

Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 12, Three Unforgettable Days, Ezekiel 24:1-27.

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 12, Three Unforgettable Days, Ezekiel 24:1-27.

We come now to Ezekiel chapter 24 and this will bring us to the end of the third part of the book of Ezekiel so far.

We noticed a keyword running through the messages in chapter 21, remember? Sword. In this chapter, there are three messages, and they all single out three days in the prophet's life. So I've called this chapter Three Unforgettable Days.

Verse 2 speaks of the first day. Mortal, write down the name of this day, this very day. So it's obviously a very important day, whatever it is.

And then down at the end in verse 25 and verse 27, we have mention of another day, and in 26, the day, the day, the day, running through 25 through 27. In the middle part, we don't have mention of a day, but we do have mention of morning and evening and morning in verse 18, and that is a separate day. In two cases, one is the precise word day in these messages and then, in one case, an obvious allusion to another day.

Verse 1 begins with a particular date, and we think, ah, we've met this practice before. And we read in the ninth year in the tenth month on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me. But if we were to look more closely and compare it with all the other references to dates in Ezekiel, this one doesn't match.

It doesn't match in its format. It matches okay in the particular time that it refers to, but the form, the calendar form, isn't the same. In fact, it doesn't conform to the chronological references in Ezekiel, but it does conform to the way that chronological references come in 2 Kings.

In fact, this is a reference to this date is taken from 2 Kings 25 and verse 1. And that date is when the beginning of the siege took place. When the Babylonian army came and initiated that long siege, that was the beginning.

And so, this seems to be a borrowing. Originally, there seemed to be no date, but it's quite easy to see how, at some point, what was that date? Oh we've got it in Kings. Well, let's put it in here.

But if you look it's a different format. But what it turns out to be, we can sort out when it was. It was in January 588 BC in our chronology.

So, we know when it was. We know when Kings says it was. Anyway, in verse 2, mortal writes down the name of this day, this very day.

The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. And so there it is. This information is being given here to Ezekiel.

And of course, it's a very important day. You might compare it to 1945 when the Russians reached the outskirts of Berlin. And that was the beginning of the end of the Second World War in Europe.

And so, it is here. Here is the siege. And it's very likely, eventually, we don't know how long, eventually Jerusalem is going to fall.

It's spelled the beginning of the end. This was the beginning of the long siege of Jerusalem. And in terms of Ezekiel's prophesying, it would be a noteworthy nail in the coffin of the exile's hopes of returning home.

Those VIPs who had first come in 597 to Babylonian exile. But things were getting worse and not better. It was a confirmation, it was an encouragement to Ezekiel to be told that what he'd been prophesying about, not knowing when it would happen, well now it had happened, God tells Ezekiel.

But only Ezekiel knew it was a Red Letter Day. Nobody else knew, in fact, but he's given this private information. He's told to write down that date as a confirmation that when it did happen, or rather when news came to Babylon of it happening, which would be even later, then it would be confirmed.

That was what I prophesied. And Ezekiel would be able to say a very sad, I told you so, didn't I, way back. I was referring back to the messages that he'd given about the siege of Jerusalem.

But for now, only Ezekiel knew through the extrasensory perception of prophecy. God as it were whispers the news in his ear. It must have saddened him, but to a greater extent it must have encouraged him as vindication of the negative messages that he'd been transmitting for so long.

I shouldn't imagine Ezekiel enjoyed giving those messages. He did, in a sense, remember that scroll, that it was sweet as he swallowed it, as he had it in his mouth and swallowed it, but it was a bitter message in content. And there must have been mixed feelings for Ezekiel as he gave these dire messages.

We've seen how Ezekiel is the master of the extended metaphor. And he shows us once again here because, from verse 3 onwards, he uses the metaphor of a cooking pot, a very ordinary utensil in every home—a pot used for cooking meat on fire outside the back door of the house.

An old cooking pot had grown rusty with long use. One might think that these commands in verses 3 to 5 are addressed to Ezekiel as a sort of symbolic action—it sounds like it at first.

