

“REASONS FOR THE COMING JUDGMENT”

**I. Introduction**

- A. I had the opportunity this past week to attend Bryna’s first driver’s education class with her.
1. The instructors require parents to attend that first class because they want to make sure that both parents and their teenage children understand that driving needs to be taken seriously.
  2. One of the things that they did in the class was show a video in which a number of teens talked about how great it is to be able to drive.
  3. Many displayed a happy-go-lucky attitude while talking about some of their irresponsible driving habits.
  4. This communicated that they did not really think that it was possible for anything bad to happen to them.
  5. The point, of course, was that bad things do happen when people drive irresponsibly, and the video made this point by telling a number of heart-breaking stories.
- B. There are a lot of people who have a happy-go-lucky attitude when it comes to God.
1. They find it inconceivable that God would ever bring anything painful or harmful into their lives.
  2. But the fact of the matter is that there are things that incite God to send judgments upon people.
  3. This can even happen with believers, in whose case the afflictions that God sends are more precisely described as chastisements.

4. As we study this passage tonight, we will see what it teaches us about three of the things that cause the Lord to send judgment, or chastisement, upon people: idolatry, faithlessness, and uselessness.

## II. Idolatry

- A. Our text begins with some of Israel's elders coming to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord about a specific concern.
  1. The context makes it clear that they were hoping to receive an encouraging word from the prophet, perhaps an assurance that their time of exile would soon come to an end.
  2. If they had been sincerely consulting the Lord, they would have come to him with repentant hearts rather than with hearts full of idolatry.
  3. They did not want to hear what the Lord really had to say to them.
  4. They wanted Ezekiel to do what the false prophets were rebuked for doing in the previous chapter.
  5. They wanted Ezekiel to tell them what they wanted to hear.
- B. The Lord knew this, and he exposed it in the response that he delivered through his prophet.
  1. He rebuked these elders for taking their idols into their hearts.
  2. God was not deceived by their outward expressions of piety.
  3. God looks on the heart.
  4. He saw that their hearts were divided.
  5. Though they had been sent into exile because of their sin, they did not respond by repenting of their sin.

6. Instead, they sought to numb their pain by turning to the idols of their Babylonian neighbors.
  7. As Iain Duguid explains, "Those who feel abandoned by God find that the pull of seeking out other gods increases, other gods whom they think can deliver the sense of security and significance they seek. If the Lord cannot deliver, why not try Marduk or one of the other Babylonian gods?" [183-184]
  8. People do the same thing today.
  9. As we have noted many times, an idol doesn't have to be an image or a statue.
  10. It doesn't even have to be something that is thought of as a god.
  11. An idol is anything that we love, serve, trust, or fear more than we love, serve, trust, or fear God.
- C. God's people are not immune to the lure of idolatry.
1. After all, the men in this passage were elders in Israel.
  2. They were the church's spiritual leaders.
  3. Yet they let their hearts become enamored with false gods.
  4. The Lord says that, in doing so, they were setting the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face.
  5. That is, their idolatry led to other sins.
  6. This is what happens when our hearts are divided and we set other things ahead of the Lord.
  7. We end up falling into other kinds of sin.

- D. God says that he will do three things in response to the inquiries of these idolatrous elders.
1. First, he will set his face against them.
  2. Though they are Israel's leaders, they will find that the Lord is not on their side.
  3. Second, God will make them a sign and a byword.
  4. Just as Lot's wife is a classic case of the dangers of looking back, these men will be a notorious example of what happens when a person's heart is captivated by idolatry.
  5. And the third thing that God will do is that he will give them what they want.
  6. He will send them false prophets who utter lies that lead them astray.
  7. Here we see that the Lord often punishes sin by letting people fall even deeper into sin and error.

