

# The Visions of Ezekiel

## Lesson 25

B. Vision Twelve – (33:21 – 39:29) 12<sup>th</sup> Year, 5<sup>th</sup> Day, 10<sup>th</sup> Month

1. The Way of the Story of Israel (33:21a)

**33:21a Now in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month,**

Eight months and twenty days had passed since vision eleven.

a) The Message with the Messenger's Arrival (33:21b)

**33:21b the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, "The city has been taken."**

In the twelfth year since Zedekiah became king of the Southern Kingdom by the authority of Nebuchadnezzar, in the tenth month and on the fifth day, multiple Israelites who had lived in Jerusalem arrived in Ezekiel's village and told him "*The City has been taken.*" Ezekiel already knew these refugees would be on their way. He was expecting them. In the fourth vision, three years before, the LORD told Ezekiel that when the city was taken, some would escape the disaster and join Ezekiel at the *Chebar River* to report the fall to the prophet fulfilling the prophecy (24:26).

b) The Miracle of the Messenger's Arrival (33:22)

**33:22 Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened and I was no longer speechless.**

Twelve years before this vision, in vision one, the LORD called Ezekiel to be His prophet. At that time, the LORD began to control the tongue of the prophet. Ezekiel would be able to speak only when the LORD told him to speak. His tongue was to be stuck to the roof of his mouth all the rest of the time (3:26). In vision four, three years before this vision, the LORD promised that when the refugees arrived from Jerusalem to report that the city had been taken, Ezekiel's tongue would be unstuck from the roof of his mouth and he would be able to speak to people without the restriction of speaking only prophecies from the LORD (24:26-27). With the arrival of these refugees, the prophecy was fulfilled, Ezekiel's mouth was opened and he could have regular conversations with the people he encountered.

Ezekiel's Fifty-second Assignment from the LORD

2. The Way of the Sluggish of Israel (33:23-33)

a) The Land of Israel (33:23-24)

**33:23 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 33:24 "Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one,**

**yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.'**

The once fruitful and bountiful Israel was but a wasteland after Nebuchadnezzar marched through it. He left some of the most undesirable behind to live on the land. The poorest of the poor and the lamest of the lame. Here, the LORD informed Ezekiel that those Nebuchadnezzar had left behind were developing a mindset that they could take control of the tribal land grants of the Promised Land for their own use. If "*Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.*" We would say it like this. "If Abraham, by himself, owned all the land, why can't all of us own the land too?" Because Abraham had a right to the land, surely, they did too! But there was a big problem in this thought. Abraham was righteous. Those left behind were idolatrous.

b) The Idols of Israel (33:25)

**33:25 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land?"**

Ezekiel's reply to the sinners on the land in the old Promised Land was "*You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land?*" You break the dietary rules the LORD has put in place. You break the commandment concerning other gods. Abraham did not! He was worthy of the land. You are not.

c) The Security of Israel (33:26a)

**33:26a "You rely on your sword,**

*"You rely on your sword ..."* was the wrong place for Israel to put their trust. They should have trusted in the LORD rather than the sword. Even with the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, the people did not know where to put their trust. They trusted in murder and plunder. They were absorbed in self preservation instead of relying on the LORD.

d) The Abominations of Israel (33:26)

**33:26b you commit abominations and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?"**

Then there was the problem of the great abomination among those that Nebuchadnezzar left behind. They were thieves. They took what belonged to others for themselves – their wives. It was an abomination in that day to defile the wife of a neighbor and the LORD has not changed His mind to this day! Because of the presence of that abomination, "*Should you then possess the land?*" Absolutely not!

e) The Waist Places of Israel (33:27)

**33:27 "Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence.**

We wish that the LORD had given a little more history about what was taking place in the Promised Land at the time in the passage of this story. Evidently, some of the Jewish people had hidden away in the caves of the land or perhaps in neighboring countries, or were outright left behind by Nebuchadnezzar because of their character and status in life. But we can look into the prophecy of Jeremiah and possibly find the answer to this quandary.

When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and removed Zedekiah as king, he did not leave the people that he refused to take to Babylon without a leader. Nebuchadnezzar put Gedaliah in charge of the people as governor. Here is the story of Gedaliah and the small Jewish remnant left behind found in Jeremiah 40 – 41. (Note: the “...” int that following Scripture means that the repeated titles have been removed. Example: “Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam” is simply Gedaliah.)

