

Ezekiel's Warnings for Today

As mankind grows further and further away from God we can see how human reasoning is able to infiltrate and manipulate even the soundest of Churches and cause some to justify sinful practices. It is not hard to see how the scripture is fulfilled which says, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron*" (1 Tim. 4:1-2). Many Christians are growing weary in doing well. Satan's darts are flying and many are dropping their shields. Those who are sound in their faith are being separated from those who are not. The purpose of this lesson is to bring to remembrance the principles which God has laid out for His people in times such as these. Through the wisdom and instructions of the scriptures God shows us how to, "*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong*" (1 Cor. 16:13).

Israel's Sins

In the days of Ezekiel, Judah had gone so far into sin that God had sent them into Babylonian captivity. The people were self-confident and stiff necked before the captivity and even though they had been shattered and taken out of their land, nothing had changed. Yet many of the things for which Ezekiel rebukes the people are happening today! Therefore the instruction that God gives His people in the Book of Ezekiel is very appropriate for our situation. For many of God's people had fallen away, most of them had compromised the truth and evidently had become very skilled at justifying their sins. Even in captivity they were listening to the false prophets.

From the beginning of the book God describes His people as a rebellious people (Ezek. 2:3-5). Nevertheless He sent the prophet Ezekiel to make Israel's sins known to them so that perhaps some might repent of their iniquity and turn back to Him (Ezek. 18:30). Let us take note of how God describes the sins of this people.

1. Ezek. 13:1-7: False prophets deceived the people by denying the word of their Lord. They were preaching peace and safety, even though God was in the middle of judging the nation. Here we have a situation where men (false prophets) were trying to keep the appearance of being sent by God, but in reality told lies which accomplished their own agendas. They "hoped" that what they said would come true and that people would believe them. Does this sound familiar. Indeed, the world today is filled with such false prophets telling people they are healed through the television and telling people not to worry; God is a God of love and will not send you to hell." Yet we must not forget what God truly says about these men in verses 8-9 of our passage.
2. Ezek. 14:1-8: Here we have a situation where men wanted to appear godly or at least tried to feel like they were godly. These men would practice all sorts of abominable idolatrous things, and then come to enquire of the Lord (Vs. 3-5). Their hearts were filled with covetousness, hatred, greed, and other forms of idolatry, but they still claimed to be a faithful people. But God has news for such men (vs. 6-8).

3. Ezek. 20:1-8: One of the sins and also one of the causes of Israel's rebellion was the fact that they failed to throw away the abominations of the world. They wanted to be God's people and to be able to enquire of the Lord (Ezek. 20:1-3). Yet God would not be enquired of by them because they would not give up the things of the world (Vs. 7-8). In fact, God clearly describes the nature of their actions in Ezek. 33:30-33. They heard the word of God, they believed the word of God, they enjoyed the word of God as a beautiful song, but they DID NOT DO THE WORD OF GOD!

Israel's list of sins goes on and on. But these are enough to show the attitude that they had toward God and His word and to apply God's judgments to us today.

Israel's Sins Today

In 1 Cor. 10:6, 11 Paul made it perfectly clear that Israel's rebellion and God's judgements of them were written for our learning and admonition so that we would not walk in their pattern of disobedience.

1. Like Israel many false prophets are going throughout the world turning heads and giving people confidence in themselves, all the while leading more and more into the false comfort and inevitable condemnation. These teachers twist the scriptures in order to justify their actions while denying the judgments of the Lord. They play on the emotions of men rather than expounding on the word of God. Those who have grown accustomed to their "chicken soup preaching" become enraged when faithful men rebuke their sins.
2. To bring some application a little closer to home we may also observe that there are many people who still go to the scriptures, that is they "inquire of the Lord," just as the elders of Israel did. But like those elders many Christians today come to God having idols in their hearts. This is manifested in two ways. 1) As an answer to the question, "where did all the churches come from?" They came from men who wanted to feel spiritual and close to God while still fulfilling their own desires. The second is seen in the many Christians who come to services, who study their bibles, who say all the things that they need to say, but their hearts are filled with bitterness, covetousness, and selfishness. We see many today who proclaim "I am a member of the true church, I am a true child of God," but in reality their hearts are far from God. When we place anything in this life before God and His righteousness, whether it be relationships, possessions or power, then we have idols in our hearts.
3. Christians are either not being taught how to or are simply choosing not to throw away the divisive reasoning, futile philosophies, and sinful ways which seem to consume the world. Many respected Christians have resorted to statements such as, "We can no longer judge other churches for things such as instrumental music and institutionalism." It is as if the worldly philosophies of "tolerance" and "Unity in diversity" have seeped into the hearts of God's people. Lately the gospel has become a means to feel good about ourselves, rather than a means to please God. Because of this many people (and by many people I also mean you and me) fit so clearly the description given in Ezek. 33:30-33. Read it again. Before we tell ourselves, "I'm not doing that!", let us consider the following points:
 - a. How often do you pray? (1 Thess. 5:17)
 - b. In your prayers, how often do you find yourself sorrowing for your sins? (Matt. 5:3-4)
 - c. Are you seeing any changes in your life for the better? (1 Thess. 4:9)

- d. How do you respond when you are corrected?
 - e. Exactly where is the kingdom of God on your priority list? (Matt. 6:33).
 - f. What will you do with this lesson after you have read it?
4. As a prophet of God, Ezekiel was designated as a watchman among His people (Ezek. 33:1-9). When God passed judgment upon the sins of Judah it was Ezekiel's responsibility to make their sins known. If he did not then their blood was on his hands. In the Lord's church those who set their hands to teaching God's word, the evangelists, elders and teachers, they become as watchmen among God's people (2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 13:17). As Paul applied this to himself so we must apply to ourselves; when we fail to give God's people the food they need, their blood is on our hands (Acts 20:26). But when the counsel of God is preached to, the ball is in our court to respond in repentance and obedience.

Turn and Live – God's Solution

We must not fail to see these things, for only when we face the truth will we know what to say to those who contradict. Let us also follow the example of the few righteous people in Israel who mourned and were saddened by the lies which filled their nation (Ezek. 13:22). There is hope! But the only way we are going to succeed is if we have a mind to work (Neh. 4:1-6). Those who repented lived: Ezek. 18:30-32. God knows it is a hard thing to keep fighting when it seems sin is prevailing. He also knows it is a hard thing to admit to wrong and to change our lives. But we must. The only way we can use these scriptures to defend our faith is if we apply them to our lives.