

Into the Hands of the Living God

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[0 : 00] Well, we come now to our Bible reading, so please do grab a Bible and turn to the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament, Ezekiel chapter 4. If you're a visitor and you need a Bible, then you'll see there's some Bibles over there and there and just down here at the front.

Do help yourself. A little later in our service, Willie is going to be preaching to us from a big section of the book from chapters 4 to 7. But just now we're going to read from chapters 4 and 5.

So let's read, beginning at Ezekiel chapter 4, verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord. And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem.

And put siege works against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.

And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face towards it.

[1 : 26] And let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel. Then, lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it.

For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment.

So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah.

Forty days I assign you, a day for each year. And you shall set your face towards the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared.

And you shall prophesy against the city. And behold, I will place cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

[2 : 45] And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer, and put them into a single vessel, and make your bread from them.

During the number of days that you lie on your side, 390 days, you shall eat it. And your food that you eat shall be by weight, 20 shekels a day.

From day to day, you shall eat it. And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hen.

From day to day, you shall drink.

And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung. And the Lord says, Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations where I will drive them.

Then I said, Ah, Lord God, behold, I have never defiled myself. From my youth up till now, I have never eaten what died of itself, or was torn by beasts, nor has tainted meat come into my mouth.

[4 : 00] Then he said to me, See, I assign to you cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread. Moreover, he said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem.

They shall eat bread by weight, and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure, in dismay. I will do this, that they may lack bread and water, and look out at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment.

And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head, and your beard.

Then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair. A third part, you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed.

And a third part, you shall take, and strike with the sword, all around the city. And a third part, you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.

[5 : 14] And you shall take from these a small number, and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these, again, you shall take some, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire.

From there, a fire will come out, into all the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord God, this is Jerusalem.

I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules, by doing wickedness, more than the nations, and against my statutes, more than the countries all around her.

For they have rejected my rules, and have not walked in my statutes. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes, or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst, in the sight of the nations.

[6 : 34] And because of all your abominations, I will do with you, what I have never yet done, and the like of which, I never will do again.

Therefore, fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive, and any of you who survive, I will scatter to all the winds.

Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary, with all your detestable things, and with all your abominations, therefore, I will withdraw.

My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity. A third part of you shall die of pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst.

A third part shall fall by the sword, all around you. And a third part, I will scatter to all the winds, and will unsheath the sword after them.

[7 : 50] Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them, and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord, that I have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury upon them.

Moreover, I will make you a desolation, and an object of reproach, among the nations all around you, and in the sight of all who pass by.

You shall be a reproach, and a taunt, a warning, and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you, in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes, I am the Lord, I have spoken, when I send against you, the deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will send to destroy you.

And when I bring more and more famine upon you, and break your supply of bread, I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children.

Pestilents and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord, I have spoken. Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his challenging word.

[9 : 22] Well, do turn with me to the passage that Phil read to us, Ezekiel, and we're looking, as he said this evening, at this section from chapters 4 through to 7.

Thus says the Lord God, I will vent my fury upon them, and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord, that I have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury upon them.

And you shall know that I am the Lord, when they're slain, lie among the idols around their altars, wherever they offered pleasing aromas to all their idols. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity.

I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. And then you will know that I am the Lord who strikes.

Ezekiel 6, 13 and 7, verse 9. Especially in the light of the terrible, murderous massacres that took place in Israel last week.

[10 : 42] And the pictures of those strewn dead bodies in the desert festival fields. These words in Ezekiel 4 and 5 and 6 and 7, they seem very hard to stomach, don't they?

God promising to his own people that he will turn his face away and do nothing while those he calls in chapter 7, the wicked of the earth, profane his land.

The worst of the nations possess their homes amid appalling violence. What are we to make of these terrible chapters?

Well, maybe, just maybe, they help us to understand our New Testaments better. Especially verses like Hebrews 10, verse 31.

The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And in fact, the whole message of the Hebrews letter.

[11:46] How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Paul tells us that the whole of the Old Testament is written to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

But salvation from what? Well, from judgment. From the sure and certain day of the wrath of Almighty God.

And the New Testament gospel is the announcement to the whole world that that day is drawing near. Indeed, according to Jesus himself, it is at hand. John the Baptist was the first to announce it, wasn't he, in Matthew chapter 3.

