

“In those days at that time,” declares the LORD “search will be made for Israel’s guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.” (v.20)

We’ve heard the expression, “Save the best for last.” In the case of God’s oracles against the nations, He has certainly saved the longest and most important oracle for last. Running 110 verses long over two chapters, Babylon’s destruction and desolation was proclaimed with a thoroughness no other nations received. As we see today and will think more fully upon tomorrow, Babylon is being punished for their treatment of God’s people among other reasons. God had used them in the discipline of his people but they had been cruel in the process and ignored God – they had even desecrated the temple.

Embedded in this oracle against Babylon is an important message about God’s covenant faithfulness. Another reason for Babylon’s fall would be for the restoration of God’s people. In those days, the remnant would ‘*go in tears to seek the Lord their God*’ and ‘*bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant*’ (v.4-5). In turn, God would forgive them and cleanse them from all sin (v.20). The chastisement of God was real, but temporary; it was painful, but necessary for a restored relationship with God.

God’s people would be forgiven and their sin would be seen no more. And this is an important message for us to grasp – we are a forgiven people. When we truly seek the Lord, turn to him and confess our sin, then he will forgive us. He will remove our sin, as the Psalmist reminds us, as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12). So many times we like to go back to our sin. We hold on to it and are afraid to let it go. When we confess our sin before God he takes it and remembers it no more. If a search is made it will not be found. Rest secure in God’s forgiveness.

Pray: thanking God for his faithfulness and forgiveness.

Reflect: do I hold on to my sin or have I accepted God’s complete forgiveness?

Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion. (v.24)

Sooner or later, every child encounters the dreaded playground bully. Through threats and force, this child ends up first in line, gets more swing time, and generally makes things unpleasant. About the only thing that silences such a kid is a bigger, stronger kid!

We might think of Babylon as the bully on the playground of ancient nations. Through brutal power and sheer intimidation, Babylon either subdued nations or demanded tribute. The only thing that would stop this bully was the most powerful “player” in the playground - the Lord God. Yet even though God had raised up Babylon as His hammer of judgment, the country used its power arrogantly for its own brutal ends. We have some indication of just how brutal Babylon was by the fact that two full chapters are given over to its judgment. Babylon was also singled out because it sacked Jerusalem and desecrated the temple.

Like the oracles against Egypt and Moab, arrogance and idolatry are reasons for Babylon’s destruction. But there was more. Babylon would also face punishment for their treatment of God’s people. Yes, they had been a tool in God’s disciplinary hand, but that did not exonerate their cruel treatment of Judah. God described Babylon as a devouring enemy all too happy to crush Judah. They oppressed God’s people and held them captive. In the end, God declared to the remnant: *‘Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion’* (v.24). The oracle against Babylon was not just a verdict of guilt, but a proclamation of God’s protection and zeal for His people. He was their Redeemer, and He would *‘vigorously defend their cause’* (50:34). Even in difficulty, God’s protective watch does not relent.

God disciplines his people because he loves them and wants them to return to him. He keeps watch over us at all times...even in discipline.

Pray: thanking God for his protective watch.

Reflect: can I see this principle of restorative discipline in my own life?

So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. (v.33)

The story is told of a European village who had long prized the stunning stained-glass windows in its cathedral. During World War II, however, air raids threatened to destroy these municipal treasures. So the people dismantled the centuries-old masterpieces and hid them, section by section, in their homes. Throughout the war, the cathedral silently awaited the return of its former glory. Finally, after the war, artisans painstakingly reassembled the beautiful windows, which had suffered no damage or loss.

After Jerusalem's destruction, thoughts of restoration must have seemed inconceivable. Lamentations ends with no indication that Jerusalem would ever be restored. Yet an apparent historical footnote tucked away at the end of Jeremiah 52 quietly attests to God's loyal love.

Recall that Jehoiachin was the third of Judah's last four kings, all of whom were evil. Unlike the other three kings, Jehoiachin's life was spared even though he spent thirty-seven years in a Babylonian prison (v.31). We are not told why the new Babylonian king, Evil-Merodach, treated Jehoiachin so well (v.32–34), but “behind the scenes” God had a greater plan.

Even though Jehoiachin was an evil king, he was still part of the Davidic line. In 2 Samuel 7:16, the Lord promised David, ‘*Your throne will be established forever.*’ Jeremiah may have wondered when he wrote Lamentations how God could keep His promise. But God faithfully spared Jehoiachin to preserve this Davidic line, which eventually led to our Lord Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:11–12).

Matthew's genealogy also shows that Jehoiachin had a grandson named Zerubbabel, who turned out to be instrumental in rebuilding the temple when the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C. (see Ezra 3:7–13).

Pray: thanking God for his plans and his promises.

Reflect: do I even feel like things are not working according to my plans? Trust that God is working to bring his purposes to bear in your life.

The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins. (v.5)

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan tells the story about Dr. Dale Birmingham who used to say that Dwight L. Moody was the only man who seemed to him to have the right to preach about Hell. When someone asked Dr. Dale why he said that, he replied, 'Because he always preaches it with tears in his voice.' That is the type of man God wants today. We have too many who are not moved by the message they give.

The book of Lamentations is divided up into five different laments or a five poem dirge. Jeremiah is just pouring out his heart over what he sees. For forty years Jeremiah was warning the people of God's coming judgment, that they needed to repent, to get right with God, but they refused to listen, they refused to change. And what Jeremiah sees before his eyes is the result of a rebellious people who he had warned that these things would come to pass if they did not repent.

One of the reason's this occurred was their prosperity that led to self-reliance. There is no need for God and there is no room for God. And yet, when our Lord taught His disciples, and us how to pray, one of the things He said was '*Give us this day our daily bread.*' You see, each and every day God wants us to trust Him, to rest in Him, to wait upon Him to provide for us. And as God does bless us, don't let that prosperity cause you to move into a condition of self-reliance!

The self-reliance and stubbornness of the people of Judah is simply put as sin. They had ignored God and continued to rebel against him. God cannot stand sin and as a just and holy God has to punish sin. Their sin led them into captivity. Our self-reliance and stubbornness will do the same. We will be held captive by sin. Many in the world today are held captive by sin. Are we like Jeremiah – are we warning them of their sin and pointing them toward the Saviour? And are we weeping over them as we warn them? Jeremiah was a book of warning. Lamentations is a book of mourning.

Pray: for the lost in your family.

Reflect: do I actively seek to point sinners to the Saviour?

Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the LORD. (v.19)

Hopelessness. A pastor encountered it in an embittered man who told him, “Don’t try to convert me and don’t pray for me. When I die, the only place I’ll go is 6 feet under.” That man needed hope. People like him who are ready to give up can find it. It’s only a prayer away.

A pastor met a mother of three small children while visiting a hospital. Her husband was dying of injuries received in a car accident, and she had no one to turn to for help. As the pastor explained God’s plan of salvation, she listened intently. Then she joined him in prayer and put her trust in Jesus. She still didn’t know how things would work out, but her prayer of faith had given her hope. Now, through new Christian friends, God is taking care of her.

In Lamentations 2, the situation appeared hopeless. Jerusalem’s streets were littered with the bodies of victims slain by the invading Babylonians. No food was available for the people who remained. Jeremiah is overwhelmed at this point. All that he has seen and is seeing is just too much for him. He has cried so much over what has taken place that he has no more tears, they are dried up. Can you imagine the grief and pain this man felt as he sat on that hill overlooking the city he loved and a people he loved? Even after how they treated him, trying to kill him, placing him in prison, mocking him and making his life miserable, and yet he still loved them. That, my friends, is the love of God shining through this man.

Jeremiah reminds them that is all on account of their sin against God. He urges them to pray and let their tears flow like a river. There is hope because they have prayer – and there hope is that God will hear and answer. The few survivors heeded the prophet’s call to repentance and prayer (v.19). We know from history that conditions improved and the exile came to an end. Do your circumstances appear hopeless? Take heart! As long as you have a prayer, you have real hope.

Pray: pouring out your heart to God on account of sin in your life.

Reflect: do I hope in the Lord and take my concerns to him in prayer?

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (v.22, 23)

On January 15 2009, 155 people on US Airways Flight 1549 thought they were going to die. During take-off from New York City, their plane struck a flock of geese, disabling both engines. In a powerless glide, the captain manoeuvred over the densely populated area, then announced: "Brace for impact." Less than 90 seconds later, the crippled plane made a water landing in the frigid Hudson River, where boats and ferries quickly arrived to rescue the passengers and crew, all of whom survived. People called it the "miracle on the Hudson" and praised the pilot and crew. One grateful passenger said simply, "We have a second chance in life."

In times of crisis, we grasp the importance of every hour. During our ordinary routine, however, we often forget that each day is a second chance. *'Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.'*

As Jeremiah laments the situation before his eyes, he recalls the Lord's faithfulness and mercy. He reminds himself that God is in control and all he has to do is wait on him. He recognises that *'men are not cast off by the LORD forever.'* (v.31) He deals with sin in their lives and shows mercy.

In the development of photographs, the film must first be taken into a darkroom. Only after the chemicals have done their work in the dark is it safe to expose the negatives to light and produce the final prints. The light, which would have destroyed the film, now brings out its beauty. God takes us through "darkroom" experiences to develop our spiritual life. As we pass through trial, sorrow, frustration, and disappointment, the image of Christ is produced in us. Then we are ready to be displayed in the light. God's mercies are new every day.

Pray: thanking God for his faithfulness in your life.

Reflect: do I daily acknowledge God's mercy in my life?

The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the world's people, that enemies and foes could enter the gates of Jerusalem. But it happened because of the sins of her prophets. (v.12, 13)

There have been many things in life when people said 'it cannot happen' and then of course it did. People said the mile could never be run in under four minutes then Roger Bannister did it in 1954. People claimed the Titanic was unsinkable then it hit an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage. People said humans would never travel in space and then Yuri Gagarin flew in space in 1961. As humans we tend to think at times that we are invincible. Certainly the people in Jeremiah's day did. None of them believed Jerusalem would ever be overcome.

In Lamentations 4, the prophet tells what happened to his people. The youth, the most valuable asset of the nation, lay dead and scattered about like broken bits of pottery. The little children starved from the lack of bread and milk. The wealthy, accustomed to the finest food and clothing, were forced to scavenge in the city garbage dumps. The princes of Judah once had been the picture of health. Now they were nothing but skin and bones. No one could even recognise them in the streets. The once tender-hearted mothers of Judah had resorted to cannibalising their own offspring.

He then explains why this happened. The people were in prideful denial. They thought too highly of themselves and their confidence was no longer in God but on material possessions and their own strength and wisdom. They listened to false prophets and then rejected the true prophets of God. They did not listen to Jeremiah when he came warning them of impending disaster. On account of their sin the unthinkable happened.

There is a great reminder here for us to keep trusting in God and relying on His Word. Do not put your trust in yourself – your own wisdom, knowledge, abilities or possessions – they will let you down and the unthinkable will happen. Trust in God alone.

Pray: asking God to help us trust in him alone.

Reflect: do I trust in my own wisdom, knowledge, abilities and possessions?

Woe to us, for we have sinned! (v.16)

During the 1884 Presidential Election Democrat Grover Cleveland was in a heated battle with Republican James G. Blaine. It was reported to the Republicans that Cleveland, a bachelor, had fathered a child with a widowed woman named Maria Crofts Halpin. Subsequently, the Republicans attempted to run a smear campaign against Cleveland, labelling him with an immorality tag. They even printed flyers with pictures of babies with the slogan, "One more vote for Cleveland."

Cleveland had a choice to make. He could deny and stir up the scandal or he could confess. Though sources differ on the fact that Cleveland admitted to being the father of the child, all agree he did admit to the affair. He also stated that he would support the child both financially and otherwise. Cleveland's candour and confession about the incident endeared the American voting public and rest is political history.

Here in Lamentations 5 Jeremiah turns to pray for mercy on his people. He summed up the nations wounds and woes in the first 10 verses, recalling that their fathers had sinned and they are still bearing the punishment for that sin. He is not blaming them though for he is willing to take responsibility for his own sin and the people for their own sin too. And that is important for us. We live in a blame culture where we like to apportion blame to everyone else apart from us. We get pulled over for speeding and blame the guy in front whom we were following. He may well be guilty of speeding too but so were we. There comes a point when we have to accept the blame ourselves and accept responsibility for our own sin. There is no one else to blame for it.

Jeremiah finishes this short book by interceding for their renewal. He prays asking that God restore his people firstly to himself and then to their homeland and city.

Pray: confessing sin in your life and seeking the Lord's forgiveness.

Reflect: do I blame others rather than accept responsibility for my own sin?

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown and I heard the voice of one speaking. (v.28)

What will it be like when we see the Lord for the first time? We all have our own thoughts on that I'm sure. The song "I Can Only Imagine" asks, "Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for You, Jesus, or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah? Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine!"

Ezekiel was a priest among the Jewish exiles in Babylon and had visions of the Lord. A flashing cloud communicated God's Word to Ezekiel. Inside this fiery pillar were four living creatures which symbolised attributes of the Lord's servants and the surrounding fire emphasised their utter holiness. Next, Ezekiel saw four wheels (v.15–21) of a chariot-like vehicle. The wheels inside wheels indicated that this object could go in any direction, including up! These wheels were covered with eyes. What an amazing picture of God's omnipresence and omniscience. Then he saw a figure on the throne. He described God's presence as *'full of fire and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him'* and like *'a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day.'* Ezekiel's reaction was to fall on his face before Him and to listen to His instructions (v.27-28).

The apostle John also saw a vision of God's presence. He may have been Jesus' closest friend here on earth. At the Last Supper, prior to the crucifixion, we read that John was "leaning on Jesus' bosom" (John 13:23). Yet when John saw a vision of the Son of God in all His glory and power, he had the same reaction Ezekiel had, and *'fell at His feet as though dead'* (Revelation 1:10-17).

We cannot comprehend how brilliant and awesome the Lord's glory is, so we can't be sure of how we'll respond when one day we're in His presence. Will we dance or be still? Will we stand in awe or fall to our knees? Will we sing or not be able to speak at all? Just imagine!

Pray: praising God for his holiness.

Reflect: imagine what it will be like seeing the Lord in heaven.

You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. (v.7)

Ezekiel has seen this incredible vision and the only thing he could do was fall facedown. God is now speaking to him and in order for him to hear the Spirit lifts him to his feet. God informs Ezekiel that he is to speak for Him. However, the job will not be easy, for his listeners will not be listening.

The very reason they were in the Babylonian Captivity was because of their rebellion against God and refusal to listen to His warnings. God is giving Ezekiel the “heads up” that they’re not going to suddenly start listening. As a matter of fact, not only will they not be listening to Ezekiel’s words, but they will be threatening his body. But the Lord tells him not to be afraid.

He clarifies to Ezekiel that to not speak would be rebellion equal to that of the other Jews. This is a reminder to all of us that God has called to be His children: we need to speak God’s Word whether people seem to be listening or not, whether people are threatening us or not. To shrink in fear of man is to be in rebellion against God.

God has heard all the excuses ever uttered in defence of why people won’t speak His Word. Moses tried to weasel out of speaking for God. He tried various excuses like, ‘Who am I’ (Exodus 3:11), ‘I’m not eloquent – my tongue is slow’ (Exodus 4:10), and ‘Send someone else’ (Exodus 4:13). Did God buy any of it? Not a chance. Jeremiah had tried the same saying he was too young. Of course poor Jeremiah had the awful response of the people ignoring his words.

We can all come up with a variety of excuses but at the end of the day God calls us to share our faith with others. He will be with us and give us the strength and courage. Let’s speak God’s word to the world around us.

Pray: for strength and courage to speak of the Lord to others.

Reflect: do I make excuses for not sharing my faith?

Then he said to me “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. (v.3)

I read about an Australian woman who developed a craving for paper. She began her unusual diet as a child, and as she grew older she ate as many as ten tissues and a half page of the newspaper every day. The woman had also consumed small quantities of blotting paper, sheets from exercise books, and petty cash vouchers.

Of course, there’s no relationship between that woman’s strange habit and the symbolic actions of the prophet Ezekiel. His eating of a scroll was meant to illustrate a spiritual exercise that all of us should engage in. If we are to declare God’s truth with meaning and power, we must take time to let it fill our hearts. We need to feel the implications of what God has said. We are to let His Word become a vital part of us so that we can’t talk about it glibly as uninvolved, detached students, but as those who have personally ‘*tasted*’ it.

The messenger of God must fill their heart and mind with the truths of Scripture. Only as they are faithful to apply the Word of God to their own life can they honestly give its nourishing encouragement and exhortation to help others. Ezekiel was to eat the Word before he would be able and ready to share the Word with those he was called to share it with.

The actual words and thoughts of God are revealed in the Bible. Don’t just read them and repeat them. Think them. Feel them. Ask the Lord to clarify them, to make them a part of your experience, and to teach you.

Yes, today’s Bible reading contains a profound principle: We must ‘*eat*’ the Word before we speak it. And as we do that we will discover as Ezekiel did that ‘*it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.*’

Pray: thanking God for His life giving word.

Reflect: do I faithfully apply God’s Word to my life?

Now, son of man, take a clay tablet, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. (v.2)

A few years ago I was on the Good Friday walk of witness through Stirling City Centre. It was interesting to watch people's expressions as they saw someone carrying a wooden cross followed by a crowd of people. Then when we stopped outside Costa and I stood on the steps and spoke about what we were doing and why (explaining the gospel to them) it was enlightening to see more expressions. Some people stared and walked on by, some laughed, some wondered what on earth was going on, and fortunately some stood and listened.

Perhaps it was like this for Ezekiel. Maybe the exiles found him interesting, perhaps just amusing. The first sign (v.1–3) involved sketching the city of Jerusalem. Curiosity probably mounted when Ezekiel enacted the city's siege. Using an iron pan, Ezekiel also showed the heavy wall of sin that separated the city from the Lord. This signified the Babylonian army surrounding Jerusalem like an iron wall.

As if this weren't odd enough, Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days, followed by forty days on his right side (v.4–6). Each day represented one year of Israel and Judah's sin against God. Ezekiel was also tied up with ropes so he could not move whilst doing this. This depicts the helplessness of Jerusalem against the Babylonian attack.

While on his side, Ezekiel was commanded to eat starvation rations, indicating how desperate Jerusalem's final siege would be. The command to cook over human excrement (v. 12) showed how defiling the siege and exile would be. As an obedient priest, Ezekiel objected to this abomination, and the Lord honoured his request (v. 15).

These things were all happening to show what happens to a people who ignore God, rebel against him and reject his ways. Ezekiel's illustrated message was a serious one. May we heed the warnings of Scripture and turn from our sin and follow the Lord always.

Pray: asking God to forgive your sin.

Reflect: do I heed the warnings of Scripture?

Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. (v.6)

Many are bald today and happy to be so. When my hair started receding some years ago I simply cut it very short to the extent I was virtually bald. Some jokes are still made about bald people but for many baldness is a style they are happy and comfortable with. That was not the case for Jews back in Ezekiel's day. Cutting your hair off was a real sacrifice for Jews and it spoke of mourning, or shame, humiliation, and disgrace. So imagine how hard the fourth visual aid was for Ezekiel.

Here in Ezekiel 5 he is told to shave his head and beard and to lay the cut hair in three piles. After the siege was over he was to burn a third of hair inside the city, strike a third of it with the sword outside the city, and then to scatter the remaining third to the wind. He was to take a few remaining strands and tuck them away in his robe.

What does all this mean? Well in verse 12 we get the answer. A third of the people will die of the plague or perish in the famine, a third will fall by the sword outside the city walls as the Babylonians invade, and a third will be scattered as they flee the devastated city. What of the few remaining strands of hair? They speak of the remnant that would be saved,

Why was all this devastation to happen? It was all on account of the sin of the people. For years (390 and 40) they had rebelled against God's law (v.6), defiled his holy temple (v.11) and generally did more wickedness than any other nation around them.

Sin has a terrible punishment attached to it – eternal separation from God. We would do well to turn from our sin and walk in God's ways always. These people rejected the Word of the Lord. May we heed God's Word and follow it always.

Pray: thanking God for His Word and asking Him to help you live by it.

Reflect: do I always walk in God's ways?

But I will spare some...those who escape will remember me. (v.8, 9)

For centuries, Rome was the undisputed world power. Its destruction was unimaginable. As is often the case, however, Rome's fall began long before its actual ruin. Weakened by greed, lust, and bad leadership, Rome became vulnerable to barbaric invasions in the fourth and fifth centuries. In 410, Alaric the Visigoth delivered a devastating blow - soon Rome was ruined, its former glory never recaptured.

To Judah, Jerusalem's destruction was also unthinkable, despite the Lord's repeated warnings. The strange command to prophesy against Israel's mountains (v.1-7) was another such warning. But why mountains? Because they represented the high places where the people worshipped pagan idols (v.4) and practiced prostitution and child sacrifice. Throughout their history, the Israelites disobeyed God's commands to rid the land of idolatry; now God Himself would destroy these detestable places.

Remember the few hairs hidden in Ezekiel's robe in yesterday's reading? True to God's Word, a chosen remnant would be spared, finally realising how they had grieved the Lord with their sin. Clapping hands and stomping feet (v.11) were signs of deep remorse. God promises to preserve a remnant, and they were at first to be scattered, then taken captive to Babylon. There they would remember their idolatrous practices, recognise they had sinned, and realise this was God's judgment.

God says in verse 10 that they will come to know that he is the Lord. This illuminates the "purpose" of the judgments! It was to bring Israel to repentance and recognition of the Lord's disciplinary action.

There are times in our lives when the Lord disciplines us but it is always for our own good. He longs for his children to know him, love him and follow him.

Pray: thanking God for His hand of discipline in your life.

Reflect: do I accept the Lord's discipline and turn back to him?

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Disaster! An unheard-of disaster is coming. (v.5)

Again the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel (v.1). Despite the repetition of “the end” five times in five verses, many exiles doubted Ezekiel’s messages because false prophets predicted peace. The people found it nearly impossible to believe that God would really destroy Jerusalem, the site of His Temple. Even if they themselves were taken from the land, surely the Temple would be spared! That’s why Ezekiel emphasised that the ‘*unheard-of disaster*’ (v. 5) was upon them.

Judgment could no longer be averted; it was certain. Again, it was because of their abominations (v.3, 4, 6, 9) a reference to their immoral idolatry. Activity & commerce would cease; there would be no buying and selling. Their belongings would become worthless, since they would be confiscated by the Babylonians. What was most important was their lives!

The few who escape over the mountains would be left to cry out over their sin like mourning doves. Courage and morale would be gone. Their money would be worthless for they had foolishly used their God-given finances to build idols. Their idols would be defiled and destroyed. God even allows Babylonians to defile His secret place.

Destruction was going to be upon them on account of their sin. God’s anger was against them and the small remnant would see this and turn from their sin and follow the Lord once more. The Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 30:5 ‘*For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*’ God’s discipline is for our good.

May we not remain in sin, ignoring the dreadful consequences of it, but rather may we heed the Lord’s warning and turn back to him.

Pray: asking God to forgive for your sin.

Reflect: what habitual sin is in my life? Confess it and ask the Lord to help you overcome it.

Is it a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? (v.17)

Imagine walking into a church, ahead of you is a cross, to one side is a piano, and to the other side, a small organ. It looks pretty much like any other church you've been in. Suddenly you notice small voodoo dolls along window ledges - above them, crystals hang. Instead of hymnals, you find Tarot cards in the pew racks. A cold chill runs down your spine. Sadly, if people from Ezekiel's day could have travelled in time and space, they probably would have felt right at home in this "church."

About fourteen months after Ezekiel's acted parables, he was taken by the Spirit to Jerusalem (v.1-3), where he was horrified to find in the holy Temple *'the idol that provokes to jealousy.'* This vile image, probably a Canaanite fertility goddess, provoked God's holy jealousy because it stood for all that is against Him and His people. And this horrible image stood opposite the glory of the Lord. Such abomination eventually drove His glory from the Temple, for His holiness cannot coexist with evil.

The entire Temple was defiled with pagan practices. Ezekiel discovered seventy elders, worshipping what were probably Egyptian gods (v.10). They were worshipping in the dark, thinking that somehow the Lord couldn't see them or that He had forsaken them (v.12). What the spiritual leaders were practicing in secret, the rest of the people were doing openly. Tammuz was a pagan god of the underworld, whose worshipers believed that their tears (v.14) enabled him to provide rain and fertility. Just past these women, Ezekiel saw 25 men worshipping the sun with their backs turned to the Temple (v.16)!

With all the warnings that God gave to His people, they are still moving farther and farther from Him, living in rebellion against Him, worshipping all these false gods, and judgment is at the door! God was serious back then and He is serious today about who we are to worship. If we reject His grace we will see His judgment.

Pray: asking God to forgive you for the idols you have in your life.

Reflect: do I hear the warnings of the Bible and still keep ignoring God?

Put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it. (v.4)

“Elvis has left the building!” - it’s a phrase that was often used by announcers following Elvis Presley concerts to disperse audiences who lingered in hopes of an Elvis encore. It was originally used by promoter Horace Lee Logan on Dec.15 1956, to plead with concertgoers not to leave a concert hall to try to see Elvis as he left, and instead remain to see the other acts on the bill. The full quotation was “Please, young people... Elvis has left the building. He has gotten in his car and driven away.... Please take your seats.”

Here in Ezekiel 9 it is clear that God has left the building. He has warned his people long enough and as we have seen in chapter 8 they have continued rebelling against him and wandering further from him. Its judgement time and it begins in the sanctuary – the very place people thought they would always be safe because God would be there. But God has left them in their sin and is judging them on account of it. This idea of the wrath of God really offends some people. Admittedly, it is difficult when we see men, women, and children destroyed in judgment. But remember, God is completely just, and sees all, while we never see the entire picture.

There is a little encouragement here in verse 4 as we learn that God did have His faithful remnant within the nation who were devastated and broken over what they were seeing. And this angel was to go and place a mark upon those faithful people. Why? Because God will not punish the righteous with the wicked.

Even in the church age, those of us who are chosen of God have been sealed with a mark. It is the Holy Spirit Who seals us. (2 Corinthians 1:22 & Ephesians 1:11-14) Let us remain faithful and keep walking in God’s ways.

Pray: thanking God for the seal of the Holy Spirit on your life.

Reflect: do I grieve the detestable acts of the world around?

I looked and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim. (v.1)

While exploring Alaska, naturalist John Muir once beheld an ethereal sight: a streak of crimson light pierced the cold grey dawn and crowned a distant peak in splendour. Suddenly this shaft of “celestial fire” lit the glacier-filled fjord in such a way that years later Muir wrote: “We had seen the heavens open and God made manifest.” There are the odd times in our lives when we see something magnificent like that too and we are drawn to think on God in all his glory. I think of times out climbing when away from all the noise and busyness of life I catch a glimpse of God’s marvellous creation and my breath is taken away at its beauty. Yet even the glory of God’s creation pales next to His Shekinah glory!

It may seem incongruent that Ezekiel saw the Lord’s glory immediately following the vision of Jerusalem’s sinful inhabitants massacred. We may not always link God’s glory with His wrath, but the fact that God punishes sin and eradicates evil should evoke our praise and worship. God’s judgment on sin reflects both His justice and His mercy. The fire of God’s judgment purifies and refines (v.2, 6–7) His people so that His glory might be restored among them.

God’s righteousness demands complete judgment, and until Jerusalem and its people were completely cleansed of sin, God’s glory would have to separate itself (v.18). The Lord’s glory was slowly removing itself from the defiled Temple. Having departed from the Holy of Holies (v.18), it would eventually depart Jerusalem altogether.

I think there is a little encouragement here for us and it is in the reminder of looking for God’s glory. If all you do is look at the sins of the land you will end up very discouraged. What did the prophet do here? He lifted his eyes higher and got a new vision of the throne of God.

Pray: praising God for his glory and majesty and power.

Reflect: am I discouraged by the sin of the world? Then lift your eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.

I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (v.19)

A few years ago a snappy little song became quite popular. Some of its lyrics went as follows: “In every life we have some trouble...but when you worry, you make it double. Don’t worry, be happy!” This song could have been sung by Jerusalem’s leaders (v.1–3)! By telling people to build houses, these leaders were implying that peaceful times were ahead. But to preach peace in the face of impending judgment was disobedient and cruel. Through His prophets, including Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Lord had made it clear that judgment was coming.

Using the false prophets’ own words, the Lord revealed that the ‘*meat*’ referred to those slain by these false prophets, and the ‘*pot*’ was for judgment, not protection (v.7). Because these leaders had forsaken God’s laws (v.12), they would be killed outside the ‘*pot*.’ As proof, one such prophet, Pelatiah, died even as Ezekiel was speaking (v.13)!

Furthermore, some false prophets claimed that God’s judgment had fallen on the exiles, whereas those in Jerusalem rightfully possessed the land (v.14-16). In response to this blatant lie, the Lord gave Ezekiel the first in a series of messages about the future restoration of the true remnant. Not only would this remnant receive the land (v.17), but God had actually been making His sanctuary with them in their exile (v.16)! This was a huge blow to the proud residents of Jerusalem.

Far more important than a restored land were restored hearts. Following His judgment, God’s people would no longer be divided by their hardened hearts toward Him (v.19–20). But this future glory must await the present judgment. As God had promised, Jerusalem’s terrible sin drove away His glory. Led by the holy cherubim, God’s glory finally departed the Temple (v.23) and hovered over an eastern mountain, the Mount of Olives. What a sad day for Jerusalem!

Pray: thanking God for restoring our relationship with him.

Reflect: how is your spiritual heart? Is it turned towards God?

Say to them "I am a sign to you." (v.11)

I well remember being at a church one summer and sharing a really good children's talk with glasses and lemonade and speaking of God's love overflowing our lives and into others. The following year I went back and the lady who greeted me at the door asked what my children's talk was going to be since last years was so good – and she recited the previous year's talk almost perfectly. Fortunately I had taken another talk with me! I asked her what the sermon was and she struggled to remember. Action talks help; visual aids are important.

Here in Ezekiel 12 we find Ezekiel giving another visual aid and action talk. Ezekiel is told to pack his belongings on his shoulders and dig a tunnel through the city wall - in the sight of all the people. Interestingly he is not told why this time – certainly not to begin with. Ezekiel simply did as he was commanded. God does not always give us an explanation why He is having us do something, He just wants us to take that step of faith and then He will show us.

If Ezekiel did not take that step of faith, if he was not obedient to the Lords commands, this lesson would not have occurred or God would have raised up someone else to speak through and Ezekiel would have missed out on the blessing of serving the Lord. I wonder how many times we miss out on the blessings that God has for us because we don't take those steps of faith?

God might not ask us to do bizarre things as he did Ezekiel, but can others tell by our life-style that we believe Jesus is coming, and that he will one day judge the world? Is our life an action sermon that catches the attention of people who are blind and deaf to God's truth? Are we living our message (not just believing it...though it starts there)?

Pray: asking God for the faith to do as he asks of you even when you do not understand why.

Reflect: do I live out my faith and belief...or is it all simply head knowledge?

Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. (v.6)

During World War II Jehovah Witnesses were told not to side with Hitler and that if they were captured and placed before a firing squad, that before the bullets hit them, the bullets would stop. The bullets would not enter them or kill them. This idea was given to them from the Watch Tower, which is a group of Jehovah Witnesses that claim to have a direct line with God, and what they say is supposedly gospel, even though they have been wrong many times - they are nothing more than false prophets! And many Jehovah Witnesses stood with complete confidence in this lie, and these people not only died physically, but spiritually, believing the lies of these false prophets!

Here in Ezekiel 13 God sends his word condemning false prophets. These prophets did not get their words from God but simply made it up as they went along. The Lord is never deceived. Because these prophets tore down instead of building up (v.5-7), and because they covered ‘*a flimsy wall*’ (v.10) with whitewash, the Lord was about to exclude them from His people. Like a “house of cards,” their hollow promises would be utterly blown apart when the torrent of God’s rightful wrath was unleashed upon the land.

There were also false prophetesses, or perhaps sorceresses, who practiced magic or fortune-telling. Like their male counterparts, these women were ensnaring the people (v.17-19), while enriching themselves. Like the false prophets, they would receive God’s judgment (v.20-23).

The main complaint by God is that the false prophets have made things up pretending it was from God and were leading his people astray. The people were so taken in that they did not test what was being said and allowed themselves to be led into sin and away from God. Let us be wise and test everything that is said against the Word of God.

Pray: asking God to help you be wise in this wicked world.

Reflect: do I always test what I hear against Scripture?

*Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices.
(v.6)*

Ezekiel had established himself as a prophet of God among the Jewish captives in Babylon. And now these elders have come to Ezekiel to hear from God, which sounds good. The problem, as we are going to see, it was all superficial, outward, and their hearts were still full of evil and idolatry, they were far from God.

In Jerusalem they practiced their idolatry in the open, but now that some are captive in Babylon, they still are practicing it, but now in their hearts, where sin begins. Yes, outwardly it looked good, but inwardly they still were rebelling against God. It is like the story of the little boy who was being punished by his father. And the father wanted him to sit in the chair, but he kept refusing. Finally, the boy obeyed his dad, sat down in the chair, and said, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but on the inside I’m still standing!” That was the heart of these elders!

We would do well to learn that cherishing sin in your heart will lead to practicing sin in your life! Sin will only remain hidden for so long before it reveals itself in public.

God comes and reveals the sin of their hearts. He offers them an opportunity to repent (v.6), turn from their idols and turn back to God. God is giving them one last chance to turn to Him, but they refused. The land was so wicked at this point that nothing was going to stop the judgment of God from coming, not even these three righteous men; Noah, Job and Daniel who was a contemporary with Ezekiel.

God’s judgment is severe but it is never greater than the sins of the people. In fact, God’s judgment is always tempered with grace and mercy. We never fully get what we deserve! Let’s turn from our sin and follow God wholeheartedly.

Pray: thanking God for his grace and mercy.

Reflect: do I cherish sin in my heart? Turn from it now.

I will make the land desolate because they have been unfaithful, declares the Sovereign LORD. (v.8)

The illustration of a vine is used in Ezekiel 15 to refer to how useless it becomes when it does not do the job it was created to do. The vine has been used elsewhere as a symbol of Israel (Isaiah 5:7). The Vine symbolised prosperity, blessing, and happiness in the nation. The Vine had one purpose: to be productive and bear grapes. So Israel was to bear the fruit of righteousness. They were to bear witness in the world to the true God.

To illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness and worthlessness in failing to bear the fruit of righteousness, the Lord revealed the uselessness of a vine...as wood. The vine could not be used for construction or even as a peg to hang pots in a house. It has twisting, gnarled branches and it does not lend itself to being cut and shaped. This was the condition of God's people in Ezekiel's day.

If a vine ceased to produce fruit, there was no point in leaving its roots in the ground; it would be far better to cut it down and burn it. The vine is even less useful when it had been charred on both ends and plucked from the fire!

The interpretation of this illustration is then given by the Lord. As the pruned vine limbs that bore no grapes were cut off and thrown into the fire, so God had delivered the inhabitants of Jerusalem to destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. The people would not escape the invading Babylonian hordes, who would pillage and burn the city. The Lord again reminded the people of the necessity of the judgment...*'because they have been unfaithful.'*

We were made to bear fruit...and we can only do that as we walk in God's ways and stay close to him.

Pray: asking the Lord to make us fruitful in our service.

Reflect: am I bearing fruit in my life?

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. (v.49)

The escalating violence in our society is alarming. Brutality ranges all the way from domestic child abuse and spouse battering to unimaginable crimes and senseless murders. As a result, politicians and police chiefs are advocating better crime prevention and stiffer penalties for offenders. These measures, while having some value, do not get to the underlying source of our social problems. The root problem is a wrong response to God's words and ways.

We see this in Ezekiel 16. God declared that Sodom was destroyed because her citizens responded to His goodness with pride, heartlessness, and all sorts of abominable conduct instead of gratitude and obedience (v.49). What's shocking is that these sins did not compare with Judah's sins! Judah even managed to "outsin" Samaria (the northern kingdom), who did not have one righteous king in its two-hundred year history. Instead of learning from God's judgment of Sodom and Samaria, Judah continued in sin, making her two "sisters" look righteous by comparison (v.51).

The mere mention of despised Sodom and Samaria together with Judah was deeply insulting; the fact that somehow Sodom and Samaria would be restored before Judah was simply unthinkable! Such humiliation is what Judah deserved yet God is going to restore the nation, not because of their faithfulness, but because of His. Their restoration and God's everlasting covenant were pure, unmerited grace (v.60).

The same is true when it comes to our salvation. You see, it is based totally upon God's faithfulness, not mine. If it was up to me to sustain it, I would be in trouble and so would you. All we must do is receive it by faith.

Pray: thanking God for his unmerited grace and mercy.

Reflect: do I respond properly to God's Word and ways?

As surely as I live, I will bring down on his head my oath that he despised and my covenant that he broke. (v.19)

Ezekiel's two parables address faithfulness and faithlessness: one speaks of Israel's unfaithfulness to God and one illustrates God's faithfulness to Israel. In this, we see a tree as a symbol of the kingdom of God.

The first parable, in images of eagles and vines, rebukes exiled Israel for breaking its oath to the king of Babylon. Although carried off into exile by the conquering eagle (Babylon), the vine (Israel) was well planted there because it kept the oath it had sworn. But when Israel proved disloyal to its oath, God declared Israel unfaithful to Him, not just to the Babylonian king (v.20). When we are faithful to God, we will also be loyal to our words - even promises given to unbelievers.

The second parable (v.22–24) uses the same imagery, but within a Messianic context. Here God, not Nebuchadnezzar, is the eagle that plucks the shoot Israel from the cedar. And instead of planting it in a '*land of merchants*' (v.4), He plants it on a high mountain, an exalted and visible place. Here it grows, not into a low vine, but a '*splendid cedar*' (v.23) in which other birds, symbolising many other nations, rest.

God is saying that He is going to take all the kingdoms of the world and bring them down and Israel will once again be lifted up. And on the mountain the stem of Jesse, the root of David, will be planted and this is speaking of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

The heart of the matter for you and I concerns our promises – are we a people of our word? Do we keep the promises we make to God and to others? God longs for us to be loyal to our word. He is faithful to his and we can rest secure in that.

Pray: thanking God for his faithfulness and for all the promises he has kept.

Reflect: do I keep my word?

The soul who sins is the one who will die. (v.3)

When salmon travel hundreds of miles up rivers and streams to spawn, they are acting on instinct. They are in a sense being driven by an uncontrollable force. I read about a young convict who thinks that human conduct is similar to that of the salmon. Referring to the murders he committed and to his own fate, he said, “Things just happen.” He thinks some kind of force was responsible for his pulling the trigger and killing two people. But he is wrong. Man is free and cannot blame his sinful actions on an uncontrollable force such as instinct.

More than 2,500 years ago, some Israelites were using a similar excuse for their sin. They quoted a well-known proverb that placed the blame for their sins on their ancestors (v.2). The basic idea here is that the children are paying for the sins of their father. They are a product of the environment they grew up in. That should sound very familiar because it is what the world is saying and teaching us.

God is telling them not to use this proverb anymore because it is not true. You can't blame your parents, your environment, the colour of your skin, your nationality, or anything else you can think of and has been thought of. You can't even say “The devil made me do it!” Why? Because you are accountable for your own actions, for what you do, not for what your parents have done. We are living in a world where everyone is blamed except the guilty party, and God is saying, “Don't listen to what the world is saying, they are wrong. It is the person who sins, they shall die. They are responsible for their own actions!”

Make no mistake. No matter what your situation, you are responsible for what you do. Stop offering excuses for your sins. Instead, acknowledge your guilt to God and accept the forgiveness He offers (Psalm 32:5). That's the first step in exercising your individual responsibility.

Pray: confessing your sin to God.

Reflect: do I blame others for my sin?

Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel. (v.1)

Perhaps one of the most surprising events following WWII was the outpouring of Allied aid directed toward conquered countries' restoration. The Marshal Plan alone pumped \$12 billion into Germany and other parts of Europe from 1948 to 1951. It may have been surprising to defeated German citizens that their former enemies would become their benefactors.

In a similar way, it probably surprised Ezekiel's listeners that he was lamenting the princes of Israel. Previously he had uttered the Lord's judgments against them and pointed out their folly and disobedience. Human reasoning would have expected some gloating, or perhaps an "I told you so," when their end was so clearly in sight. Instead, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to mourn the "lion cubs" whom He had raised up to govern the nation.

The lioness probably refers to the nation in general, and the first cub (v.3–4) - to Jehoahaz, Zedekiah's brother. He had reigned only three months when the Egyptian pharaoh took him captive back to Egypt. Jehoahaz's nephew, Jehoachin (v.5–9) succeeded him to the throne. Jehoachin was an evil king, who was exiled to Babylon, where he spent 37 years in prison.

Although the imagery shifts to a vine in the final part of this chapter, the passage is still about Israel's kings. The lament is intensified when the grandeur of the united kingdom is recalled (v.10–11). From its former heights, Judah was finally uprooted and replanted in a "dry and thirsty land" - the exile in Babylon.

It is not our place to be gloating to people who are suffering on account of their sin saying "I told you so". Rather we should be lamenting the fact they have ignored God for so long. We should be seeking always to keep pointing people to the Saviour in the hope they will turn from their wicked ways and turn to the Saviour.

Pray: for the prodigals in your family.

Reflect: do I always seek to help the lost and point them to Jesus?

Isn't he just telling parables? (v.49)

In the comic strip, Peanuts, a particular scenario is frequently replayed. Lucy offers to hold the football for Charlie Brown so that he can kick it. As he approaches the football, Lucy lets go and Charlie falls flat on his back. We are tempted to wonder how Charlie Brown can keep trusting Lucy over and over.