Set on the pot, set it on, pour in water, put in the pieces, all the good pieces, the thigh, and the shoulder, fill it with choice bones, take the choicest one of the flock, pile the logs under it, boil its pieces, see also its bones in it. In China, where I was living last year, there's very much a belief in the beneficial properties of bones. And bones are always cooked with the meat.

In fact, chopped up bones. And the marrow in them will be good for you. And when it's served on your plate, it's a mixture of meat and bones.

And people spit out onto the table those little bones. Whereas, I delicately took them and put them in my soup bowl. So, bones are very valuable because of the rich content of the marrow inside them.

Which is an interesting phenomenon here. But in fact, as you look carefully, it's really a rhetorical command to Nebuchadnezzar. It's really ordering him because this is the day when there's the siege of Jerusalem.

And so, Nebuchadnezzar is being told here to get on with the siege. And to carry it out and accomplish that siege, in fact. And so, it's ordering him to initiate the siege, but in these heavily metaphorical terms.

And, of course, the real addressees, looking on and listening, are the 597 prisoners of war. And the meaning is the meaning of the message is that Israel's God stands behind the king of Babylon in laying siege to Jerusalem. That's what it's really saying.

And God is working out his own negative purposes through Nebuchadnezzar. And so, Nebuchadnezzar is implicitly obeying God's orders. The text is not absolutely clear in its details, but we can understand that the siege is being described.

And from now on, the people inside the city are like chunks of meat and meaty bones being put in a cooking pot. And things are going to get very hot for them from now on, during the siege. And included in the contents are the choicest pieces from the best of the flock.

In other words, Jerusalem's VIPs are going to be there, locked up behind the walls of Jerusalem. And the royal family of Zedekiah, the royal administration, and other socially important people. They are going to be there, the very best of people, in the pot, as meat and bones.

But really, in the siege. And then verses 6 to 11 refer to the second stage of the metaphor. Verse 11 is going to inform us that it's actually a copper pot.

It's made of copper, this cooking pot. But it's an old cooking pot and there's corrosion. And it speaks of rust, but it's actually the green corrosion that you get from old copper.

And there's mention of this rust. Verse 6: Woe to the bloody city, the pot whose rust is in it, whose rust is not gone out of it. And so you're drawing attention to the corrosion inside this old pot.

It hasn't been cleaned for a long time; it has just been reused and reused and left uncleaned. That rust is going to be burned out, or rather, that green corrosion is going to be burned out. So, put more wood on the fire, because now it's time to deal with that pot, cleanse it, and get rid of the corrosion.

It's like our modern practice of having a self-cleaning oven. The temperature is very high, so the dirt in it is changed into little bits of white stuff that you can wipe out at the end. And so, there's this extra fire.

Verse 10: Heap up the logs, kindle the fire, and stand it empty upon the coal so that it may become hot. Verse 11, Its copper glow, its filth melt in it, its rust be consumed. And this, of course, is at the end of the siege; Jerusalem is going to be set fire to.

And all those wooden buildings are going to be consumed. And so, after the inhabitants are taken out, then there's that second stage. And so, a reference to the deportation of people from Jerusalem in 587, and also a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by fire.

And so that's where you're going in this long-extended metaphor of the cooking pot and the fire underneath it. But what does the corrosion stand for? What is this corrosion? Well, it's linked with blood. The city of bloodshed, or the bloody city, in verse 6. And in 22, verse 2, Jerusalem was called the city of bloodshed.

And he went on to blame there Jerusalem's leaders and citizens for engaging in bloodshed and failing to safeguard the sacredness of human life. And here, that shed blood, the virtual bloodstains on Jerusalem's streets are likened to the corrosion in the old, uncleaned cooking pot. It's got to be cleaned out.

We've got to get rid of all those bloodstains. And in verse 11, no, in verse 8, we have a little mention, a little metaphorical reference to blood as being placed on a bare rock instead of being poured on the ground. In my commentary, I've translated verse 8, and I have placed the blood she shed on the bare rock.

I've translated. I have permitted the blood to be left uncovered on the bare rock. And the thought is that the bloodshed was very blatant. You can think of bloodshed as falling down to the ground and then being absorbed by the ground, and you don't notice it so much.

