

## LONG OUTLINE EZEKIEL CHAPTER 33: A TURNING POINT

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P. Phillips

### INTRODUCTORY NOTES:

- A. After the condemnations of chaps. 1 – 24 and the judgement against the nations in 25 – 32, Ezek now turns his attention to promises of restoration in chaps. 34 – 48. Chapter 33 is the “hinge,” or connector, between the two aspects of Ezek's messages of judgement and of hope.
- B. Ezek 33.21-22 picks up where 24.26-27 leaves off. The pivot in chap. 33 is vs. 21 where the message of Jerusalem's fall brings to a close the prophecies of doom (for the most part) and authenticates once and for all that Ezek is the Lord's prophet. (Recall when this was questioned: “The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing” (12.22).
- C. We note the literary parallels between chapters 33, 3, and 18.

33.7-9	Ezek as the Watchman of the Lord	3.17-19
33.11	No pleasure in the death of the wicked	18.23
33.13-16	Discussion of the righteous and of the wicked and the Lord's judgement upon them.	18.21-22, 24
33.17-20	“The Lord's way is not right”	18.15-30

### DISCUSSION:

1. *The word of the Lord came to me:*
  - a. This the usual intro to an oracle. Again emphasizes that the message is from the Lord himself.
  - b. In a way, it signifies a continuation of previous messages up to vss. 21-22.
2. *“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman,*
  - a. Vss. 2-6: The idea of a watchman is relevant since JS [JS = Jerusalem] is to be attacked.
  - b. The people chose a watchman, not the Lord in this case.
  - c. Since the people have chosen the watchman, one would think they would pay special attention to him.
  - d. But all have become so corrupt, they might reject the chosen watchman's message if he tells them something he doesn't like. After all, look at what they did w/ Jeremiah (cf. Jer 43).

- e. The image of standing on a watchtower to announce destruction appears as well in scripture (cf. Is 21.6-9; Hab 2.1).

### EXCURSUS

Who are the “watchmen” we have chosen for ourselves?

- a. Financial advisors
  - b. News media
  - c. Politicians and political parties
  - d. churches
3. *and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people,*
    - a. Blow the trumpet. Lit. the shophar, not a trumpet as we think of it
    - b. Used for calling and dismissing troops.
    - c. In Zeph 1.14-16 it announces the day of the Lord.
    - d. Note also the seven trumpets in Rev 8.
  4. *then if anyone who hears the sound of the [shophar] does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.*
  5. *He heard the sound of the [shophar] and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.*
    - a. “Blood on his head” ==> he bears sole responsibility.
    - b. In vss. 3, who is bearing the sword?
  6. *But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.*
    - a. Note that the watchman bears responsibility for not warning,
    - b. BUT the sword will still “take away” the iniquitous one. I.e., one w/ iniquity cannot complain that it’s the watchman’s fault and, therefore, he should be let off unpunished. (Remnants of Eden??)
  7. *“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.*
    - a. Vss. 7-9 parallel chap. 3.7-9
    - b. Note here that Ezek is the Lord’s appointed watchman. Apparently the Lord knows that a “populist” watchman will be worthless. They will tell the people what the latter want to hear rather than the truth.
    - c. But the ultimate watchman is the Lord (Ps 127.1).

8. *If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.*
- The Lord has appointed Ezek as his chosen watchman, but notice he does not say, “If YOU say to the wicked...” but “If I say to the wicked...”
  - Shows the unity between the Lord’s word and what the prophet presents
9. *But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.*
- Now the shift is from I to YOU.
  - The equality of the Lord’s speech w/ that of the prophet obtains.
10. *“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’*
- This looks like a tripartite lament:
    - Our transgressions and our sins are upon us;
    - We are rotting away in them;
    - What can we do to survive?
  - It looks like the people have come to their senses and ask what they can do.
  - Are the messages and the circumstances in JS starting to penetrate their obdurate hearts?
  - Before they blamed their fathers for their calamity (18.2) and even God himself (18.19, 25).
  - But is this for real? (Stay tuned!)
  - But the basic question is:

HOW THEN CAN WE LIVE?!

11. *Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?*
- Reprise of 18.23, 32.
  - First and foremost, God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that people should repent (Cf. 2 Pet 3.9: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*”
  - “As I live, declares the Lord God.”
    - A divine oath (cf. Heb 6.3: God swears by himself.)
    - This is why God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

BUT WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION “HOW THEN CAN WE LIVE?”
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ANSWER: REPENTANCE!