### III. Faithlessness

- A. In the next part of our passage, the Lord declares that the judgment that is about to come upon the land of Israel has been brought about by the people's faithlessness.
1. Most of the covenant people had turned away from the Lord and were unfaithful to him.
  2. They ignored his law and his call to repent, and they kept on living however they pleased.
  3. When God enters into a covenant with people, he binds himself to them in a manner that is analogous to the marriage bond.

4. Believers have an obligation to live unto the Lord.
  5. Our lives are no longer our own.
  6. God has redeemed us at great cost and made us his.
  7. This is why faithlessness provokes his anger.
- B. As a result of Israel's faithlessness, the Lord says that he will send four evils upon them.
1. There will be a time of famine.
  2. There will be wild beasts that ravage the land.
  3. There will be a military invasion.
  4. And there will be a pestilence that decimates the population.
  5. As each of these judgments is described, the Lord reiterates their certainty by saying that he would not relent from sending them even if upright men like Noah, Daniel, and Job were living in the land.
  6. Noah and Job stand out as exemplary believers from the period before Israel was brought into existence.
  7. Daniel was a contemporary of Ezekiel who had been taken to Babylon with the first wave of exiles in 604 BC, seven years before Ezekiel was taken into captivity.
  8. Daniel quickly distinguished himself for his faith and devotion, so much so that he is put in the company of these other godly men from ages past.
  9. The point that the Lord is making in referring to these three men is that a few righteous cannot save many wicked.

10. Each individual is held to account for his own life.
- C. This section ends with the Lord saying that he will leave some survivors when the Babylonians lay waste to Jerusalem.
1. These people will be carried into exile, where they will live alongside those who are already in exile.
  2. The Lord says that when the present exiles see how these new exiles live, they will be consoled for the disaster that he brought upon Jerusalem.
  3. This does not mean that the people will be comforted by the sight of these exiles.
  4. This is an ironic type of consolation.
  5. The Lord is saying that when they see the wicked manner in which these new exiles live, they will realize that the Lord had good reason for bringing destruction on the city of Jerusalem.

#### IV. Uselessness

- A. This brings us to chapter 15, where a third reason for the coming judgment is given: Israel's uselessness.
1. This is the shortest chapter in the book of Ezekiel, but it packs quite a punch.
  2. There are other Old Testament passages where the image of a vine is used to describe God's people.
  3. In Psalm 80, Israel is likened to a vine that the Lord brought out of Egypt and planted in the good soil of Canaan, but when its walls are broken down it is ravaged and laid waste.
  4. And in Isaiah 5, the Lord refers to Israel as a well-tended vineyard that only brought forth worthless fruit.

5. A similar point is being made here is Ezekiel 15.
  6. If a vine isn't producing any fruit, the wood of its vines is completely useless.
  7. God's people were not producing anything of value.
  8. Therefore, he is about to give them over as fuel for the fire.
- B. This description of Israel stands in sharp contrast to Jesus's use of the image of a vine in John 15.
1. He calls himself the "true vine," the fulfillment of what Israel was supposed to be.
  2. The only way that we can be fruitful for God is if we are ingrafted into Christ.
  3. Apart from him, we cannot do anything that is good in the sight of God.
  4. But if we are truly united to him, our lives will bring forth fruit that brings glory to God.
  5. Jesus's teaching about branches that do not bear any fruit bears a close resemblance to what we read here in Ezekiel 15: those branches will be gathered and thrown into the fire.
  6. That is a picture of what we all deserve as long as we are apart from Christ, the true and living vine.
  7. Left to ourselves, we cannot produce anything of spiritual use.
  8. Like a fruitless vine, we are only fit for judgment.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Carelessness can be deadly in many areas of life.

- B. Nowhere is it more deadly than it is with respect to spiritual matters.
- C. When true believers are spiritually careless, the Lord sends chastisements to bring them to repentance and renewed faith.
- D. And when false believers are spiritually careless, the Lord sets his face against them and gives them over to destruction.
- E. Let us not forget that our God is not to be trifled with.
- F. He is a consuming fire.
- G. So let us worship and serve him with reverence and awe for all our days.