

The Sword of the Lord

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[0 : 00] And Willie is going to be covering five chapters today, and I'll not be reading all five chapters. I'll be reading a selection. So I'll point out where we are, but you can follow along in your own Bibles.

And if you don't have a Bible with you, we have visitor Bibles at the side, at the back. Please do grab a Bible. And we're in Ezekiel 20 to the end of chapter 24.

And we'll be reading a little selection from those chapters. So beginning in Ezekiel chapter 20, and I'll begin there in verse 1.

So Ezekiel 20, and beginning at verse 1. In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me.

And the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Is it to inquire of me that you come?

[1 : 12] As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. Will you judge them, son of man? Will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers.

And look on down to verse 27. Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, In this also your fathers blaspheme me, By dealing treacherously with me.

For when I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, Then, wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, There they offered their sacrifices, And there they presented the provocation of their offering.

There they sent up their pleasing aromas, And there they poured out their drink offerings. I said to them, What is the high place to which you go? So its name is called Bama to this day.

Therefore, say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, Will you defy yourselves after the manner of your fathers And go whoring after their detestable things?

[2 : 26] When you present your gifts, And offer up your children in fire, You defile yourselves of all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, A house of Israel?

As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. And then Ezekiel chapter 21, verse 1, The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, Set your face towards Jerusalem, And preach against the sanctuaries, Prophesy against the land of Israel, And say to the land of Israel, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I am against you, And I will draw my sword from its sheath, And will cut off from you both righteous and wicked.

Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, Therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north, And all flesh shall know that I am the Lord.

I have drawn my sword from its sheath, It shall not be sheathed again. And they're looking on to chapter 22, And verse 23, And the word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, Say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed, Or reigned upon in the day of indignation.

The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured human lives, They have taken treasure and precious things, They have made many widows in her midst.

[4 : 11] Her priests have done violence to my law, And have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, Neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean.

And they have disregarded my sabbaths, So that I am profaned among them. Her princes in her midst are like wolves, Tearing the prey, Shedding blood, Destroying lives to get dishonest gain.

And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, Seeing false visions and divining lies for them, Saying, Thus says the Lord God, When the Lord has not spoken, The people of the land

have practiced extortion, And committed robbery.
They have oppressed the poor and needy, And have extorted from the sojourner without justice.
And I sought for a man among them, Who should build up the wall, And stand in the breach before me for the land, That I should not destroy it, But I found none.

Therefore, I have poured out my indignation upon them, I have consumed them with a fire of my wrath, I have returned their way upon their heads, Declares the Lord God.

[5 : 29] And then on finally to chapter 24, And verse 15, The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, Behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke, Yet you shall not mourn or weep, Nor shall your tears run down, Sigh but not aloud, Make no mourning for the dead, Bind on your turban, And put your shoes on your feet, Do not cover your lips, Nor eat the bread of men.

So I spoke to the people in the morning, And at evening, My wife died, And on the next morning, I did as I was commanded. And then down to verse 25, As for you, Son of man, Surely on the day when I take from them their stronghold, Their joy and glory, The delight of their eyes and their soul's desire, And also their sons and daughters, On that day, A fugitive will come to you to report to you the news.

On that day, Your mouth will be opened to the fugitive, And you shall speak and be no longer mute. So you will be assigned to them, And they will know that I am the Lord.

Amen. May God bless his word to us. We'll do turn in your Bibles, if you would, To Ezekiel chapter 20.

And as Paul said, We're looking at this long section from 20 to 24 this morning. And here's the theme. Behold, I am against you, And will draw my sword from its sheath, And will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, Says the Lord God.

[7 : 33] Chapter 21, verse 3. Now as we know, The prophet is speaking to his people, Already in exile, But hoping for a swift end to it, And a return to Judea and Jerusalem.

But Ezekiel's message is very different. Things are far worse than they imagine, Because their sin is far worse than they will yet admit.

And Ezekiel's relentless message has been, That worse judgment is coming. There is no hope for Jerusalem, No hope for those who remain in Judah. They're going to be utterly destroyed.

And the only hope for the future of God's people Lies with those beleaguered exiles already in Babylon. But, They must heed God's warning.

And they must humble themselves. They must repent and turn, If they're going to live. And we saw last time, That in the midst of all the great movements in history, And God's sovereign dealings with the nations, Every individual is responsible, To God, For their lives, And for God's call on their life.

[8 : 51] Each will be judged, For his own sin. Each will be saved, Only by turning, To God who is merciful. Why will you die, Says God?

Turn and live. That's the urgent call. But nevertheless, No man is an island. And the fact is, We're all caught up, Aren't we, In the machinations of history?

The choices that rulers make, Affect whole populations. The economic folly of rulers, Affects everybody. War, Affects everybody.