Flee from the wrath to come. Bear fruit in keeping with real repentance. Why? Because the Messiah has come with his winnowing fork in his hand.

to draw his wheat into the barn, yes, but to burn the chaff in the fire. Luke tells us, doesn't he, that that was the good news that John the Baptist proclaimed.

[12:50] Well, it wasn't received, was it, as good news by many. Herod locked him up for breach of the peace. Like Ezekiel here, was bound in his house with cords and ropes.

But Jesus came bearing the same message. His very first words in Matthew 4. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It echoes, isn't it, of Ezekiel chapter 7.

Behold the day. It comes. The end has come, he says, for Israel. And at the end of Matthew's gospel, the risen Lord Jesus proclaims the meaning of his resurrection.

And it is that the day of reckoning has now come for all the nations. And his disciples must take that message to the whole world, calling everyone to bow down and repent and obey him as Lord.

And on the day of Pentecost, Peter boldly declared that Jesus, through his resurrection, has been declared, he says, both Lord and Christ, fulfilling Psalm 2.

[13:51] He's enthroned as the judge of all the nations. And all must repent because only in Jesus is there forgiveness and hope and hope of salvation.

Apostle Paul preached the same message to the great and to the small alike. He declared that all must repent if they're to be saved from the sure and certain judgment that is now coming at the hand of Jesus Christ.

And God has given us assurance of that by raising him from the dead. What God promised of old, he said, he has fulfilled by raising Jesus.

God means what he says always. And he does what he promises. And don't ever doubt it. Don't ever presume that you don't need to respond.

That's the message. Of course, Peter tells us, doesn't he? Many will doubt, many will scoff. But don't ignore history, says Peter, because God has judged many times throughout biblical history.

[14:58] And indeed, he still does in human history. Indeed, as one scholar, Douglas Stewart notes on these chapters, God's anger against iniquity may take the form of warfare.

And it behoves citizens of all nations to consider when confronted by an enemy whether or not their sins as a people have had anything to do with the distress that they face.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? But you see, the important point is that both Peter and Jude tell us that all such judgments throughout history are examples.

They are warnings to the world and to the church to take heed, as Paul says, lest we fall. Ezekiel was writing for those who were already in exile.

And he was writing to destroy false hope that they had, false presumption, that because they were the people of the book from the land of the book, because they had a temple which was a canopy of safety under which they would be sheltered from all such threats, well, they would be fine.

[16:08] Things would soon get back to normal and they would return. No, says Ezekiel, how wrong you are. The only way that they're going to be brought back to reality was to experience the calamitous cataclysm of judgment.

The exiles had to see what God was going to do to his city, to his temple, to his whole land in order to vindicate his name among the nations who've learned instead to scorn his name and profane his name because of the faithless wickedness of God's own people and they must repent, they must mourn for their sins and cast all their hope only on God's covenant mercy which alone was the only possible hope they had of salvation.

Ezekiel wrote for his generation but God has preserved it for future generations and indeed for us in these last days to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ so that we're not like them led into presumptuous folly as though God didn't really care much for our sins.

It's written to lead us into penitent faith through Christ Jesus who is our only hope. They're very solemn words in these chapters there's no escaping it.

Solemn for the world and for the church and for every one of us as Christians God does judge in history and God will judge every single one of us in our personal history.

[17 : 55] The apostle says it's appointed for man to die once and then comes judgment. So we need to take that warning seriously don't we because it is says the apostle a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Friends if you ever died of that then I think these chapters are written for you. They are written for us. It's a long section we'll focus mainly on chapters 4 and 5 we'll dip into chapters 6 and 7 but we'll try and see the big picture which lays out here the reality of God's judgment and then the reason for God's judgment and then the revelation that judgment brings.