But if you've got a bare rock, then, and the blood is put on that. Oh, look at that blood. And it's so blatant and very obvious.

And to God, this bloodshed is so obvious and so blatant. And it calls out to be dealt with. And it's rather like Genesis 4, where you had Abel's blood shed by Cain.

And though it was shed on the earth, the ground cried out for God to do something about it. And here, God can see that bare rock covered in blood. And so, it's so visible and so blatant that it has to be dealt with.

That the administration in Jerusalem has been responsible for killing off its citizens for their own sake. And letting them die and doing nothing about it. Verse 13.

Yet when I clenched you in your filthy lewdness, you did not become clean from your filth. And this is a reference to 597. In a way, that was a chance for Jerusalem to reform itself.

After the VIPs had gone in 597. And they should have said, well, we've got to clean up our act, or else it might happen again. Jerusalem should have said that, but it didn't.

And things had gone from bad to worse. So, God had to intervene again. In fact, in 588 and then the actual fall of Jerusalem in 587.

We're talking about the cleansing of the pot. And we might think that that's something positive. But there's never any positive thought here.

That cleansing is purely negative when dealing with bloodshed, and getting rid of it through the capture of Jerusalem. We come to the second day.

In verse 15 onwards. And this is a very traumatic and personal day for Ezekiel personally. And it involves his own personal life and family.

Because there's a symbolic action that hurts Ezekiel very much. Verse 16. With one blow, I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes.

Your wife is going to die. Your wife is going to die suddenly, just like that.

And it's going to be a shock. And it's going to be... Whenever she died, it would be a shock. But the suddenness would make it even more of a shock. For so long, she's been the delight of your eyes. And then suddenly, she's gone. She's dead.

Well now normally... Normally when somebody in the family died. There would be a whole routine of mourning customs. To express and alleviate to some extent the grief that one felt.

And this would... Most cultures are like that. Though I don't see many signs of them in contemporary USA. But when my mother died in the 1940s.

There was an elaborate ritual. And there was not only the funeral. But the curtains on the windows at the front of the house.

It would be kept closed for many weeks. And we males in the family wore black ties and black armbands for many weeks. And this is what we did. And everybody would know their mourning. They would look at the house—their mourning. They would look at the men—their mourning. And the women would be dressed in black dresses. So on.

And so, it would be made very obvious. And so there would be this visual expression of grief. And I told you last time.

About that African-American daughter. Whose father had just died in the hospital. And that... Wailing.

That woke up everybody in the hospital ward. Well, that is normal in many cultures, and it was normal in Israel.

But here. Very strangely, we might think. Ezekiel is told. The second part of verse 16. 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 sandals on your feet. Wear your ordinary clothing. And do not cover your upper lip. Or eat the bread of mourners.

And so, there we are. He wasn't to have that funeral meal. And invite the rest of the family and friends.

And so, it's very striking. And in fact. In verse 18. His wife did die. And the next morning. I did as I commanded. Went about my normal business. Showed no sign of mourning or grief at all.

And this is a symbolic action. That Ezekiel is to engage in. And he's not to put any of the customs into operation. That his own culture would regularly practice, he could only grieve inwardly. He was to dress normally. Not to hold this special funeral meal. Now. His fellow prisoners of war.

Recognize from what they know of Ezekiel that this must be a symbolic action. Or we might say lack of action. In this case. And verse 19. The people said to me. Will you not tell us what these things mean for us. That you're acting in this way. This is so abnormal.

That you're not engaging in these mourning practices, everybody does it. And you're quite entitled to do it. Feel free. Oh. Oh well.

And so, the interpretation comes. The interpretation comes. And Ezekiel has the opportunity, in response to that questioning, to pass on the interpretation. And to be a witness to God's intentions.

And he can speak of the background. Of the whole situation behind the symbolic action. The corruption, the total breakdown of society. No. He can say what's to come.

In 587. And what's to come is to be the complete breakdown of society. And all the norms of society. They are going to be done away with. And even though children are going to die. Verse 21.