Including the vast majority of ordinary people, Who have no desire for war, But are forced to fight in wars. It was said of the first world war, Wasn't it? That it was a tragedy, Of the slaughter of lions, Led by donkeys.

And there's a growing drumbeat, Isn't there, Of warmongering, In our world today. The descendants of those donkeys, Seem to be plentiful, In the corridors of power.

[9 : 52] The choices of leaders, Affect many. Both in the world, And of course, Among God's people. And that's why, The Bible sets such great store, By the quality of those leaders, The shepherds of Israel, The kings of Israel, As we've been seeing, In full studies in the book of Kings.

But also, In the New Testament, Among the shepherds of God's church. That's why the New Testament letters are full, Aren't they? Of ensuring, True leadership, True shepherds, Not false shepherds.

Righteous rule in God's church, Not evil rule. Because worldly ambitions, Among leaders, Always brings folly and disaster, Both in the church, And also in nations.

And we all need to hear, God's warnings. In the words that he speaks to the world, But also, Especially of course, To the church. We need those warnings, In all the scriptures. And the apostle

Paul tells us, Plainly, That whatever was written, In these former days, Like Ezekiel's prophecy, Was written for us.

For our instruction, So that through endurance, Through the encouragement of the scriptures, We might have hope. Well, What hope is there for us, In these grim chapters?

[11 : 05] They seem very grim. They are grim. But the refrain throughout them, Is unmistakable. God will accomplish his purpose, In the world.

And you will know, That I am the Lord. The nations will know, That I am the Lord. I will be king over you. That's Ezekiel's message, That's the whole Bible's message.

It's confirmed, Isn't it? On the lips of the Lord Jesus. I will build my church, And the very gates of hell, Will not prevail against it. So be in no doubt of that. God will let nothing, Stand in the way, Of his purpose, For his people, And for this world.

And therefore, Ezekiel is telling us, We must be absolutely clear, That God will clear away, All the corruption, The iniquity, From among his people, And he will destroy, Their attachment to it.

And when he does, You must not mourn, For the loss of it. That's what God says. Because only the purging, Of God's terrible sword of judgment, Will open the door, To a future hope of resurrection, Of life, With your covenant God.

[12 : 20] There's a great paradox, To Ezekiel's words in these chapters. If you look at chapter 20, Verse 33. God says there, That they will know him, Truly as their king, Only when he pours out, His wrath on them in judgment.

With wrath poured out, I will be king over you. When he purges their rebellion, Verse 38. Then you will know, That I am the Lord.

But look on to verse 44. You shall know that I am the Lord, He says, When I deal with you for my name's sake, Not according to your evil ways. And he brings them back, To the land of promise, As verses 40 to 43, Describe there, Full of penitence for their sin.

As a pleasing aroma, I will accept you, Says the Lord there in verse 41. There is both judgment, And deliverance, You see. But, They are inseparable.

That deliverance, Can come only through, The purging of, Complete judgment. And in these chapters, We can't avoid, The dreadful message, That God himself, Is the one, Who is about to kindle, A fierce fire of judgment, Among his people.

[13 : 32] Verse 47. Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, And it will devour all. And that fire, Is the sword of the Lord, Himself.

This chapter 21, Will tell us plainly. His sword, Drawn in wrath, Against his own land, His own people, And even, As chapter 21, Verse 25 says, His own anointed king.

Well, We're covering a long section, As I've said, So we need to be selective, But I hope that we can try, And get a broad, Sense of the sweep, Of what is one, Coherent single message, In these chapters.

And indeed, It's a very sobering one. What it means, When the sword of the Lord, Is unsheathed, In judgment, Against those, Who bear, His own very name.

First of all, Let's look at chapters 20, And 21. And we can summarize, The key issues here, As perversity, And patience, And then presumption, And punishment.

[14 : 35] Chapter 20, Catalogues God's remarkable patience, In the face of Israel's, Relentless perversity. And in chapter 21, That gives way, To God's certain punishment, In the face, Of his people's, Continued presumption.

Chapter 20, Reads rather like, Stephen's ferocious diatribe, In Acts chapter 7, Which also relates, Israel's whole history, As one of God's, Remarkable and persistent, Patience, In the face, Of relentless, Persistent, Perversity.

And Stephen's conclusion, If you remember, In Acts 7, Is exactly, Ezekiel's message here, Always, Always, You resist, The Holy Spirit. In fact, Some think Ezekiel, May well have, Modeled his speech, On Ezekiel's one.

Begins, In verse 1, With the elders of Israel, Coming to inquire of God, Seven years now, Into their exile. And they're likely, Wanting to ask God, Well why haven't we, Gone back home yet? And their attitude, Is clearly wrong, Isn't it?

Because, Well look at verse 3, God gives them, Absolutely short shrift. I will not be inquired of you, He says. And again at the end, Verse 31, It's emphatic, As I live, I will not be inquired of by you.