Now all the commanders of the forces that were in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah ... over the land and that he had put him in charge of the men, women and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been exiled to Babylon. So they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah .... Then Gedaliah ... swore to them and to their men, saying, " Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans; stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, that it may go well with you. "Now as for me, behold, I am going to stay at Mizpah to stand *for you* before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather in wine and summer fruit and oil, and put *them* in your *storage* vessels, and live in your cities that you have taken over." Likewise also all the Jews who were in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom, and who were in all the *other* countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant for Judah and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah .... Then all the Jews returned from all the places to which they had been driven away and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered in wine and summer fruit in great abundance. Now Johanan ... and all the commanders of the forces that were in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and said to him, "Are you well aware that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah ... did not believe them. Then Johanan ... spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, " Let me go and kill Ishmael ..., and not a man will know! Why should he take your life, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you should be scattered and the remnant of Judah perish?" But Gedaliah ... said to Johanan ..., " Do not do this thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael." *Jeremiah 40:7-16*

Now it came about in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, ... of the royal family and *one* of the chief officers of the king, along with ten men, came to Mizpah to Gedaliah .... While they were eating bread together there in Mizpah, Ishmael ... and the ten men who were with him arose and struck down Gedaliah ..., with the sword and put to death the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, *that is* with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war. Now it happened on the next day after the killing of Gedaliah, when no one knew about *it*, that eighty men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria with their beards shaved off and their clothes torn and their bodies gashed, having grain offerings and incense in their hands to bring to the house of the LORD. Then Ishmael ... went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went; and it came about as he met them that he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah ...!" Yet it turned out that as soon as they came inside the city,

Ishmael ... and the men that were with him slaughtered them, *and cast them* into the cistern. But ten men who were found among them said to Ishmael, "Do not put us to death; for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil and honey hidden in the field." So he refrained and did not put them to death along with their companions. ... Then Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had put under the charge of Gedaliah ...; thus Ishmael ... took them captive and proceeded to cross over to the sons of Ammon. But Johanan ... and all the commanders of the forces that were with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael ... had done. So they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael ... and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon. Now it came about, as soon as all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan ... and the commanders of the forces that were with him, they were glad. So all the people whom Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan .... But Ishmael ... escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the sons of Ammon. Then Johanan ... and all the commanders of the forces that were with him took from Mizpah all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael ..., after he had struck down Gedaliah ...*that is*, the men who were soldiers, *the* women, *the* children, and *the* eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon. And they went and stayed in Geruth Chimham, which is beside Bethlehem, in order to proceed into Egypt because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, since Ishmael ... had struck down Gedaliah ..., whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. *Jeremiah 41:1-18*

Surely, the Jewish remnant and its leader were killed by the sword in the villages and in the open fields once they came out of hiding by one of their own and his associates.

f) *The Mountains of Israel (33:28-29)*

**33:28 "I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate so that no one will pass through. 33:29 "Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed."**

With the governor dead and the last of the Jewish remnant on its way to seek safety in Egypt, the Promised Land was depopulated. It took more than seven months after the fall of Jerusalem, but it came to pass and this prophecy was fulfilled.

g) *The Talk from Ezekiel for Israel Heard (33:30)*

**33:30 "But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, 'Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.'**

No doubt, the news from the refugees was devastating to the exiles living near Ezekiel. He was their prophet. They had chosen him to be their watchman. The LORD had appointed him as their watchman. They needed a word from the LORD concerning all they had heard. People are people and people talk and they are not too particular where they talk. No one could stop them from talking

about the circumstances and Ezekiel was the subject of their conversations. It was time to go to their watchman and seek his words.

### 3. The Way of the Sinful of Israel (33:31-33)

#### a) What They Sought (33:31a)

**33:31a "They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them,**

For twelve years the elders of Israel and Judah had heard the words of the LORD spoken by Ezekiel and with the destruction of Jerusalem, they needed to hear from him again. As before, they came to sit before Ezekiel to listen to him. But the LORD warned Ezekiel about them. They would listen, but they would not follow his instructions. As the watchman, it was Ezekiel's responsibility to deliver the message. He was not responsible for what they did with the message. What would they do with the message? Nothing.

#### b) What They Desired (33:31b)

**33:31b for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain.**

The elders would not follow the instructions from Ezekiel and that was because of their desires. Notice that the LORD told Ezekiel that the elders confessed aloud their desires. They were not secret. Their mouths spoke what their hearts wanted. Lustful gain! The words of the LORD promised heavenly things, the desires of their hearts tempted earthly gains. That was what they desired.

