



Week 6: Pride Comes Before the Fall

Week 6, Day 1 – Read Ezekiel 25:1-11

Understanding the Passage

In chapter 25, Ezekiel turns from pronouncements of doom against Israel and Judah to a collection of oracles against four of Judah's neighbors/enemies. The order of these oracles has apparently been determined by the geographical locations of the nations addressed. From Israel's perspective, Ammon lays to the east, Moab to the southeast, Edom to the south, and Philistia to the southwest. According to tradition, both the Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot. The feuds between Israel and these nations were largely rooted in territorial disputes.

The Ammonites are the focus of the first of Ezekiel's oracles because the nation delighted over the destruction of Israel and the deportation of the nation of Judah. They too shall be plundered and see their land taken from them. By insisting that Ammon's ruin will be Yahweh's doing, Ezekiel reasserts the sovereignty of Israel's God, whose power and authority are manifested in the fates of nations that perceive Judah's catastrophe as contempt for God and God's people.

Moab's offense is that it interprets that Judah's demise is a result of the fact that "the house of Judah is like all the other nations." Moab's interpretation challenges both Israel's unique election and their God Yahweh. Both Ammon and Moab will lose their sovereignty as a result of their attitudes.

It might be nice to see God, through the prophet Ezekiel, ease up on Judah for a bit and go after those who thought Jerusalem was getting what she deserved. But, we must caution ourselves from enjoying their comeuppance too much lest we find ourselves repeating their same mistake. The message is the same. God is in control and we are to worship and love him as our Lord. Too many times in our culture, we celebrate when others fall because that temporarily takes the attention away from ourselves. But in the end, regardless of those around us, we must answer the question for ourselves – whom do I worship?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which verse(s) in this passage speak to you the most and why?
2. Have you ever delighted in the downfall of others? What are the possible dangers of doing this?
3. We seem to like it when other people get what we feel like they have coming to them. How do we reconcile a God of mercy with our desire for justice?
4. What are you in need of grace for today? How could you show God's grace to someone else today?

Week 6, Day 2 – Read Ezekiel 28:1-10

Understanding the Passage

This passage pronounces judgment upon the king of Tyre (a Phoenician city-state located on an island just off the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea). Because of the protection of the city's location, the king fancies

himself as a god who sits on a divine throne. This king has vast wisdom and enormous wealth, but his consequent pride will be pierced by the Babylonians. His death will prove that he is not the deity he claims to be, and he will meet his end “in the heart of the seas,” the very place where he has found protection from his enemies in the past.

For Ezekiel’s readers, this would be yet another example of a prideful ruler getting too big for his throne. The message is a simple one—claim to be an equal to Yahweh and you will soon find all that made you so confident will be taken away from you. But, for the modern reader, we should not have to use too much imagination when considering the king’s confidence. Most of us would not overtly claim to be a god, but we often think and act as though we are the gods of our own lives. My time, my money, and my possessions are my own – no one should tell me what to do with them.

Or perhaps our struggle lies more with trusting in ourselves, thinking that our labor has brought us to this point and now things are safe and secure. Was the king of Tyre wise and wealthy because he worked hard to achieve those things, or was he just lucky that his city was well protected by water on all sides? Probably a little of both. Regardless of our status, we will find ourselves in dangerous waters if we think that we are the god of our universe.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which verse(s) in this passage speak to you the most and why?
2. What is something you possess that you worked hard for? What is something you love that was given to you? What is the difference in how you feel about those things?
3. Does God seem to give some people more than others? What emotions arise when considering this question’s answer?
4. What is something you want to thank God for today? What is an area of control that you want to turn over to God today?

Week 6, Day 3 – Read Ezekiel 29:8-16, 32:31-32

Understanding the Passage

When the Babylonians became a real threat to Judah, Jerusalem looked not to Yahweh for her protection, but to the neighboring power of Egypt. This proved to be a mistake. The nation was not as strong as Judah perceived and Babylon destroyed the Holy city despite her allies to the southwest. Because of this, Egypt “shall be a desolation and a waste.” They too will learn who the Lord is because they made empty promises of protection and trusted in their own strength. Ezekiel declares the period of Egypt’s extreme desolation as 40 years or roughly a single generation. Yahweh’s threat that he will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, echoes Israel’s fate suggesting that they will share the same fortune with Israel.

After the 40 years have passed, God will restore Egypt, but it will be a meager shell of her former glory. They will never again have the power to influence nations nor will Judah ever be tempted to rely on Egypt for her security. In turn, the Israelites will remember their former misplaced reliance and acknowledge Yahweh’s sole sovereignty over them.

Readers of Ezekiel past and present are reminded that it was out of slavery in Egypt that God delivered his people during the Exodus. It is no doubt a bit ironic that they looked to their former oppressors for protection rather than the God who had delivered them so long ago. The desire to “return to Egypt” is not uncommon among our temptations today. We may be more inclined to put our trust in things that enslave us because they are more familiar or more tangible than God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which verse(s) in this passage speak to you the most and why?
2. Have you ever been tempted to “go back to the way things were” rather than stepping into something new that God has for you?
3. Have you ever put your trust in something or someone that did not deliver? How did you respond to that emotionally?
4. Examine your heart today, where do you place your trust when it comes to your security? Ask God to reveal this to you.

