

Ezekiel – The Aftermath

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Chapter 33 is transitional from the perspective of the structure of the Book of Ezekiel as well as from the perspective of the story flow. Chapters 33 and 34 contain words for the exiles as the enormity of the destruction sinks in. **Chapter 33 is quite “topical”** it picks up earlier themes as well as sets the stage for the rest of the book. Now some of the exiles would begin to respond to Ezekiel’s message. Some would repent to form the remnant to return to the land. (Ez33:21, 33:7,18-19,20b, 34:11-12)

The News of the Fall of Jerusalem: Jerusalem was burned on August 15, 586. July/August is the 5th month, Ab. It took until the 10th month, Tebeth, December/January, for the “fugitive” to get to Ezekiel. When this occurred, Ezekiel’s “muteness” ended (Ez33:21-22, 3:26-27, 24:25a,26-27).

The Role of the Watchman: This section is very similar 3:16-21 and 18:1-29, but the approach is different: **it is the people who assign the “watchman”**. In the ancient world, everyone was familiar with the importance of the “watchman” on the city wall to warn of impending danger. **Responding to the “watchman” is the essence of individual responsibility**, as discussed in chapter 18 (Ez33:1-6). God uses the familiarity with the role of the watchman as the basis for the **“metaphor of the watchman”**. It is the responsibility of the “watchman” to warn the people of the consequences of sin (Ez33:7-9). **The role of the watchman has passed to the New Testament Church** (Mk16:15bα, 13:10, Mt28:18b-19a,20a, 24:14,45-51, 5:13-15, 1Cr1:20-12, 9:16).

Individual Responsibility: Several statements in chapter 33 are also nearly identical to statements in chapter 18 where the concept of **“individual responsibility”** was elaborated (Ez33:12-16). Sins can always be repented of, but previous righteousness can never cover current sin. **Each person must stand alone before God** (Ez33:17-20). Some of the individual exiles were beginning to listen to Ezekiel (Ez33:10-11, 3:11), but the majority were still stubborn (Ez33:30-33, 2:5). After the destruction, there were very few people remaining in the land, but God was clear and specific that he was NOT working with them (Ez33:23-29). **God’s purpose is that each person comes to “know that I am the LORD”** (Ez5:13).

The Shepherds of Israel: Chapter 34 begins God’s messages to those who were beginning to repent. **The “shepherds” are the leadership group** – in particular, priests, Levites, elders. Only the exiles are left to hear this, but much of the content derives from the historic failures of the “shepherds”; therefore, it has to be taken as didactic for the “shepherds” among the exiles. **This whole chapter is a metaphor where “sheep” represent people with whom God is working** (Ez34:1-10).

The Good Shepherd: This is a very important metaphor – Jesus clearly identifies himself as the “Good Shepherd” (Jh10:11). **YHWH / Jesus Christ identifies his sheep** – those called to the **“remnant”**; those called to the **“Church”**; and, those called to the **“New Israel”** (Ez34:11-12). This prophecy is specifically about the Second Exodus and calling people to the New Israel (Ez34:13-14), but **Jesus generalizes the role of the Good Shepherd to all his dealings with those who are called at any time to be True Worshippers** (Jh10:14). Jesus emphasizes that the role of a “shepherd” is one of service and succor (Ez34:15-16, Mk10:45, Lk22:26b-27).

The Remnant and the Second Exodus: This section describes how God identifies those to form the “remnant” as well as those to participate in the “second exodus”. **The attitude of competitive selfishness to attain personal advantage is condemned**. **Jesus knows his sheep**, “my flock”, but externally there is no distinction from the rest of the sheep, “rams and male goats”, (Ez34:17-19). The “fat sheep” are those that get ahead by taking advantage of others (Ez34:20-22). **This is clearly looking to the New Israel in the World Tomorrow** (Ez34:23-24), but the principle applies to all those called in all ages, “many are called, but few are chosen”.

The Remnant and the New Israel: The **“covenant of peace”** is the **“new covenant”**: Ezekiel has already touched on it in 11:14-21, 16:59-63, and 20:40-44; the classic prophecy is in 36:22-36 – to be covered next time (Ez11:19a, 16:60b, 20:41b-40a). **The exiles would have understood this as promise of protection and abundance upon their return to the Land of Israel** (Ez34:25-27a), but the real focus is the New Israel in the World Tomorrow (Eze34:27b-30). Finally, **the “metaphor” of the Good Shepherd is explained** (Ez34:31).

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