



LifeStone

AMPLIFY CHRIST

VOLUME 6

God's Wrath against Sin

The holy God must judge sin

God's Wrath Revealed

*For the believer, Jesus bears God's wrath;
for the unbeliever, judgment awaits*

God's Wrath Poured Out on Christ

Believers are saved from the coming wrath

Christ Satisfies God's Wrath



AMPLIFY CHRIST

VOLUME 6

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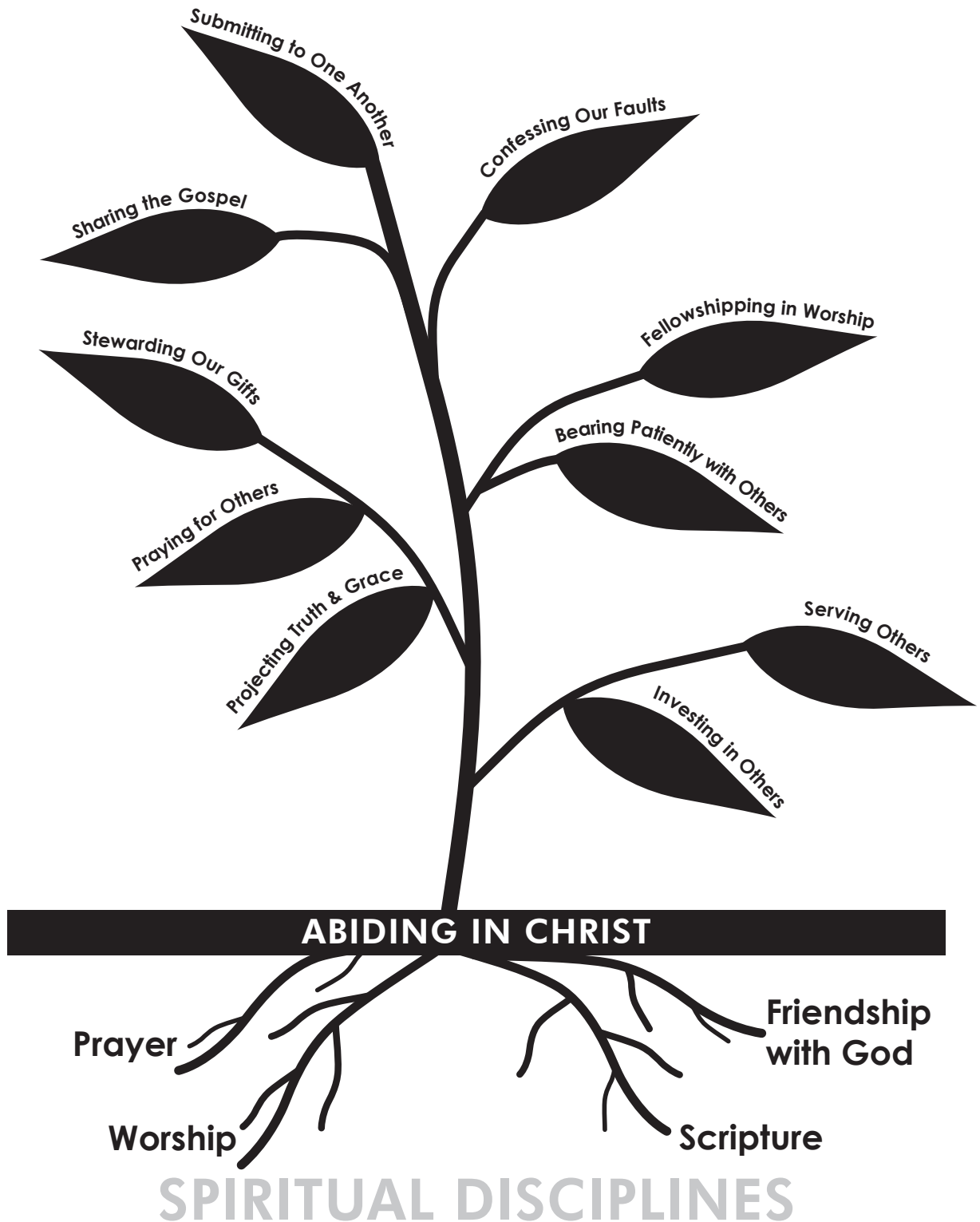
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OUR MISSION

LifeStone exists to empower **DISCIPLES** to make **DISCIPLES**. We seek to fulfill our mission by publishing Bible study and **DISCIPLESHIP** curriculum as well as offering real-life application training. We equip **DISCIPLES** as they journey through the various stages of life. As **DISCIPLES** grow in Christ, we continue to partner with them and their churches through training and other resources to empower **DISCIPLES** to make **DISCIPLES**.

DISCIPLE MAKING



FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EDITOR IN CHIEF

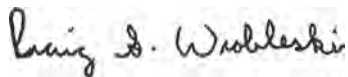
Dear Almighty Father,

Thank You for Your unconditional grace and mercy bestowed on LifeStone Ministries for 120 years. We are humbled by Your Son, the Master-Servant, who became the Living Stone rejected by men. You love us and build us up to be spiritual storehouses. We pray for Your strength and courage to be the living stones in our culture. We pray for perseverance to sacrifice ourselves to live wholly in subjection to Jesus Christ. May we glorify You in all our words and deeds as we strive to grow Your flock to spiritual maturity. We pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit as we engage Your flock.

Lord, we pray that this exposition of Your Word meets 2 Timothy 3:16. May the lessons contained in this labor of love emulate profitable teaching, graceful correction, and righteous training. We pray for all those who will be receiving instruction from these lessons. We pray for the teachers to approach this inspirational work with humility and meekness. May Your holy character and love for us leap from the pages and bring us all to our knees in thanksgiving.

Our glorious King, may we build the confidence and convictions of Christian leaders in our homes, churches, and missional fields to fulfill the Great Commission. Let us be renewed with strength and peace to empower Christian disciples to make disciples.

Under truth and grace,



Craig S. Wrobleski, M. Div., D. Min.
President & CEO
LifeStone Ministries

Dear Christ follower,

Our mission at LifeStone Ministries is to empower Christians to make disciples. We desire to partner with churches in this discipleship process. We have created a discipleship tool to help churches fulfill their calling. This new publication—*Amplify Christ*, as we call it—features a simple yet comprehensive five-step Bible study method that focuses on robust Bible learning and biblical application in a world that is often hostile to Christ's teaching.

Amplify Christ is not just another Bible curriculum. Discipleship requires a significant level of commitment from both teacher and student. Our discipleship tool likewise requires serious commitment. Leaders will need to inspire a group of people—maybe as few as one or two—to commit to spiritual formation and discipleship by investing their time and being willing to share their successes and failures. Group members can expect to read the lesson each week for an hour. Above all, group members will need to be honest with and encourage one another every week.

We have published this new discipleship tool and now prayerfully entrust it to you. We pray with all our hearts that the Holy Spirit will use it mightily to transform your lives and the lives of your group members, churches, and communities.

Sincerely,



James M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Editor in Chief
LifeStone Ministries

HOW TO USE AMPLIFY CHRIST

Christian discipleship is a matter of following the Master's footprints. The first disciples did just that—they followed Jesus from place to place, shared the same meals, slept at the same campsites, celebrated the same special occasions, and met the same people. In all these experiences, Jesus taught them verbally and through His actions. The disciples saw Jesus react to different people in different situations. They examined His work habits, observed His demeanor, and scrutinized how He practiced what He preached.

Even though we moderns can't follow Jesus physically, we are nonetheless called to be like Him in word and deed, conformed to His image. This is our calling, and we dare not ignore it. The only way we can know how to follow in Jesus' footprints is to learn about Him in the Bible. In the New Testament, eyewitnesses and other early disciples detail Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching. Similarly, the Old Testament helps us understand God's intentions for us through stories, worship materials, prophetic messages, and the Mosaic Law. God has given us His precious Scriptures to know how we should live. For this reason, disciples should have an intense thirst and hunger for God's Word.

