they were prophesying about the fall of the city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was prophesying the same thing, only he was 500 miles away, in exile in Babylon. Remember that as you continue to read Ezekiel this week, you are reading a book that was written not in Israel, but in a foreign pagan land. So as you read it when you keep that in mind, for instance, when he gives illustrations about what's happening in Israel, you've got to recognize he's doing it in Babylon, in front of the Hebrews, who had been exiled to Babylon, but also in a place where the Babylonians themselves could see what he was doing.

The book is roughly divided into three parts, chapters 1 through 24, is the judgment of God against Jerusalem that is about to fall, chapters 25 through 32, the shortest of the of the three sections, is a judgment against those who caused Israel's destruction. And that judgment comes after the fall of Jerusalem. And then the final section, chapters 33, through 47, is a section of consoling the Hebrews in their loss and in their grief over the fall of Jerusalem. And it gives them some hopefulness for the future. So last week, we started and we got about halfway through the first section.

So this week, we'll pick it up there in the middle of that first section, the judgment against Jerusalem, and Jerusalem this fall, which is about to happen very, very soon. First of all, we'll start with chapters 13 and 14 this week, where God through Ezekiel condemns the false prophets and the idolaters that are causing the impending fall of Jerusalem. I want you to note that the accusations begin not against those who are worshiping idols, that is the common people who are worshiping idols, the condemnation and the accusations from God begin against those who knew better, the priests who should have known better, and who lead the people to a place of idolatry, rather than worshiping God as He is supposed to be worshiped.

We've talked about it before, we'll talk about it later, leadership carries a heavy burden in the Bible, the leaders are more responsible than the followers for the sins that are being committed. But you'll also notice, that doesn't let the followers off the hook. So while leadership carries a heavier burden, when the people fall away from God, it doesn't mean that if you're following someone away from God, that it's all the leader's fault. No, we all carry a responsibility for the decisions that we make. Whether we're a leader, or whether we're a follower, we then continue on in chapters 15 through 17. And in these intersections, there are three allegories that are given about Israel.

But before we get to those allegories, let's take a look, I want you to note that at the start of many of the chapters in Ezekiel, as an example, in this next section, chapters 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18, all of those chapters and many other places in the book of Ezekiel, you'll see this phrase, "The word of the Lord came to me". This is Ezekiel's way of starting a new prophecy.

For us it's like saying, "Okay, here's yet another sermon from Ezekiel". So every time you read the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to me", it's the beginning of another prophecy or today, we would call it the beginning of a new sermon, okay? So while they all flow together in the narrative of Ezekiel, each time he says that you're beginning a new segment, a new oracle, a new prophecy, a new sermon.

Now, in this segment here of chapters 15 through 17, we now see three very vivid pictures, comparing Israel, first of all, to a useless vine in chapter 15, secondly, to an abandoned baby in chapter 16. And then thirdly, a story about an eagle and a vine in chapter 17. Again, when we talk about taking the Bible literally how do we take these stories about Israel being a vine about Israel being an abandoned baby and so on? Well, again, we are not literalists. Literally nobody is a total literalist, because we read the Bible as it was intended to be read. Are the miracles intended to be taken literally? Yes. The historical books are intended to be taken literally, miracles and all. But when in the middle of a prophecy, God gives Ezekiel a vision. Did the vision happen to Ezekiel? Did God literally give Ezekiel those visions? Yes. But was there a baby abandoned? No, it's a figure of speech that God is using through Ezekiel to tell Israel about their state before God, and about how he keeps coming back and rescuing them, and how they keep running away from him. So we want to be careful of that, as we're reading through it.

We then get to chapters 18, through 23, which is basically the final pronouncement of the doom of Jerusalem. That is absolutely inevitable. There are several prophecies in this segment about Jerusalem's upcoming fall. Please note, again, the timestamps, he's 500 miles from Jerusalem, and God is showing him what's happening in Jerusalem, almost exactly as it's occurring. And there's no way of course of him to know that from 500 miles away, way back at that time.

Also notice in this spot, 18 to 23, that their sins are really vividly outlined. Why does God just go over their sins over and over again, ad nauseam to the point where it's like, okay, we get it, we're bad, is it because he's done so so relentlessly? No one, when the collapse happens, we'll be able to say, why did this happen? Or you didn't warn us? No, you were warned over and over and over again. And then we come to a pivotal chapter in Ezekiel, Ezekiel, chapter 24, is when Jerusalem falls. This happens around 588 BC, where the seat actually not reducing falls but where the siege of Jerusalem begins.

Now, here's how accounts put the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in Second Kings chapter 25, verse one, now, this is going way back in week 18. We read this Okay, so we're gonna go way back for a moment in Second Kings 25. One, we read this. So in the ninth year of Zedekiah, 's reign, on the 10th day of the 10th month, that's a very specific date. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, marched against Jerusalem with his whole army, he encamped around the city and built siege works all around it. So the siege of Jerusalem began on that exact day. We read about that in a historical account of Second Kings 25, one back in week 18.

Now this week in Ezekiel 24, verses 1 and 2, written 500 miles away. We read this in the 9th year in the 10th month, on the 10th day, so it's exactly the same timestamp as we just read about in Second Kings, "The word of the Lord came to me". So this is when he receives the prophecy. On the day the siege begins, Ezekiel receives this prophecy, "Son of man, record this date on this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day".

You'll notice in those two verses, it gives you the date, 9th year, 10th month, 10th day. Then it says, record the date, this very date, and then later on this very day, are you getting the idea that God wants it to be particular what he's telling him is, I'm giving you supernaturally what you could not know in the natural that this is the day 500 miles away from you, the siege of Jerusalem is beginning.

