

# Ezekiel 25

## I. Introduction

**A. Summary Statement:** Ezekiel calls us to remember we are exiles and as exiles to remember that God is near and is infinitely concerned for His own glory. Therefore Ezekiel calls us to refuse the temptation to place our hope in an imagined past or an alluring present but instead to repent and to wait for God's future salvation.

### B. Outline:

1. God is Present in Exile Ezekiel 1-3
2. God is Present to Judge in Judah Ezekiel 4-24
3. God is Present to Judge the Nations Ezekiel 25-32
4. God is Present to Save His People Ezekiel 33-48

### C. Detailed Outline:

God sees idolatry, hates idolatry, and will not dwell with idolaters	Ezekiel 8-11
How did we get here? Failing to listen to God's Word and replacing it with our own	Ezekiel 12-14
Three Parables of Idolatry: we should feel the horror of idolatry	Ezekiel 15-17
Justice and Mercy: A Call to Repent	Ezekiel 18
A Lament and a hope	Ezekiel 19-20
The immanence and inevitability of God's judgment	Ezekiel 21-22
God's Judgment Falls	Ezekiel 23-24

### D. Continuing:

1. Last time we were in Ezekiel, we finished the first main section of Ezekiel - looking back at Jerusalem
2. So, naturally, this week, we are starting the second main section of Ezekiel - looking around at the nations
3. But, before I jump into the second section, I want to pause and think about the overview and the implications of the first section and then think how that leads us into the second section
4. So, this morning I'm actually going to start with application - I'm going to make some broad application of the first section to us so that we can feel what it means that we should not be looking back to an imagined past, how does the fall of Jerusalem apply to us
5. And then, once we feel the implications of Ezekiel's first message, I'm going to connect that to Ezekiel's second message and see why the second message is necessary

**E. Proposition:** If, whether intentionally or practically, we place our hope in returning to a past we believe was better we are not hoping in the gospel. But, that doesn't mean we should instead join the nations- the world is the enemy of God and of God's people.

1. Ezekiel 4-24 - Whether in Babylon or in Manhattan, KS, we are exiles
2. If we aren't meant to be culture warriors, should we just join the culture?
3. Ezekiel 25 - the world doesn't hold any hope either

## II. Whether in Babylon or in Manhattan, KS, we are exiles: a review of Ezekiel 4-24

### A. Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon

1. As you might recall, one of the main premises of my understanding of Ezekiel is that Ezekiel was preaching to early exiles in Babylon, not to those in Judah or Jerusalem
2. But, this makes Ezekiel's first message a little bit of an oddity: why preach about the impending destruction of Jerusalem to those who have already been exiled from Jerusalem?
3. Why preach to the exiles in Babylon about Jerusalem, unless the exiles were tempted to place an improper hope in Jerusalem, to place their trust in what Jerusalem was, or, in effect, to idolize Jerusalem
4. And when we think about it, it makes sense - Jerusalem was God's city where God's king reigned and where God dwelt in God's temple. The history of Jerusalem was replete with stories of God's providence, God's salvation, God's presence, and God's blessing.
5. The exiles, thrown dragged away from their country and their culture must have been in a very confusing situation - everything that they once knew was gone and they were scattered among a people who did not know God and lived as though they did not know God.
6. In their confusion and sorrow, it must have been easy to look back at Jerusalem and hope that they could return, that things would just go back to the way they were. Maybe things weren't perfect, but clearly it was better than what they had been cast into.

### B. God's message to the exiles

1. It was to these exiles that God sent Ezekiel and God had one very clear message: you cannot hope in Jerusalem!
2. Hoping in Jerusalem was to overlook her faults, to excuse her hypocrisy, and to question God's holiness
3. Hoping in Jerusalem was hoping in a temporal manifestation of God's work rather than in God
4. Hoping in Jerusalem would only lead to destruction, because Jerusalem was bound for destruction
5. So, Ezekiel preaches a very pointed message of judgment against Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon - if the exiles found hope by trying to return to the way things were in Jerusalem, they could not be ready for God's plan - they would be looking at Jerusalem instead of God