Modern-day disciples, however, sometimes get discouraged about reading the Bible because of its antiquity and foreign culture. Sometimes they get so enthralled by the Bible's antiquity and alien culture that they fail to apply its teaching. Modern-day disciples may segment a familiar verse from its context and fail to understand its intended meaning, and sometimes they fail to integrate Scripture into theology.

For all these reasons, our new discipleship tool emphasizes five key elements for Scripture study. We hope *Amplify Christ* helps you become more like Christ.

THE METHOD

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS

- 1. Amplify the Background.** Because the Bible was written long ago in a culture different from ours, we investigate rigorously to bridge the gap separating us moderns from the biblical writers. We present to our readers those backgrounds that help them understand the biblical passage.
- 2. Amplify the Text.** One of the legacy features of our publications is the exposition of the text. We focus on the original author's intended message to his original audience, addressing the question, What was the author conveying to them back then? We hone in on the verse-by-verse details to explain the passage's big picture.
- 3. Amplify the Context.** Many Christians see Scripture as piecemeal. We want disciples to see how individual stories and texts are connected to the whole biblical story. We read the text as sentences within a paragraph and paragraphs within a larger text unit. This is basic exegesis. But our readers should also understand how the entirety of a book fits into the whole of Scripture and the larger biblical history. We write to show how each text interconnects to form a majestic and awe-inspiring picture of God's plan.
- 4. Amplify the Faith.** Christians need to allow Scripture to inform their thinking and basic Christian doctrine. We believe that God inspired His Word and that we should accept it as the rule of our lives as we seek to follow the Spirit's guidance. To this end, we spell out how the biblical text informs Bible doctrines and how we should think.
- 5. Amplify Your Life.** Our goal is not to create a bunch of smart, brainiac Christians. Yes, we want Christians to be competent readers of the Bible, but this is not enough. We do everything we can to help disciples apply the text to their lives so that they grow in Christ's likeness. We think deeply about the text, explicitly seeking ways to articulate the principles of the ancient text to us today and to the specific individual. We are most urgent about the Christian formation of Christ followers.

TIMELINE

Unknown	Adam and Eve
Unknown	Noah
Unknown	Tower of Babel
2166-1991 B.C.	Life of Abraham
1916-1806 B.C.	Life of Joseph
1876-1446 B.C.	Israelites in Egypt
1446 B.C.	Exodus
1446 B.C.	Law at Sinai
1446-1406 B.C.	Wilderness wandering
1406-1399 B.C.	Joshua leads the conquest
1360-1075 B.C.	Judges Period
1051-931 B.C.	United monarchy
1011-971 B.C.	David reigns
959 B.C.	Solomon builds the temple
931-586 B.C.	Divided monarchy
722 B.C.	Assyria conquers Israel
605 B.C.	Babylon conquers Assyria
586 B.C.	Babylon conquers Judah/temple destroyed
539 B.C.	Persia conquers Babylon
538 B.C.	Exiles return to Judah
515 B.C.	Temple rebuilt
458 B.C.	Ezra returns to Israel from Babylon
445 B.C.	Nehemiah rebuilds the wall
331 B.C.	Greece conquers Persia
175-164 B.C.	Seleucid rule over Israel by Antiochus IV Epiphanes
63 B.C.	Rome captures Jerusalem
7 to 4 B.C.	Birth of Jesus
A.D. 26-30	Jesus' ministry
A.D. 30	Jesus' death and resurrection
A.D. 45-56	Paul's missionary journeys
A.D. 70	Rome destroys the temple

IMPORTANT DATES

God's Wrath on His People's Sin

Written by Glenn Weaver

READ AND TAKE NOTE

Read Ezekiel 22:17-31. Look for:

- the severity of God's judgment for sin
- the categories of sins that result in judgment (vs. 25-29)
- God's hope to find a reason not to judge His people (vs. 30)

FIND IT

Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea

Who: God
Ezekiel
residents of Jerusalem

What: God declaring His impending judgment on Jerusalem

When: around 587 B.C.

Where: Babylon

Why: because of Jerusalem's pervasive sin and refusal to repent

How: by Ezekiel's message that God will destroy the city

Spiritual Formation: Disciples can avoid the discipline of God by repentance and faithful obedience.





AMPLIFY THE BACKGROUND

The book of Ezekiel begins with a chilling reminder of the desperate times confronting the Southern Kingdom of Judah—Ezekiel’s prophecies started in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity by the Babylonians (1:2).

Judah had some good kings in the past. For example, Hezekiah was noted for his trust in God. Upon his death, however, his young son Manasseh took sole rule of the throne. His reign of fifty-five years was noted for extreme wickedness. Ungodliness and idolatry in the most brutal forms flourished under his evil rule. Although he repented near the end of his life, he did not undo all the evil he had done (2 Chronicles 33:10-20).

After his son, Amon, followed in his father’s evil footsteps for a brief reign, Manasseh’s grandson Josiah ascended to the throne. Josiah began sweeping reforms to bring back proper worship of God, but those efforts were halted when he was killed in battle. The kings who followed Josiah returned Israel to the evil ways of King Manasseh.

Jehoahaz, Josiah’s son, reigned for three months before being taken away prisoner, and his brother Jehoiakim accepted the crown and ruled for eleven wicked years. Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, reigned for three months before King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon attacked and took him captive in 597 B.C. It was during this same plundering of Jerusalem that Ezekiel and thousands of other Judahites were exiled to Babylon.

NOTES

NOTES

But it was going to get far worse than that for Jerusalem. Manasseh had led Judah down a path of destruction that would end with God's judgment (2 Kings 23:26-27). God would use the brutal Babylonians to destroy Judah and Jerusalem because of His people's disobedience and violation of His covenant.

THOUGHTS

Ezekiel was an unusual prophet. But he was the perfect person to convey the horrors that would soon come on Jerusalem.

Ezekiel had a unique prophetic ministry, which began in 593 B.C. He had visions of the Lord on His throne (Ezekiel 1; 10). He was a priest who, because he was in Babylon, could not serve in the temple (1:3), but God transported him to Jerusalem in a vision (chaps. 8–9). Later, after the destruction of Jerusalem, he had a vision in which God transported him to the ruins of Jerusalem and showed Ezekiel a new temple (chaps. 40–48).

But Ezekiel does not stand out only because of his visions. God used him as an object lesson to the Judahites who were in captivity with him. Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry by eating a scroll (3:1-3). Then he was confined in his house, where he was bound and could only speak at God's command (vss. 24-27). Then, using a brick and an iron frying pan, he portrayed the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3). He had to lie on his left side for 390 days and his right side for 40 days (vss. 4-8). His food and drink were sparse and unappetizing, fit only for those who were enduring a siege (vss. 9-17). This is only a sample of what Ezekiel portrayed concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Ultimately, God told Ezekiel that his wife would die and forbade Ezekiel to mourn for her, as her death was an object lesson about the destruction of Jerusalem (24:15-18).

Ezekiel's message proclaimed that Judah had been unfaithful to God. God promised judgment would come upon His people and the nations that had persecuted Israel or rejoiced in her misfortune. The wickedness of the people led to destruction, but God would not abandon His people. He would restore a remnant with a Davidic descendant upon the throne (37:21-28).

AMPLIFY THE TEXT

In Ezekiel 22, the prophet delivered three judgment messages against Jerusalem's pervasive wickedness. Each message was graphic and left no doubt that God's unleashed wrath was justified. In this lesson, we will investigate the last two messages.

Just a few years after Ezekiel's proclamation, the promised destruction of Jerusalem became a reality.

JERUSALEM: THE CRUCIBLE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT (Ezekiel 22:17-22)

Over fifty times in the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel began his proclamations with the same statement that appears in 22:17: "The word of the Lord came

to me.” Ezekiel had been rendered mute (cf. 3:26-27), which further emphasized that Ezekiel’s message was what God wanted to proclaim to His people. This was especially important since there were false prophets in the city who said that Jerusalem would experience peace (cf. 13:15-17). Ezekiel’s words were not of peace but of the certainty of God’s judgment upon His rebellious city.

