

Flee From the Wrath to Come!

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[0 : 00] And we'll be reading all of chapter 12 and a couple of extracts from chapters 13, 14 and 15.

But I do turn to Ezekiel 12 and we'll begin there. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of Bibles just at the side, at the back. Please do grab a Bible if you need one.

Ezekiel 12, beginning verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me.

Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight.

[1 : 11] You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight as baggage for exile.

And you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight as those who must go into exile. In their sight, dig through the wall and bring your baggage out through it.

In their sight, you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.

And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands.

I brought out my baggage at dusk, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight. In the morning, the word of the Lord came to me.

[2 : 18] Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, What are you doing? Say to them, Thus says the Lord God.

This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it. Say, I am a sign for you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them.

They shall go into exile, into captivity. And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it.

He shall cover his face that he may not see the land with his eyes. And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans. Yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. And I will scatter towards every wind all those who are around him, his helpers and all his troops.

[3 : 22] And I will unsheathe the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the Lord. When I disperse among the nations and scatter them among the countries.

But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.

And the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink water with trembling, with anxiety, and say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land of Israel, They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay.

In this way her land will be stripped of all it contains, on account of the violence of all those who dwell in it. All the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation.

And you shall know that I am the Lord. And the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing?

[4 : 44] Tell them, therefore, Thus says the Lord God, I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.

But say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall be no more any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

For I am the Lord. I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord God.

And the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.

Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God, None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be performed, declares the Lord God.

[5 : 55] Then in chapter 13, God condemns strongly the establishment prophets. prophets who, far from standing in the breach and building up the truth of God against the people's rebellious faithfulness, have colluded with them, telling them what their itching ears want to hear.

In verse 10, they say, Peace, when there is no peace. And the women who have turned the people to occultism and magic, lying to my people who listen to lies, verse 19, Therefore, verse 23, I will deliver my people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

And so in chapter 14, God says to Ezekiel's people and their leaders, who still have idolatrous hearts, that they must learn from what God is about to do to Jerusalem, and that the only hope for all is to repent and turn away from your idols and turn away your faces from all your abominations, verse 6.

No one will be saved by association just because they are some godly people among them. No. If God will judge any land that sins against him, verse 12, then how much more, verse 21, will he judge his own people who have all the privileges of God's word unless they repent and turn their hearts to him?

And so chapter 15 sums up with the stark message. A fruitless vine is no good for anything at all, not even for firewood.

[7 : 45] And so, like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I have given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And you will know that I am the Lord when I set my face against them. Well, that's a quick overview of those chapters, but perhaps during the offering in a few moments you could read over chapters 13, 14, and 15.

And Willie will be dealing with this whole section a bit later in the service. We'll do turn to Ezekiel, and we're looking at chapters 12 to 15.

We've often said there only and only ever has been one true gospel of the one true God.

Paul tells us that gospel was preached in advance to Abraham. Hebrews 1 tells us that it was proclaimed in multiple ways to the ancients by the prophets, but now in these last days it's proclaimed to the whole world with finality, of course, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[8 : 57] In Revelation 14, we hear it from the angels to the world. Put it this way, Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come.

Paul preached similarly to the intellectuals in Athens in Acts 17. Now, he says, God commands all people everywhere to repent because God has fixed the day on which He will judge the world by the risen Jesus Christ.

The same gospel opens the New Testament witness in the gospels. Listen to John the Baptist, the last prophet of the old order, the first evangelist of the new. Flee from the wrath to come.

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Don't begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. We're special. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid at the root of the tree. Every good tree, therefore, that doesn't bear good fruit is cast down and thrown into the fire.

[10 : 01] John is the last of the Old Testament prophets, but he has the same gospel as they all did. We read in Ezekiel 14, verse 6, Repent and turn away from your idols.

That was Ezekiel's gospel six centuries before Christ. That I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, says the Lord. So Ezekiel, John, Jesus, Paul, the angels of heaven, they all have only one message to proclaim, and it is to hear and to heed God's gracious warning.

To bear fruit in keeping with real repentance, or to bear the fire of God's real wrath. Flee from that wrath to come.

That's their gospel. This is the gospel of Christ. And as Paul tells us, this is the message of the whole Old Testament. And these scriptures are here in our Bibles, he says, to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

And it couldn't be more vivid, could it, than here in Ezekiel 12 to 15, or more vital for us to hear as the church today.

[11 : 17] It's a long section, but I want to try and trace the coherent message as best as we can, which is all about establishing God's real revelation, and exposing man's real rebellion, and therefore encouraging all in real repentance.

First of all, look at chapter 12. The message here is very plain. It is that real revelation, God's revelation, will be established, and especially among those who are complacent, or skeptical about his coming judgment.

God's word will be proved true, and his people will be a witness to his lordship in his just judgment. Now remember, Ezekiel's first vision of glory in chapters 1 to 3 was followed by a dramatic message about a coming new siege in Jerusalem. And so in the same way, his second vision that we looked at last time of God's glory departing from the temple and the city in verses in chapters 8 to 11, that also is now followed by another drama, and this time depicting a new exile.

And in chapters 12 to 15 here, the message of that coming captivity, with all its horror, is very clearly foretold, and its absolute certainty is underlined.

[12 : 37] The last verse of chapter 15 says this, I will make the land desolate because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord. And these chapters press on the nearness of this impending reality, and it tackles head-on various objections that people have to what seems utterly impossible for them to believe.

It's amazing, isn't it, how quickly some things become unarguable in the society, and people think things are impossible. Remember back to the millennium, about a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism.

And the assumption was, wasn't it, in the Western world that we've reached, well, the end of history, is what a famous philosopher called his book, the triumph of Western liberal democracy.

It'll be the end of wars. It'll be the end of nationalism and strife. There'll be a global nirvana of peace and prosperity. Well, look around at the world today.

It's perhaps more fractured than at any time for around a century. And a century ago, the same hubris at the end of the 19th century was utterly shattered, wasn't it, by decades that had two dreadful world wars.

[13 : 58] Well, in the 6th century BC, the Israelites thought that it was quite impossible that God would ever possibly cast his people out of the land and abandon them, abandon his city and his temple.

But Ezekiel was to tell God's people, those ones who were already in exile, they assumed just for a short while, know how utterly wrong they were. And the message in verses 1 to 16 here in chapter 12 is as plain as it is dramatic.

A total exile is coming for all the rest of Israel. That is utterly certain. And through that, the nations will see that God is a just and a holy God.

And his people will know it also, verse 16 of chapter 12, when they're forced to face up and to confess their abominations among the nations. So that all may know the Lord, the covenant God, is not to be trifled with, not to be presumed upon.

Verses 1 to 16 act out what this coming exile is going to mean and the misery of it. The ignominious attempts at nighttime escape for the prince, that's the puppet king, Zedekiah and all his nobles and their troops.

[15 : 23] But they're going to be captive. They're going to be slaughtered and brought to utter humiliation. And Ezekiel has made a personal sign of this, he says in verse 6, for the house of Israel.

Because you see, he's to do it all in their sight, verse 3. Again, that's underlined, verse 4 and verse 5 and verse 6, and on it goes. It's to be unmissable, done in their faces.

Why? Well, look at the end of verse 3. So that perhaps they will understand, even though they are a rebellious house.

Even at this late stage, on the brink of calamity, grace is still seeking a response. Why will you die, O house of Israel? Pries the Lord in chapter 18.

I have no pleasure in judgment. Think of how at the last supper even, the Lord Jesus held out that morsel of bread, even to Judas, his betrayer.

[16:24] Surely looking him in the eye, and saying, why will you die? As William Still put it once so memorably, yes, John Bunyan tells us, in the Pilgrim's Progress, there is a slippery path which runs to hell from the gate of heaven.

But there is also a gate to heaven situated at the very threshold of despair. Yet Judas resisted it, as did Israel here, so many times.

And God warns right to the very end, his warnings are gracious. Why will you die? That they were unheeded. And so, verse 10 to 12, the prince would be taken into exile, not seeing the land with his eyes, because his eyes were put out.

And the last thing he saw before they were put out was his two sons being killed right in front of him. Can you imagine? You can read it in 2 Kings 25. Everything was fulfilled that was foretold here.

And within three short years of Ezekiel speaking these words. Do you think any rulers, any governments, imagine that they could come to such an ignominious end in such a short time?

[17:42] Well, I suppose today government ministers don't last long, do they? Even prime ministers. But there was no elections in Babylon. And yet, as Douglas Stewart says, in his commentary, God's hand is over all governments, whether they know it or not.

All national leaders will one day answer to him for how just and how generous their rulers be. No human ruler exalts himself without eventually being abased.

It would be well, wouldn't it, for all rulers to ponder that reality. And all those who seek the limelight around them. Verse 14, I will scatter to the winds all who are around him and unleash the sword after them.

But, verse 16, look, some will escape. Is that a sign of hope? Well, perhaps, but barely so because it will not be to declare their righteousness in escaping the sword, but to witness to their shame, to declare among the nations that indeed it was their abominations that brought this terrible judgment on themselves and on the land and to show and to vindicate the justice and the righteousness of God who is not partisan, who is not partial, who doesn't turn a blind eye to wickedness just because it's among some privileged class of people.

But rather, he is just and he punishes all sin and especially among those who should know better than any the true way of goodness and of truth.

[19:20] And so, what God's people thought was impossible became utterly inevitable. The destruction of every last vestige of their religious institution and in the full glare of a watching world, a pagan world, they could not conceive of it.

That's what verse 2 says in chapter 12. They're living in a total delusion. They're a rebellious house. They've got eyes and ears, but they are utterly blind and utterly deaf to the reality that is staring them in the face.

That it is I Chabod, that the glory has departed, that the end is near. And yet, that same delusion, well, it's all around us today, isn't it, still?

Among so many in our institutional churches as Paul was praying. I've heard a lot of it this week, I'm afraid, from well-meaning, but I fear very, very naive people in the Church of England.

As our synod has finally, just like the Church of Scotland did over a decade ago, become openly and utterly defiant in its apostasy. It's like *deja vu*.

[20:36] Having heard it all before from those in the Church of Scotland who just did not believe that our national church could ever really have its lampstand removed. And yet, a little over a decade since that took place, since it publicly took a stand in the sight of all to depart from the truth of God, the Church of Scotland is in numerical meltdown and in financial meltdown.

Some of its presbytery is literally being decimated. And its membership evaporating exponentially. And yet, even still, delusion abounds.

This very week, I heard of a minister's wife confidently saying that this Church of Scotland will soon rise like a phoenix out of the ashes. Well, I'm afraid that the only part of that vision likely to prove true is the part about the ashes.

Wasn't so, was it, for the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3? They didn't heed Christ's warning, it seems. And their lampstands were removed.

They disappeared off the face of the earth. And the truth is that just as God said of the beleaguered rump of humiliated Israelites here in verse 16, the pitiful, crumbling remnants of our established

churches today, their only witness to the pagan world round about is in their calamity and their collapse.

[22 : 07] Which people see and will perhaps understand is entirely because they have abandoned their gospel and the truth of God.

They declare their abominations among the nations, says Ezekiel, and perhaps some will see and learn and begin to take seriously the Lord whose revelation of truth will be established and prove true.

But Israel's self-delusion was so deep that only an utter desolation was going to wake them up. And so in verses 17 to 20, Ezekiel's to make a dramatic show of fearfulness and terror.

Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, drink your water with trembling and anxiety. For these complacent exiles who thought that they too would soon rise like a phoenix from the ashes, teaching them reality, was going to take, verse 19, anxiety, dismay, and verse 20, desolation.

So I don't think that Ezekiel had to play at these things. He was himself full of dismay because he knew that God was deadly serious. He knew that he also was among the people who were going to face all of this.

[23 : 34] and he showed in his own life the seriousness of God's truth. And that, I think, has something to say to us also as believers today, doesn't it?

Because we're called, aren't we, to demonstrate in our own lives what we know of God's truth and the seriousness of lives that are lived and the knowledge of eternal realities that others are blanking out.

I don't mean Christians are to be long-faced and sober-sized all the time. Of course not. But, nor should our lives be visibly superficial and shallow and just filled with the same froth, the same follies that the world is around us.

And so often our culture is just trite and trivial, isn't it? Driven by fashions, by celebrities, by vanities. And certainly the Christian church should not be a place of superficial entertainment, but it should be a place of serious engagement with the truth of God, with the weighty implications of that truth for all of our lives and for this world.

Well, that was Ezekiel's witness, wasn't it? He embodied entirely his own message. And he didn't shrink either from naming the reasons for the coming judgment.

[24 : 53] Verse 19, the violence of those who dwell in the land, which you've seen in previous chapters was very tied up with economic exploitation as well as pagan religion, as well as prosperity practices.

They'd sown the wind of the world's way, as Hosea had said of Israel a century before. Now, they were reaping the whirlwind of a world that turned against them. They were blind and deaf to God's truth and his warnings.

But God's not blind and deaf. He sees and he hears. And his moral laws are real and they are vital. And when they're scorned, when they're rejected, it will always lead to harm and corruption in society.

Ultimately, it will lead to chaos and disintegration in society. It may take generations. The mills of God grind slowly. But a reckoning will come and a reckoning was coming here.

And that's a warning, isn't it? Not just to the church today, but also to our culture today. And perhaps it will take anxiety and dismay and desolation.

[26 : 08] The utter calamity of something like war or famine. Or just the chaos of suicidal government policies on energy, on security, on immigration, on all sorts of things.

Maybe it will take all of that to wake up our nation and other western nations to the blessing and the goodness and the health of its Christian heritage, which it is scorned and abandoned.

We've taken that for granted, haven't we, for so long? But God's kindness, God's patience, well, so often it doesn't lead to thanksgiving, but it just leads to complacency, to skepticism, even outright unbelief.

And that's the way it was in Ezekiel's day here. Look at verses 21 to 28, where he now uses plain words on top of his drama to make the meaning absolutely clear and unmistakable. Make no mistake, all such skepticism, all such complacency about God's judgment is going to be exposed. Now many prophets before Ezekiel, you see, had promised coming judgment. Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, many others. Micah chapter three is very specific about the destruction of Jerusalem.

[27 : 19] And yet, here we're there, 150 years later, and it hasn't happened yet. And so, verse 22, people are saying, how the days grow along, and all these visions, they turn out to be nothing.

Judgment's never going to come. But you're wrong, says the Lord. Just those people today are wrong. Peter says that, doesn't he? In his second letter, scoffers will abound in these last days, saying, where's the judgment?

Where's the judge? Where's the coming again of this Jesus as judge? But people are wrong today, and they were wrong then. God is not slow.

Don't misunderstand God's patience for powerlessness or indolence. He is patient, giving time for repentance. But alas, many times, through history, upon nations and in cultures, and even upon the professing people of God, that judgment must come.

Therefore, says the Lord in verse 23, the days are near. You who are skeptical, you who disbelieve that God will judge, you'll see it soon. And verse 26, those who know that maybe God can judge, but they're complacent.

[28 : 40] Oh, it's a distant thing. It's going to be way in the future. We don't need to worry about it. No, verse 28, it's coming soon. None of my words will be delayed any longer. God is merciful. And he's relented in the past many times.

Remember, Hezekiah repented and postponed judgment back in 2 Kings chapter 20. And he famously said, oh, there'll be peace in my days. Be okay. But no, don't presume upon God's mercy. That's an easy thing for us to do, isn't it? Especially perhaps an easy thing for those who grow up in the Christian church who know the grace and the mercy of God. And they think, oh, well, I've got plenty of time to get really serious about that later on.

I'll live for myself just for a while at the moment. No. There is such a thing, you know, as too late in the calendar of God, isn't there?

For individuals, for churches, for nations and cultures. That's what Jesus says in the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13. One more year.

[29 : 46] Give it every chance to produce fruit. But then, if not, cut it down and cast it into the fire. God is patient. He abounds in grace and in mercy.

But he is not passive. And he warns. And either his warning is a savor of life unto life, if it's received, or, says Paul, it will be a savor of death and judgment if it's refused.

Don't doubt that. Verse 25, I will speak and perform it. Verse 28, the word I speak will be performed. God's real revelation will be established beyond all doubt.

Ultimately, in judgment of this whole world, but also many times in history and in personal history, God's word will be proved true. And whereas people abandon his rule, they cannot presume upon his patience forever.

And there will come a time where if they don't witness to him by their fruitful faith, they will witness to him by fearful judgment upon them.

[31 : 03] When all that they hold dear collapses round about them. And in their calamity, they declare to the world, verse 16, all their abominations.

will be to the Lord. And that is never a message people want to hear, is it? Not then, and not today in the days that we live.

And that's why the New Testament tells us many false prophets will arise in the church telling people what their itching ears do want to hear. Positive messages. Not this negative doom and gloom preaching.

Not this Jeremiah of judgment. And so the message in chapter 13 is here. That as real revelation will be established, so all real rebellion will be exposed.

Especially among the spiritual professionals, the establishment preachers. And they will be punished along with their hearers with whom they collude in this moral and spiritual delusion.

[32 : 07] Verses 1 to 16 of chapter 13 is a diatribe, isn't it, against the establishment clergy who have done nothing to arrest or to repair the moral ruin among them, but rather have done their bit to undermine further the spiritual security of the nation.

They're blind to God's truth, verse 3, following their own spirit, like jackals among the ruins.

That is devastating, isn't it? They're scavengers among the ruins. Far from building things up, they're just tearing things further down, inflicting their own violent damage to the nation.

Verse 5, to prevent it standing in battle in the day of the Lord. They're utterly oblivious to the ruin around them and they are further contributing to that decline.

those of you who read our daily readings, which are on Ezekiel at the moment, you may recall a quote in this passage from my father's notes there, where he quotes from a book published in the 1960s called *The New Morality*.

[33 : 17] Let me quote an excerpt. Civilization collapses when the essential reverence for absolute values which religion gives disappears. Rome had discovered that in the days of her decadence.

Men live on the accumulated faith of the past as well as its accumulated self-discipline. Overthrow these and nothing seems missing at first.

A few sexual taboos and so on have gone by the board, but something else has gone as well. The mortar which held society together.

Then, the rats come out of their holes and begin burrowing under the foundations and there's nothing to withstand them. And he goes on speaking of Ezekiel's day here.

In a time of crisis, what was needed was to give a moral and spiritual lead to the people and to enable them to close their ranks against the approaching enemy.

[34 : 20] But that's what they'd not done, these spiritual leaders. Verse 5. They'd not gone up into the breaches. Instead, they just gave false vision, lies.

And friends, the liberalism, the decadence of our society in the late 20th century, in that, the mainstream church did not go into the breach. They just joined, like jackals scavenging the crumbs from our progressive society's tables.

disciples, that embraced the new morality. And look where we are today. Verse 7.

Nothing but false visions, lying divinations. Whenever they say, oh, thus says the Lord, whenever they say, oh, this is where the Spirit is leading us to discover new truth today. But verse 6 is just as true, isn't it?

The Lord God has not sent them. And yet they think he'll fulfill their word. They think he will bless their apostasy. Well, it's not new, is it, today?

[35 : 27] Here it is, back in Ezekiel's day, the establishment clergy were utterly rotten to the core. The New Testament's just as clear. 1 John 4 warns us, doesn't it? Many false prophets already abound.

2 Peter 2 repeatedly warns that that will be the case in the church. False preachers following their own spirit, the spirit of the age, and telling people what?

What they want to hear. Attractive and reasonable, winsome, all that. But according to the Lord here, verse 8, uttering nothing but falsehood and lies, and the Lord will not collude in that.

Verse 9, I am against you, against the preachers of false theologies, lying promises about peace with the world. And he says they will be cast out of his kingdom, cast aside as leaders from the council of his people, as members from the register of the house of Israel, and losing all inheritance, he says, in the land, losing their place in the kingdom of God forever.

They're chilling words, aren't they? Chilling words, especially for Christian leaders. prayers. That's why James warns, doesn't he, in chapter 3. They'll be judged with much greater strictness.

[36 : 51] Why? Well, because leading the precious children of God astray is a terrible crime in God's sight. What did Jesus say? Better to be cast into the sea with a millstone around your neck than cause even one of his little ones to stumble.

And they had done that, verse 10, misled the people into making peace with the world, pretending to build spiritual reality, but in fact, building only false and feeble religious pretense, smearing with whitewash, the whitewash of all sorts of spiritual language about new insights, about fresh revelation, about walking together, about other integrities, about inclusiveness, all the rest. But all, says Ezekiel, built on sand, the shifting sand of the world's evil desires, not upon the abiding rock of God's eternal truth.

And he will judge it. Of course, that sounds so harsh, doesn't it? Surely Jesus, surely Jesus wouldn't talk like that.

Look carefully at verses 11 to 14 here. And then read later on Jesus' own words in Matthew 7, verses 21 to 27. He takes exactly Ezekiel's words here and affirms exactly the same point, where he says all such false and fake and phony spiritual language will absolutely collapse under the flood of God's coming judgment, like a house built on sand.

[38 : 39] And great was the fall of it, says Jesus. And of those who built it, look at verse 15 here, the wall is no more, and those who smeared it, the prophets of Israel, the preachers of peace.

Your precious institution and your own empty ministries collapsed in the dust because you lied.

Peace with the world is not progress as you say it is. As the apostle James says, it is to become enemies of God and it is to make others into enemies of God and that is a terrible sin. And that's reiterated here in verses 17 to 23 where it's a women's role. Here as occultists that's emphasized they're dabbling not only in the world's sensual mores but in its sinister magic. And that too, I'm afraid, is a feature increasingly of our own day, is it not, in our culture. The occult and even overt satanism is rampant around us today and especially actually among those who have so much influence in society, among celebrities and those in the cinema screen and so on. [39 : 58] Now that is one of the significant marks of a decadent and a dying civilization in any time. And it was utterly condemned, utterly forbidden in God's land.

Read about it in Deuteronomy 18, but here it was right in the heart of Judah. Just as today, verse 19, lying to people who listen to lies.

God is resolutely against all such. And notice the emphasis in verse 22.

What are they doing? Two things. Disheartening the righteous, devaluing their struggle to be godly and to be holy, and discouraging repentance, telling people not to turn from their wicked ways and so save their lives, but just to go on being themselves, true to them.

Jesus accused the establishment preachers in his own day of exactly the same thing, did he not? Of shutting up the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. A terrible crime, preventing people finding eternal life.

[41 : 14] Better, indeed, a millstone around your neck and cast into the depths of the sea. And God will shut down such perverse and pernicious fake faith.

Verse 23, no more. I will deliver my people out of your hand. Well, preachers and leaders seeking popularity, seeking friendship with the world today, read that and take note.

The situation here is dire, but it's also deeply dangerous. I am against you, says the Lord God. And if God is against us, it doesn't matter if all the world is for us.

So you see, with real rebellion exposed, thirdly, real repentance must be embraced. It's the only hope, especially for those who are especially privileged or else, God says, you face utter ruin.

And that's the message in chapters 14 and 15. Ezekiel speaking to his own company of exiles and saying they must be warned and see what happens in Jerusalem and themselves turn wholeheartedly from idolatry.

[42 : 38] If they also are not going to end up in the same ruin. The exiles, you see, have been taken away out of all the idolatry of Israel in the land. But you see, at the beginning of chapter 14, when these elders come to consult the Lord through Ezekiel, God says, I'm not going to speak to them.

Why? Because verse 3, they're still utterly idolatrous at heart. They've taken their idols into their very hearts, hedging their bets with the world, wanting a foot in both camps.

But you can't pretend with God no amount of spiritual talk and posturing will hide the multitudes of idols in their hearts, says verse 4. No amount of circumcision or baptism for that matter or anything will avail anything unless there are truly circumcised hearts, not idolatrous hearts.

And therefore, verse 6, there must be real repentance. Turn away from your idols and turn away your faces from your abominations.

The sin in your heart has to be named for what it really is. Not renamed, not sanitized, not called, oh, just who I am. It's just the real me inside.

[43 : 55] I'm just expressing who I really am, my real identity. No. No. In your heart is heinous rejection of the God whose image you are created to be.

And that must be repented of. Not just what you've done, but what you are, what you've become. And only that will enable you to hear God and be heard by him.

That was Jesus' answer too, wasn't it? Remember the wealthy young man who came to him in Luke 18 who wanted to hear about eternal life? But when Jesus told him the way he could hear, leave behind everything you so value in the world and come and follow me, he went away sorrowful.

He never heard the words from Jesus that would have given him life because he wouldn't take off the headphones that were drowning out Christ's call with the siren call of this world's reward.

And as James keeps reminding us in his letter, friendship with the world makes us enemies of God. death to his word. It's to win back our hearts, look at verse 5, to lay hold of our hearts that God calls people to repent.

[45 : 19] Do you see? Same as chapter 12 verse 3, perhaps they will understand that is God's desire. But if we will not turn our hearts, well, verse 7, you see, he will answer, but only in action, in judgment.

Verse 8, I will set my face against that man and cut him off. God will not entertain hypocrites. He won't entertain false spirituality, false piety.

He cannot abide that. Read all the diatribes of Jesus against the hypocrites. Read James' letter.

Don't ask the Lord for anything with a divided heart, being double-minded.

If you're trying to be friends with God and also friends with the world, don't think you'll receive anything from the Lord if you come to him with that hypocrisy. Show him your faith is real.

Turn away from wickedness. Become a doer of God's word. Humble yourself. Seek God. Resist the devil. And God will draw near to you, he says.

[46 : 25] That's real repentance. But if you won't do that, well, Ezekiel has the same message. Not only will you not receive what you want, but you will receive what you deserve.

God's judgment. For both, notice verse 10, the false inquirer and the false preacher who collude together in this whole self-delusion and hypocrisy.

Twisting God's word to justify sin, to internalize idolatry. And that's a real warning, isn't it? Both to those who outwardly say, oh, we want to hear God's word, we want to profess faith in Christ, but inwardly just cherish and cultivate their own idols.

But also to all of us, especially to preachers and leaders, well, may we be tempted to keep silent to avoid confrontation over these things.

Whether it's because of a misplaced sense of compassion or sensitivity, or just because we don't want to seem to be unpleasant or judgmental, become unpopular.

[47 : 44] No, we're all responsible. We can't hide behind others. We can't somehow think that we ourselves will be held up and saved by others, saved by other people's repentance.

That's actually the point of the second half of verse 14, chapter 14 from verse 12 to 23, because some evidently thought that judgment would be averted on Jerusalem because there were some faithful saints still there.

But four times here, Ezekiel says, not even Noah and Daniel and Job together could avert my wrath on Jerusalem. And that's a principle of God's justice, he says in verse 13, for any land that sins, do you note?

Which is perhaps why these three names that he quotes are actually great worthies from before the time that Israel was a nation. Noah and Job we know as godly ancients, but the third one there is probably not Daniel, the contemporary of Ezekiel, the book of Daniel, but Danel, another ancient who was known for his righteousness.

It's worth also noting by the way in passing here that these four disasters that are mentioned in this section, famine and wild beasts and sword and pestilence, they're all covenant curses for Israel, they're all mentioned in Leviticus chapter 26, and yet notice that he applies here biblical morality and God's judgment to every nation, not just to Israel.

[49 : 08] Verse 13, when any land sins, God will judge it. God's righteous commands are universal, for all time, for all places, not just for Israel, not just for Christians today.

God's commands, God's law is the basis of his judgment of this whole world. But verse 21, notice how much more culpable, how much more responsible is Jerusalem, God's city, Israel, the people of the book, how much more culpable for their sin and failure to repent.

That's the point. Don't think, oh, we've got Abraham, we've got Moses, we've got the law. That will not exempt you from God's judgment. Rather, you are even more responsible.

And if you won't repent, then your pedigree, your privilege, all your great heroes will not avail you anything at all. You are set in the midst of the nations to be a light to the nations.

And yet you're worse than all the nations, he says. A pillar and buttress of God's truth has just become a pillar of shame. And his message is, you therefore deserve it all the more.

[50 : 26] And you'll be forced to admit that. Look at verse 22. when the few survivors from the right join you in exile and you see just how wicked their ways have really been.

You'll be consoled. You'll change your mind. You'll realize this is not about God's weakness, about God's failure to protect his people. Rather, this is evidence of the justice of God, of his faithfulness to his promise.

You will know, verse 23, that I have not done this without cause. See what he's saying? There's no salvation by proxy.

Not for churches, not for individuals, or here, not for any land. Just because you know godly Christians, they're Christians, just because you attend a Bible teaching church, just because you live in what you thought was a Christian nation, whatever.

It wasn't the presence of Noah, was it? It was the preaching of Noah that saved those who listened to his word and who took shelter under God's one appointed way of salvation.

[51 : 28] It wasn't just because they lived next door to Noah. There must be real response. There must be real repentance, or else there will be in the face of real rebellion, there will be real ruin in the end.

And the little epilogue there in chapter 15 sums up that warning, doesn't it? In a devastating way in this focus on the vine. The vine was a symbol of life, a symbol of luxury in the ancient world and especially for Israel, often likened to a vine.

This is a clear picture of Israel. Everyone knew it. Isaiah 5 speaks about Israel as God's vineyard. Jeremiah 2 21 says that God planted a choice vine with pure seed and yet has become degenerate, he says, worthless.

And that's the point here, isn't it? A vine has one purpose and one alone to produce fruit. The wood of a vine is no good for anything, it's not even decent firewood, verse 4, it just gets consumed far too quickly.

And when it's burned, when it's half charred like that, it is the epitome of worthlessness, verse 5, it is good for nothing. And the point is painfully clear, isn't it?

[52 : 46] Israel was chosen to bear fruit as God's light to the world, but has failed in its only purpose for existence. And so it's fit only for the fire of judgment.

And so the Lord says, verse 7, I will set my face against them. Even if they escape, the fire will consume them.

To quote the Bible notes again, this is as true of the church and of individuals and any of God's people as it was of Israel. There are no alternative functions to those who are called of God.

If we fail in those appointed for us, we can't be used for anything else. That's what Hebrews 2 says, doesn't it? How shall we escape if we refuse such a great salvation?

If we have even greater privilege than these Israelites of old, don't we have far, far greater responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ today, as Christians today? And that's Jesus' word of warning to all of us, isn't it?

[53 : 59] He picks up exactly this image of Ezekiel's vine here at his words to his disciples in the upper room, remember? John chapter 15. And he tells us that it's he at last who is all that the vine of God should have been, bearing fruit, bearing light to the world, and giving life to all who are joined to him as branches.

But he says, you must abide in me, you must abide in my love, and you'll do that if you abide in my commandments. That's the only way to bear fruit, real repentance, ongoing, humble, real, obedient faith.

But Jesus says, doesn't he? If instead there's real refusal, if anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch that withers into the fire to be burned.

That's what Ezekiel warns here, isn't it? Except it's perhaps even more personally put here. Do you notice? God says he will set his face against them.

That's the antithesis in every way of the blessing of God. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. That is the ultimate beatitude.

[55 : 27] To behold his face is the gospel promise. To be transformed from one degree of glory to another. But to have his face turned away, to have his face turned against you, that is the very definition of everlasting ruin.

They will see his face eternally. That is the promise of Revelation chapter 22. That is the beauty of eternal life in heaven.

But to have God's face turned against you, turned away forever, forever. That is a picture of the bitterness of eternal death, of hell.

So Jesus says today to us, just what Ezekiel said to his people then, repent. Turn away from your idols.

And turn away your faces from all your abominations. Flee from the wrath to come. And if we have ears to hear, let us pray that the Lord may, through heeding his warnings, take hold of our hearts and keep them today and forever from idols and for him.

[57 : 00] Let's pray. Lord, would you lay hold of our hearts, we pray. Turn us, Lord, in heart and mind and soul.

Turn us to love you with all our strength and keep us before your face now and forever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.