

Session 1 The Forerunner Message in Ezek. 33-35

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Babylon attacked Jerusalem and took prisoners back to Babylon in three different waves over 20 years—in **606 BC** (Daniel taken), in **597 BC** (Ezekiel taken), in **586 BC** (Jerusalem destroyed).

Ezek. 1-3 Ezekiel commissioned as a prophet (soon after the second attack in 597 BC)

Ezek. 4-24 Judgment on Jerusalem (between the attack in 597 BC and the final one in 586 BC)

Ezek. 25-32 Judgment on the nations (between the attack in 597 BC and 586 BC)

Ezek. 33-48 Israel's future restoration (after the attack in 586 BC that destroyed Jerusalem)

- B. Outline for Ezekiel 33-35

33:1-33 Ezekiel speaks as a watchman to warn Jerusalem

34:1-31 False shepherds and Jesus, the true Shepherd

34:1-10 The Lord's judgment against Israel's unfaithful leaders

34:11-16 The Lord will bring His scattered people back to the land of Israel

34:17-22 The Lord will judge between Israel's good and bad leaders

34:23-24 The Lord will establish His servant David over Israel

34:25-31 The Lord will establish a covenant of peace with Israel

35:1-15 Judgment on Israel's enemies who sought to possess the land—Edom

35:1-9 The certainty of Edom's judgment

35:10-15 The reasons for Edom's judgment

II. EZEKIEL SPEAKS AS A WATCHMAN TO WARN JERUSALEM (EZEK. 33)

- A. Ezekiel 33 is the turning point in the book of Ezekiel as news of Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC reached the Jewish captives in exile in Babylon.

- B. Watchmen are prophetic messengers and intercessors (33:7). Ezekiel was a watchman over Israel (33:7-9) who was responsible to warn the wicked to repent to avoid the coming judgment.

7"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8When I say to the wicked, '...you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked...that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand...⁹If you warn the wicked to turn...and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." (Ezek. 33:7-9)

- C. Ezekiel emphasized that the Lord took no pleasure in the death of the wicked (33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9).

¹⁰"...say to the house of Israel..., ¹¹'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways... ¹⁷...your people say, "The way of the LORD is not fair" ...¹⁸When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. ¹⁹But

when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is... right, he shall live because of it.”
(Ezek. 33:10-19)

- D. The news of the fall of Jerusalem reached the Jewish exiles in Babylon in December 585 BC or 18 months after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in July 586 BC (Jer. 39:1-2; 52:5-6).

²¹It came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month...that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has been captured!” (Ezek. 33:21)

- E. Even in the face of the severe crisis in Jerusalem, Ezekiel continued as a faithful watchman, calling for repentance and warning the unrepentant survivors that more judgment was coming (33:24-28).

²⁴“Son of man, they who inhabit those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, ‘...the land has been given to us as a possession.’ ²⁵Therefore say to them, ‘...you lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood...’ ²⁶you commit abominations...should you then possess the land?’ ²⁷Say thus to them, ...those who are in the ruins shall fall by the sword, and the one who is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured...’ ²⁸I will make the land most desolate...” (Ezek. 33:24-28)

III. THE LORD’S JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL’S UNFAITHFUL LEADERS (EZEK. 34:1-10)

- A. The fall of Jerusalem dashed their hopes, leaving them disillusioned and questioning God. Ezekiel’s salvation oracles encouraged the depressed exiles with the news that all is not lost!
- B. Ezekiel as a faithful watchman warned the unrepentant people of their sin and coming judgement if they refused to repent. The leaders of Israel were called shepherds. God judged them for their cruel leadership and because they fed themselves rather than their people (34:4).

²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel...’ Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves...’ ⁴The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick...but with force and cruelty you have ruled them...” (Ezek. 34:2-4)

- C. Israel complained against God’s leadership and the mistreatment of Gentiles, but Ezekiel insisted that Israel take the primary responsibility for their national crisis. As a watchman, he called them to repent of sin (34:2, 4) and warned of judgment on their current leadership (34:10).

IV. THE LORD WILL BRING HIS SCATTERED PEOPLE BACK TO THE LAND (EZEK. 34:11-16)

- A. The promises of restoration in 34:11-31 have their ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age and a partial fulfillment throughout history. Phrases like “no longer” (34:22, 28, 29) and “cause to cease” (34:25) identify the time frame for their ultimate fulfillment as being in the Millennium.

- B. God promised to search for, deliver, and bring His people to Israel (34:11-16; Lk. 15:4-7). In this age, Jesus will do “in part” what He will do “in fullness” when He returns. He searched for His people in Ezekiel’s generation, throughout history, and in an increased way leading to His return. Jewish people returned from Babylon in 536 BC and again in recent times related to Israel becoming a nation in 1948. Nearly 700,000 Jews returned by 1952 and another 700,000 came from Russia within ten years of the fall of communism in the USSR in 1989.