[15 : 46] Why? Well because there comes a time, When even God's patience, Will come to an end. And having refused his grace, God now withholds it.

Think of Jesus, When he was before Herod, Do you remember? Herod had been given, Every opportunity to repent, He'd given, John the Baptist, A personal ministry, Throughout his life. And he'd resisted. And when Jesus, Then stood before him, And he wanted something from Jesus, He was silent. No word, I will not be inquired of, By you.

It's a real warning, Isn't it? Not to refuse God, When he speaks to you today, Because, Tomorrow, It may be too late. And we saw in chapter 18, That these people, Had no recognition, Of their culpability.

They blamed everyone, But themselves. Blamed their forebears, They blamed their circumstances, They blamed other nations, And on it went. They saw themselves, As the victims. And so God now, Gives them, A history lesson, About their own, Glorious history, As they saw it, But God sees it, Very differently.

[16 : 58] He shows them, That the truth about them, Is in fact a parody, Of what God, Had actually called them to be, And what they should have been. Instead of being those, Who beautified God's name, Among the nations, They blasphemed his name, Among the nations.

And the chapter reads, Like a devastating case summary, Given by an advocate in court, And it comes to landing, With devastating force, There in verse 30, This is you, He's saying, You're the same today, Will you defile yourselves, After the manner of your fathers, Whoring after their detestable things?

Yes you are. Verse 31, Horrific child sacrifice, Notice. A cardinal sign, Of their godless idolatry. And yet you think, You can still come, And inquire of me, Says the Lord.

Because I don't see, All this filth in your lives. As I live, I will not be inquired of by you. You don't have time to look in detail, But if you do, You'll see that the same pattern, Is rehearsed through every era, Of Israel's history.

In Egypt, Verses 5 to 9, There were idolatrous in heart. That's not something, We often think of or remember, Is it? But it explains why, So soon at Sinai, Israel are just reverting, To their Egyptian gods, The golden calf.

[18 : 18] Verse 10, Describes, Onwards, It's the Exodus generation, Then from verse 18, It's the next generation, In the wilderness, Then from verses 27 to 29, It's the subsequent generations, In the land, From Joshua, Right through the history, That we've been reading in Kings.

And it's one long story, Of relentless perversity, And rebellion, Rejecting, God's gracious and good laws, Rejecting God's instruction, For life, And for blessing, And instead craving, All the idols, Of the world around.

Look at verse 16, They rejected God's Sabbaths, God's wonderful provision, Of a holiday, Every single week, Think of the contrast, That is, To their slavery, In Egypt.

A holiday every week, Reminding them, What the whole purpose, Of human life is, To rest and enjoy, A relationship with God, And a relationship, With other human beings, Other people, Instead of living, In relentless bondage, To labor.

It's astonishing, Isn't it? Who on earth, Would exchange, God's day of rest, For utter slavery, Slaving after their business career, Their university work, Their school work, And so on.

[19 : 32] Well only enough, A fool, Who has no understanding, Of God and his gospel. And they rejected, His statutes, Also verse 16, God's wonderful precepts, That show us, The way of living, That brings true, Human flourishing.

In terms of personal life, And of family life, And of business relations, Of economic health, And so on. But of course, They thought, That they knew better than God, How to live out, Sexual relationships, And family life, And business ethics, And bioethics, And criminal justice, And all these things.

And yet, In the face of all this, Perverse rejection of God, He showed, Persistent restraint, He withheld his judgment. Notice why, Three times we're told, Verse 9, And verse 14, And verse 22, Do you see, Each time God acted, For the sake of his name, His reputation, Among the nations.

That was Moses' plea to God, Remember, At Sinai, The golden calf. The same again, When at Kadesh Barnea, The people rebelled, And refused to enter the land, And God was going to destroy them, And Moses said, No Lord, The Egyptians will see, And they'll scorn you, They'll say you're defeated, That you have no power.

God's patience, With his people, With his church's witness, Was for the sake, Of his own glory, And for the sake, Of his own gospel, Of bringing, His glorious salvation, To all the nations, Of the world, So they would know him, As God.

[21 : 07] But now, Look at verse 32, At the end there, His people are so near, To becoming, Utterly engulfed, By the cultures, Of the godless world, That he can, Withhold his justice, No longer.

He will not, Let his church, He says, Become indistinguishable, From the nations. Worshipping idols, Of wood and of stone. Worshipping false, And utterly false, Ideologies, That breed, Inhumanity and death.

And so God says, In verse 33, Very plainly, Judgment, Judgment, Is coming, Exile, Is coming.

Verse 35, I will enter into judgment, With you face to face, Says the Lord.