#### c) What They Loved (33:32a)

**33:32a "Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument;**

*"Behold, you are to them like a sensual song ...."* Humans have never changed down through the centuries. There has always been something about the righteousness of the LORD that draws all people to Him. Everyone wants it. Everyone tries it. Everyone desires it. In times of trouble, they instinctively cry out to the LORD when the pressures of the world are just too great. But when the pressures are off, those who have not fully trusted in the LORD forsake Him for their own desires. We have seen that as a nation in the weeks that followed the 9/11 attacks in New York with record attendance in every Church in America for about three weeks. Still, even the lost and rebellious love the LORD and His words. We see the word "sensual." It is the Hebrew word *agab* and it means *love*. It is one of three Hebrew words that can be translated as love in our English versions. The word "sensual" is used in our text (NASB) because *agab* this love expresses a relationship that draws the heart toward the subject. In this case, the love song is sensual because it draws or lures the listener into the message. Therefore, the exiles of Israel and Judah loved the song of the LORD sung by *"a beautiful voice and"* played *"well on an instrument."* The music is smooth and moving. The voice is enjoyable and entertaining. Sinners as they might be, they still love to hear it performed and played. Suitable for instruction, meaningful words of testimony and dear to every soul they are. Who is not familiar with *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, or How great Thou art?* But what will the person do with songs like those? The LORD told Ezekiel that answer.

## d) What They Did (33:32b)

**33:32b for they hear your words but they do not practice them.**

What do the people do with the words of the love songs of the LORD? “... *they hear ... but they do not practice them.*” The Jews could not get themselves out of the way and let the LORD have His way!

## e) What They Realized (33:33)

**33:33 "So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst."**

Nevertheless, the LORD had placed Ezekiel as the watchman, and it was simply his job to speak for the LORD. The Jews would hear and ignore, but when time had passed and all the accounts were settled, all the wrong had been done, the people would still “*know that a prophet has been in their midst.*” Ezekiel was not responsible for the actions of the hearer; he was only responsible to deliver the message.

## Ezekiel’s Fifty-third Assignment from the LORD

## 1. The Way of the Shepherds of Israel (34:1-10)

## a) The Selfishness of the Shepherds (34:1-2)

**34:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"**

We now come to the way of the shepherds of Israel. “*Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?*” The rulers of Israel were often called shepherds in the Scripture. This warning was not being directed at the leaders who had been in charge back in the Promised Land. Nebuchadnezzar had already brought that possibility to an end. This warning was directed at the wicked *elders of Israel* stationed in exile with Ezekiel. What had they done? They had fattened their own pockets by exploiting the people under their care.

We might think it strange that the *elders of Israel* were still leaders among the people in exile, but in every society, there is a pecking order of some kind. We even see it in the most restrictive prisons where inmates are segregated. The exile was anything but restrictive. The government of the Babylonian Empire did not provide for every need of the hundreds of thousands of exiles in their care. The exiles were placed on land where they were expected to make their own way. As such, leaders among the people emerged. The powerful became more powerful; the poor were pushed into poverty. Such is the one fallacy of the idea of socialism. In theory, everyone would be equal in wealth in standing. In reality, a great divide occurs with a few who fatten their pockets and many who have nothing in theirs. The *elders of Israel* in exile with Ezekiel, those who had been coming to his tent for a dozen years, were guilty of taking advantage of the least fortunate Israelites for their own good.

## b) The Egocentricity of the Shepherds (34:3)

**34:3 "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.**

Second, the LORD saw and proclaimed the egocentricity of the shepherds in exile. The primary job of the elders was to lead the people to resources to meet daily needs. The LORD could see that the needs of the elders were being met with great supply and overflowing. The needs of the people were being filled with little or nothing.

c) The Ignored of the Shepherds (34:4)

**34:4 "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.**

Next, the needs of the people were blatantly ignored by the shepherds. To ignore the sick, diseased and broken showed their outright lack of care for their own people. Instead of being the caretakers, the *elders of Israel* took every advantage from the people to their own personal edification. When the leaders did not lead, the desperate people sought to venture out on their own where they were eventually lost from all connection with the family.

d) The Disregarded of the Shepherds (34:5-6)

**34:5 "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 34:6 "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.""**

Now we come to the disregarded of the shepherds. We notice those for whom the shepherds did not care. Those who needed their protection. Those who needed their guidance. Those who were in danger, who had made bad decisions, who had wandered where they never should have gone, who were vulnerable in every aspect of life.

e) The Mistake of the Shepherds (34:7-8)

**34:7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 34:8 "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock;**

Then there was the great mistake of the shepherds. "...*My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock ...*." The LORD had the shepherds in His sights. "*As I live,*" declares the Lord GOD "...". No one should ever be in this position with the LORD. No one should be so self-centered that he does not do that which the LORD has directed him to do. These shepherds were in outright defiance!

f) The Forfeiture of the Shepherds (34:9-10)

**34:9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 34:10 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed**



**themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.'"**

The LORD's judgment would be this. The shepherds were about to lose their positions of authority in the *nation of Israel*. No longer would they be leaders. They were headed to the poor house. Frankly, the LORD was about to cause them to starve. Israel's flocks would be removed from the shepherds and delivered to the care of the Savior.