### C. We may feel very similar to the exiles in Babylon

1. So, that was a quick review of what we've heard in Ezekiel 4-24, but as we consider God's message to the exiles, we may feel very similar to the exiles in Babylon
2. Most of us can look at the world around us and feel that we are very out-of-step with the world, that we find ourselves in the middle of a people who do not know God and live as though they do not know God
3. And, as we look around, it seems that the world goes from bad to worse - even fifteen or twenty years ago, gay "marriage" was a fringe idea and "transgenderism" was a term I was unfamiliar with - the culture seems to be running away from God at a full sprint
4. As we look at the world around us, we may feel just as confused and out-of-place as the exiles did in Babylon
5. And, like the exiles in Babylon, it might be easy to look back and wish we could just return to an earlier time, a time when life seemed better, a life when things seemed to make more sense
  - a. Maybe we look back at the 1950s, when the background culture seemed to be more Christian, when public schools opened in prayer, and most respectable citizens were members of a local church
  - b. Or maybe we look further back to the early days of the founding of the United States and think of the rugged heroism of settlers and the bravery of those willing to fight for what they believed in
  - c. Or maybe we look further back to the Puritans and the glory days of the English-speaking church and think of their piety and their preaching and wonder why we can't be more like them
  - d. Or maybe we look even further back to the Reformation and those who were willing to stand up to a hypocritical church and call them back to the true worship of God
  - e. Or maybe we look back somewhere else, but we look back and we wish that things could just go back to how they were

#### **D. God's message to us**

1. And this is why Ezekiel's message is important for us as well - perhaps we aren't tempted to hope in ancient Jerusalem, but we are tempted to look back at what was and hope in it
2. And Ezekiel would look at us and say, No! You can't look back, you can't return to what was - looking back is idolizing the past not hoping in God, looking back is ignoring the failures of the past, whitewashing what was
  - a. When we are hoping in the past, we often choose to over emphasize the good and overlook the failures
  - b. For example, we look back at prayer in schools and culture of Christianity but forget that much of what was there was hypocrisy and merely *cultural* Christianity
  - c. We look back at the founders and emphasize their best qualities and their 'Judeo-Christian' values and overlook the fact that most of them were emphatically not Christian and many of their lives and their actions were emphatically not Christ-like
3. Now, I want to be careful - I'm not saying that we can't learn from the past, that there aren't preachers and authors and others from other times that can still speak timely wisdom to us, in fact, I think it is good to learn from other ages because they can speak wisdom that isn't bound up by our current situation - but I am saying that our desire can't be to return to what was, our hope can't be in remaking the past
4. I think the way that this is often expressed is the culture warrior - the Christian who sees the world falling apart around them and feels the need to fight to make it go back, to return it to what it was
  - a. The Christian who gets super involved in politics, because our hope is undoing the decline of our culture
  - b. The Christian who spends a significant amount of their time denouncing the culture and pointing out how 20, or 50, or 100 years ago was better
  - c. The Christian who confuses holiness with trying to live like they did back 'then'
5. Ezekiel's message speaks to us and says that this is the wrong impulse for God's exiles - our hope isn't looking back
  - a. We can rejoice in God's past providence and God's past blessing, but never has God's kingdom been perfectly manifested on earth and the way to God's kingdom is not by looking back
  - b. If we are always looking back, always wishing for what was, hoping in a return to a previous state, then we aren't really hoping in God, we aren't looking for God's salvation

### **III. The dilemma: if we aren't meant to be culture warriors, should we just join the culture?**

#### **A. So, Ezekiel's message brings a complex conundrum both for us and the exiles in Babylon**

1. If the exiles aren't supposed to hope in Jerusalem, if they aren't supposed to be looking for a way to return to what was, what should they be doing?
2. Maybe instead of fighting their current situation as exiles scattered among the nations, maybe they should simply blend in - join the nations and give up on being a separate people, a people devoted to God
3. Maybe their hope is in becoming a valued and valuable part of the culture in which they find themselves - if there is no return to Judah, then they must need to look for something else

#### **B. And this seems to be the conundrum for us as well**

1. If our hope isn't in the past, if our goal isn't to force the culture to go back to what it was, what should we do?
2. Maybe we should just join our culture, blend in to that which is around us
3. Maybe resisting the massive changes in the culture's understanding of sexuality, of justice, and so many other things is pointless and we should go along with the changes