God’s message began with His address to Ezekiel, calling him “son of man” (22:18). God is never recorded calling him Ezekiel, but ninety-three times He addressed him as “son of man.” This designation referred to Ezekiel as a human being, in this context as a representative of God’s rebellious people. In God’s call to Ezekiel, He told him to listen to what He said and not to rebel like the rest of the house of Israel (2:8). Ezekiel was part of the people, but he had a message from God to deliver to them.

When King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon attacked Israel and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., he also destroyed other cities in Judah (cf. Jeremiah 34:6-7). But Jerusalem was special. More than just a capital, it was the city where God dwelled in the midst of His people. His temple was there, where He was present in a special way. God judging that city sent a bold message—God would not tolerate His people’s pervasive sin.

THOUGHTS

Jerusalem was pictured as a crucible—a container where metal is melted by high heat so that impure materials can be removed. Sadly for Israel, they were the impure materials receiving God’s judgment.

God used a thematic illustration in this passage to describe His people—but likely not in a way they expected (Ezekiel 22:18-22). He pointed them to the purification process by which the ancient world obtained silver. Frequently silver mined in the ground is not pure but is mixed with other metals. This requires a process to remove the impurities and leave just the purified silver. The process of purifying silver in ancient times required high heat, for pure silver melts at 1,763 degrees Fahrenheit. Getting a fire that hot required a furnace.

The impure byproduct is called dross (solid impurities that float on top of molten metal) or slag (molten liquid impurities). For Ezekiel’s purposes, the terms can be used interchangeably, and either term may be used in different Bible translations.

The biggest surprise to Israel was likely that God did not consider them to be the silver. They might have welcomed the words of Psalm 66:10-12, where the psalmist recounted that God tested them to purify them as silver is purified, and they had come through the trials better than they were before. Or perhaps they would think the same way as the prophecy of Zechariah 13:9, that God would refine them like silver or gold and that their place with God would be assured.

But the time of God’s patient refining of His people was over. There was no silver among them for Him to purify. The nation had become nothing but worthless dross to be cast by the wayside (Ezekiel 22:18). God wanted silver, but all that He found among His people was impurity, people characterized as being other metals that made the silver impure.

NOTES

Israel was God's chosen people, the nation God had selected as His possession among all nations (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He loved His people and made His earthly dwelling in their midst. Countless times He had demonstrated His goodness and care for them by delivering them from powerful enemies. They were designated to show God's character to the nations, but their rebelliousness against God and His covenant made them unfit for the task. Ezekiel recorded elsewhere that Jerusalem, as the representative of the nation, had acted more wickedly than the surrounding nations (Ezekiel 5:6).

THOUGHTS

God used a brutal army as His instrument to judge His own people because they loved sin and idolatry more than they loved Him.

Because Israel had become nothing but worthless dross, God decreed that He would gather them within the walls of Jerusalem as a metalsmith gathers metal into a furnace (Ezekiel 22:19-20). The fortified walls of Jerusalem would not be a means of protection but would become the crucible of their destruction. In a few short years, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon swept into the land of Israel in 588 B.C., attacking fortified Judean cities on his way to the prize of his rebellious vassal state, Jerusalem. There he laid siege until 586 B.C., when the walls were breached and the city destroyed.

God would blow the fire of His wrath upon Jerusalem, just like a metalsmith blows air into a furnace to increase the heat and melt the metal (vs. 21). The Lord was not merely displeased with His people. God was intensely angry with His people.

The Israelites and the Egyptians learned of God's great power when the Lord brought Israel out from their land of bondage. By His actions, they learned His sovereign identity when He proclaimed, "I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:7; 7:5, 17). The plagues demonstrated that this was not mere talk but the truth. Through this same phrase, appearing seventy times in Ezekiel, God signaled that the coming horrific events were a clear statement that God oversees history and will not be disobeyed, even by His chosen people, without serious consequences (Ezekiel 22:22).

