

The Cauldron Burns – Ezk 24

Back in Ezk 11, the prophet challenged a popular saying in Jerusalem. The leaders of the nation said that Jerusalem was like a pot, or a cauldron, and they were like the meat in the cauldron, being protected from the flames. They came up with this as a snide retort to the prophet Jeremiah, who preached about Jerusalem as a boiling pot. Back then, God said they would not be protected by the city, but would instead be dragged out to be judged.

Now in ch 24, the imagery of the pot is brought back by God in a parable. First, God is careful to set the date, 9th year, 10th month, 10th day – that equates to Jan 15, 588 BC, and was the date Ezekiel had been pointing to for four years. It was on that day when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Acc to 2 Kgs 25:1-2 the siege continued 2 years before the city was destroyed.

In the parable, the pot is filled with water and meat, then fire is set, so that it boils well. This pot which the people of Judah thought would protect them has become the place of their demise. Their “goose is cooked”, so to speak. Once it is boiling well, God describes how the rust, the corrosion, “scum” in KJV, ruins the meat, so the meat is taken out and set on the ground, wasted. The people who thought they would be safe in the city would be dragged out into exile, without regard for their position in society.

Why was this judgment coming? Because of the blood shed in Jerusalem. God had spoken against King Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21: “Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ...because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day. Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

It was 53 years from the reign of Manasseh until the siege of Jerusalem began, and all through that time God was warning His people of the judgment to come. How patient God was! Now He was ready to pour out His wrath, and said in v. 9, “Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great... kindle the fire...let the bones be burned up...” Notice God’s desire in v. 13 – “I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed...” This is how God works. He is sovereign, yet He allows freedom of choice, even if it goes against His desire. In that, He remains sovereign, because He carries out the judgment that is deserved for violating His law. As He says in v. 14 – “I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God.”

The last part of the chapter is hard for us to comprehend. God tells the prophet that his wife is going to die, but he was not permitted to mourn publicly for her. We wonder how a loving God could do something like this to His obedient servant. One thing to note is that God isn’t doing this as a punishment to Ezekiel, but is using it as part of the prophet’s ministry. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that death is common to all, as part of the curse on this world. We may expect a long life, particularly when we live in obedience to God, but He doesn’t exempt us from the prospect of death. God wasn’t heartless in His dealings with Ezekiel. He gave advance notice, and also allowed the prophet to grieve privately. Publicly, however, Ezekiel was to be stoic, as a sign to the people of the harsh reality

when news of Jerusalem's downfall came to them. Jerusalem was the delight of their eyes, the yearning of their souls, but it was a stench in God's nostrils because of sin, and they were not to mourn over God's judgment.

This brings to a close Ezekiel's long message of judgment on Jerusalem, and when word came of its accomplishment, God said that he would be free to speak once again. The result: "and they will know that I am the Lord." We need to know that God hates sin, and will bring judgment on sin. It may take years before we see it, but He will do it. We saw even in this harsh message of judgment that His greater desire is for us to turn from our sin, come to know Him, and find forgiveness. That's why Peter wrote "count the patience of the Lord as salvation" (2 Pet 3:15). He also said in v. 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."