“[Let] the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (vs. 11).

- d. Note also how this works for nations (Jer 18.7-12). See how it worked out for Nineveh w/ Jonah’s preaching.
12. *“And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins.*
13. *Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die.*
14. *Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right,*
15. *if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die.*
- Vss. 15: Usual sins enumerated one more time.
  - True repentance is giving back what has been taken and living a life in conformity w/ the Torah.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Ezekiel is not propounding a “works righteousness,” although vss. 14-15 may seem that way. Both in the OT and in the NT salvation comes by faith and not by works (Eph 2.8, 9); yet we have been saved unto good works (Eph 2.10) and faith produces good works, otherwise it is dead (Jas 2.17). The list of actions here are the outward manifestation of faith.

16. *None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.*
- In sum: Righteousness -> wickedness = death; wickedness -> righteousness = life.**
  - In NT parlance, one has to become a new creation (2 Cor 5.17).
  - None of the sins will be remembered. Cf. Mic 7.19—sins cast into the sea.
  - IN SHORT: Vss. 12-16: It is not how one starts the race but how one finishes the race. Note Doug Stuart’s parable of dressing up for a contest.
17. *“Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just.*
- Reprise 18.15-30

- b. Begin a tête-à-tête re: the righteous and the wicked. People say the way of the Lord is not just.
    - i. This phrase can be translated “The way of the Lord is not *even* [measured, balanced]” (D. Stuart).
    - ii. Can also mean the Lord is not scrupulous (D. Block).
    - iii. In other words, the Lord is not being fair.
18. *When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it.*
19. *And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this.*
20. *Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”*
- a. Note how the people stumbled over the simple message of repentance and blamed God for being unjust.
  - b. But cf. Prov 21.2: “Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord *weighs* the hearts.”
  - c. The emphasis again is on REPENTANCE.

#### EXCURSUS

We hear the same argument about God’s fairness today.

- A. How can God judge those that have not heard the gospel?
  - B. Why doesn’t God save the rest of my family. How unjust!
  - C. How can a just God let X,Y,Z happen (Holocaust, Ukraine, covid, etc.) if he really loves the world.?
  - D. These are excuses to justify the rejection of God’s simple message— “REPENT, for the kingdom of God is at hand!”
    - a. This was the message of John the Baptist who told his audience to change their ways as proof of repentance (Cf. Lk 3.19-14).
    - b. Basically, John had the same message as Ezek!
21. *In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has been struck down.”*
- a. “The city has fallen.” Lit. “has been *smitten, destroyed, conquered.*” Question on when the city fell, but for sure summer (July or August) of 586 B.C.
  - b. The date the fugitive arrives appears at best to be *19 January 585*
    - i. Putting details together (but not here!), it took about five months for the fugitive to arrive, maybe along w/ exiles from JS.

- ii. The message from the fugitive also legitimates Ezek as a true prophet. Remember the proverb hurled at Ezek: “The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing” (12.21-28).
- 22. *Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and he had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning, so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.*
  - a. A REAL TURNING POINT HERE! A PIVOT!
  - b. Now Ezek’s ministry will change to speaking hope for the exiles.
  - c. But this has to wait for a bit.
- 23. *The word of the Lord came to me:*
- 24. *“Son of man, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, ‘Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.’*
  - a. Said by the people left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25.12). Perhaps since they were left, they felt the land belonged to them and that they were fulfilling God’s covenant w/ Abraham.
  - b. In short, Abraham was one and got all this land. (See the promise in Gen 12.7.) We are many; *how much more do we deserve it!*
  - c. Similar to 11.15 [NIV]: “Son of man, the people of Jerusalem have said of your fellow exiles and all the other Israelites, ‘They [the exiles] are far away from the Lord; this land was given to us as our possession.’”
  - d. The people may have been focusing on Is 51.2-3:
    - “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; *for he was but one when I called him*, that I might bless him and multiply him. For the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.”
  - e. Perhaps they thought now that judgement is over the time of restoration will begin, but they still have the old heart and are not repentant.
  - f. *Unlike Abraham, they are not faithful to the Lord.*

#### EXCURSUS

What is comparable to the false hope that “Abraham was one” in today’s churches?

- A. I’ve attended church all my life;
- B. My parents are Xns;

- C. I was saved and baptized as a kid;
- D. I sang in the choir;
- E. I'm no worse than others.

25. *Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God: You eat flesh with the blood and lift up your eyes to your idols and shed blood; shall you then possess the land?*

26. *You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land?*

- a. Vss. 25-26 are restatement of the sins that brought destruction.
- b. Note the sins that continue to be committed: eating meat w/ the blood in it; idolatry; bloodshed.
  - i. "You eat flesh with the blood." The Hebrew is literally "you eat over the blood," an idiom used also in Lev. 19:26. The reference may be to illicit sacrifice.
  - ii. "You rely on your sword." You use force against others to gain your advantage.
- c. IN SHORT: The people were still disobedient.
- d. As such, unlike Abraham—*THE SURVIVORS POSSESSED NEITHER MORALITY NOR FAITH.*

27. *Say this to them, Thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall 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 strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence.*

- a. Disobedience will bring three familiar judgements: *sword, wild animals, pestilence* (cf. Lev 26.22, 25, 32-33 [wasteland also included]).
- b. I.e., the Lord is carrying out the curses of the covenant.
- c. The Lord mentions these judgements before: Wild animals, sword, and pestilence will demolish the land *even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were to intercede* (14.15-19).

28. *And I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and her proud might shall come to an end, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that none will pass through.*

- a. "The mountains of Israel will be desolate." I.e., the places of the false worship, will be desolate.
- b. The idolatrous shrines will disappear! No more false worship!

29. *Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed.*

- a. God will carry out his promise of destruction. This is part of knowing he is the Lord!

- b. It is the iniquity of the people that is bringing this on, not injustice on the part of the Lord for which he has been accused.
30. *“As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, ‘Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’*
- a. Vss. 30-32: The people come to Ezek asking for advice, but their hearts are not right w/ God. It continues to be a show.
  - b. People gather at the “walls and doors.” In today’s parlance, “water cooler” or “coffee pot.”
  - c. Fake repentance:
    - i. Is 29.13: “... this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me ....”
    - ii. Quoted by Jesus: Mt 15.8; Mk 7.6.
    - iii. Hos 6.1, 4:

*The people say:*

“Come, let us return to the Lord ...

*The Lord’s reply:*

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?

What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your love is like a morning cloud,

like the dew that goes early away.

- d. Note previous attempts to consult Ezek for what the Lord’s will is, but because of disobedience, the Lord would not be consulted by them (14.3; 20.3).
- e. There is nothing new under the sun. Even today, people have “itching ears” described by Paul in 2 Tim 4.3-4:

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

- f. I go back to what I said previously about choosing watchmen that agree w/ our formed opinions. (Cf. comments on vs. 2 above.)

31. *And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain.*



32. *And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.*
- a. Their hearts are still looking for personal gain (esp. vs. 31).
  - b. They get a “kick” out of what Ezek is saying. I.e., he continues to be amusement to them (cf. Ezek 20.49 [Heb 21.5]—“speaker of parables”).
  - c. Ezek has become like movie stars that talk about politics, morality, climate change, etc., but who know nothing. People find them entertaining but do not take them seriously. (Unless the listener has some kind of mental deficiency.)
  - d. For preachers, “The seriousness of the message should never be obscured by the desire to make the medium more attractive.” [Duguid, p.389.]
    - i. Note *Marshall McLuhan*: “The medium is the message” because “it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”
    - ii. In short, *the seriousness with which we communicate God’s message will be the seriousness w/ which our hearers will take the message.*
33. *When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”*
- a. “*When this comes ...*”; i.e., destruction. Then they will know “that a prophet has been among them!”
  - b. Ezekiel is vindicated. He was right all along!

### QUESTIONS AND LESSONS

1. Was Ezek a successful prophet? I guess that depends on how we define success.
  - a. His prophecies came true, but ...
  - b. Most of the people did not repent.
  - c. But Ezek remained faithful, and that is the measure of success in the Lord’s eyes.
2. A preacher (in the general sense) is not called to entertain (although being winsome is a plus), but to be faithful to the message of the scriptures. (Again, cf. 2 Tm 4.3-4.)
3. Rhetorical skill can be useful, but not a substitute for the truth. People may be drawn by the performance, but their hearts may still remain hard.
4. To relate the message truthfully to one’s audience requires that the messenger himself be convinced of the message.
5. “You have to go through that stage of horror, disbelief, dislocation and despair, the dawning realisation [*sic*] that everything you have been taught is a lie. Only then will you be ready to learn the truth” (James Delingpole).