Your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. He's saying that to the 597 exiles. And yet, there is to be no mourning. And as Ezekiel had just lost his wife. They would suffer--the hostages. The exiles of 597 would suffer bereavement and even worse.

The temple was the lifeline between God and Judah and was going to be destroyed. An unthinkable disaster. In fact. Verse 21. I will profane my sanctuary. And so. Which is the delight of the eyes of the Judean people.

And so, life as people know it, is going to collapse with 587. And when the prisoners of war hear of it. They're going to collapse in apathy. And they're going to be too devastated by their grief even to carry out the normal cultural soothing customs. Too stunned even for tears. It's going to be overwhelming.

This news of the fall of Jerusalem. And so even now. Ezekiel.

Bereaved Ezekiel. He was a sign pointing forward. To this great crisis. Which was going to happen. Befalling the Judeans. In Jerusalem. And affecting. In their grief. The prisoners of war, their last hope of going home, were taken away from them. Hearing of their sons and daughters. Who'd been killed at the hands of the Babylonians.

Back in Jerusalem. And so. Life was going to grind to a halt. And Ezekiel is to give expression to this. And then 25 to 27, is this last section. And this is another day that's mentioned. It has to do very much with the siege. It may have to do with the actual fall of Jerusalem.

After the siege, it's not made absolutely clear. But 26. It speaks of the day. When somebody who has escaped from Jerusalem. And come all the way to Babylonia is going to come to you. Reporting the news of what's happened back in Jerusalem.

And that will be another fateful day. It's one thing for it to happen historically back in Jerusalem. It's another for the hostages to actually find out from a survivor. Somebody who was actually there. Who can say with their own mouths that it has indeed happened.

But there is going to be. There's going to be a sort of a sort of happy ending. For Ezekiel at this time. Because it's going to mean the end of the ministry that he has been exercising. Concerning the destruction that was to take place in Jerusalem and Judah and interpreting those things as the punishment of God. His work would be over. And along with it will be the ending of that old symbolic action.

Remember in chapter 3, when he was going to be struck dumb and he would be housebound under house arrest as it were? And he wouldn't have anything to say. except those occasions when God opened his mouth. To utter those prophecies of judgment.

Well now he's told on that day is a forecast. Verse 27. On that day. Your mouth shall be opened and to the one who has escaped. And you'll be able to talk with him. And you shall speak and no longer be silent. And so, you shall be a sign to them. And they shall know that I am the Lord.

How very interesting, because Ezekiel. Is a sign. To the exiles in two ways. We didn't mention it but in verse 24. In all that lack of mourning about the collapse of society. Ezekiel shall be a sign to you. You shall do just as he has done. And when this comes. you shall know that I. Am the Lord God.

And there is one commentator who sums it up very nicely. The difference between

those. Those, two days. In verse 24, Ezekiel is a sign of God's judgment and its consequences. In verse 27. He's a sign of God's grace and its consequences. I think that's true.

And we shall have to unpack that a little bit. In the case of verse 27. And at this point we need to remember as I've often said that the book of Ezekiel especially in the first edition. Falls into two halves roughly. One to 24 and then starting again in chapter 33. And moving on to the end of 48.

And there's this ministry of doom on the one hand and there's this positive ministry on the other. We also saw that in the second edition. There was a pushing back. Of some of those positive messages. Into the first half.

But they were barbed positive messages. Weren't they? But we're coming to the end of that bad news for the hostages. For the exiles. Those VIPs who were really being held hostage in Babylon to try and prevent Judah from rebelling again though that didn't work out very well.

And so, that's the end of that first phase. And we're going to be moving on to a new phase. And so implicitly.

This is looking forward to that second part of the book. In fact, but we've also seen. In our studies. That there's this pushing back of material. In chapter 33, Ezekiel is a watchman. Push back to chapter 3. And the theme of commissioning. There are Two types of commissioning. The old commissioning and the new commissioning, put side by side. In chapters 2 and chapter 3.

And in various ways, there's pushing back. So that very obviously. The second edition. Is meant for those. That whole group of exiles. Not just the 597 ones. But the 587 ones who followed on, the mass of people from Judah generally, not just the Jerusalem VIPs. And there's this pushing back. And overall, there's this theme of judgment. Yes. In the context of salvation for the 587 people. But judgment still has a role.

And I've spoken now and then of judgment with a capital J. And judgment with a small J. And so, in a sense. We're moving on to the new message. But we've already. had the privilege of listening to the new message. Which has been interspersed among the old. So, the whole thing can be read as with direct messages applying to the 587 group. And very much, there's the thinking, that appears now and then. that. the exiles ought never to forget their past history. In Jerusalem and they're turning against God. Okay.

There's looking forward to better things. In the future. But they needed to remember

what had happened way back. And that there was this great need to do so. And as we've been reading through.

Well, when we come to the second half of the book. We're going to see it again. Very plainly, in chapter 36. And in verse 31, then when you've gone back to the land. You shall remember your evil ways and your dealings that were not good. You shall loathe yourself for your iniquities and your abominable deeds.

And that was a healthy remembering. That was a healthy remembering. Remembering. What sinners they were, in fact. And so, appreciating the grace of God and being determined not to do it again. For God's sake.

But to honor God. And so that message is very necessary. And we've had it before.

We had it in chapter 16. And. In verse 54.

One of these messages that are post-587. I will restore your fortunes in order that you may bear your disgrace. And be ashamed of all that you've done. And there's this great need. Not to forget. Not to forget what has happened.

And similarly, I think, there are these two facets of what we've just been talking about. Judgment with a capital J. Judgment with a small j. On the one hand, and this need to remember. Remember, from our unconverted lives and not to forget things. In a sense, by-gones are by-gones. But in another sense, we must never forget.

And one finds that the New Testament wants to bring out these two aspects that judgment with a small j, for instance. If we look at Romans 8 in verse 13. If you live according to the flesh you will die. If you live according to the flesh you will die. That is not an evangelical, evangelistic warning. This is talking to Christians here in Romans 8. And you've got the choice of death or life. And there's that warning there. If you live according to the flesh you will die.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul could warn his Christian readers. All of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body whether good or evil.

Galatians 6:7. God is not mocked. For you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh. You will reap corruption from the flesh. But if you sow to the spirit. You will reap eternal life from the spirit.

And then, along with that. We've got a message in Romans chapter 6 and verse 7, the need for shame for Christians. As they look back upon their past. They must never forget those shameful things. And that's very striking, 6:17. Thanks.

Well, first of all verse 21. Those things of which you are now ashamed. Those things of which you are now ashamed were a mark of your pre-Christian lives and then back in verse 17. Thanks be to God that you having once been slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the new moral teaching of the gospel. And there's never forgetting that was what you were. And you mustn't be like that now. And so that memory, has got to be very strong. And it is very healthy, in point of fact.

But, of course, in the New Testament. All this is radically different from that other judgment. With a capital J. And we mentioned in an earlier lecture. Romans 1 to 3. The wrath of God. It's still a very important item. In the New Testament, as in the Old, the wrath of God that rests upon all. The judgment of God that rests upon all. But now, we are saved from that judgment and moving into a new era of salvation.

And in this case, we don't bear the judgment. In this case, with a small j, We do bear the judgment but in that capital letter J, we don't. God absorbed the judgment in the person of his son on the cross. But there's still that big judgment. Still a small judgment. And so this is where Ezekiel wants to be.

And in the book, in the second edition, you've got this mingling of these two types of judgment and throughout. This call to remember that those past bad old ways. But in the first edition there's a radical break. You're moving from judgment to salvation. And so, this means that for Ezekiel, historically there's that move from pre-587. judgment to post-587 looking forward to salvation.

And so that means that when we come to this final verse, verse 24, you shall speak. And no longer be silent. And you shall be a sign to them because you're going to have plenty to say to them, but from now on it's going to be some good stuff that they'll be glad to hear.

And you perhaps will be much happier, to be speaking about. And so, it's looking ahead to that message of salvation which we're going to have in succeeding chapters.

But next time. We've got to come. To some little bridge material. The oracles against the foreign nations in chapter 25 through 26 which is the first half of the messages. Against the foreign nations.

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