

False Pictures

August 27 — *Lamentations 2:1-4:22*

Day 239 — 126 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, recounted the terrible situation in Jerusalem after its fall to the Babylonians. The picture he painted was grim, indeed. "In all the world," he wrote, "there has never been such sorrow. I have cried until the tears no longer come. My heart is broken, my spirit poured out, as I see what has happened to my people" (2:11, 13).

How could this disaster have been avoided? Jeremiah answered, "Jerusalem, your 'prophets' have said many foolish things, false to the core. They did not try to hold you back from exile by pointing out your sins. Instead, **they painted false pictures, filling you with false hope.** Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn again in repentance to the Lord. Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, 'We have sinned and rebelled, and You have not forgiven us'" (2:14; 3:40).

The repentance of sin would have prevented the judgment of God from falling on His people; but, **repentance of sin requires acknowledgment of sin, which first requires exposure of sin.** People will not repent of their deeds if they do not know that they're wrong. However, they will not be convicted of their wrong if those deeds are not held up before their eyes as wrong.

Herein lies the danger of the false prophet or false teacher. Tickling people's ears with flowery words and feel-good messages is catamount to painting false pictures and planting false hopes. **The Gospel message, absent the reality of sin, is a false gospel!** To promise eternal salvation apart from genuine brokenness and repentance is to set them on the ocean in a skiff made of paper. We must not be guilty of this!

A proper presentation of the Gospel must include exposure to sin. Without one's acknowl-

edgment of sin, one has no need for the Savior. **If one does not first know that he is lost, then he will not believe that he needs to be found.** Therefore, when sharing the message of Christ with others, we must not skip over the reality of their depravity, their absolute inability to please a holy God in their fallen, corrupt, and wicked nature.

Daily Reflection

What about our society is making it harder to expose the sins of our nation?

What will be the result of silencing the truth about our sinful nature?

Unfortunately, **we are allergic to offending people in today's society.** We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Is it better to spare one's feelings or spare one's soul from eternal damnation? Offending the people of Judah with exposure to their sin would have saved their nation; offending people today, with exposure to their sin, opens their eyes to their need for Christ. **The preaching of sin must be a routine practice of a healthy, effective pulpit.** *Before people will understand and accept the good news, they must first hear the bad news, that in their sin, they cannot please a holy God.*

Are you guilty of painting false pictures?

Too Big For Your Britches?

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

August 28 — *Lament. 5:1-22; Obadiah; 2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 40, 41*

Day 240 — 125 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We finished Jeremiah's book of *Lamentations*. He summarized the situation in Jerusalem in detailed fashion and recorded the sentiment of the people, "The joy of our hearts has ended; our dancing has turned to mourning. The garlands have fallen from our heads. Disaster has fallen upon us because we have sinned." However, Jeremiah ended on a positive note, "But Lord, You remain the same forever! Your throne continues from generation to generation. Restore us and bring us back to You again" (5:19-22).

Jeremiah also recorded for us some of the chaos that ensued after the fall of Jerusalem. Though the Babylonians had established their own governor, Gedaliah, there were discontent guerilla forces working behind the scenes as well. Ishmael, a member of the royal family, was sent by the Ammonites to murder Gedaliah and his staff and make a power play for control of Judah; however, Johanan and his men believed that the Jews would be better off under Babylonian control for a while. The showdown between them left dozens of people dead and the land without law and order. Thus, the people prepared to flee the country, fearing the anger and return of Nebuchadnezzar.

Finally, we read the book of *Obadiah*, which consists of one chapter of prophecy aimed at the nation of Edom. Instead of assisting Jerusalem in its time of need, the Edomites helped the Babylonians in capturing or killing escapees. This decision angered the Lord, who vowed revenge. His message was pointed and powerful, "You are proud because you live in a rock fortress and make your home high in the mountains. Who can ever reach us way up here, you ask boastfully. **Don't fool yourselves!** Though you soar as high as eagles and build your nest among the stars, I will bring you crashing down!" (1:3, 4).

Daily Reflection

When I was a boy and I would smart off or defy my mother somehow, she would respond with a common idiom that I did not understand at the time. She would say, "You're getting too big for your britches!" Britches, or breeches, are pants. That was mom's way of saying I was becoming prideful, and **my pride was making me feel bigger or more important than I really was.** She would also say, "You're aimin' for a whoopin'," which meant that I was dangerously close to getting spanked! That was enough for me to change my behavior.

Have you ever felt too big for your britches? What is it about pride that makes you feel bigger or more important than you really are?

Pride is deceiving. It makes you think more highly of yourself than you ought. Pride can be the result of experiencing unchecked success, reaching an important position, gaining power, obtaining wealth or possessions, etc. Pride has a way of causing you to focus on your strengths and to overlook your flaws. You begin to think that you are bigger and better than others. You might even believe, at some point, that **you are untouchable**, like the Edomites, who lived in rock fortresses high in the mountains. "Who can touch us up here," they boasted.

Beware! **God is opposed to the proud.** His response to the Edomites was, "I will cut you down to size" (1:2). **No one is untouchable!** Pride usually comes before a fall. If you become too big for your britches, you will only be aimin' for a whoopin'!

Pretenders

Today In Your Reading...

Jeremiah and Ezekiel continued to deal with stubborn and rebellious people, even after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was approached by the army officers who ran Ishmael out of Judah. They and the people who remained asked him to pray to the Lord and seek His instructions for whether to stay in Judah or to flee to Egypt. "May the Lord be a faithful witness against us," they said, "if we refuse to obey whatever He tells us to do! Whether we like it or not, we will obey the Lord our God" (42:5, 6).

Ten days later, Jeremiah shared the Lord's answer. "Stay here in this land. If you do, I will build you up and not tear you down. I will plant you and not uproot you. For I am with you and will save you and rescue you from Nebuchadnezzar's power..." (42:10-12). **The message was not what the people wanted to hear.** They had already made up their minds to flee to Egypt for safety before the Lord responded.

"You lie," they shouted at Jeremiah. "The Lord our God hasn't forbidden us to go to Egypt!" So Johanan and all the army officers and all the people refused to obey the Lord's command to stay in Judah. A large group of them traveled to Egypt and hid there, thinking they were safe. Of course, they weren't. Jeremiah, who was taken captive to Egypt, warned them. "The Lord God says, 'I will surely bring My servant Nebuchadnezzar here to Egypt. He will destroy this land!'" (43:10, 11). But the people would not listen. **They ignored Jeremiah and continued to do whatever they wanted.**

Far away from Egypt and Jeremiah was Ezekiel. He was with the exiles who were deported to the Babylonian Empire. However, he was dealing with the same problem as Jeremiah. He would deliver the Lord's messages to the people with no response. **They would come pretending to**

be sincere and sit before Ezekiel listening, but they had no intention of doing what the Lord would tell them. They expressed love with their mouths but in their hearts they only wanted money. Ezekiel was nothing but entertainment to them. **They heard what he said, but they refused to do it** (33:30-33).

Daily Reflection

When I read passages like these, all I can do is shake my head. These people make me angry. After all that God had done to devastate Judah and destroy the city of Jerusalem, they still had the gall to spit in His face. What was He to do with them?

Reread *Ezekiel 33:30-33*. In what ways could these verses describe the people who sit in our churches today?

How many people go to church pretending to be sincere, feigning to listen to what God has to say, but who have already made up their minds that they will go their own way? **They are pretending to be sincere.** They are playing a game, going through the motions, fulfilling their religious "duties," attending only to be seen, but the rest of the week they do whatever they want. Is this you? Are you a pretender? In the end, the Lord will say to you, "Depart from Me, for I never knew you" (*Matthew 7:22, 23*).

Feed My Sheep

August 30 — *Ezekiel 34:1-36:38*

Day 242 — 123 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Ezekiel gave us another glimpse of what would take place after God brought His people back to their homeland. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away and you will no longer worship idols. I will give you **a new heart** with new and right desires, and I will put **a new spirit** within you. I will take your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart. I will put my Spirit in you so you will obey My laws and do whatever I command" (36:25-27).