Verse 37, Under the rod of judgment, He will bring them forcibly, Back into his covenant, With a great purging, Notice verse 38, Of all rebels, Who will be cast off forever.

And it's God who will do this, Says verse 38, His sovereign hand of purging. But, Verse 39, Notice, Each will be wholly responsible, For their own destiny.

[22 : 22] They must choose, Whom they will serve, Whether God or idols. Remember Joshua's command, Choose this day, Whom you will serve, God or idols.

But he is saying, Be absolutely clear, The only way back for any, Into God's land, Will be through humble penitence, In response to God's word. Verse 43, You will remember your deeds, You will loathe yourselves, For all the evil, You've committed.

You see, The gospel never changes, Does it? God will have his people, Under his rule, In his place, I will build my church, But not, Without his people's, Repentance.

It's my way, Not yours, God says. God sets the terms, Not us. He deals with us, Verse 44, If you look, For his name's sake, Not according to our, Evil deeds, Or our corrupt deeds, No, It's we, Who must bow to God.

God doesn't, Pander to us, God does not bow to our self-assertion. But the tragedy is, That so often, We will only learn that the hard way, Isn't that right?

[23 : 37] And now, After multiple generations, After centuries, Of perversity and rebellion, Punishment of a truly devastating nature, Was coming.

And it would affect the whole land, With all its people. Verse 47, Fire, A blazing fire, Of brutal invasion, Was coming. And look at verse 48, Everyone will see, That it's God himself, Who has kindled it.

This firestorm of war, Was the unleashing, The unsheathing, Literally, Of the sword, Of the Lord himself. And verse 21, Chapter 21, Rather, We'll go on to lay that out, So grimly.

Chapter 21, Verse 4, My sword shall be drawn, Against all flesh, From north to south. Verse 10, Sharpened for slaughter, Polished, To flash like lightning.

That is a terrifying picture. Utterly devastating. And to face the reality, That it's God himself, Who is behind it. Of course, People can't really believe that, Can they?

[24 : 48] Not now, Not then. Look at verse 49, They wouldn't believe Ezekiel, He's talking nonsense, Silly parables, He's a nutter, He's a fundamentalist menace, God will never judge us, But he will.

Look at verse 10, The second half of it, Chapter 21, They have despised God's repeated rebuke, The wooden rod of correction. So now, They must face the steel of his sword.

That is a terrible message, Ezekiel has to deliver. He won't have to feign, The groaning and the grief, And the breaking heart of verse 6, As God tells him, He feels it.

And yet, Look at verse 14, God says he must also affirm, That this message is right and just, You've got to clap your hands, And applaud God's judgment, Because God himself says in verse 17, I'm clapping my hands, Because this judgment is right and just, And it is essential, In a moral universe, That God judges evil.

God's punishment on human evil, Is just and good, And it is deserved. And that is because, He has made us, As responsible beings, Not as puppets, Not as animals, But as men and women, Made in his image, In his glory.

[26 : 15] He dignifies our choices. To not punish evil, Would be to demean us. It would be to treat us, As mindless creatures, Not as majestic creatures, Responsible to God.

And how much more responsible, Are those to whom God, Has revealed himself, In all his, Holy glory, And his goodness, And his grace. These words are a real warning, Aren't they?

Never to presume, On God's election, As Israel did, To their calamitous cost. And it's just as clear, A warning all the way, Through the New Testament. As you obeyed in the past, Says Paul to the Philippians, Keep on obeying, All the more.

Work out your salvation, With fear and trembling. Don't presume. Strive to make your calling, An election sure, Says Peter. So as not to fall into judgment, The way not to fall, Into God's judgment, He says, Is to practice, It's to live out, Godliness, And brotherly affection, And love.

Not just talking about, God's doctrines of grace, It's doing that grace, That God has called you to. Don't ever presume, Upon your election. God's sovereignty, Is something far bigger, Than you can ever think, That you, Can presumptuously fathom.

[27 : 37] Indeed there's a great irony here, In chapter 21, Look at verse 18. He's talking here, About a pagan king, Breaking all of God's laws, Practicing divination, Occultism.

And it's him, That God himself, Is directing, In judgment against his people. And they're hoping, Oh maybe he'll choose another road, And invade another nation, Instead of Judah and Jerusalem. No, Because it's God, Who is doing it, Against his own city. They thought that was impossible. And we may be tempted, To think that's impossible today, That it's different for us, In the New Testament church.

Listen to the words, Of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, Speaking to New Testament churches. If you do not repent, I will come against you soon, And war against you, With the sword of my mouth.

I will throw you, Into great tribulation, Unless you repent. If you will not wake up, I will come against you, Like a thief, And I will spit you, Out of my mouth.

[28 : 50] Read Revelation 2 and 3. Message is exactly the same, Isn't it? Do not presume ever, Upon God's extraordinary patience, To those who have received, His extraordinary privileges.

