

August 25

Ezekiel 25, 29, 30, 31

Hi, my name is Marty Barnhart, I am the Director of Ministry Expansion here at Christ Community. Today we read in Ezekiel 25.1-17; 29.1-16; 30.1-26; and 31.1-18.

Today we read about Jeremiah prophesying from Jerusalem about events to happen in the centuries in the future. Outside the gates of the city the Babylonians will try to get through the gates or break down the walls during the next two years from 588 BC to 586 BC. When you block it together with the oracles directed against other foreign nations, (Jeremiah 25- 32) there is an awful lot of material in this book about Judah that has nothing to do with Judah!! The reason for that is, of course, as simple as the geographic fact of Judah's location. Let me quote a bit from John Taylor's commentary on Ezekiel: ¹

"...no commentary on the life and future prospect of her life (that is Judah's life) would be complete without reference to the mighty neighbors who jostled for power around her. Judah's very existence was bound up with the foreign policies of nations like Assyria and Babylon, Egypt and Persia. They determined whether the little Hebrew kingdom was allowed to retain her independence, like a little Switzerland, or whether she should become a political satellite, or a military staging post, or an international bargaining point. They could no more be ignored than the United States and Russia can be ignored in the policies of a state in Europe or Southeast Asia today.

"What Ezekiel was at pains to point out, however, was that the final say in Israel's destiny was not theirs but God's -- and God was Israel's God! More than that, he said that even the destiny of the greatest powers, such as Egypt, was in the hands of Israel's God. Jehovah or Yahweh controlled everything. The situation was, in fact, the very reverse of what appeared to be the case. The secular historian saw Israel dwarfed into insignificance by mighty neighbors; the prophet Ezekiel saw the great powers held firmly in the hand of little Israel's mighty God. The lesson for the Christian minority is not difficult to draw."

This is perhaps a very important lesson for us to learn. As America has become more and more ethnically and religiously diverse, the Christian consensus has eroded to the point of disappearing. Though we may still be the single biggest block of religionists in the land, we are a very definite minority in a society that is becoming more and more intolerant of our "exclusive" views. That could mean persecution is just around the corner, and if it comes, we will really need to remember that though we may feel ourselves to be at the mercy of the big crowd of opponents out there, the reality is still that our future, and theirs as well, lies

¹ John Taylor's commentary on Ezekiel p. 198-199

squarely in the hands of the one true omnipotent God -- who happens to be our personal new covenant God as we read yesterday!!

The chapters we read today contain the statement "This is what the Sovereign Lord says" fourteen times as it is addressed to the nations surrounding Israel.

We read today about a 40 year captivity into which Egypt was going to fall (29.13), and from which they would never recover, in the sense of becoming once again a world dominating power. Tell me something...Have you ever read a book about the grandeur of ancient Egypt, or watched a television documentary about the ancient Pharaohs or the great architectural wonders of that ancient land, and wondered what happened to all of the creative power and dominance? From the time of the rise of the Greeks and Romans onward, Egypt has slipped into relative obscurity, from which it has only recently emerged, and even now, to what can at best be described as nearly 'a shadow of its former self.' Whatever happened to Egypt? God's judgment happened -- and just as Ezekiel prophesied -- so from that time forward Egypt has been reduced -- and will be -- until "they know that I Am the Lord" (29.9; 30.26).

There is some pretty vivid imagery here to which I want to draw your attention very briefly. Egypt is a "dragon" or "a great monster" lying in the streams (29.3) That word ('tannin') in Hebrew, which is sometimes translated as 'sea-monster' or 'leviathan' in other Old Testament passages, might be picturing one of the huge old crocodiles of the Nile. God says, 'I am going to pull you out of the river with hooks, and leave you high and dry to rot in the wilderness.'

Egypt is also pictured as a broken reed that fails all who trust her (29.7). This description probably harks back to the words of Rabshakeh to Hezekiah back in Isaiah 36. Rabshakeh spoke for the King of Assyria, but his diagnosis of the value of trusting Egypt was right on target! If you try to lean on a broken reed, its splinters will pierce your hand and do you a very painful injury!!

I want to close by repeating the phrase that I know you will forever more associate with the name of Ezekiel: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says." That was God's purpose in all of His dealings with Israel and Judah, and with Babylon, Egypt and every other nation on the face of the earth. He wants to be known and worshipped by all men everywhere. That is the goal. "Then they will know that I am the Lord."

As I said yesterday, God knows you and wants to be known by you. Thanks for reading today and rest in his assurance:

- 1 O Lord you have searched me and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue

you know it completely, O Lord.
Psalm 139.1-4 (NIV)