JERUSALEM: THE CITY OF THE GUILTY (Ezekiel 22:23-31)

In the previous message, Ezekiel proclaimed God's coming judgment on Jerusalem. Now Ezekiel told God's rebellious people why the Lord's fiery wrath was coming on them. He began his third message of judgment with the same introductory statement that he used earlier (vss. 17, 23). God called Ezekiel "son of man" and then addressed Israel (vs. 24). God began with the state of His people. The people were like a polluted land that needed a deluge to remove debris. Sadly for them, no thunderstorm arrived to sweep away the refuse of sin.

THOUGHTS

The people God listed as the reason for His judgment were the very ones who should have been examples of godliness.

Starting in Ezekiel 22:25, God singled out specific groups of corrupt people in Israel to describe their affronts to God. He confronted the sins of the ruling princes, priests, city officials, prophets, and the general populace. The proclamation made by the prophet Zephaniah during the reign of King Josiah against the sins of Jerusalem still had value during Ezekiel's day. In fact, Zephaniah 3:3-4 may form the basis for Ezekiel's descriptions in Ezekiel 22:25-29.

God began with the princes (vs. 25). (According to some manuscripts, the first category is prophets. Since prophets appear later in the list, it is better to follow the manuscripts that list princes as the first category.) The princes, as sons in the line of David, were described quite fittingly as lions (cf. 19:1-6), but it was not the majesty of lions to which God referred. God's accusation focused on lions as bloodthirsty killers of His people. Rather than promoting justice in His name, the rulers of the nation had been self-serving. By means of their power and influence, they had robbed the innocent and helpless.

The second group God condemned was the priests (22:26). The priests were entrusted with the sacred task of representing the people to God during the temple sacrifices. The requirements for the task of using the sacred vessels and approaching God were well documented in the book of Leviticus. The priests even had the warning of the former priests Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron, who approached God with fire in a way that did not conform to His instructions. God judged them immediately (10:1-7). Then God gave instructions to Aaron on the importance of distinguishing carefully between what is holy and what is common and between the clean and the unclean (vss. 8-10).

The priests violated the instructions that the Lord had given Aaron. Earlier the Lord showed Ezekiel what was happening in the temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8). There were all sorts of idols and idolatry not only in Jerusalem but in the temple itself as well—the same temple where the Lord dwelled and met with His people! The priests did not stop it or instruct the people in properly respecting God. The Lord was ignored in His own house! Further, the priests did not enforce keeping the Sabbath that God had prescribed for His people. Jeremiah also warned the people that God's judgment would fall if they did not keep the Sabbath (Jeremiah 17:21-27).

The third group, the city officials, was a different group than the princes mentioned in Ezekiel 19:1 and 22:25. This group likely referred to all the officials below the royal rulers, such as the judges. They were compared to a pack of wolves destroying God's flock for their own personal gain (22:27).

The fourth group was the prophets (vs. 28). Previously, Ezekiel spent most of chapter 13 chastising false prophets who were deceiving God's people. Ezekiel drew imagery from that earlier proclamation as he summarized the charges against the prophets.

In Ezekiel 13, God used a metaphor of whitewashing a wall to make it look sturdier than it really is. A corresponding example for us might be putting a coat of paint over a rotten board or using a layer of body fill and paint on a rusty car. The prophets' messages were like the whitewash—the message of peace for Jerusalem sounded great to the hearers, but there was no solid foundation for their assertions. God did not give the prophets a message of peace. Their lies hid the truth—God was going to judge Jerusalem. The false prophets would also experience God's wrath because they presumed to speak for God, proclaiming a message that He had not given them as if it were His message.

NOTES

The fifth group was the “people of the land” (22:29). The phrase likely refers to those who had enough influence (possibly land owners) to be able to commit the atrocities Ezekiel mentioned but were not city officials. He revealed that this group used extortion and robbery to achieve personal gain. Their targets were the poor, needy, and foreigners—the helpless ones of society. God takes a very dim view of those who target the helpless! God will arise to protect the poor and needy (Psalm 12:5), and He loves the sojourner (Deuteronomy 10:18).

