

Devotions for Sept. 05 – 11, 2011

Monday, September 5, 2011: Ezekiel

Daily reading: Ezekiel 1:1-3

Ezekiel is born in Jerusalem around 623 B.C. His father serves in the temple where Ezekiel trains to be a priest. Although it is a time of relative independence for Judah, there is a constant threat of military overthrow by the oppressive Babylonian Empire. When Ezekiel is 26 years old, Jerusalem is attacked, and then occupied, by the Babylonians. Finally, in 597 B.C., many of Jerusalem's prominent families, including Ezekiel's, are hauled off to Babylon to live as refugees for 30 years, between 593 and 563 B.C., in a region now part of Iraq. Ezekiel, a powerful communicator filled with God's Holy Spirit, a prophet with vision, speaks God's message of hope and promise into these dark and desperate times. How would you feel, exiled in a foreign land at 26? Ask God to help you understand how devastating exile was for God's people.

Tuesday, September 6, 2011: A Living Children's Sermon

Daily reading: Ezekiel 4:1-8; 5:1-5; 37:15-23

Ezekiel is primarily known for the Valley of the Dry Bones, but that is just one part of this prophetic book. In Ezekiel 4, he makes a brick model of Jerusalem under siege, symbolizing the punishment of Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 5:1-5, he uses a sword to shave his head. He divides the hair into three piles: one he burns, one he chops up with his sword, and the other he throws up into the air. This illustrates how some will be killed in the siege and some will be scattered in exile. In Ezekiel 37, he writes "for Judah" on one stick, and "for Joseph" on another stick, and holds the sticks together in one hand to symbolize the reunion of the kingdom of Israel with God. What do these mini-sermons say to you? Ask God for deeper understanding of God's work in our midst.

Wednesday, September 7, 2011: Valley of Dry Bones

Daily reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

In a vision, Ezekiel is carried to a valley of dry bones, where he speaks the words of the Lord. The bones come together, are covered with skin, and live. This symbolizes the Hebrews: their hope is gone, yet they return to thrive again to their own land. With sinew, muscle, and breath, the God who formed us from the dust brings life into the midst of what seems like death. Ezekiel speaks life into death, hope into hopelessness, and possibility into impossibility. The vision is meant to encourage the despondent Jews, to predict both their restoration and recovery. It also hints at the resurrection of the dead, when Christ himself breathes new life into the dust of all who have died. Is this your hope? Ask God to breathe new life into you today.

Thursday, September 8, 2011: The Messiah

Daily reading: Ezekiel 34:17-31

The whole nation of God's people is one flock that needs to be cared for and led. Good pastures might mean the nourishment that comes from the word of God, and the deep waters connect to justice that can roll down like streams. The later verses point to the coming Christ, especially if you read 23-31 in a variety of translations. Here is a good shepherd coming to lead this flock to pastures and deep water. This shepherd is compared to a tender shoot that emerges from the ground, and then grows to be the Tree of Life for all nations. This tree bears all kinds of spiritual fruit. Ezekiel's call is to repentance, and this repentance leads directly to the kind of reconciliation only possible through Jesus Christ. Do you see Jesus Christ as your good shepherd? Ask God to lead you to green pastures and deep spiritual waters this week.

Friday, September 9, 2011: Harlot

Daily reading: Ezekiel 23:43-49

Ezekiel compares the southern kingdom (including Jerusalem and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin) and the northern kingdom (including the other ten tribes, called "Israel") to prostitutes because of the idol worship leading to their destruction. But when the Hebrews are brought back to Jerusalem, Ezekiel feels that all twelve tribes of Israel will be united with a new temple in Jerusalem (see Ezekiel's vision in 40-48), with priests from the sons of Zadok of the tribe of Levi. No foreigner will be able to enter the sanctuary of the temple, a strict Hebrew belief, probably stemming from Ezekiel's background as a priest. These are harsh words, but there are times when harsh words are required to bring about caution, correction, or clarity. Have you ever had to share words of correction? Ask God to guide you when you're called to say something that needs to be said.

Saturday, September 10, 2011: Sentinel

Daily reading: Ezekiel 33:7-11

Chapter 33 begins a new section in Ezekiel, presenting prophecies of the coming restoration of God's people. Ezekiel's message turns from doom and gloom to comfort, hope and the redemption of all things. It is a cautionary, yet hopeful, passage and a message of God's faithfulness to all people in all times. For the rest of the book, Ezekiel prophecies hope. He is reminded that he is the nation's sentinel. Before Jerusalem's fall, he spoke of punishment and dispersion. Now he proclaims the hope of restoration, but even this message does not improve the people's response. They listen to him with curiosity, and then live as they please. Today we have the good news of forgiveness, but it's so easy to ignore this message and continue to live as we please. We need to speak truth to one another; words of correction and encouragement that lead to repentance and reconciliation. Do you ever hear words of correction, and then live as you please? Ask God to help you truly listen when someone tries to bring you a word of caution.

Sunday, September 11, 2011: Light a Candle

Daily reading: Isaiah 40:28-32

Its ten years to the day. Who can forget the sights and sounds of that morning in September as planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania? Today is a day for remembering those who died, their families, their friends, their co-workers, the rescuers, the fire fighters, the police, and the recovery workers. It's a day to give thanks for the chaplains, aid-givers, and kind-hearted people who began the hard work of helping all of us recover from this tragedy.

Today, light a candle and remember. Pray for all those whose lives will never be the same.