#### **C. This conundrum is what moves us into the second part of Ezekiel's message**

1. Ezekiel has proclaimed that God is present to judge in Judah - Judah and Jerusalem are under God's judgment and there is no hope in returning there
2. Now Ezekiel is going to proclaim that God is present among the nations as well, but as He was present to judge in Judah, He is also present to judge among the nations

## IV. Ezekiel 25 - the world doesn't hold any hope either

### A. Let's read Ezekiel 25 together

*The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites and prophesy against them. Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, 'Aha!' over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the LORD. For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*

*"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,' therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the LORD.*

*"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, therefore thus says the Lord GOD, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord GOD.*

*"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, therefore thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I lay my vengeance upon them."*

### B. The second section of Ezekiel's message addresses this conundrum - if we aren't meant to go back to what used to be, should we just join the nations?

1. So, Ezekiel's message turns from Judah to the nations
2. Again, Ezekiel isn't preaching to each of these nations - he's preaching to the exiles in Babylon - and his primary audience isn't the nations, it is the exiles
3. God (through Ezekiel) is telling the exiles that there is no hope looking back to Jerusalem, but there is also no hope looking to the world around them
4. And he starts in Ezekiel 25 by placing himself back in Jerusalem and looking at the nations surrounding Judah, starting in the northeast and going clockwise to the west, and Ezekiel's message is clear:

### **C. The nations are under God's judgment as well**

1. To Ammon: Ezekiel 25:4-5,7 - *therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and Ammon a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the LORD. ... therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as plunder to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.*
2. To Moab and Seir: Ezekiel 25:9-11 - *therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the LORD.*
3. To Edom: Ezekiel 25:13-14 - *therefore thus says the Lord GOD, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. And I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath, and they shall know my vengeance, declares the Lord GOD.*
4. To Philistia: Ezekiel 25:16-17 - *therefore thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I lay my vengeance upon them."*

### **D. The nations are under God's judgment precisely because they despised God's people**

1. God could have judged the nation for numerous violations of His holiness, but what God lays out against each of the nations is that they rejoiced over the downfall of God's people
2. About Ammon: Ezekiel 25:3,6 - *Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, 'Aha!' over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile ... For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel,*
3. About Moab and Seir: Ezekiel 25:8 - *"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,*
4. About Edom: Ezekiel 25:12 - *"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them,*
5. About Philistia: Ezekiel 25:15 - *"Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity,*
6. Not only does this warn the exiles that there is literally no hope to be found in the world, this colors the previous message: the exiles should hope in a return to what Jerusalem was - it fell because of idolatry - but the exiles also shouldn't despise what Jerusalem was - it was the city of the living God and the residence of God's king, the capital of God's people

### **E. So, the exiles shouldn't hope in Jerusalem, but they shouldn't join the nations either**

1. And this is a message for us as well - we can't be people who hope in the past, those who are constantly fighting the culture to try to return to an early age where everything was right, but we also shouldn't join the culture
2. The evil we see in the culture is real evil and the feeling that the culture is going completely the opposite way of us is a correct diagnosis - we don't need to fight them as they run down their evil path, but we clearly shouldn't join them
3. The culture, the nations hate everything that we represent, trying to join them will only lead to our ridicule and our inclusion in God's judgment, there is no payoff for joining the nations

## **V. So, as I conclude this message, I want to make an observation and general application**

### **A. The two dangers I have tried to draw out in this message are the two dangers that seem to always face the church**

1. There is a branch of the visible church that is always fighting to stay in the past, to keep things as they were, to find hope in history and therefore is super politically active or otherwise active in fighting the culture to try to 'reestablish' Christ's kingdom here on earth
2. And then there is a branch of the visible church that is continually giving into the culture, even joining the culture in their mad rush into destruction and death

### **B. And God says that both of these dangers are incredibly dangerous - both of these dangers lead to God's judgment and distract from God's salvation**

1. So, we need to be careful not to place our hope in transforming the culture around us back to what we had (or imagined we had) in the past - our hope isn't in the past and it isn't here at all
2. But we also need to be careful not to therefore give into the sinfulness of the culture and go along with it - we don't need to fight the culture but we also don't need to go along with the culture
3. This leaves us in a weird spot on earth, a spot where we will always be on the losing end in the world - but that's where God wants us, because His salvation isn't here and now, his salvation is in the future