God concluded his condemnation of Jerusalem by stating how much sin had pervaded the people (Ezekiel 22:30). He used a figure of speech about a man building the protective walls in the city that would repel the Babylonian force that God was going to use to judge Jerusalem. In this context, such a person would be righteous, one who kept God’s law and worshipped God wholeheartedly.

This was similar to God’s discussion with Abraham concerning Sodom (Genesis 18:20-33). God agreed that He would spare the city if just ten righteous people were found (vs. 32). Sadly for Sodom, God did not find ten righteous people in the city! Only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters escaped from the city, though his wife perished during their exodus (19:16-17, 26-28).

THOUGHTS

God looked for one righteous person in Jerusalem that would cause Him to withhold His judgment. He wants to forgive. If He judges us, the failure is ours.

God placed a much lower bar for the city of Jerusalem than for Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezekiel 22:30). He looked for just one righteous person who opposed the injustices being committed. He wanted to preserve His people, but sin so thoroughly penetrated their lives that they were in a worse state than Sodom when God rained fire upon it. Ezekiel earlier stated that Jerusalem was more wicked than Samaria and Sodom (16:46-52). The Lord could not find even one person to convince Him that Jerusalem should not be destroyed. Therefore, God determined that He would pour out His wrath upon them (22:31). Their punishment would correspond to their evil ways.

AMPLIFY THE CONTEXT

PLACE IN THE BIBLE

God’s condemnation of Judah, often directed to Jerusalem specifically, was especially harsh in Ezekiel. The prophet did not word his proclamations to the nation for them to repent now, or else God’s wrath would fall later. Instead, he worded them to convey that Israel’s judgment was a certainty and that they merely needed to wait for it to come to pass.

Why did God speak so harshly with His chosen people? On what basis did He weigh their actions and find them wanting? The answer is found in the type of relationship God had with Israel. God made a covenant with Israel through Moses after God’s people left Egypt. This covenant followed a similar format to

that used by other ancient nations, so Israel would have understood what type of relationship they had with God. Undoubtedly, Moses, who was educated in Pharaoh's household, would have seen similar covenants.

There are a few types of ancient covenants. The type that God presented to Israel through Moses was much like a suzerain-vassal covenant. In this type of covenant, the superior party, such as a conquering king, told the conquered people what they were required to do in their relationship with the king. The benefits of obedience and penalties for disobedience were included in the terms of the covenant. For Israel, their covenant document, which was in the format of ancient suzerain-vassal covenants of the same era, was the book of Deuteronomy. The curses and blessings appear in Deuteronomy 28 through 29.

The Lord promised His people great blessings. They would have many children, their fields would produce large crops, and their herds of livestock would abound. They would find prosperity in all their endeavors, and their enemies would flee from them at every turn. To receive those blessings, Israel needed to follow God's commandments (28:13-14). If Israel failed to obey all that God commanded in His law, then Israel would endure the curses stipulated in Deuteronomy 28 through 29. The people faced destruction because they had disobeyed God and broken the covenant (cf. Ezekiel 16:59).

THOUGHTS

Do Christians today have promises of blessings for obedience and face curses for disobedience?

King Jehoiakim was an evil king who led the nation astray. Therefore, in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:47-52, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and took Jehoiakim captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:5-6). Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, was no better than his father. The Babylonians took him away as a captive as well (vss. 8-10). During this invasion, Ezekiel was taken into captivity. During the reign of Zedekiah, the next king, God sent the Babylonians to destroy the walls of Jerusalem, burn the temple, and kill or capture the people (vss. 10-20). This devastation is the focus of Ezekiel's prophecies in Ezekiel 22.

If Israel expected the Lord to be faithful to keep His promises of blessing, the people should also have expected Him to keep His promises of curses for covenant disobedience. God's perfect character of mercy and justice required that He fulfill all that He had promised. Israel should have anticipated God's discipline for many years. They had plenty of time and the warnings of many prophets, but they would not change their ways.

