

# The Compass

Week 45

OT Readings: Ezekiel 12:1-23:49

NT Readings: Hebrews 7:1-10:39

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- In Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23, God rages against Judah for her idolatry (adultery in God's eyes) in the strongest and most forceful language. One can feel God's jealous passion.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even given how wicked they have become, God ends His indictment with thoughts of redemption and mercy.
- Chapters 20-24 occur from the years 591 to 588 BC, these chapters chronicle the history of God's dealings with His people and become a "countdown to catastrophe."<sup>2</sup>

### New Testament

- The "new covenant" language of Jeremiah finds its fulfillment in Jesus (Heb. 8); the old covenant is obsolete and is now passing away replaced by the superiority of Jesus and all that He has accomplished.
- The author further develops details and develops the idea of Jesus' high priesthood by showing how His once-for-all-time sacrifice is the fulfillment of what the OT sacrificial system foreshadowed.

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**Ezek. 18:30-32 and 33:11.** Our view of God may be the single most important thing that drives and determines our Christian life. Without a doubt, we all have distortions in our understanding; however some distortions can be fatal to our faith and ability to trust Him. Many see God as angry, filled with rage and quick to bring pain and judgment. The NLT is a little weak in 18:32; the NASU reads, "For why will you die? I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies...repent and live!"

In both passages there is a sense of intensity in the appeal, a longing and urgency that God might give life and that death might be avoided. His heart is grieved over those who choose to do life without Him because His heart is so filled with dreams for good for each of us! He grieves because He cannot give to us the good He intends; our hearts are hardened and our minds resistant. Perhaps the great mystery of all time from God's perspective is "Why? Why will you not open your heart and life to My heart and life? I only long to give you life!" Sin is the great question mark of history. Why would we want to do life without Him? Why would we choose to resist His love, goodness, grace and purpose for us? There is no reason for sin – it simply makes no sense. No wonder Charles Finney, the 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalist, called sin "moral insanity."

Ezekiel's words ring in our hearts – God is not angry, He is for us! He "takes no pleasure" in our pain and difficulties, even our self-inflicted death. He longs for us. He desires to bless us beyond our wildest imaginings; His purposes and intentions are for our good and beyond what we can fully fathom!<sup>3</sup>

## Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

**Heb. 10:19-25.** In the OT, entrance into the holiest place was restricted; only the High Priest could enter and that one time per year. Jesus, the fulfiller of what the OT foreshadowed has opened the way into the very presence of God. His awesome sacrifice did what no animal could (10:1-10) and we who live in the light of it are to know that we are truly forgiven and have unrestricted access to Him. The author of Hebrews uses the sacrificial imagery to assure his readers – we are washed clean, our conscience clear – let's rush into His presence fully assured in our confidence in Him. To live in this kind of grace has implications.

It means that our hope is sure, we can hold on tightly to Him no matter our situation because He has kept His promises to His people and He will keep His promises to us. It means that our relationships and commitment to one another matter, and in light of our confidence in Him, we should "encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds" (10:23-25). Those to whom the author writes are under incredible pressure because of their

faith; they were close to abandoning Jesus and taking the easy way out. Perhaps we are not tempted to give up on Jesus, but when the pressure is on it is easy to become offended or afraid in our relationships with other Christians; we “fight or flight,” and neither are appropriate for those living in the assurance of His love and acceptance. Rather, we are to draw closer together, drawing strength from and giving strength to one another, living in the light of His presence and power.

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### Ezek. 18. Q. “Are we *really* responsible for our lives and how so?”

We live in an age of victimization. For many the pain of abuse or abandonment or the sin of others against them is very real and has left its painful scars. Does that mean that we are simply victims? Who is responsible really for our life and situation? Is there way out, a way to life?

Few OT passages are clearer on individual responsibility. God, through Ezekiel, is dealing with an excuse raised by the people for why they do not respond to God’s appeals, “We have no responsibility. It’s our forefather’s fault.” The proverb states this (18:2) and the people claim as much - they are not personally responsible, their generation is being dealt with because of their ancestor’s sins (18:19). God says, “Enough! No longer are you to quote this absurd proverb!”

In a series of scenarios, God shows each person is responsible for their own lives and actions, regardless of their parent’s. And each will be held personally accountable. He shows how someone can be wicked and repent, gaining life or one can be righteous and turn away from God and lose their lives!<sup>4</sup>

The implications are rather obvious – we are personally responsible for our lives and choices; others may influence us, their choices may impact us for good or ill, but each of us is alone responsible to choose our own course. And the passage is equally clear: we *can* do so.<sup>5</sup>

For those filled with excuses, God makes clear that we have a responsibility to make for ourselves a new heart. Apparently it is within our power to do so since we are commanded to do it. But what does this mean? The passage context and the whole of Ezekiel define how we make such a heart: we must turn from our self-focus to a wholehearted allegiance and surrender to God and forsake our sin.<sup>6</sup> God will give to us what we need if we will turn completely to Him and receive His life.

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<sup>1</sup> One might recoil when reading these chapters and ask, “Is this really how God is?” If it seems strong, then we might need to consider again the depth of God’s love and heart toward us – He truly is a jealous lover. Read again Ezek. 6:9, “I have been hurt (‘broken to pieces’) by your adulterous hearts which have turned away from Me.”

<sup>2</sup> Fee and Stuart, 200. 588 BC marks the beginning of Jerusalem’s end as the Babylonians begin the siege of the city.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 3:14-21. 1 Cor. 2:9-10. These are not “pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye” but things to be experienced NOW by the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Some may argue that this is OT thinking. However, the NT is equally clear – we can choose to live how we want and if we forsake our relationship with God we can forfeit the life that comes only in that relationship. See last week’s discussion on “once saved, always saved.”

<sup>5</sup> Much popular teaching on the idea of “generational curses” must be set aside based upon the clarity of this teaching. Is it possible to be influenced by the sin of previous generations (e.g., alcoholism, etc.)? Yes. But this is *influence* only, not a deterministic cause for sin. Someone might argue that this is a bit simplistic; addictive behaviors are difficult to overcome. While this is true, unless we emphasize personal responsibility and break any victim mindset, freedom will be even more difficult, perhaps impossible.

<sup>6</sup> Any theological system that teaches “inability,” holding that we *cannot* repent unless God *causes* us to repent must take seriously the clear teaching of this passage. Ezek. 18 is a clear statement of the nature of the human will and freedom. Is this to say that we can repent and turn without God’s help and grace? Of course not. Other passages emphasize that God has a part and does His part in the “making of a new heart,” e.g., Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:22-28. Is this a contradiction? I think rather it shows that repentance is “synergistic,” i.e., something we must do with God and in response to God’s influence and appeal to our heart, mind and conscience. Our failure to understand this basic definition of repentance has led to our ineffectiveness in evangelism. “Saying the prayer” falls far short of “make for yourself a new heart.”