¹¹For thus says the Lord GOD: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock...so will I seek out My sheep...from all the places where they were scattered...¹³I will...gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land...

¹⁶I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away...” (Ezek. 34:11-16)

V. THE LORD WILL JUDGE BETWEEN THEIR GOOD AND BAD LEADERS (EZEK. 34:17-24)

- A. The Lord’s restoration process involves judging His sheep individually (34:17-22; Mt. 25:31-46).

¹⁷“And as for you, O My flock...Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats...¹⁹And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet...

²⁰I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns...²²therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.” (Ezek. 34:17-22)

- B. God warns corrupt shepherds among His people that He will judge them. The “rams and goats” refer to the leaders in the nations that have oppressed their people. These powerful leaders selfishly deprived the poor (34:18-21). He intervenes to rescue the weak and to establish order in society.
- C. Israel has been a prey to their own evil leaders as well as to hostile, wicked nations (34:22). Jesus’ leadership includes judging individual leaders within Israel’s society. Ultimately 2/3 of the Jewish people will die in the end times, while 1/3 will be saved by calling on Jesus’ name (Zech. 13:8-9).
- D. The Lord promised to establish one shepherd referred to as “My servant David” (34:23; 37:24-25).
²³“I will establish one shepherd over them...My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them...” (Ezek. 34:23-24)
- E. “My servant, David” is a title for Jesus who will sit on the throne of David and is called the son of David (16 times in the Gospels), the seed of David (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8), the root and offspring of David (Rev. 5:5; 22:16), and a Branch of David (Jer. 23:5). He fulfills the promises in the Davidic covenant that God establish a king to reign forever on the throne of David (2 Sam 7:12-16).
- F. The capture of King Zedekiah in 586 BC signaled the collapse of David’s royal house. It seemed that the Lord revoked the covenant by allowing the fall of Jerusalem and the collapse of David’s house. Here Ezekiel announced that God’s promise to David had not been forgotten.

- G. Some see both Jesus and King David as being included in various prophetic words related to reigning in the Millennium, David with a resurrected body ruling as a regent under Jesus.

⁹They shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up. (Jer. 30:9)

⁵Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days. (Hos. 3:5)

- H. Just before David died, he spoke of his role on earth in the age-to-come in the Millennium.

¹Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel...²King David...said...,

*⁴“The LORD...chose me above all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever...”
(1 Chr. 28:1-4)*

VI. THE LORD WILL MAKE A COVENANT OF PEACE WITH ISRAEL (EZEK. 34:25-31)

- A. What Jesus will do in fullness when He returns is what He is doing in part and in an increasing way leading up to His return. Seeing what He thinks of and has zeal to do reveals His heart to us.

*²⁵“I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing...there shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷Then...the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe ...and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from...those who enslaved them...²⁹I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer...bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore.”
(Ezek. 34:25-29)*

- B. *Covenant of peace*: This is a reference to the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

1. *Wild beasts*: Wild beasts will be domesticated (34:25, 28; cf. Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos. 2:18).

¹⁸In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. (Hos. 2:18)

2. *Sleep in woods*: They will sleep outside without fear of animals, evil people, snakes, etc.

3. *Rain*: Rain will cause the land to produce (34:26; cf. Isa. 65:21-22; 30:23; Hos. 2:22).

4. *Abundant crops*: The Lord will cause the land to be fruitful (34:27, 29).

5. *No longer prey*: Israel will never again be preyed on or enslaved by Gentile nations (34:27).

6. *No famine*: No more famine as in great tribulation (34:29).

7. *No shame*: The Gentiles will no longer heap shame and insult on Israel (34:29).

8. *National salvation*: The Lord will be their God and they His people (34:30; cf. 20:40-44).

- C. These blessings will be released in fullness when Israel acknowledges Jesus as Messiah (Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26). These blessings were not seen in fullness, neither when Israel returned to the land from Babylon captivity in 536 BC nor after 1948.

VII. THE FUTURE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAEL (EZEK. 20:32-44)

- A. The Jewish elders living in exile in the Babylonian captivity came to Ezekiel asking for a word from God. They came in 591 BC (20:1) five years before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.
- B. Ezekiel prophesied a new wilderness experience (20:36-39) and regathering (20:40-44) of Israel in context to the Great Tribulation and the return of Jesus.
- C. This prophecy was partially fulfilled when Israel returned to Jerusalem in 536 BC after 70 years of captivity in Babylon and then again in 1948 when Israel returned to the land after the Romans scattered them in AD 70.
- D. 20:33-38 describes 5 steps in the process of Israel's restoration. First, Israel will be gathered from the nations (20:34). Second, they will be brought into the wilderness of the nations (20:35). Third, in the wilderness the Lord will plead His case with them that will bring many of them into the bond of covenant (20:35-37; 34:25). Fourth, He will purge rebels from their midst (34:16-17). Fifth, they will enter the land as a people walking in covenant faithfulness to God (36:24-25).

33“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. 34I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. 35And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. 36Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord GOD. 37“I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; 38I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” (Ezek. 20:33-38).