PLACE IN THE STORY OF SALVATION

Since Adam and Eve in the garden, humanity has rebelled against God. His chosen people, Israel, and their kings failed to live up to the stipulations of God's covenant in the book of Deuteronomy. That failure led to a new covenant. This new covenant was written on hearts, not on stone tablets (Jeremiah 31:33). Through Christ's sacrifice, the Lord forgives the sins of those who trust in Him and brings His promised blessings on His people.

AMPLIFY THE FAITH

At the core of Israel's failure to keep the covenant was their failure to esteem God properly. Their worship of idols of various kinds led to their failure to follow God. This was the situation for Jerusalem during Ezekiel's day, but it did not begin or end there.

For example, God rescued Israel from their Egyptian overlords through Moses. God showed His great power by defeating Egypt and delivering Israel from a hopeless situation at the Red Sea. Then He led His people through the wilderness, providing them with water to drink and manna to eat. Even their clothing and sandals did not wear out in forty years (Deuteronomy 29:5)!

But when Israel reached the border of the land God promised to them, they failed to trust that God could provide what He promised. They heard the reports from the spies that there were giants in the land behind fortified walls. They feared people instead of fearing God. They esteemed God as less powerful than God's creation. The Lord called the first generation from Egypt rebellious and unbelievers (Hebrews 3:8-12). As a result, God condemned the generation of Israelites who left Egypt to wander for forty years and die in the wilderness. But God did not give up on His people or His promise. He would lead the next generation of Israelites into the land through Joshua's leadership.

THOUGHTS

God's discipline is not restricted to Israel. Even followers of Jesus Christ may succumb to sinful tendencies, sometimes resulting in terrible consequences.

The Israelites who experienced the 586 B.C. destruction of Jerusalem, spoken of by Ezekiel, followed the same disobedient tendencies that characterized the rebellious Israelites who left Egypt. But that would not be the last time that God's people would experience judgment for their failure to love and obey Him.

Jesus was not welcomed by the Jewish leadership. He chastised them for their wickedness and opposition to God (Matthew 23:1-36). He lamented Jerusalem's rejection of her God (vss. 37-39). He declared that the temple would be destroyed (24:1-2). As we know from the Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman armies laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple as they suppressed a Jewish revolt against Roman rule in 70 A.D. The terror and hardships endured by the citizens in Jerusalem during the siege were truly astounding.

The failure to esteem God properly and obey Him is not only a Jewish problem. Even followers of Jesus Christ may succumb to sinful tendencies, sometimes resulting in terrible consequences. While all condemnation has passed from believers to Christ (Romans 8:1), Christians can still experience severe discipline in this life.

The church at Corinth provides an example of God acting when His instructions are not heeded. When the church gathered to eat their community meal, some believers failed to treat others properly. Instead of taking the Lord's Supper and caring for others in the church, their self-centered attitude resulted in some of them becoming sick and even dying (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)!

AMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

The harsh proclamations from Ezekiel concerning Jerusalem may seem inapplicable to those who have trusted in Jesus Christ, but it would be a mistake to think that. God does not take a more “enlightened” view of sin than He did during Old Testament times. If anything, the stakes are higher now. While in the past God worked primarily through one small nation, now He is invading all nations with the message of the death of the Son of God on their behalf.

THOUGHTS

God’s view of sin has not changed. He remains merciful and eager to forgive. He awaits our repentance.

God is using His sin-damaged yet forgiven followers to reach the world and show that God is holy, wise, and the only one worthy of worship and obedience. When His followers follow their own selfish desires, it is an affront to the loving and holy God who provided for their salvation. While God’s view of sin has not changed, He remains merciful and eager to forgive. He awaits our repentance and worship from a pure heart.

NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your estimation, what are some of the most common sins overlooked in your community?

2. What are steps that you can take to address those problems in your community?

3. In your estimation, what are some of the most common sins overlooked in Christian churches?

4. Do any of those problems exist in your church? If so, what are steps that you can take to address those problems?

5. Evaluate your life. Does your lifestyle conform to the world’s desires or to a sincere longing to worship and serve God?

6. Are there areas of your life where the Holy Spirit is convicting you of sinful thoughts or behavior? If so, what should you do about it?