So first through chapter 4 and down to chapter 5 verse 4 make clear the inescapable reality of coming judgment. God's coming judgment is clearly pictured in a series of dramatic acted prophecies each of them which begins you'll see with a command for Ezekiel to take something in verse 1 take a brick verse 9 take wheat and barley and so on in chapter 5 verse 1 take a sword so every day for well over a year Ezekiel acted out almost certainly in silence until eventually in chapter 5 verse 5 he does speak he acts out in silence a message but nevertheless one which was still very clear to everybody by the end of that relentless display and that acting made it not just vivid but it also pressed home the reality of it and the imminent coming of it all the siege and then the sack of Jerusalem is inescapable it's near it's coming verses 1 to 8 of chapter 4 visualize the fact of that coming judgment it means disaster for God's city

Ezekiel sets up a brick model of the city under siege but the real sting look is in verse 3 there'll be no help from God because his face will be utterly cut off from the city's pleas by a wall of iron there'll be no intercession no mediation by the prophet saw that last time in chapter 3 verse 26 and even if there were there'd be no answer from God because as verses 4 to 8 make clear this is God's punishment and Israel has to bear it in full that's represented by Ezekiel spending part of every day for well over a year lying on his side there's endless arguments among the scholars about exactly what the length of these days means I think the most likely is that the 390 days represents in round terms the time in years between the building of Solomon's temple at the height of his kingdom and its coming destruction so it represents the whole period of Israel's slide into apostasy from Solomon's reign onwards all the stuff we've been reading about in

Kings and then the 40 years well again that's a very highly symbolic figure for Israel it represents the 40 years of their punishment wandering in the desert when they refused to enter the land under Moses some folk think that the 40 days and the 390 days ran concurrently so that for the last 40 days he spent some time lying on both sides maybe I think if one follows the other which seems to be the more natural reading it gives us interestingly a total of 430 days and if that represents 430 years that's also very symbolic because in Exodus 12 verse 40 we're told that's the number of years that Israel was in slavery in Egypt but whatever we make of all of that the overwhelming point is that it is long and it's relentless and five times in just three verses here look it rams home that this is the punishment of the house of Israel it's from the hand of God himself then verses 9 to 17 visualize not just the fact but the awful famine of the judgment the only food will just be meager basic rations a few ounces of food of barley about a pint of water and that's probably I suppose quite realistic for famine measures under siege but Ezekiel's real revulsion look comes at verse 12 when God says you've got to cook the food on a fire of human excrement now it's not just the disgusting thought of that but for Ezekiel it's the spiritual defilement that's being prophesied in verse 13 there

[22 : 40] God's people will be made unclean and defiled in exile far away from God's presence in the temple and utterly defiled unable completely to go anywhere near him even if they weren't far away and as a priest Ezekiel protests violently and God relents in verse 15 and says well you can use cow dung in your acting instead but no doubt Ezekiel were to indicate to all of the people the real meaning and the sheer horror of what it was speaking about and what was coming and then there's a climax in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 5 which represents the sheer fury of the coming judgment destruction for God's own household his people take a sharp sword he's told and this last action the most horrific of all is what seems to lead directly into the verbal litany in verse 5 and it's

both painful for Ezekiel never mind the thought of shaving your beard and your head with a blade imagine using a sword painful for Ezekiel but it's agonizing in its message because it represents utter shame that kind of shaving was forbidden to priests but as an expression of grief and this was a deep expression of grief it was forbidden to all

Israelites it was a pagan custom read about it in Deuteronomy 14 and it represents terrible grief here shame slaughter a third of Israel dying in the dreadful siege another third dying as they fled away and then the rest scattered in exile and later on verses 11 and 12 make that absolutely clear in case there was any doubt and even those who are preserved through that verse 3 many of those also will end up in the fires of persecution and death this is a devastating image Israel shorn of its priestly role among the nations shattered in the grief of national defeat and shamed before those nations among whom she should have shone says Chris Wright he goes on as Ezekiel's horrified neighbors stared at their apparition before them this gaunt specter of a starving man shaved bald with his hair in piles at his feet and tears of pain stinging in his eyes blood trickling from gashes in his malnourished skin they realized they were looking into the mirror of their own future as a people and if there could be any doubt left at all what was being demonstrated is now plainly declared as in verse five onwards the visual becomes verbal verse eight behold

I even I am against you says the Lord God I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of all the nations and the outlines clearly doesn't they pestilence famine and sword verse 13 then shall my anger spend itself and I will vent my fury upon them but as well as pressing home verbally the visualized reality of the coming judgment God's word through Ezekiel clearly expounds the reason for it and that's what dominates the rest of chapter five and six and seven clearly added to this message of the inescapable reality of the coming judgment is the irrefutable reason for that coming judgment God's judgment having been vividly and clearly pictured is now vividly and clearly proclaimed in words thus says the Lord verse five this picture of disaster you're looking at before you is

Jerusalem whom I set at the center of the nations to be a light to the nations to bring the knowledge of my salvation to the ends of the earth is how Isaiah put it in Isaiah 49 that's Israel's whole purpose since the very call of Abraham way back in Genesis 12 remember and yet look verse six not only has she failed in that task she's rebelled so badly that she's worse than all these nations more turbulent than they verse seven and therefore I will execute judgments just as he promised he would do if Israel abandoned the covenant they should have been far far better than all the nations they alone had all the clear revelation of God and his law of righteousness for life no other nation had that great privilege but look at verses six and seven they've ignored his holy statutes and his rules they've not even met the standard of the pagan nations round about them but God will not ignore his statutes and rules there's a word play here there the same word that's used for God's statutes in verses six and seven and his rules mishpatim is the same word translated judgment in verse eight so they'll be judged with exact justice just retribution for their sins that's the point and it's an inevitable judgment God will not ignore his covenant it gave huge privileges to Israel but it also demanded great responsibilities from them if you read Leviticus chapter 26 later you'll see that these chapters here simply show how everything God said there would be so is so if you do not listen to me he said there and will not do these commandments and therefore break my covenant I will set my face against you and you can read there exactly the promises he makes in terms of panic and pestilence and sword and so on in fact all of these dreadful verses here and those verses I read from chapter 6 verses 4 and 6 and verse 13 and so are exactly lifted out of what God said in

[29 : 03] Leviticus 26 and the message is unmistakable isn't it God takes sin deadly seriously even if you do not and especially sin among his people who are privileged to be the people of the book in the land of the book we've been reading in Kings haven't we about the centuries of that sin throughout Israel and Judah more than 400 years of rebellion in a kingdom so privileged it was founded on God's righteous laws it had God's worship right at the heart of its nation 400 years God is patient slow to anger abounding in his covenant life but as Peter reminds us he's not forgetful he will bring all deeds to judgment just judgment and indeed personal judgment look at verse 13 it's my anger it's my fury which will spend itself the enemies of Israel were not the great powers and empires of the world and the answer to their problems will not be new alliances with different empires against the wicked of the earth against the worst of the nations as chapter 7 calls the coming

Babylonians although of course yes through history and God's providence alliances among nations have often opposed and resisted great evil it's necessary to do that but only God can vanquish real evil and when God's people who are called to be a witness to the nations become worse than the nations it's God's judgment upon his own people that will be a warning to those nations verse 15 you shall be a warning and a horror to the nations all around you because I even I am against you that's a very sobering word isn't it especially when we remember that Paul says these things are written for us in this gospel age lest we presume that we stand and in fact are in real danger of falling and when we remember the repeated refrain of the risen Lord Jesus to his churches as we were looking at in Revelation 2 and 3 repent or I will come against you he says what we see here is that God's household his church and indeed Christians and indeed nations can live on their past spiritual capital for a very long time for centuries even and yet increasingly in decline and they can think that they're immune to

God's judgments but God does see and God is not slow says Peter as some count slowness he will be true to himself and he is here in a long awaited judgment that is coming and that is just God will be true to his covenant what does Paul remind Timothy if we deny him he will also deny us if we are faithless he remains faithful to his covenant for he cannot deny himself Jesus says the same thing doesn't he in Matthew chapter 10 whoever denies me before men I will also deny before my father who is in heaven these are warnings warnings for the world Ezekiel says but warnings also for us that's what Paul says you think you're standing firm you're no different he says to the Corinthian church you need to flee from idolatry too but surely we're New

Testament Christians surely we live in these last days of the spirit surely surely these warnings don't apply to us Paul says yes they do they're written for our instruction even yes upon whom these ends of the ages has come because we believers today in God's household Jew and Gentile now together in one household united in Christ we're tempted to the same presumptions as Paul how many times have you heard people say oh once saved always saved that's a mantra isn't it often that people give when especially they are people who cherish the sovereignty of God cherish the doctrines of grace well friends Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God's sovereignty with knobs on didn't he he waxes lyrical about their predestination before all worlds to glory in Christ but what Paul means by that is it lays upon you a great responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ to walk worthily of that calling to keep putting away falsehood to put on the new identity with righteousness and holiness do not grieve the spirit of God he says walk as children of light take no part in the works of darkness you can grieve away the spirit of God Paul says to these Christians just as happened here chapter 5 verse 11 I will withdraw says the

Lord and that's what happened in the exile Ezekiel is going to see the glory of God leaving and departing from his temple and his people and the reason well it's summarized there in chapter 5 verse 11 look it's because of their detestable things that defile God's worship that's idols and the abominations in their behavior that those idols led them into the actions that flowed out of that religious presumption and pride and God withdrew himself because of their adulterous worship which always leads to abominable wickedness and that's a very sobering thought because describes doesn't it a great deal of the culture all around us today and alas too often in the church around us today what did that idolatry and these abominations actually look like well chapter 6 and 7 flesh out and illustrate these two things for us you can read them later but in chapter 6 the chief focus is on idolatry on adulterous worship look at the middle of verse 9 there the whoring heart that is departed from me eyes that go whoring after idols see Ezekiel's prophesying in chapter 6 against the mountains of Israel and especially these were notorious for high places for the shrines to idols that they worshiped alongside their pretense of temple worship of God and literally it was whoring because pagan worship was all about the earth about fertility and so both male and female prostitution was very central to that worship your sexual energy energized the gods and brought you blessings and favor and fertility much more exciting than a group bible study for some people but Ezekiel you see as a priest of God knew all his life that religious sin false worship is at the root of all sin and idolatry false worship is the very heart of human sin it turns the truth of

[36 : 48] God into a lie says Paul and turns everything upside down instead of worshiping the creator he says we worship the creation and that is why God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness because says Paul they exchange the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and serve the creature rather than the creator human beings he says suppress the truth it's an extraordinary self-delusion and the bible constantly exposes that one famous places in Isaiah chapter 44 where the prophet has a diatribe against false idols and the folly of it he mocks

the man who takes a piece of wood and chops it in two and one half he chops up and makes a fire to warm himself and cook his food the other half he makes into an idol and bows down before it and says deliver me you are my God and Isaiah says his deluded heart has led him astray and he cannot deliver himself and say is there not a lie in my right hand idolatry is the exchange of truth for a lie the living

God for dead idols and yet it is utterly delusional and utterly detestable to God like a man who would exchange his living wife for a blow-up sex doll and yet there is a very great market for these things which should make us think shouldn't it because it's very easy for us to perhaps see the delusion of buying down to a wood-carved idol and think that's got nothing to say to us but you see what the prophet is condemning is the deluded heart of man and the deliberate blindness in the heart of man to the truth and whether the form is an ancient idolatry of wood or say the modern ideology of woke both of them at root are exactly the same delusion and the same lie the issue of idolatry could not be more relevant today friends in our Western culture today it is rampant we live in a world that is devoted to the worship of created things and the chief idol is our self Carl Truman's book the rise and the triumph from the modern self charts this inexorable rise of the worship of what he calls the free expressive self that is the god of our Western culture today and Matthew Roberts last week at our gospel partnership conference spoke so helpfully on that subject as well we live in a culture that says what I want is who I really am that's my identity that's what I must serve and so my outer life and the body must serve and conform to my inner life who I think I am even when what I think I am is manifestly at odds with what is observable and what is biologically true

