

EZEKIEL 24

A SAD DAY FOR EZEKIEL

The messages contained in this chapter formed the melancholy close of Ezekiel's communications to his countrymen, before Jerusalem was overthrown. And the chief intention of what is here communicated was to declare beforehand the inevitable certainty of the coming evil, and the spirit of intense contrition and Godly sorrow which it ought to have awakened among the people. On the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah, the prophet received a command from the Lord to write down that particular date as one that was memorable in the annals of his country's history – not, however, for any good that was connected with it, but for the evil that transpired on that day. For this was the very day upon which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege against Jerusalem – as is actually noted as a matter of history in 2 Kings 25:1 and Jeremiah 39:1. And the fact that this historical detail was actually delivered on that very same day – in a Divine message – by Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar River, must have been intended to present his hearers with an undoubted proof of his character as a true prophet of the Lord! He delineated the disastrous results in which that siege that had just begun would eventually terminate. This is done, in the first instance, by means of a parable.

The prophet was instructed to set a pot or caldron upon the fire, to pour water into it, and then fill it with the choicest pieces of meat. As for the remaining bones, he was to put them in the fire underneath the pot; and thereby, he was to create such a glowing heat that the pieces of flesh in the pot – and even the bones belonging to them – would be boiled well.

This parabolic image was evidently chosen in reference to the proverb that was formerly spoken of in chapter 11:3 – that proverb which was tauntingly thrown out in common conversation among the people: "This city is the caldron, and we are the flesh." In a proud feeling of false security, they had spoken thus. But now they were about to discover, by bitter experience, that there was indeed a dreadful truth embodied in the image of that proverb, which was to be brought home to them as a rebuke for their senseless folly. So far from the city proving to be their place of secure strength, like the iron ribs of a caldron; it was actually to be set like a cooking-pot on the fire – and all the people, like so many pieces of meat that were destined to be devoured, were to be put into this pot and subjected to a boiling heat!

Such severe dealings necessarily implied an intense degree of sinfulness, and the words (verse 6-14) that followed Ezekiel's parabolic demonstration were specifically designed to reveal this fact. It was the excessive and hardened

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The parable of the cooking-pot – verses 1-14
- ❖ The death of Ezekiel's wife – upon which, the prophet is forbidden to show any signs of grief – verses 15-27



wickedness of the people which provoked such awful severity of dealing on the part of God. All corrective measures of a less extreme kind had already been tried upon them, but in vain; and so their rebellious and obstinate condition called for the greatest degree of severity.

As for the second part of Ezekiel's message which he was to deliver upon this occasion, it directly affected himself. The Lord caused him to understand that he was to be visited with the severest bereavement, in the loss of his dearly beloved wife – “the desire of his eyes.” She was to be taken from him by a stroke – that is, by a sudden and striking act of Providence. In ordinary circumstances, such a calamity would naturally have called forth and justified the most moving demonstrations of grief. But the prophet was expressly forbidden to manifest his sorrow! No reason is given for these singular restrictions upon the prophet. He simply hears the Word of the Lord and communicates it to the people, so that they might know that the approaching visitation was peculiarly from God. And in the evening, the sad event came. The prophet's wife passed away; and in obedience to the injunctions laid upon him, he abstained from all the usual expressions of grief and mourning. As might have been expected, the people's curiosity was awakened; and they came to Ezekiel in order to inquire what these things signified. Then they heard that this was all intended to be a sign or a picture of what was about to take place in their own history and experience. They, too, would shortly lose something that was pre-eminently dear to them – namely, the sanctuary of the Lord. And that was not all, for their own sons and daughters would also be given up to the sword. But even in the midst of these singular occasions of grief, the usual signs of affliction would not be found in them. They would neither mourn nor weep outwardly, despite the fact that feelings of gloom would weigh heavily upon their hearts.

What a noble specimen of devoted, self-sacrificing goodness is presented to our view in the case of the prophet himself! And how clearly does it foreshadow the ministry and ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus! Ezekiel had entered upon his ministry under the most appalling discouragements, with the clear understanding that – as far as immediate results were concerned – he had been given both a thankless and a hopeless task. But this did not hinder him from throwing his energetic soul into the work of reformation! Message after message came forth from his lips – charged with the heaviest tidings, and breathing out the lively feelings of an affectionate and earnest heart. But even when everything had proved to be ineffectual, he still yielded himself and his dearest treasure upon the altar of sacrifice for his people, so that they might have yet one more opportunity of realizing and repenting of their sins, and finding mercy with the Lord!

Lord, we beseech You to give us grace to learn from the rebellious Israelites, to give heed to the words of reproof You send us, and to repent of our sins! Amen.