And then this record was kept in the book in the book that we now know as Second Kings and in the book of Ezekiel, they were kept written down for the next 70 years. They were separated from each other. They are in Jerusalem, you have the book of Second Kings that was recorded in Babylon 500 miles away, you had the book of Ezekiel where this was recorded. And for 70 years of the exile, nobody came back to join these books together. So these separate accounts were kept in separate books 500 miles apart from each other. Can you imagine what happened when they brought those two books together? And they compared them and realized, whoa, this book was recorded 500 miles away. It's been kept separate for 70 years, and it says exactly the same day.

Now, what also happens horrifyingly and tragically, in Ezekiel 24 is that Ezekiel's wife dies. Ezekiel's wife dies and then God tells him, you should go about your usual business. Because this is a demonstration to the others that just as you are not going to put on sackcloth, you're not going to cover yourself with ashes, you're not going to tear your garments, you're not going to walk through the streets in tears. You're going to walk around like normal business because this is how I God am acting towards my bride, Jerusalem. I will not mourn her siege because she has earned this now obviously Exekiel's wife didn't do anything wrong. She simply passed away on that date. But God uses that circumstance to draw a very vivid picture.

Now, let's pause here. Here's a man who knows that on this date, the city that he loves is under siege. On that very day, his beloved wife dies. And then God tells him, you walk around the city today, and you act like you're fine. We talked about it earlier, the rule of the reluctant prophet. Why is it the prophets never want to become prophets, because prophets are asked to do stuff like this. That's how challenging and difficult it is. So when people run around going I'm a prophet, I'm a prophet, and seem happy about it, that always is a red flag. Profits don't want to be profits, because profits have to go through difficult things like that.

And then we'll conclude our reading this week, in chapters 25, through 30. The book now shifts to the next and to the shortest section of the book. Now that Jerusalem is under siege, and is about to fall, and it falls pretty quickly after that. There's no need to keep condemning Jerusalem after it's falling, fallen. So now God turns his anger through his ego, against the enemies of God's people, those who came against her and those who have caused her destruction. So the question that you might have is, okay, well, then how can God get mad at the people who caused Israel's destruction? When God said, I'm going to destroy you? And I'm going to use them to destroy you? How? How can God get mad at nations who he used to do what he wanted done? Well, here's why. When people do evil, that is their choice. Then when God chooses to use even their evil for his purposes, it doesn't absolve them of the evil that they have done.

Here's an example. We'll get to this in weeks 41 through 44. When we read through the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we're going to see Judas betray Jesus. Now, did God use Judas as betrayal of Jesus for His purposes? Yes. But does that absolve Judas of the sin of betraying Jesus? No, God knew Judas would betray Jesus. That's Judas, his choice to sin. And

then God says, I can use even your sin for my purposes before this, when Pharaoh's heart was hardened way back in Exodus, right? When we read about that way back tonight, and Exodus several times, it says, And God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Now, it's not like Pharaoh was for the Israelites before that. And then God completely flipped him. 180 degrees. No, Pharaoh already hated them. He didn't want them to leave. And so God just nudged him a little further in the direction he was already heading. It doesn't let Pharaoh off the hook for his hatred of Israel or for his sins. God simply allows the consequences of their evil to play out. And then he uses it for his own purposes, that guilt is still theirs. So what did we look for this week? First of all, notice the shift of tone at chapter 24. And beyond, it shifts from the condemnation of Jerusalem to the condemnation of those who came against Jerusalem. Secondly, notice the timestamps. These are real events that happen in real history. On the other side of that, thirdly, notice that the figures of speech and the visions that are given are not to be taken literally, they are visions that were literally given to Ezekiel, but the visions themselves are not events that took place. They are dreams, they are images, they are visions that describe God's principles behind the events that are taking place. This is one of the challenges of books like these literal timestamps, but non literal visions and prophecies. But that's not a big deal. That's like, going to,

it's just, it's like saying, Okay, I went to church on Sunday, at this place at this time, and I heard this specific pastor, and this pastor told this parable about a guy who it was raining. And he said, God rescued me. And a car came by and the car said, Hey, come with me, I'll save you from the flood. And he said, No, I'm waiting for God to save me. And then the flood gets higher, and the boat comes by and he says, Come with me, and I'll save you from the flood. And he says, No, God will save me. And then he's on the top of his house about to be consumed by the waters. And a helicopter comes by and says, Please grab onto the ladder. I want to save you. He says, No, God will save me. And then he dies, he drowns, he gets to heaven, and he goes, God, why didn't you save me? And God says, I sent a car, I sent a boat and I sent a helicopter. What more do you want? Right? That's an old story, an old parable that lots of pastors have told. Was there an actual guy that that happened to? No. Okay, you got to read Ezekiel the same way. You can say I went to this church, this place this time and heard this pastor tell this story. Did that literally take place? Yes. But then the story he told literally take place? No, it's a story to tell another point.

All of Ezekiel is like that. Try to keep those two streams in your heart and mind as you read. At times it can be challenging. But if you go into it that way and look for it in that way, it'll help you understand what we're looking at. So that's how we're going to approach it this week. This is the second week that we're in Ezekiel, we'll be in Ezekiel all week. And then we still have an entire week of Ezekiel to go. But there's a ton of stuff happening. I hope you get a lot out of it. And what we've talked about today will help you see things that maybe you hadn't seen in Ezekiel before. All right, thanks. We'll see you next week.

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Veronica Beaver. The theme music was written and performed by Jack Wilkins of JackWilkinsmusic.com. And me? I'm Karl Vaters and I'm your Bible Reading Coach.