I will present my body as a living sacrifice to my god you see it is an utter upside down perversion Romans 12 verse 1 turning truth into lies it is built on a delusion because what truly defines us all of us as human beings is our creator we are made to be worshipers of our god and our maker we are made to be servants of our true god and lord but instead you see the very heart of sin is to turn that upside down and worship the created thing transforming true worship into a perverse worship of ourselves you see the delusion that is this pervasive phenomena around us now of this trans ideology that is just an extremely obvious manifestation of the universal idolatry of the human heart because to seek our identity to seek our meaning our purpose our fulfillment in anything other than our true destiny which is to be worshipers of god alone that is the depths of idolatry and that's a detestable thing to god don't you find it disturbing that our culture around us today is just as idolatrous as ancient Israel in our western culture which has also had the huge privilege has it not of the word of god in our own accessible language for hundreds of years just like Israel had I was very struck when I was thinking of this to think that the authorized version of the bible has been in our hands just a little bit short of 430 years 1611 it was published in fact in Scotland the earliest English bible was the Geneva bible published in 1578 I think and that's more than 440 years and yet for four centuries just like in ancient Israel it seems our culture has persistently turned truth into lies and sought meaning and security and identity and wealth and in power and in prosperity and increasingly just in sexual pleasure just like the pagan Israelites who were seduced by ancient pagans and you see as our culture today regresses more and more and more into what is really pre-Christian paganism we are seeing more and more outright earth worship and sex worship it's no accident we shouldn't be surprised that the green movement and the pride movement are so closely connected it's always been that way paganism is the same lie whether it's ancient or modern and as the religious delusion the perverse behavior increases so the perverse behavior increases and that's where we are today and that's what we're seeing in these chapters you see the adulterous worship of chapter 6 is the root cause of all the abominable ways that you then read about in chapter 7 chapter 7 verse 3 now the end is upon you after these 400 years and I will punish you for all your abominations no time to go into this in detail but the chapter consists of three oracles each of them with a forecast of judgment for their ways and each of them ending with the same formula and they will then know that I am the Lord and notice a prominent word three times throughout this chapter that is exposed as the root of these abominations what's the word? verse 10 pride pride pride has blossomed and budded and fostered violence and wickedness verse 20 pride has perverted God's beautiful things into something that's detestable and perverse and utterly polluted the whole culture corruption in the worship of God leads to corruption in the world of men idolatry leads to all kinds of social evils you can read of them here verse 23 violence and bloodshed verse 19 all kinds of wealth through exploitation that's corrupted them and so now after all this time verse 24 I will put an end says the Lord to the pride and judgment will see total

economic collapse verse 12 will be misery for the buyer and the seller but it's caused by total moral collapse which is caused by total spiritual collapse and God will repay exactly the wealth that they worshipped verse 19 the silver and gold it won't save them because silver and gold are no good when there's no food to buy or when there's no oil to buy or gas to buy for that matter and nor will the church be any help at all in this national crisis verse 26 no vision from the prophet no instruction from the priest no counsel from the elders a famine of the word of God due to the failure of the church of God and that's a salutary warning to all who have an ingrained conviction that it could never happen to us it could it could for God is not mocked whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap the Christians in Asia Minor

I'm sure thought exactly the same when they read those words that John brought to them in his revelation in chapters 2 and 3 but all of their lamps were snuffed out weren't they gone I'm sure the Roman Empire thought that when it ruled the world and then one day it was no more but my father who wrote those words when he was born in 1922 the sun still had not set on the British Empire before he was 35 every last vestige of that power was gone drowned in the collapse of the Suez Crisis I'm sure the American Empire thinks today this could never happen to us our whole western civilization thinks that doesn't it but the truth is friends it may very well be that our grandchildren will only know how to speak Mandarin or Arabic

[46 : 57] I will put an end to the pride says the Lord especially of those who had the truth of God in extraordinarily privileged ways but turned that truth of God into a lie defiling his sanctuary with what is detestable and abominable and through that judgment alone it seems they will at last know that the Lord is true and that their idols are false and futile a lie and that's the relentless refrain through these chapters and all through Ezekiel then you will know that I am the Lord and so we mustn't miss this last thing the intentional revelation through the coming judgment God's coming judgment has a clear purpose they'll hear his words and they'll know his truth one way or another

God will act to vindicate his holy name and to show himself to be just and righteous in punishing evil and it will be as chapter 5 verse 15 says it will be a warning to the world Ezekiel's pictures couldn't convey that detail but his words are so clear what happens to God's people is revelatory both to them but also to the whole world to Israel there is revelation to them in their ruin through his wrath they will know that he is the Lord the covenant God who means what he says and does what he promises read those awful words again in chapter 6 verses 3 to 6 and verses 13 to 14 you see they thought oh God's on our side God's against all those others but remember what Jesus said to those who are given much much will be required and their unrepentant hearts meant that they could only have their eyes open from their blindness they could only have the delusion driven from their minds as they saw their own ruin that is a terrifying thing read revelation chapter 7 later on and see there how God is telling us that there will be many from the greatest to the least for whom the great revelation of who they truly are and who they were created for and what their whole life was about will only come at last as they are crying to the mountains and the rocks fall on us hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of his wrath has come and who can stand

