

Week 33

August 13 - August 19

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 31:15-40, 37:13-38:28; 51:15-52:3a; Ezekiel 1:1-16:63

The reading for this week will deal with Israel in exile. While there are still some who remain in Jerusalem, the main shift of the Scriptures has been on those who are living in exile in Babylon. Particularly we see this in Ezekiel, whose ministry was directly to God's people living in exile. Because they were dark days for God's people, both those left in Jerusalem and those in exile, there is a recurring theme of hope that we will be looking at this week.

August 13th

Jeremiah 31:15-40; 49:34-51:14. "New Covenant"

The days in which Jeremiah ministered were certainly dark days. Judah as a nation was falling apart and God's covenant people, the Israelites, had essentially abandoned God at this point. However, as you read today, because of God's faithfulness there is still hope.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 delivers the promise of a new covenant. It is the covenant that Jesus spoke of during the last supper (Matt. 26:28). It is the covenant that was sealed with the shed blood of Christ. And it is this passage from Jeremiah that was quoted by the author of Hebrews as he contrasted the new and the old covenants (Heb. 8:8-12)

It is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6) because it involves an internal change. Instead of being focused on external obedience and works, Jeremiah says that God will write His word on their hearts. We, as members of this new and better covenant, have the word of God emblazoned on our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It was this promise of a future covenant that gave hope to the faithful few in Jeremiah's day and it continues to give us hope as well.

August 14th

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 37:1-10; 51:15-58; 52:1-3a. "False Hope"

Ever since the kingdom of Israel became divided under Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), the kings of both Israel and Judah led God's people through a downward spiral of idolatry and disobedience. This had resulted in Israel no longer being a major player on the world political scene as it had been under David and Solomon. We see in Jeremiah 37 that the only relief Israel had from the Babylonians was when Egypt threatened to attack. While this gave Judah some hope, Jeremiah was quick to point out that trusting in Egypt was a false hope.

False hope can be quite devastating. As we see in the Old Testament, anytime God's people trusted anyone or anything other than the Lord, it resulted in a false hope. I think this is a key lesson for us to glean from the Old Testament. Anytime we trust someone other than the Lord, including ourselves, for our salvation or for the strength to battle temptation, it will result in tragedy.

August 15th

Jeremiah 37:11-38:28; Ezekiel 1:1- 3:15. "God's Omnipresence"

Leaving home for an unfamiliar world can indeed be a frightening experience. It will be an experience that will be repeated thousands of times in the coming weeks by young men and women heading off to college. For the Christian, it is helpful and comforting to know that God is there with you in that new and different place.

This is also a truth that God's people who were living in exile in Babylon needed to know. Because the Jewish system of worship was centered around the temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of the Lord, it was especially difficult for these exiles to understand that God is omnipresent and is not limited to a single physical location. The vision Ezekiel received served to accomplish just that. The wheels moving in every direction speaks to God's ability to be present in every situation everywhere.

All of us have that place where God feels especially present and that place where we always feel like we are home. However, we can know and have confidence that, no matter where we are, God will be present with us and our relationship with Him is not dependent upon a location or building.

August 16th

Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 51:59-64; Ezekiel 3:16-4:17. "Hope Springs Eternal"

Those of you who know me, know that I love baseball. The game is a wonderful gift from God, in my opinion. Someone once said that the great thing about baseball (professional baseball that is) is that every team goes into the season knowing they will win sixty games and lose sixty games and the rest of them are up for grabs. This gives each team hope in Spring Training.

Ezekiel received a similar statement of hope in 3:27. The Lord told Ezekiel that, when he delivers a message from the Lord, "some will listen, but some will ignore you." What a comfort and hope to know that some will listen.

We too can share in that hope and comfort Ezekiel had when we share the gospel message. Scripture teaches us that God indeed has elected some to believe in Him. So, while everyone with whom we share the gospel may not repent and believe, we can have the confidence that some will. And since we do not know whom God has elected, we are to obediently move forward with the command to preach the word, knowing that some will believe. – David Curtis

August 17th

Ezekiel 5:1-9:11. "That's Not a Threat, It's a Promise"

"For I am the LORD! What I threaten always happens." – Ezekiel 12:25

Ezekiel paints a very bleak picture for the fate of God's people. But for those who have been reading the Scriptures closely, it should come as no surprise, because Moses informed Israel as to what would happen if they refused to listen to the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Even though God is pouring out His judgment on Israel, there is hope in knowing that He is fulfilling His promises by doing so. This is because there is more to God's promises in Deuteronomy than just words of destruction. Two chapters later in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Moses prophesies concerning God's promise of restoration when those who remain repent and return to the Lord.

While many of us make idle threats, the Lord doesn't. His promises are real and trustworthy. Reading about God fulfilling His promise of judgment reinforces our hope of salvation and the promises that we have in Christ.

August 18th

Ezekiel 10:1-13:23. "Personal Relationship"

At the start of this week, we read about the coming of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. In God's expression of hope to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel, we read more details of the coming covenant (Ezekiel 11:14-21). As part of the new covenant, God will do a heart transplant in His people, removing the old heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh that obeys God. This is a picture of what happens in the lives of Christians today. When we come to faith in Christ, God regenerates that life and puts in them a new heart and his Holy Spirit, who now enables them to follow God.

Another element of the new covenant mentioned in this passage is the emphasis on personal relationship with God. "Then they will truly be My people, and I will be their God" (11:20b). While Israel belonged to God as His covenant people, whom He had redeemed, under the new covenant the personal connection we have with the Lord is stronger because of the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer.

August 19th

Ezekiel 14:1-16:63. "Righteousness of Christ"

"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" – Isaiah 64:6

In Ezekiel 14, the Lord patiently reveals to His people that they have no hope of avoiding His judgments. The point that He is repeatedly making is that your righteousness cannot save you from God's judgment. He further strengthens the point by declaring that even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel and Job would not spare the people of judgment. This statement rings true for us as well because our righteousness is not sufficient to save us in the face of God's judgment.

Praise be to God that the story does not end there, for we have a glorious hope in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus we can, through faith, have His righteousness credited to our account. This is the only way we can know and experience the hope of salvation. Attempting to avoid God's wrath by our own righteousness is as futile for us today as it was in Ezekiel's day.

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Review Jeremiah 31:31-34 where the promise of a new covenant is revealed. You might also want to look up the references cited from the book of Hebrews in the Aug. 13th devotional. How is the new covenant different than the covenant God had established with Israel at Mt. Sinai?

The author of Hebrews calls it a better covenant. Why does he do this?

How is the new covenant a source of hope for Israel? What about for us?

Have you ever been disappointed by a false hope. Can you share that experience with the group? How did it affect your life?

How does God's omnipresence and your knowledge of it affect your faith and your relationship with Him?

If you knew, like Ezekiel did, that some will listen to you and some will ignore you, would you be encouraged or discouraged?

Why can we have confidence and hope that some people will respond to the gospel message?

How does reading about God's judgment on Israel encourage our faith and trust in Him?

Compare the new covenant passage in Ezekiel 11:14-21 with Jeremiah 31:31-34. How are they the same? How are they different?

How does reading these new covenant passages impact your understanding of your relationship with God?

What are some of the ways people try to avoid facing God's judgment?

Why would Ezekiel mention that even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel and Job would not be sufficient to save them? What does this say about the spiritual attitude or condition of Israel at the time?

Why can we have hope and confidence in facing God's judgment?