It's written for us, It's a real word, Isn't it? To the church today, Especially in the western world, With centuries, Of God's privileged revelation. And I think it's also, A word of warning, To the whole western world.

Of course, Our nation, Or Europe, Or the United States, Isn't, And never has been, God's special elected nation, Just like Israel was, Back then. But, Western Christendom, Was called that, For a reason, Wasn't it?

The west, Has known extraordinary privilege, Through the pervasive influence, Of Christian thinking, Christian thought. And with that blessing, Of God's merciful revelation, Comes a responsibility, To live up, To that high privilege.

And that makes the message, Of chapters 22, And chapter 23 here, Very, Very sobering indeed. Because the key issues here, Are privilege, And profanity, And spiritual prostitution, And its penalty.

[30 : 14] Chapter 22, Presses home, The sheer depth, Of the degradation, Of Jerusalem, Through the people's sin. The holy city, Verse 2, God has renamed, The bloody city.

And there's a ring, Of agonized pathos, Right throughout this chapter, Of sheer betrayal, In you, In you, In you, Verse 6, Princes of Israel, Shed blood, In you, Verse 7, Fathers and mothers, Are treated with contempt, In you, My city, The fatherless, The widow, Are wrong, In you, And on it goes, You see, It echoes of Christ's word, About the temple, Isn't it?

My father's house, Has become a den of robbers, Israel's horrific profanity, As a people, Of such high privilege, With God, Is displayed, Here, And pressed home, In chapter 23, Which describes, The revolting nature, Of the utter spiritual prostitution, And therefore, The righteous need, Of such a severe penalty, From God.

Chapter 22, Consists of three oracles, Each begins, The word of the Lord came, And verses 1 to 16, It just describes, Jerusalem's defilement, She's defiled and guilty, Through idolatry, And through bloodshed, And what we have here, If you read these verses, Is a picture of utter moral collapse, Religious, Social, And sexual, And if you read these chapters, You'll find that, Nearly all of them, Are direct violations, Of God's covenant commands, And especially those, That are found, Incidentally, In Ezekiel 18 to 20, That we were studying, Just recently, With Stephen, But it's all summed up, In verse 12, Look, Me, You have forgotten, Declares the Lord, But what you notice, When you read these verses, Which strikes you, Is just how very similar, It sounds to our culture today, As one writer notes, The breakdown of societies,

Generally follows the same pattern, In every age, It's always in this way, That collapse comes, And it's a stark warning, To churches, That presume on their privilege, Think that they can, Profane the clear commands of God, Verse 4, I have made your reproach, To the nations, And as a mockery, To all the countries, Well, It's a simple truth, Isn't it?

[33 : 02] About a nation, That has left God, Completely out of its reckoning, It's what God does, To nations, And to churches, That have been blessed, With his blessing, But have forgotten him, Moved away from him, Our country was once called, Great Britain, The sun never set, On the empire, It's not very, Much so today, Is it?

We're not taken very seriously, Among the world, The American empire, Is losing credibility, By the day, Isn't it? Increasingly, Open to mockery, And scorn, In the world, Well, Verses 12 and 13 here, Ezekiel chapter 22, Might very well be read, In our parliament, Or in Capitol Hill, Don't you think? The second oracle, Begins in verse 17, And it tells of God's evaluation, Of his people, Who have defiled themselves thus, Israel has become dross to me, Says the Lord, Therefore, God says, Should be gathered, Into the fire, Of wrath, Jerusalem, Where nations should come, To see the light, Of the glory of God, Is instead, Just not dross, Chaff to be burned, Normally, A smelter, Of course, Burns the dross off, To leave, The mass of purified metal, But here the picture, Of just a vast pile of dross, With perhaps, Perhaps, Just a few grains, Of valuable metal, As a remnant, To the fire, At very best, It's going to be long, And painful, And largely, A very disappointing process, And again, It's such a warning, Isn't it?

God, His call, And election, Is never, To be presumed upon, As a mere privilege, It is for a purpose, And that purpose, Is fruitfulness, And there is a judgment, Coming, Isn't there, That will reveal that, For every single, Single one of us, Paul talks about it, In 1st Corinthians 3, That they will declare, Won't it?

Whether, What we've built with, Is gold, And silver, And precious stones, Or in fact, Just wood, And hay, And stubble, Dross, That's the language, That Paul uses, About every one of us, In our own Christian lives, In the service, Of God's kingdom, He's consistent, In Ephesians 2, After talking about, God's glorious election, In Ephesians chapter 1, He talks about, Its purpose, And he says, We are God's workmanship, We're created, In Christ Jesus, For good works, We're created, To bring him glory, That's why he's called us, Think of Jesus language, In the parable of the talents, We're to be good, And faithful servants, Serving the master's business, Not just presumptuously, Burying, What he gives to us, We're called to adorn, The doctrine of God, Our saviour, Not to abandon it, And yet, You see here, Even as his people, Forget him, And abandon him, There'll still be witnesses to him, In his justice, Look at verse 5 again,

[36 : 17] There'll be mocked, There'll be defiled, There'll be full of tumult, In the eyes of the world, I read an article, Just last week, About the national church, In Scotland, Now apparently being, The biggest property agent, In the land, With more than 5,000 properties, On its books, To sell off, So calamitous, Is its decline, Those who are near, And those who are far, Mock, The me you have forgotten, Property sales, Limited, The third oracle, In verse 23, To the end, Shows, How it all came to this, And this is so important, The land is diminished, To dross in God's eyes, Through terrible defilement, Which was led, By a widespread collusion, Of delusion, The words devouring, Destroying, And it's all enticed, By lies and deception,

In verse 25, A conspiracy, Says the Lord, Not a conspiracy theory, But a fact, Of prophets, Verse 25, And priests, Verse 26, And princes, Verse 27, And indeed, All the people, Verse 29, The church, The civil authorities, And the population, To a man, Verse 30, Not a single man, To stand in the breach, No one, Left, To build up the walls, All in total opposition, To God, And in his righteous way, For life, And notice verse 26, It begins, With the failure of the church, The priests, Whose duty it is, To teach the difference, Between right and wrong, Between holiness and evil, Utterly blurring that distinction, And the prophets, Verse 28, Smearing whitewash, Over the actions, Of political leaders, Telling them what they want to hear, Telling them, Yes, God supports this, When God's word, Actually says the opposite, And they're like getting,

Royal chaplaincies, And honors, And seats on important committees, And all the rest of it, For their labors, Very different, Isn't it, From what we're hearing, On Wednesday night, About Samuel Rutherford, Or about John Knox, And Andrew Melvin, And all the rest of, Our great Christian forebears, In this nation, Who spoke fearlessly to kings, Didn't whitewash their actions, And said to them, No the king is not the law, The law is the king, And Christ is your king, And you are under Christ's rule, To do as he pleases, And to rule only, As he allows you to rule, Not against it, There were those, Who stand in the breach, In the past in this nation, There were those, Who built up the walls, For freedom, That's why we have, The society, That we've enjoyed, For hundreds of years, In this country, But who's going to stand, In that breach today, Who's going to build up the walls, And not live, By the lies, Of whitewash, As Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Warned his compatriots, Behind the

iron curtain, Not to do, Not to acquiesce, With the lies,
Of communism, And just say nothing, And silently, Therefore just whitewash, Over all the acts, Of those, Who were turning truth, Into lies, Who were allowing rulers, To become, As they were here, Verse 27, Oppressive rules, Tearing the prey, Shedding blood, Living for dishonest gain, The apostolic call, To the church, Is to be the pillar, And the buttress, Of truth, In the world, In a world, Of deception, And lies, In a world, That propagates, Propaganda, Of governments, Of media, Big tech, The call to the church, In this world, Friends, Is not a call, To quietism, And just, Silently whitewashing, These things, It's a call, To stand in the breach, It's a call, To build up the walls, That are being torn down, All around us, To the ruination, Of human lives, And, Bringing the great risk, Of divine judgment, Paul says to us, We're to walk as children of light, He wrote those words, To an utterly degenerate, Sexualized culture, In Ephesus, And he said, Not only you take no part, In the works of darkness, But you are to expose them, With the light, Of God's truth, Because it is the truth of God, That brings the light, That alone, Will make people see, The true darkness, Of evil, And so begin to repent, And turn away from it, We are to intercede, For a godless world, But we're also called, To intervene, We're to expose, The world, To the piercing light, Of the truth of God, And that's what God's doing here, Through Ezekiel, And just as today, People will not see, In fact, We may not see, Just how wicked our society is, In God's eyes, Well, They didn't see it then, [41 : 21] They were blind, They were so hardened, In their sin, And that's why God, Had to use his megaphone, To rouse them, A megaphone of pain, And indeed, As he did so, He used profoundly, Shocking language, Again, Chapter 23, Is brutally frank, In its language, And that is because, He has to use, Chris Wright's words, Shatter the misconceptions, They had on the hard rocks, Of reality, It's very like chapter 16, Except the language, Is even more lurid at times, If you have a glance, At verse 20 and 21, It will tell you that, I won't read them, But even, As it's printed there, So starkly, It's toned down in translation, For decency, The allegory, In this chapter, Concerns two sisters, Ahola, And Aholibah, Samaria, In the northern kingdom, Jerusalem in the south, And both, Have been promiscuous whores, Unfaithful to God, But this is the point, Far from learning, From the fate of Samaria, And God's judgment, On that northern kingdom, A hundred years before, Now, Judah hasn't learned, It's become even worse, Outdoing her sister, In her sin, Utterly disgusting God, I turn from her in disgust, As I turn from her sister, In disgust, Says the Lord, In verse 18, And yet, She increased her whoring, Now again, Israel and Judah, Of course, Had a unique place, In salvation history, But in another way, In another way, They just typify, All humanity, And every nation, Let me quote some words, From my father's notes, There's a melancholy fact, In the history of nations, Empire after empire, Kingdom after kingdom, Has fallen, And been broken, Through its godliness, And depravity, And yet, Not one of them, Has learned from its predecessors, All alike, Have gone the same way, What could underscore, More graphically than this, The sheer blindness, Of sin, But you see, It's an immutable law of God, That when you sow the wind, You will reap, The whirlwind, And God tells Judah here, That the lovers, That she's courted, And then rejected, That they'll come back, With fury, Verse 22, I will bring them against you, On every side, Judah, You see, Had sought to drink, The cup of the world, Idolatry, Immorality, Just as Samaria, Her sister had done, Well so says the Lord, Here in verse 32, I will give her cup, Into your hand, But notice verse 33, It'll be a cup of horror, Of desolation, It'll turn to shards, Of glass in your throat, That will tear you apart, And it's a judgment, He says, That is absolutely just, And absolutely deserved, Because of the sheer depth, Of your depravity, And that's what verses 37, And following in this chapter 23, Describe for us, Wanton wickedness, Utterly foul behavior, Bloodshed, Child sacrifice, Idolatry, Profanity, And all at the same time, As they were still going, To the house of God, At the same day, They came into my sanctuary, To profane it, Says the Lord in verse 39, This is what they did, In my house, And so he says in verse 46, Terrible and terrifying judgment, Will come, Just punishment, You shall bear the exact penalty, He says, For your adultery, In verse 49, And it will be a warning, He says, To every generation in future, Not, To so wickedly prostitute yourselves, Spiritually, As you have done, Verse 48, A warning to all women, That's not about women literally, That's not misogyny, The allegory is, Saying that these nations, Are being represented here, By these different women, It's a warning to all nations, And to all generations, Especially, Those who have been so privileged by God, That they cannot, Profanely prostitute themselves, And abandon God's ways, Without ultimately, Bearing the penalty, For that sin, Even if God may be patient, And very, Very slow, To bring that punishment, And as I said, The

New Testament, Is just as clear, Friends, That these are warnings, For the church, Especially for the church, How shall we escape, Says Hebrews, If we neglect, Such a great salvation, Now revealed to us, In all its fullness, And it is also a warning, Isn't it, To privileged nations, Who in God's providence, Have known his word, Have known his ways, But have forgotten him, Have scorned him, And it's a warning too,

[46 : 29] Isn't it, To every one of us, Individually, Because people too, Can become, So hardened at times, Sin can become, So ingrained, That even the ordinary means, Of God's grace to us, The discipline of his word, And his spirit, Can begin to have no effect, On us, So that, Only the fire, Only the sword, Of God's judgment, Is able to burn, That sin, Out of our lives, And that's the graphic message, In chapter 24, Where the key focus is on, The pain, The pain, That alone leads, To proclamation, In facing up, To the miserable pain, Of horrific loss, Of all earthly loves, Only then, Can be heard, The merciful proclamation, From God, Of hope, And of life,

The date there, In verse 1, Just emphasizes, The historic reality, Because verse 2 says, On that very day, And Zedekiah, The king in Judah, Rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, On that very day, He responded, By decreeing his army, To be sent, To besiege the city, And ultimately, To lead to its capture, And destruction, And so God says to them, If you read in this chapter, In the parable of this pot, That they, And you think, That you're in Bible, You think you're God's choice meat, But it's not so, Look, This cauldron, Verse 6, Is full of corrosion, And the only way, To cleanse it, He says in verse 11, Is to put this empty pot, On the fire, Until all that corrosion, Is utterly burnt off, And that, Unthinkable destruction, Must come, It's the only way, Says God now, Verse 13, Cleansing, By fire, And you are not, To mourn, When that happens,

You are to recognize, God's good and just judgment, Is the only road to hope, To recognize, That sin, Must be purged, Because only then, Can salvation be proclaimed, And see in verse 19, Or verse 15 and following, We have this most, Dramatic, The most, Devastating, Of all of Ezekiel's, Bizarre, Prophetic signs, God's prophet himself, Becomes, The message, Verse 27, You will be a sign, To them, And they will know, That I am the Lord, What's the sign, Well Ezekiel's own grief, Becomes his gospel, God's word of judgment, Becomes flesh, Literally, In his own life, God, Takes from him, At a stroke, Verse 16, The delight of his eyes, His own wife, And he tells him, You're not a lie to mourn, Or weep aloud, In public, There must be no, Grief, Seen from you, And so it was, In verse 19, The people, Naturally find that, So absurd, And so strange, That they say, What on earth, Does this mean? And he tells them, God's made me a sign, And you're going to lose, The temple, That you love, The city, Verse 21, All your pride, All your power, Everything, And only that, Will get through to you, So you can begin, To understand, The real depth, Of your plight, And only then, Will you be able to hear, Where your true hope lies, Verse 27, On that day, On that day, Ezekiel's mouth, Will be opened, He'll begin, To preach, A message of hope, And of a future, On that day, When the message, Of disaster, And death, The message of horror, And loss, Comes, On that day only, Can be the message, Of the beginning, Of hope, And of life, But only then, Only through pain,

And horror, Comes the proclamation, Of hope, And that word, Has to become flesh, In Ezekiel, The servant of the Lord, In order, For the people, To begin, To be able to hear, And receive his gospel, An extraordinary cost, For God's servant, To deliver God's word, So it could come home, To people's hearts, Don't you think?

[51 : 02] His own grief, Embodied his gospel, His sorrow, Opened the door, To what would become, Only thus, Only thus, The proclamation, Of saving hope, As we'll see, When we come to chapter 34, After that day, When they hear, Of the destruction, Of Jerusalem, And all of their hopes, With it, She would be so surprised, There's a, There's a strangely, Familiar pattern, About all of that, Isn't there?

The threefold repetition, There in verses, 25 to 27, Of the phrase, On that day, It does indeed, As Chris Wright points out, It has an eschatological flavor, That is, It points to the great end, It points forward, To the ultimate day, The day of utter darkness, For God's people, And the horror, Of the apparent, Absolute defeat, Of God's people, And even of God himself, When the delight, Of the father's eyes, Was taken away, At a stroke in death, And yet, The song of heaven, On that day, Was not one of grief, But one of triumph, From joy, And out of the disciples, Grief at the cross, Came mouths opened, To proclaim a message of hope, A message of restoration, A message of resurrection, From the dead, But only through death, Only through judgment, Only through the purging,

Of the terrible weight of sin, And the just payment, Of the penalty of sin, How could that be? Well, There was at last, A man to stand in the breach, To arrest judgment, From his people, Indeed, At last, The king, Whose crown, It truly was, Would come, The one, Who back in chapter 21, Ezekiel says, The one to whom judgment belongs, He did come, God himself, In the person of the son, And he will judge at last, All nations, And all the world, But before that day, Before that day, He came to rescue from judgment, All who will turn to him, And live, All who turn away, From all their pride, And their power, In themselves, And come, Humbly, With penitent faith, To receive what only he can give, Only that way, The forgiveness of sins, But how could that be, How, How could sin's penalty be, Put away, The horrible, Vile rejection of God, In the human heart, Surely that must be punished, That must be punished, Isn't that Ezekiel's message? It is, Look again at chapter 23, In verses 33 and 34, Look again at that horror, In the cup of horror, And desolation, The cup of God's wrath, And judgment and sin, Look at those words, And then remember, That dark day, In Gethsemane, When in agony, The Son of God, Cried out, Let that cup pass, From me, Because he knew, It was the cup of desolation, The cup of God's wrath, Upon sin, But he didn't flinch, He stood in the breach, And he said, Not my will, But thine, And he drank that cup, Our cup, Your cup and mine, The cup of judgment, And desolation, And horror upon sin, So that, So that as he offered, To his own, In the upper room, We might drink, In the place of that cup of judgment,

[54 : 54] The cup of salvation, The new covenant in his blood, He stood in the breach, For his whoring, Wayward bride, His church, And his grief, Became his gospel, And in his humiliation, Was born our hope, And just as the word of God's salvation, Became flesh, In his servant, Ezekiel, So that at great cost, To his servant, His people, Would see and hear and know, That he is the Lord, Well, So the word himself, Became flesh at last, So that in the man of sorrows, We might hear, The message of God's ultimate salvation, And on that day, Out of the darkness of death, And out of the pain of grief, That we shall bear together, Said the father to his son, You will be assigned to them, And they will know, That I am the Lord, This is the gospel of Christ, And thanks be to God, And what could be more appropriate, Than we come now, To the Lord's table, To lift that cup, And to proclaim his death, Until he come, Let's pray, Heavenly Father, How we tremble, Under the reality of our sin, And under the horror, Of your just punishment, And penalty for that sin, But how we marvel, That your servant, That your servant, Became our savior, That he drank our cup, And we might drink his, And so we praise you, And we praise his name, And we rejoice, In the gospel of your son, And we ask that now, As we take this bread, And drink this cup, That we may proclaim, Not with grief, But with great joy, A glorious truth, Of your great salvation, In Jesus name, Amen.