Week 6, Day 4 – Read Ezekiel 31:1-12

Understanding the Passage

This passage begins by pronouncing the date, perhaps to give the reader some context of the time that has passed since the last vision was delivered. God commands Ezekiel to address Pharaoh, Egypt’s king, and his military forces. He begins with a rhetorical question, “Who can be compared to you in your greatness?” then immediately suggests Assyria, a cedar of Lebanon. Those to whom Ezekiel was originally writing would have read the cedar metaphor attributed to Assyria as negative even though it is presented as positive. Ezekiel is comparing the strength and beauty of one tree, Egypt, to the strength and beauty of Assyria. Assyria was recently a great and powerful nation that fell from power when it was subdued by the new power in the land, the Babylonians. Modern readers, without context, could possibly see the beautiful imagery of the tree in this passage as complementary, but Ezekiel’s intention is not to praise. Rather it is to say, “just as the powerful Assyrians fell so shall you Pharaoh, king of Egypt.”

This suspicion of imminent judgment is confirmed by Ezekiel in verses 10 and 11, “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, I gave it into the hand of the prince of the nations; he has dealt with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out.” Verse 11 keeps the reader from assuming that it was Babylon who is the real power behind the fall of the Assyrians and Egyptians by proclaiming “I gave them over to your enemies.”

This passage is a great example of how context can change the meaning behind the words we read in scripture. Had we just opened our Bible and plopped our finger down on these verses, the judgement following the metaphor might have felt like an unwarranted sharp left turn. But, because we are well prepared for the “pride before the fall” motif that Ezekiel has been using, and because we know what happened to the Assyrians, we are able to understand where Ezekiel is taking us in this passage.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which verse(s) in this passage speak to you the most and why?
2. Do you think Ezekiel’s metaphor of the strong tree was effective for the readers of his day? How about for us today?
3. How important is context when it comes to scripture? Can the Bible mean something for us today that the original writer never intended it to?
4. Have you ever had the feeling that something may happen to others, but it won’t happen to me? How might this metaphor of the strong tree be a warning for us today?

Week 6, Day 5 – Read Ezekiel 34:1-6, 11-16

Understanding the Passage

There is some debate in academic circles as to who the “shepherds” are in this passage. It could mean leaders in Jerusalem, other kings from nearby nations, Judah’s false prophets or kings who led Jerusalem astray. Regardless, the point is that the people have been led astray and have become lost because those who were

commissioned to guide and care for them only served themselves. These bad shepherds made no attempt to strengthen the weak animals, to heal the infirmed, bind up the injured, or return to the flock those who had strayed.

Lacking a leader, Yahweh calls them “my sheep,” asserting that God is their true owner and the “good shepherd” who will save his lost and scattered people, bringing them back to him. In describing God’s redemptive power, Ezekiel draws from vocabulary rooted in Israel’s Exodus from Egypt and entrance into Canaan. Yahweh will “bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and bring them into their own land.”

For modern readers, the image of “the good shepherd” should be very familiar. Jesus Christ is often referred to as the “good shepherd” and the one who will save his people. This passage is beautifully pointing toward the coming of Christ. Where bad prophets and rulers lead God’s people astray, Christ will come and bring the lost back to him. Even leaving the 99 in order to find the one who has gone missing. Like the parable of the sheep and goats, we should be challenged today to not be the bad shepherds as described in this passage. We should strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bring good news to the poor, and return to the flock those who have strayed.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which verse(s) in this passage speak to you the most and why?
2. Have you ever been “led astray” by someone or something? How did you realize it?
3. What emotions does this passage invoke in you when hearing the familiar good shepherd metaphor?
4. How is God calling you to be a good shepherd to others? What does that look like in your context today?

Week 6: Questions for Weekly Discussion (based on video lesson, daily readings and reflections, and weekly sermon):

1. Of the daily Bible readings and reflections from this week, which one hit home for you, or provoked the most thoughts and questions?
2. We seem to like it when other people get what we feel like they have coming to them. How do we reconcile a God of mercy with our desire for justice?
3. What are you in need of grace for today? How could you show God’s grace to someone else today?
4. What is something you possess that you worked hard for? What is something you love that was given to you? What is the difference in how you feel about those things?
5. Does God seem to give some people more than others? What emotions arise in you when considering this question’s answer?
6. Have you ever been tempted to “go back to the way things were” rather than stepping into something new that God has for you?
7. Have you ever put your trust in something or someone that did not deliver? How did you respond to that emotionally?
8. How important is context when it comes to scripture? Can the Bible mean something for us today that the original writer never intended it to?
9. Have you ever been “led astray” by someone or something? How did you realize it?
10. What emotions does this passage invoke in you when hearing the familiar good shepherd metaphor?
11. How is God calling you to be a good shepherd to others? What does that look like in your context today?

Notes, Reflections, and Prayers: