

Ezekiel 20:45-22:31 “The Ethics of Exile”
Psalm 49
James 1:16-2:13

October 17, 2010

By now, I think that you’ve probably gotten Ezekiel’s point.

Everyone has sinned – far worse than you think –
and the wages of sin is death –
so prepare to die!

The destruction of Jerusalem is a picture of the final judgment.

The temple in Jerusalem was designed as a microcosm of the world –
the heavens (represented in the holy of holies)
the earth (represented in the holy place)
and the sea (represented in the great basin outside the holy place).
And so when God sends the Babylonians to destroy his temple,
he is showing forth a picture of his judgment against all the earth.

Ezekiel 20-23 forms a single unit, comprised of 9 “Words” from the LORD.

Ezekiel 20:1-44 is the first “word.”

Ezekiel 23 is the last “word.”

Ezekiel 20:45-22:31 consists of seven shorter “words”

In Ezekiel 20-23, the LORD is preparing Ezekiel for the message that will come in ch 24.

Because in chapter 24 two things will happen.

The siege of Jerusalem will begin, and Ezekiel’s wife will die.

Death is coming.

And so our passage today is asking you:
are you ready for the final judgment?
Are you ready for judgment day?

Psalm 49 also points out that death is coming.

Our hope is not that we can escape death.

Our hope is that God has redeemed us from death
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Sing Psalm 49

Read James 1:16-2:13

Chapter 21 announces the coming judgment in the Riddle of the Sword

with the parable of the forest fire in 20:45-49 that burns both the green and the dry tree,
and then three “words” that interpret the fire as the “sword for slaughter.”

This reminds us of Ezekiel’s enactment of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 5
when he wielded the sharp sword upon his own head and beard –
as a picture of what the sword would do to Jerusalem.

And then chapter 22 speaks of the “bloody city” and how Jerusalem is now like Ninevah – the holy city has become a bloody city – and will be destroyed in fire.

So our passage begins and ends in fire,
as God speaks of his eschatological wrath – his final judgment –
that will fall upon his people.

1. The Riddle of the Sword and the Final Judgment of Israel (20:45-21:32)

a. The Forest Fire Will Burn both the Green and the Dry Tree (20:45-49)

45 And the word of the Lord came to me: 46 “Son of man, set your face toward the southland; preach against the south, and prophesy against the forest land in the Negeb. 47 Say to the forest of the Negeb, Hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from south to north shall be scorched by it. 48 All flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.” 49 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not a maker of parables?’”

Notice in verses 45-49 that the fire will devour “every green tree”
and “every dry tree.”

No one will escape.

And this parable is not especially hard to understand!

b. The Sword Will Cut off both the Righteous and the Wicked (21:1-7)

21:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries. Prophesy against the land of Israel 3 and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked. 4 Because I will cut off from you both righteous and wicked, therefore my sword shall be drawn from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. 5 And all flesh shall know that I am the Lord. I have drawn my sword from its sheath; it shall not be sheathed again.

Verses 1-5 of chapter 21 are in parallel to verses 45-49 of chapter 20.

The fire of the first word is replaced by the sword in the second word –
and the sword will go forth throughout chapter 21
and accomplish God’s purpose of wreaking havoc upon his people.

God says that the destruction of Jerusalem will cut down “both righteous and wicked.”

No one will stand in the day of judgment.

Everyone will die.

6 “As for you, son of man, groan; with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan before their eyes. 7 And when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ you shall say, ‘Because of the news that it is

coming. Every heart will melt, and all hands will be feeble; every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming, and it will be fulfilled,'” declares the Lord God.

c. The Song of the Sword for Great Slaughter (21:8-17)

In verses 8-17 we hear the “Song of the Sword” –
as Ezekiel sings of the coming of the sword for slaughter –
Ezekiel sings his wailing song of judgment.

8 And the word of the Lord came to me: 9 “Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord, say:

*“A sword, a sword is sharpened
and also polished,
10 sharpened for slaughter,
polished to flash like lightning!*

(Or shall we rejoice? You have despised the rod, my son, with everything of wood.) 11 So the sword is given to be polished, that it may be grasped in the hand. It is sharpened and polished to be given into the hand of the slayer. 12 Cry out and wail, son of man, for it is against my people. It is against all the princes of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with my people. Strike therefore upon your thigh. 13 For it will not be a testing—what could it do if you despise the rod?” declares the Lord God.

The time of testing is over – and Israel has failed.
This confirms Paul’s interpretation in Galatians 3-4.
Israel is my son, my firstborn.
But Israel has despised the rod of discipline,
and so they will be handed over to the sword for slaughter.

14 “As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, 15 that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. 16 Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. 17 I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the Lord have spoken.”

In verse 14 Ezekiel claps his hands and the sword takes on a life of its own.
The sword is made like lightning and it flashes and glitters as it slaughters all flesh.

And in verse 17 we hear that God himself claps his hands –
he is the one who orders the sword –
he is the one who comes in judgment against his people.

d. The Eschatological Coming of Babylon against Jerusalem (21:18-32)

Then in verses 18-32 we hear *who* this sword is!

And we hear of the coming of the king of Babylon to Jerusalem.

In verses 19-23 Nebuchadnezzar comes to a fork in the road.

Will he turn left and go to attack Rabbah of the Ammonites?

Or will he turn right and go to attack Jerusalem?

He will use divination – trusting his own magicians –

but God himself will rule the divinations and ensure that the armies of Babylon come against Jerusalem.

18 The word of the Lord came to me again: 19 “As for you, son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come. Both of them shall come from the same land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to a city. 20 Mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah, into Jerusalem the fortified. 21 For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows; he consults the teraphim; he looks at the liver. 22 Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth with murder, to lift up the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build siege towers. 23 But to them it will seem like a false divination. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be taken.

And all of this, because Jerusalem is guilty before him:

(read)

24 “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.

Note particularly in verse 25 what God says to the “prince of Israel” (Zedekiah).

25 And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, 26 thus says the Lord God: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. 27 A ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.

In Genesis 49:10, Jacob had said that the scepter would not depart from Judah

until he came to whom it belongs (or “until Shiloh comes” depending on how it is read).

Verse 27 is very plainly echoing Genesis 49:10 –

and turning it upside down.

Normally we would take Genesis 49:10 as a Messianic promise –

but Ezekiel takes it as fulfilled (in a sense) by Nebuchadnezzar!

The last-days judgment of God is coming upon Israel.

Jerusalem will now endure God’s final judgment.

Nebuchadnezzar here serves as something of an anti-Christ.

Jacob’s prophecy of Judah and the scepter

would lead one to believe that there is a future Messiah –
a glorious kingdom in the future!
But Ezekiel turns all this upside down.
The glorious future is for Nebuchadnezzar...

Well, at least until v28!

28 “And you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach; say, A sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter. It is polished to consume and to flash like lightning— 29 while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to place you on the necks of the profane wicked, whose day has come, the time of their final punishment. 30 Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I will judge you. 31 And I will pour out my indignation upon you; I will blow upon you with the fire of my wrath, and I will deliver you into the hands of brutish men, skillful to destroy. 32 You shall be fuel for the fire. Your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall be no more remembered, for I the Lord have spoken.”

Verses 28-32 then speaks of the taunt of the Ammonites.

The Ammonites were laughing at Jerusalem because of the sword (Babylon)
that had destroyed Jerusalem.

But God says that the sword itself (Babylon) will be judged –
and the fire of God’s wrath will be poured out on the sword.

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar will be God’s instrument of death in destroying the temple in Jerusalem.
But God will judge Nebuchadnezzar as well.

So chapter 21 uses the riddle of the sword to show how Babylon will be the agent of destruction
who will then also be destroyed.

Chapter 22 then turns to Jerusalem.

2. The Bloody City: Jerusalem as the City of Man (22:1-31)

a. The Guilt of the Bloody City (22:1-16)

So far, Ezekiel has zeroed in on the sin of idolatry,
with occasional references to sexual sin and oppressing the poor.

But here in chapter 22, Ezekiel declares that Jerusalem is “the bloody city” –
a name that Nahum had give to Ninevah.

The scriptures had spoken regularly of Jerusalem as God’s “holy city” –
Jerusalem was a picture of the heavenly city.

But through her sin, Jerusalem had become no better than Ninevah –
no better than Samaria or Sodom (Ezek 16).

Jerusalem was supposed to be the city of God,
but instead she has become the city of man.

But what is the point of Ezekiel 22?

After all, Ezekiel is in Babylon!

What does it mean to judge the bloody city of Jerusalem,
when you are 1,000 miles away?

Remember that Ezekiel's hearers were the leaders of Jerusalem.

And they are now living in exile in Babylon.

In condemning Jerusalem's sins,

Ezekiel is speaking to the exiles and saying,
"do not be like this any more!"

It is too late for Jerusalem –

but for the exiles in Babylon, there are lessons to be learned.

22:1 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then declare to her all her abominations. 3 You shall say, Thus says the Lord God: A city that sheds blood in her midst, so that her time may come, and that makes idols to defile herself! 4 You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made, and you have brought your days near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. 5 Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you; your name is defiled; you are full of tumult.

Verses 1-5 target the central issues: idolatry and bloodguilt.

These two sins strike at the great two commandments:

Moses had said "love the LORD your God with all your heart..."

Idolatry violates the great commandment.

Moses had also said, "love your neighbor as yourself..."

Murder violates the second commandment.

Indeed, when you strike out at man (who is created in the image of God)
you are striking out against God.

But then verses 6-12 provide the evidence for how hatred of God and neighbor
has spread into every other sin as well.

And Ezekiel starts with the *princes* of Israel –

with the leaders – many of whom are now in exile in Babylon!

6 "Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. 7 Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. 8 You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. 9 There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. 10 In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. 11 One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his

daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord God.

Everyone who has power has been using it for hatred of neighbor –
rather than love of neighbor.
And *all of this* is described as forgetting God.

If you treat your parents with contempt,
then you are forgetting God.
If you ignore the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow,
then you are forgetting God.
If you profane the Sabbath or despise holy things
then you are forgetting God.
(we still have holy things in the NT – baptism and the Lord's supper are holy things –
think of how Paul speaks of unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper:
He says some people have died because they partook unworthily!)
If you are sexually impure,
then you are forgetting God.
If you make a profit to the harm of your neighbors,
then you are forgetting God.

What does this mean?

It means that you must remember *and love* God in every relationship.
Ezekiel walks through the Ten Commandments and says
that every single one of the Ten Commandments is about remembering God.
If you remember the Lord your God and his grace and kindness in redeeming you,
and calling you, and making you his child,
then you will love *him* in all your relationships.

Last week we read from Galatians 3-4 about Paul's view of the law.

Paul sees the law as a paedagogue –
the paedagogue was a servant whose job was to discipline the children
according to the rules of their father.

But according to Paul,
you will never grow up and enter into the inheritance of your father,
so long as you are under the paedagogue.

But of course, according to Moses (and Ezekiel)
the law was never intended as the way to get you into the inheritance.

Think back to Moses:

did Israel inherit the land because of their faithfulness in the wilderness?
No! Israel rebelled in the wilderness!

For that matter, think back to Joshua:

God says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous,
for you *shall cause this people* to inherit the land
that I swore to their fathers to give them." (Joshua 1:6)

It was *Joshua's* faithfulness that caused Israel to inherit.

(By the way, do you know what Joshua's name is in Greek?
Jesus.

Do you think that was an accident?)

So if the law is a paedagogue – a disciplinarian –
whose job is to beat us when we disobey our Father –

and if Jesus is the faithful Son who has paid for our sins (through his death)
and “grown up” and entered his inheritance (through his resurrection and ascension
to the right hand of the Father)

then how should the Christian think about the law?

How should you think about that paedagogue?

Well, was he a faithful servant?

Yes! He did his job well!

The Law was a faithful servant that did precisely what God intended.

Therefore we should love the law.

If your father had a faithful servant who trained and disciplined you
according to the teaching of your Father,
then when you grew up and entered into your inheritance,
how would you treat that servant?

Would you throw him into a gutter?

Of course not!

Would you let him beat you up anymore?

Of course not!

Rather, you would love and respect him for all that he taught you!

And you would remember the lessons that you learned –
you would do *the things of the law* –
without the *club* of the law hanging over you.

You see, this is why people are confused about Paul's view of the law!

Paul can speak of the law as a good thing – a wonderful thing – that we should do –
and yet he can react with horror
when people start talking about being *under* the law.

And the reason is very simple:

you are not *under* the law!

You are no longer a child!

You have entered into the inheritance that God has given to Jesus!

But this does not mean that you are “free” to do whatever you like.

You are grown-up children of God.
The law is no longer an external club to beat you –
the law is written on your hearts.
You do these things – not because of some external compulsion,
but because it is simply part of who you are in Christ!
It is (as James calls it) the law of liberty!

Jesus taught his disciples this with respect to the Sabbath, when he said
that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

In saying this, he showed that the Sabbath was not merely a Mosaic ordinance,
but was established at creation.
God created man on the sixth day –
and then on the following day he established the Sabbath.

If you view the Sabbath as a burden to be under –
then you are laboring under a faulty view of the law!
Do you think it a burden that God requires you not to steal – but to use your gifts to help others?
Do you think it a burden that God requires you to use your tongue to encourage others,
rather than tear them down?

Sure, at times it may feel like a burden –
because our desires are pulling us in the wrong direction!
But as Alan Strange said a few weeks ago –
doing what Christ requires is not a burden!
As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30
“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
(And incidentally, the very next thing that Jesus did
was to teach on the Sabbath – on how he was “lord of the Sabbath.”)

Jesus says that the Jews had turned God’s gracious gift of the Sabbath
into an onerous burden.
It is to be a day of rest and refreshment –
a day where you set aside the cares of the week,
and rejoice before the Lord for his steadfast love and faithfulness
demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the point we heard from James –
that we look into the perfect law, the law of liberty.
James also demonstrates the same mindset when he says
that the one who breaks the law in one point has become guilty of all of it.
God’s royal law is one:
“love your neighbor as yourself” captures the whole of our duties toward one another.

Sin is a failure of love.

Ezekiel 22 testifies to a massive failure of love in Jerusalem.

The holy city has become the bloody city.

They have failed to love one another, because they have forgotten the LORD.

And so God says:

13 “Behold, I strike my hand at the dishonest gain that you have made, and at the blood that has been in your midst. 14 Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it. 15 I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries, and I will consume your uncleanness out of you. 16 And you shall be profaned by your own doing in the sight of the nations, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

Some would be tempted to say, “ah, but since we’re in Christ, this doesn’t apply to us.”

Do you know what Jesus said to church in Sardis?

“You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die,

for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

Remember, then, what you received and heard.

Keep it, and repent.

If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief,

and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.” (Rev. 3:1-3)

That whole “thief in the night” business

is all about how Jesus will come in judgment upon the church *now*.

It is not about the final judgment “someday.”

It is about how the final judgment may come upon the church *early* –

if a church does not wake up, repent and live like God’s children!

In other words, what happened to Jerusalem could happen to us!

After all, the destruction of the temple in 587 BC was *not* the final judgment.

It was a *picture* of the final judgment.

It was a *foretaste* of the final judgment.

And if all we have today is the “reputation” of being alive,

then we are prime candidates for Christ coming like a thief against us!

b. All Have Become Dross in the Fire of God’s Wrath (22:17-22)

17 And the word of the Lord came to me: 18 “Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver.

19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my

anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. 21 I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. 22 As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have poured out my wrath upon you.”

Ezekiel seems to have had a good understanding of the process of refining silver.

And he says that the house of Israel is like a lead ore that has no silver content.

As it passes through the refiner’s fire,

all the dross will be removed.

And there will be nothing left!

And in these final two sections of our passage
you can see the familiar biblical picture:

if water doesn’t work – try fire.

That’s the big picture of the story of redemptive history.

God destroyed the world with water in the flood – and started over.

Did humanity improve?

Well, if water doesn’t work – try fire!

The Mosaic law uses the same principle to deal with moldy clothes or houses.

First you wash with water.

If the mold comes back, burn it.

If water doesn’t work – try fire!

Now God uses the same picture with respect to Jerusalem:

c. Princes, Priests, and Prophets: if Water Does Not Work, Try Fire (22:23-31)

23 And the word of the Lord came to me: 24 “Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation.

But we are not talking about ordinary rain.

This will be fire from heaven that will consume the city –

like the fire from heaven consumed Sodom and Gomorrah.

It’s worth pointing out that in the NT we still have the same picture.

Our Lord Jesus Christ passed through water – as he was baptized in the Jordan River.

And he also passed through the fire – as he passed through death and hell on the cross.

As John said, “I baptize you with water,

but *he* will baptize you with the Spirit and with fire.”

Why do I emphasize Christ?

Because the problem with Jerusalem is her leaders.

Her princes – her prophets – her priests.

And because her princes, her prophets, and her priests are corrupt,

the people also have followed their leaders.

Watch what God says.

Verse 25 – the ESV “says” prophets – but the LXX translated this as “princes” –
which is only one letter different in the Hebrew
(and certainly fits better the image of the lions from Ezek 19)

25 The conspiracy of her prophets [princes] in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

The princes – the kings of Israel – were supposed to be lions
defending their people from their enemies.
And they are like roaring lions – but against their own people!

We need a prince – or better, a King! –
who will be the great Lion of Judah –
the great Leonine Warrior of Psalm 76 –
who will triumph over all his and our enemies,
and subdue us and rule and defend us.

26 Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

According to Leviticus, the priests had two jobs:
first, offering sacrifices and administering the “holy things”
second, teaching about the holy and the common, the unclean and the clean.

Ezekiel (and remember that he had been trained as a priest)
says that they have failed in both.
And because they have not distinguished between the holy and the common,
because they have not taught the difference between unclean and clean,
because they have disregard my Sabbaths,
therefore, God says, “I am profaned among them.”

Think about that for a minute.
“I am profaned among them.”
God is holy.
To treat God and his holy things as common is blasphemy.

And as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 11 –
this is still true today.
Those who treat the sacraments as “common” are profaning God.
Those who treat the church as “common” are profaning God.

Tonight we'll be looking more at the question of holy times and places in Psalm 81.
Never before in human history have there been no holy days and no holy places.
The idea that everything is common is a peculiarly modern.
(Some would say that everything is holy –
but if everything is holy – if everything is set apart –
then there is no distinction between the holy and the common.
And so for all practical intents and purposes – everything is common.)

Our holy times and places are *different* than those of OT Israel –
but we still have holy times and places.

27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. 28 And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord has not spoken.

Verse 27 returns to the princes – but the point is to set up verse 28.
The prophets smear whitewash for the princes.
The prophets are saying “hey, it’s no big deal” –
when it *is* a big deal!

Back in Ezekiel 13 we saw the prophets smearing whitewash over the walls of Jerusalem.
We saw there that Ezekiel’s pun would probably be better translated,
that they were smearing “hogwash” on the walls.
Flimsy walls with whitewash will not withstand the assaults of the enemy.

We need a Prophet who speak the truth to us,
who will reveal the depths of our sin,
the marvels of God’s grace,
and who will call us to repentance!

Because when we have prophets, priests and kings like Israel:

29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice. 30 And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. 31 Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God.”

If water doesn’t work,
try fire.

God says that he “sought for a man among them who should build up the wall
and stand in the breach before me for the land.”

He has found that man in Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one who has passed through fire and death
as he took the wrath of God upon the cross –
as he stood in the breach as our prophet, priest and king.

And so I say to you,
You are a land that *is* cleansed –
in your baptism *you* have passed through water –
you have been baptized into Christ Jesus – into his death.

Of course, water alone will not immunize you to the fire of God's wrath.
Baptism includes two parts: the outward sign (water)
and the inward reality (the Spirit and fire).

But those who receive the grace of baptism by faith
have passed from death to life,
and therefore you now have died to sin.

Sin is no longer your master.
As Paul says, "sin shall have no dominion over you,
since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14)

Peter summarizes our identity as elect exiles nicely in 1 Peter 1:17-25.
Listen carefully, because this describes how *we* are to live:

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, [this is what it means to be Jerusalem in Babylon] 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for

*"All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord remains forever."*

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.