- E. ***I will bring you out from the peoples:*** With a mighty hand the Lord will gather Israel out of many countries. His mighty hand reminds us of the miracles He did when He delivered Israel in Egypt. Jeremiah prophesied that God would gather Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation in such a powerful way that it would be remembered more than Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Jer. 16:15).
1. Israel has been scattered by God among the nations three times—in 721 BC by the Assyrians, in 586 BC by the Babylonians, and in AD 70 by the Romans.
 2. Israel has returned to the land twice—in 538 BC, and then related to 1948. Both returns were partial fulfillments of this prophecy since neither fulfilled all the details of this text.

- F. **The wilderness of the peoples:** Ezekiel described a time when the Lord would gather the Jewish people out of many countries to “the wilderness of the peoples” where He would plead His case with them. They will be led to a “temporarily camp” in the wilderness, parallel to what Israel experienced in the days of Moses (Rev. 12:6,14; cf. Isa. 40:3; Jer. 31:2; Ezek. 20:35; Hos. 2:14).
1. In the Great Tribulation, Jews will find special provision in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14).
¹⁴But the woman [remnant of Israel] was given two wings...that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent [Satan]. (Rev. 12:14)
 2. Jeremiah prophesied the families of Israel will find grace in the wilderness (Jer. 31:1).
¹...“I will be the God of all the families of Israel... ²The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him [Israel] rest.” (Jer. 31:1-2)
 3. Hosea prophesied Jewish people will find comfort and singing in the wilderness (Hos. 2:14).
¹⁴“...I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her... ¹⁵she shall sing there... ¹⁶In that day...you will call Me ‘My Husband’...” (Hos. 2:14-16)
- G. **Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers:** “Just as” He revealed His glory through a pillar of fire, manna coming from heaven, water flowing from a rock, and hearing His voice (Ex 19).

VIII. JUDGMENT ON EDOM: REMOVING ENEMIES SEEKING TO RULE THE LAND (EZEK. 35)

- A. Ezekiel 35 focuses on the removal of Edom who sought to rule the land of Israel. Ezekiel continues on the theme of removing people who are hostile to God’s purpose for Israel, including Israel’s shepherds (34:1-11) and Israel’s enemies—Edom (35:1-15).
- B. The future restoration of the land to the Israelites is linked to the Lord removing animosity with the people living in the ancient land of Edom. This confirms this is an end-time prophecy because, if it only had to do with ancient Edom, then it would not be an issue at the end of the age. The ancient cities and the name *Edom* no longer exists, but the people of Jordan live in that geographic area.
- C. Mount Seir is a territorial name for Edom (modern-day Jordan). The Lord designated Mount Seir as Esau’s land grant in the same way that the Lord gave the Israelites land (Deut. 2:1-7).
- D. Edom has a long history of animosity with Israel including land disputes (Gen. 25:22-34; 27; 36:1; Num. 20:14-21; 24:15-19; 1 Sam. 14:47; 1 Kings 11:14-22; 2 Kings 8:21; 2 Chron. 20:1-23; 28:17; Ps. 137:7; Isa. 1:11-16; Lam. 4:21-22; Dan. 11:41; Amos 2:1; Obad. 10-14; Mal. 1:2-5).
- E. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, the Edomites rejoiced and assisted Babylon in plundering Jerusalem (2 Chr. 20:10; Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21-22; Obadiah 1-14; Joel 3:19; Mal. 1:2-5)
- F. The certainty of Edom’s judgment (35:1-9): Edom was the nation that most consistently resisted Israel’s occupation of the Promised Land.

2“...set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it, ³and say to it...‘O Mount Seir, I am against you...⁴I shall lay your cities waste, and you shall be desolate. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. ⁵Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel...at the time of their calamity [attacked by Babylon]...⁶I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you...⁸I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those who are slain...⁹I will make you perpetually desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited; then you shall know that I am the LORD.’” (Ezek. 35:1-9)

- G. The reasons for Edom’s judgment (35:10-15): This prophecy was partially fulfilled when Edom was subjugated by Babylon, then Persia, and then again in 126 BC by John Hyrcanus (a Jewish high priest). The ultimate fulfillment of this passage will cause the whole world to rejoice. (35:14).

¹⁰“Because you have said, ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them’...¹¹therefore...I will do according to your anger and...the envy which you showed in your hatred against them; I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. ¹²... I have heard all your blasphemies...against the mountains of Israel...¹³You have boasted against Me... ¹⁴The whole earth will rejoice when I make you desolate...¹⁵O Mount Seir, as well as all of Edom—all of it! Then they shall know that I am the LORD.” (Ezek. 35:10-15)

- H. Even many in the United Nations speak negative things against God and Israel (35:12-13). It is important to reject the rhetoric that springs up from the same ancient arguments from Edom that fuels some of the arguments promoted by the *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement* that works to end international support for Israel because of her alleged oppression of the Palestinians.