The same question might have been asked of Judah and its misplaced trust in Egypt. On numerous occasions Egypt had either failed or refused to help. Yet in 591 B.C., Judah again turned to Egypt when Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Because this was really rebellion against God, Ezekiel reviewed Judah's rebellious history to show that "rebellion doesn't pay."

Beginning with the Exodus, the Lord recounted the people's rebellious idol worship and failure to obey His laws, particularly the Sabbath. This rebellion persisted to Ezekiel's day (v.29–32), but now included abominable child sacrifice.

Yet this could have been called a history of God's grace. He led His people out of Egypt, gave them His laws, and brought them into the Promised Land. Even now, God was promising that He would lead His people out of exile and restore them to their land (v.41–44). But God also allowed the people to persist in sin until they grew weary of it (v.39), followed by a fiery cleansing of their sin (v.45–48).

The ultimate goal of God's judgment is to bring forth a people for Himself. Suffering is not the end of the story, salvation is! How gracious is our God.

And yet as the chapter ends Ezekiel is distraught. The people think he is only telling stories. They don't think it will really happen. How sad that people today think the bible is a fairy story and that judgement day will not happen. Pray for them and try and convince them of the truth.

Pray: thanking God for his salvation.

Reflect: how can we convince others that the bible is truth?

This is what the LORD says: I am against you. (v.3)

I've lost track of the times I have tried to point sin out in people's lives and they will simply not believe me. I try sharing it in various ways – with illustrations and just with words – and they still think I'm making it all up. It is frustrating. And that's what Ezekiel must have felt. He was distraught at the end of chapter 20 as the people thought he was only telling stories. They either refused to understand it or just didn't believe it.

Now, as chapter 21 begins, God tells Ezekiel to give the same message, but this time, it will be in much clearer terms. The age of grace has come to an end and the day of God's wrath was upon them. God's patience, God's longsuffering was over, for the people refused to repent and get right with Him. And thus, His sword of judgment has been taken out of its sheath and He is ready to use it upon this nation for their wickedness.

Here is how Ezekiel is going to make known this message. He is to go around the prisoner of war camp in Babylon, sighing. You know, "OHHH....! OHHH!" And when the people see him acting like this, seeing him so broken-hearted, they will ask him what is wrong, and Ezekiel will tell them the news of God's coming judgment, a judgment that is at the door. They would not escape!

God is telling Ezekiel in v.14-17 to clap his hands, twirl his sword, help the people get the POINT of the message! And the point is this, sin brings about sadness, it cuts people up, it will destroy them. The tragedy in all of this is God said it didn't have to come to this. If they would have repented, if they would have returned to the Lord, they would have lived and they would not be cut to pieces. But they refused, and God's judgment will be completed!

What God said to His people back then He is saying to us. Sin will destroy your life! But, if you turn away from sin, if you return to the Lord, God will restore your life, and joy will return.

Pray: asking God to forgive your sin and restore your life.

Reflect: how I get the gospel message across to others?

I looked for a man among them who would...stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. (v.30)

In 1895, an Irish missionary arrived in India, little knowing how God would use her to rescue hundreds of young girls, “dedicated” as temple prostitutes. Her heart broken with God’s love, Amy Carmichael ministered for 53 years to these precious little ones. To this day, the Dohnavur Fellowship remains a refuge for many facing unspeakable dangers.

The power of one individual fully committed to the Lord is truly amazing. How awful then is the place where not a single righteous individual is found! Such was Jerusalem, a “city of bloodshed,” just prior to its fall. You don’t have to read much of Ezekiel 22 to see complete social disintegration. Individuals shed blood, defied parental authority, mistreated the oppressed, desecrated the holy, and committed all manner of sexual immorality. And it all boiled down to one reason: they had forgotten the Sovereign Lord (v.12).

What else could the Lord do but purify away the dross? It is amazing that the Lord did not forsake His people altogether, a thing that would be impossible for His complete faithfulness. But their excessive sin did provoke His momentary wrath. Understanding this explains such severe judgment.

God’s judgment obviously entailed withholding His blessing, even upon the land - His own creation - which suffered drought and barrenness. Physical drought illustrated the spiritual drought of the people. Their dry, hard hearts were cruel and vicious, so God withheld His gracious gifts of rain and abundance. The priests especially should have understood this connection between physical deprivation and disobedience (Leviticus 26:3–4).

I wonder if you and I would stand in the gap and seek to rescue the lost in our world?

Pray: for strength and courage share Jesus with others.

Reflect: how can I stand in the gap for others?

Since you have forgotten me and thrust me behind your back, you must bear the consequences... (v.35)

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan appears to be the ideal woman. Yet as the story unfolds, the reader discovers that Daisy is easily impressed by wealth and success - and Jay Gatsby, who has spent his life trying to win her. The only problem is that Daisy is already married. This tragic tale of ambition and infidelity is a more modern version of today's passage.

Judah and Samaria were like two sisters - the older Oholah represented the northern kingdom, Israel, whose capital was Samaria; Oholibah represented Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. Despite the rift between these two, they were united on one thing - their sin. Indeed Oholibah saw the sin of her sister and did not learn from it. How much are we like that?

Oholah prostituted herself with the Assyrians, but Oholibah - with both the Assyrians and the Chaldeans (another name for the Babylonians). Throughout Israel's long history, the Lord had promised to provide all it needed - including a relationship with Himself. But both Israel and Judah were easily impressed with the wealth and military prowess of neighbouring countries. Chariots and vast armies were easier to trust than the Lord. Even more appealing to these two "sisters" was the pantheon of foreign gods and goddesses. Not only did these foreign idols shift the Israelites' allegiance from the One True God, worship of these false deities entailed debasing and defiling practices.

In putting their trust in other countries, peoples, and idols they had forgotten God. That word "forgotten" can mean "to mislay." It wasn't that they were absent minded. The problem was that God was lost beneath all the other garbage they had placed in their life. Instead of being the focus, he was just one of many. And thus, they were paying the penalty for their actions. Let us not forget God but keep him as the main focus of our lives.

Pray: asking God to help us keep him on the throne of our lives.

Reflect: does God still have first place in my life?