This message was a foreshadowing of what would happen when the Messiah would come and establish the New Covenant. He would bring salvation with Him and give us **a new heart**. When He left, He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell His followers, so that they would have His strength to overcome their sin and govern themselves, keeping to His laws and statutes. We are, of course, living in that time today.

I was struck today by Ezekiel's blistering message to the leaders of God's people. "Destruction is certain for you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. **Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep?** You let your flock starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended to the sick or bound up the broken bones. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost... So my sheep are scattered without a shepherd. They have wandered into the mountains and hills and no one has gone to search for them" (34:1-6).

Daily Reflection

This passage struck a chord with me because I am in numerous leadership positions; yet I get so busy and distracted with my own problems that I oftentimes fail to notice, much less tend to, those people around me. **I am guilty of feeding myself while others starve.**

How are you doing with recognizing and meeting the needs of those around you? Can you relate to my failure? How does our neglect fall in line with the enemy's plans for your life?

List those people whom you have neglected to shepherd, to lead, to pray for, and to care for as you should.

What are some ways that you can do better at shepherding the "sheep"? How can you focus more attention on others when you have your own issues to deal with?

Jesus asked Peter once, "Do you love Me?" Peter, of course, said that he did. Jesus responded, "Then **feed My sheep**" (John 21:15-17). Whether or not you have a leadership position, there are those in your sphere of influence — family, friends, co-workers, church members, neighbors — that need attention. They are weak, sick, broken, and starving, and the Lord has placed you there to share His love with them. Don't miss your opportunities to be a good shepherd. **Feed the sheep!**

Plans and Prophecies

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August 31 — *Ezekiel 32:1-16; 37:1-39:29*

Day 243 — 122 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Ezekiel was given two powerful visuals of acts God would perform for His people; then, he received a prophecy of the end times. First, let's consider the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (*37:1-14*). Ezekiel was "carried away by the Spirit" to a valley filled with skeletons; the Lord told him to speak to the bones. As he spoke, "the bones came together and attached themselves. Then muscles and flesh formed over the bones; finally skin formed to cover the bodies."

Because of their judgment and exile, the people of Israel were saying, "We have become old, dry bones; all hope is gone." But the Lord wanted them to know that He would resurrect their nation and bring them home again. "I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel."

The second visual Ezekiel was given was with sticks (*37:15-28*). God told him to choose two sticks and to write on them the names of Israel and Judah. "Now hold them together in your hand as one stick," said the Lord. "I will gather the people of Israel from among the nations. I will bring them home to their own land... I will unify them into one nation, and one king will rule them all... My servant David will be their prince forever, and I will make with them an everlasting covenant."

Of course, the return of the tribes will occur shortly after this prophecy was given; even their unification would take place soon. But the reference to David ruling over the people again is not a literal return of David himself, but a foreshadowing of one of his descendants, the Messiah, unifying the people in the last days. Jesus is the one who will rule David's people and forge an everlasting covenant with them; and that covenant will be one of peace. God's people will no longer know internal conflict or foreign war.

The final message today, related to Israel, was concerning the end times (*38:1-39:29*). God told Ezekiel about another time when a huge military force would invade the land of His people. "A vast and awesome horde will roll down on them like a storm and cover the land like a cloud... This will happen in the distant future... But, I will knock their weapons from their hands and they will die on the mountains... Thus, I will make My name known among My people. I will not let them be desecrated anymore; and the nations too will know that I am the Lord." No doubt, God is referring to the last days, when the Anti-Christ amasses an impressive force against Israel, only to be defeated by the Lord.

Daily Reflection

Of the three prophecies today, two of them have already been fulfilled. Obviously, the end times have not occurred yet. However, with the fulfillment of the first events, what does that cause you to think about the third one?

Prophecy is another way that the Lord has proven His divinity. While we may grow weary of reading prophecies, as they are a little strange to us, our faith and confidence in God should be strengthened by the fact that so many things that He has predicted have already come true. Indeed, all of time is stretched out before Him; He sees the beginning and the end, the past and the future.

We can also see that, while things seem to happen haphazardly, **God has a plan.** All things play out as He intends. Therefore, we do need not to fear. Though the times may be full of turmoil and uncertainty, our God is in control. **His plans prevail despite our enemy's schemes!**

Watchmen on the Wall

Today In Your Reading...

We covered several different things, including a prophecy of Egypt's judgment and destruction, a personal message to Ezekiel, a record of the captives taken in the three deportations, a psalm written by those in exile, and an account of the descendants of the sons of Israel. Regarding the number of captives taken to Babylon, Jeremiah's records are different from those listed in *2 Kings 24*, perhaps because he counted only males (like in the Exodus).

I found it interesting that Jeremiah recorded the exact numbers at all and that the numbers were so small. Here is the remnant that the Lord would use to rebuild His nation. Though they were few in number, after seventy years, they would multiply; and, upon their return, they would be a mighty host. For example, Ezra records later that over 42,000 Jews came home in the first return from Babylon (*Ezra 2*).

I was also challenged by God's personal message to Ezekiel. "When I bring an army against a country, the people of that land choose a watchman. When the watchman sees the enemy coming, he blows the alarm to warn the people. Then if those who hear the alarm refuse to take action, it is their own fault if they die. They heard the warning but wouldn't listen, so the responsibility is theirs. *But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, then he is responsible for their deaths.* They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman accountable. Now, Son of Man, **I am making you a watchman for the people**" (*33:1-9*).

Obviously, the watchman held a very important position in society. The lives of those living in a city were in his hands. If he did not do his job well, then many people's lives were at stake. Therefore, a watchman could never fall asleep

on the wall. He had to stay alert at all times. He could not get distracted from his duty but rather he had to stay focused on protecting the people in his care; and, at the first sighting of an enemy, he must sound the alarm so that others could have ample warning to flee to safety.

Daily Reflection

In one sense or another, we are all watchmen on the wall. Parents protect their children, pastors or elders protect their congregations, leaders protect their followers, and friends protect their friends. You get the idea. Peter wrote, "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the Devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (*1 Peter 5:8*).

Who are those for which you are a watchman?

What are some of the duties you have as a watchman for these people?

Evaluate your performance as a watchman on the wall. What are you doing well? In what areas do you need to improve?

More Than a Name

September 2 — 1 Chronicles 5:18-8:28

Day 245 — 120 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We were given an account of the descendants of the tribes of Israel, otherwise known as a genealogy or "family tree." This section is part of a list of genealogies found in *1 Chronicles 1-9*. Of course, this type of reading is not our favorite, but genealogies play an important role. Here are a few reasons why genealogies are significant.

First, God's people were divided up by tribes. Therefore, *for one to prove his tribal heritage, he would point to his genealogy*, the record of his family line. Second, a genealogy was important in *keeping track of the royal line*, so that David's descendants would always be on the throne. Third, genealogies give us *a sense of time*. We can count generations and use ages to reckon dates and the order of events.

A fourth reason why genealogies are important is that *they set the Bible apart from books of myth, fairy tale, and legend*. It is a book of history, with reliable information that can be verified in history. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, genealogies are included in the Bible to help us *follow the line of Christ*, the Messiah. How would we be able to verify that He was of the line of David without a family tree? How would we recognize all that God had done to arrange His arrival without seeing the names in His line of ancestors?

Daily Reflection

Can you think of any other reasons why keeping track of genealogies is important?

When we look at a genealogy we only see a long list of names, which rarely means anything to us. What we miss is the fact that **behind each of those names is a story**. Each person in a genealogy had a story of successes and struggles, of triumphs and tragedies. Unfortunately, all of those are forgotten in a genealogy.

One day your name will be added to a genealogy. Many years from now your descendants will look back at the family tree and read only your name and miss your story. All that you have experienced will be forgotten. All that you have learned will be erased; and all that you have accomplished will be no more. You will only be a name on a family tree.

If you could insert a few lines to describe yourself for future descendants, what would you include? How would you summarize your life?

While it may seem depressing, that you will one day be a name in a family tree, be encouraged. **God knows all things**. He forgets nothing but your sins. In His records, He has taken note of your life. Though you may not influence those who live in the future, you can make a difference now. **Are you more than a name** to those around you?