Paul says these things are written for us for the Israel of God today and especially let me say to us who are Gentile Christians today Paul says doesn't he don't you become proud but stand in awe for if God did not spare the natural branches Israel neither will he spare you behold the kindness of God and the severity of God severity towards those who have fallen but kindness towards you if you continue in his kindness there's revelation in his wrath there's also revelation in Israel's ruin for the nations moreover I will make you verse 15 an object of reproach among the nations in the sight of all who pass by God's purpose for Israel will not be thwarted he's saying even by their own sin and rebellion

God promised way back through Moses in Deuteronomy 28 exactly this that in exile Israel would become a proverb among the nations and in Deuteronomy 29 he says this that when all these curses come upon them for their sin all the nations will say it is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord the God of their fathers and went and served other gods and worshipped them therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land and Ezekiel saying far from being a matter of gloating it should be a warning to all such because as Peter says if judgment begins with a household of God what will be the outcome for others who do not obey his gospel the sufferings of Israel at God's hand throughout their history and who knows perhaps even to the present day Ezekiel says it's a warning to the world of just how severely God takes spiritual adultery departure

from his covenant truth it's a warning to the church today and the truth friends is that sadly we live in a culture in our nation and so in most of the west where perhaps the chief revelation of God to the world today through the church is in its ruin secular people many writers have noted the catastrophic decline of the mainline denominations in our nation and they've said and I've read them saying these things well it's because they've abandoned the Bible it's abandoning the historic faith that's why their buildings are empty that's why their coffers are empty and some at least in seeing that have sought out the remnant of those who have fell to the true faith the orthodox gospel and have sought God's true word revelation in his people's in his hope in his such judgment is there wisdom for salvation for those who do hear and heed God's severe words well yes even in the darkness of these awful chapters there is because as well as the revelation of judgment amid real ruin there's also a glimmer of revelation of salvation amid real repentance look at chapter 6 verses 8 to 10 as we close there will be some who escape the sword and the Lord says who will remember me among the nations where they're carried captives and they'll remember how

[53 : 48] I have been broken over their whoring heart and they shall be loathsome in their own sight and they shall know that I am the Lord they will know him with truly penitent hearts there's hints there's glimmers of hope all through these dark chapters God relenting over the defiling excrement that surely implied that there would be some not utterly defiled and separated from him chapter 5 verse 3 that speaks of those who are hidden in his robe they wouldn't all be burnt in the fire and these here chapter 6 verse 9 they would truly see what they've done they'd see the pain in the broken heart of God because of their sin and because he is the covenant God the Lord God he will be faithful again back in Leviticus chapter 26 along with all the promises of punishment there's also hope because God says if they confess their iniquity if their heart is humbled then I will remember my covenant and I will remember the land that I might be their God

I am the Lord and all these hints imply that there can still be hope even amid this terrible judgment but how can that be how it points us doesn't it to the fact that this is not the end of the Bible story and it points us to that great climax which comes in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ when he came as the true Israel when he came as the ultimate covenant messenger speaking God's word to his people when he came to bear on his body actually what Ezekiel could only act out here in verses 4 to 6 of chapter 4 the full punishment of the house of Israel all through the ages for every true Israelite whether Jew or Gentile so that those who through his gospel come to see what they have done breaking

God's heart through their rebellious rejection of his love whoring after idols of their own making and come to weep at the evil that they've committed so that they will come to know that he is the Lord that he is God the Lord who strikes in judgment yes upon his people's sin but the Lord who bears that sin himself as our savior the first step you see the first step in knowing wisdom for salvation it's here in chapter 6 verse 9 it's knowing true repentance remembering him the true and only savior it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God but you see in his hands alone also lies hope because

God said to his true servant Jesus what he said here to Ezekiel five times you shall bear their punishment till you have completed the days of your siege friends never for the proud never for the proud but always always for the truly penitent that is hope in the hands of the living God let's pray blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied almighty

God who shows to them that are in error the light of thy truth to the intent that they may return to the way of righteousness grant unto all of us in this fellowship of Christ's church that we may turn away from things contrary to our profession and follow all such things that are agreeable to the same through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen