

KINGDOM SPIRIT



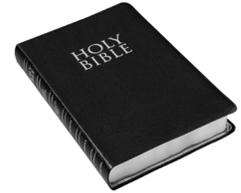
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 806

JEREMIAH—EZEKIEL

It is important to understand that even though God brings judgment on Israel, Judah, and the house of David for their sins, His promises to Abraham and to David are still in effect.

Jer. 37 tells us that in the 9th year of King Zedekiah, the king of Babylon again came against Jerusalem and besieged it. King Zedekiah sent a couple of officers to Jeremiah to ask him to ask God to send the Babylonians home. They were informed that God would turn back their own weapons and fight against them Himself with famine and pestilence and the sword and would deliver them into the hand of king Nebuchadnezzar. Whoever would give themselves up to the Babylonians would live, but if not, they would die by famine and pestilence. Especially was God against King Zedekiah.

The Babylonians temporarily withdrew however, and Jeremiah intended to leave the city and go into Benjamin, but he was seen by one of the captains who thought he was going to the Chaldeans (Babylonians) and had him arrested and put into prison.

But King Zedekiah, wanting to confer with Jeremiah secretly, let him out and granted that he might stay in the court of the prison and commanded a portion of bread be given to him daily as long as bread was available. Jeremiah continued to encourage the people to give themselves up to the Chaldeans. Some of the princes

felt this was treason and told the king they thought Jeremiah should die. The king gave him into their hands. They had him put in a pit of mire in the prison to starve, but a eunuch named Ebedmalech saw them do this and sought and received the king's permission to take him out.

(So that we might better understand why Jeremiah took the position that it was necessary for the people to give themselves up to the Babylonians for their survival, we might should look at the law dealing with contempt of court in Deut. 17:12. **“And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.”** All of Deut. 17 needs to be read to get the full context, but basically if someone would not do what they were sentenced to do by the judge and/or the priest, he was to be executed. In the case here with Judah, God is the judge and the sentence He has specified is that Judah was to go into the Babylonian captivity. Anyone refusing to do so would then be in contempt of court, God's court, therefore their sentence was execution. Jeremiah was aware of this and was trying to get the people, including the king, to give themselves up to the Babylonians that their life might be preserved. So what might seem treasonous was instead an effort to get the people to abide by the law of God.)

The king again asked Jeremiah what he should do, but when Jeremiah told him to give himself up, he said he was afraid to do so. God

promised Zedekiah he would not die by the sword but he would go into captivity into Babylon and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. Zedekiah made a covenant with the people in which they would release all of their Hebrew servants. The people at first complied, but then went back on their word and forced their former servants back into bondage. Jeremiah told them they would die because of this.

According to Jer. 32, while the siege was on, God told Jeremiah to purchase some land from his nephew in Anathoth and make all the required evidence of the purchase and then to seal and store this evidence that it be not destroyed, as He says that the day would come that they would again buy and sell in the land as Jeremiah had done.

In Jer. 33, God continues to tell of His promise to bring both Judah and Israel out of captivity and to heal them, forgive their sins and cleanse them. In those days, He will cause the Branch of Righteousness to grow up unto David and He shall execute judgment and righteousness. He also says that David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel and neither shall the priests, the Levites, want a man before Him to sacrifice continually. Only if His covenant of day and night can be broken can His covenant with David and the Levites be broken. But keep in mind that He has told Jehoiakim and his heir to the throne, Jehoiachin, that they nor their seed can no longer occupy the throne.

Jer. 39 tells us that in the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, famine is extreme in the city and the mighty men and King Zedekiah decide to make a run for it at night. Their flight is of no avail however, for they are no sooner out of the city than they are caught by the Babylonians. King Zedekiah is brought before King Nebuchadnezzar and he has to watch as all of his sons are slain before him and then his eyes are put out and he is put in chains and led to Babylon where he spent the rest of his life in prison.

Josiah, Zedekiah's father, king of Judah, had four sons, three of which we have discussed already and they either can't, or are forbidden by

God to have any of their sons assume the throne. The fourth son, Shallum, was sentenced by God to go into captivity and die there, thus never to return to Jerusalem (Jer. 22:11-12) So in effect, the royal line seems to be cut off in spite of a promise by God that David would never lack a descendent to sit on his throne. Keep this promise in mind as we proceed, as the clues of what God plans are brief and few in number. We have to pay very close attention to what happens here and leave it to later prophets to give us clues of what is in the mind of God.

Nebuchadnezzar gave charge to Nebuzardan, his captain of the guard, that Jeremiah was not to be harmed, but was to be allowed to do whatever he wanted. All of the survivors, with the exception of the very poor, were carried away captive. For those few that were left, Nebuchadnezzar appointed a man named Gedaliah to be governor over them and the land of Judah. Those left included the very poor, captains of Judah's armies that were in the field away from Jerusalem at the time of the captivity, and others returning to Jerusalem after the captivity. Jeremiah and Baruch, and according to Jer. 41:10 and 43:6, King Zedekiah's daughters were a part of this group. We're not told how many daughters there were, but there had to be at least two.

The king of Ammon sent Ishmael, a captain in Judah's army, to assassinate Gedaliah, which he did, with the intent of taking this remnant back to Ammon. However, other captains foiled his attempt to take these captives to Ammon. The people of this remnant then asked Jeremiah what they should do, promising to do whatever God told him. But when Jeremiah told them to stay in Judah, they told him he was lying as they feared Nebuchadnezzar. So instead of staying in Judah, those in charge of the group took the whole group, including Jeremiah, Baruch and the king's daughters, into Egypt. As a result, God promised to destroy them all with the exception of a very small remnant, that they would know that this was God's word. This remnant would escape back to Judah.

If we look back at the commission God

had given Jeremiah (Jer. 1:10), we can see that he isn't yet done with all God told him he was to do. He has yet to do anything so far as building and planting. Also, in chapt. 45, God promised Baruch He would preserve his life, so it is more than likely that these two will be in that small remnant that was to escape back to Judah. Later, other prophets will lead us to believe the king's daughters also are to be in this small group. We leave Jeremiah at this point in Bible history. While we won't deal with Jeremiah again directly, we'll get some clues as to what he did to further fulfill his commission from God.

The balance of the book of Jeremiah deals with Judah's neighbors and enemies and God's judgment on them. Egypt and the Philistines are to be spoiled by the Babylonians. Moab, Ammon, Kedar and Elam were to all go into captivity and all but Kedar are promised by God that He will one day bring them out of captivity.

Edom was to receive quite severe punishment. Jer. 49:10, 15 and 21 all indicate this severity. There is not a promise to return them from captivity. Syria (Damascus) is to fall and be consumed.

Then the prophet deals at length with Babylon. The end of chapt. 51 indicates that Jeremiah made this prophecy in the fourth year of King Zedekiah and sent it to Babylon with a man named Seraiah. Babylon was to be utterly destroyed. The city itself was to be so completely destroyed that there was never to be another inhabitant. In discussing this destruction, several important messages to and about Israel and Judah are given. They were to come and seek their God in the day of Babylon's destruction (Jer. 50:4-6) and are commanded to get out of Babylon in verse 8. Great was to be the fall of Babylon (Jer. 50:46). Nations from the north (later we will be told that this referred to the Medes and Persians) were to come and destroy Babylon, but God refers to Israel as His battle axe (Jer. 51:20). God indicates that He will use Israel to render unto Babylon all their evil that they have done in Zion (Jer. 51:24). God declares again He is against Babylon (Jer. 51:25) and again tells Israel to get

out (Jer. 51:45).

Chapt. 52 reviews what happened to Zedekiah and to Jehoiachin. Thus ends the book of Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet as is evidenced by his book of Lamentations. Since Lamentations does not cover new aspects of our story, we will not cover it at this point.

The next books of Ezekiel and Daniel are each quite different in perspective than the prophets that we have been covering. Let's look at the prophet Ezekiel first. If we look back at the history of Israel, we find that God often provided an Israelite to somewhat govern His people when He sends them into captivity or into another nation. Joseph is an example of this. We'll see a little later in our study that Daniel is another example. While we do not have any record of anyone provided by God in this sense, when He sent Israel into the Assyrian captivity, we do find that at the time that Judah was to go into the Babylonian captivity, a kind of on the spot news reporter, if you will, in Ezekiel, except he received his information through visions and God's other methods of transmitting news to him. He was located among the captives by the river Chebar. Young's Analytical Concordance tells us the Chebar River could have been identical with the Habor River or the River of Gozan, the area to which the majority of the Israelites had been moved to by the Assyrians, or it could have been a great canal near the city of Babylon. Since Ezekiel was sent to the children of Israel by God (Eze. 2:3), I believe it is more likely that it is the former, he was already among them.

At any rate, he saw visions of God, the first of which, he tells us, was one he saw on the fifth day of the fourth month of the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. Remember that Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, took the throne and reigned a little over eleven years, following Jehoiachin's captivity, before the Babylonian captivity of all of Judah. Ezekiel uses Jehoiachin's captivity as his time reference throughout his writings.

This first vision he saw is described in Eze. 1:4-28 with Ezekiel telling us in verse 28, **"This was the appearance of the likeness of the**

glory of the LORD.” He was to see this same vision of the glory of God several more times but it is important that we realize it symbolized the presence of God to Ezekiel and God spoke to him in this presence. God gave Ezekiel the roll of a book and instructed him to eat it. It was written within and without with lamentation and woe. He was to go to the children of Israel, though they be a very rebellious house, and speak unto them what God told him whether they accepted it or not.

God took him, in the spirit, to the city of the captivity, though Ezekiel was at first angered and embittered by it. He was told that he was set a watchman over Israel and told that if he failed to warn the wicked, the wicked would die in their own iniquity, but God would require his blood at the hand of Ezekiel, the watchman. If he was warned and he did not repent, Ezekiel would not be held responsible. The same applied to a righteous man. If the man continued in his righteousness, he would live, but if, by not being warned, he turned to wickedness he would die in his iniquity, but his blood would be required of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel went through a lot of personal discomfort as he performed signs God required of him to demonstrate the siege and fall of Jerusalem. Once, he was to demonstrate with the cutting of his hair and beard and then dividing the hair into three parts; burning one part, cutting one part up with the knife and scattering a part into the wind, to demonstrate what God was going to cause to happen to the people of Judah. One-third of the people would be killed by pestilence (the fire), one-third would be killed by the sword (the cutting with the knife) and one-third would be scattered among the nations (the scattering into the wind). A small remnant was to escape, but most were to be destroyed because of their abomination in worshipping their idols.

Ezekiel was then taken in the spirit to Jerusalem and shown all the abominations of the house of Judah. The vision of the glory of the LORD was present most every time Ezekiel was shown another vision. This time Ezekiel saw six men armed for battle except one clothed in linen

and carrying an ink horn by his side. The one with the ink horn was instructed by God to put a mark on the forehead of those who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are being done and then the others were instructed to slay the rest of the people and to have no pity. As they did so, Ezekiel fell on his face before the glory of the LORD for fear God would destroy all of His people, but was told by God that the sin was too great for Him to back off.

As Ezekiel saw the wickedness and was told to prophesy against it, he became fearful that God would destroy the whole remnant of Israel (Judah). God answers that the house of Israel were the ones to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem had said, **“Get you far from the LORD: unto us is this land given in possession.”** (Eze. 11:15) God promises that even though He had cast Israel far off among the heathen (nations), **“Yet will I be as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.”** (Eze. 11:16) He continues to promise a return from the captivity and to cleanse the land and give them a new heart that they may walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances and do them. Ezekiel was then returned to those of the captivity and told them what he saw. Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy the judgment of God against Jerusalem. It is not different from what we heard from Isaiah, Jeremiah and the others we have studied, but keep in mind Ezekiel is telling this to another group of people who have not heard from these other prophets, at least directly.

We'll continue with Ezekiel next issue starting with chapter 17. **JRL**

ROADBLOCKS

If one wants to seriously study the Bible, he or she is sure to run into some serious roadblocks that will interfere with that study. Usually these roadblocks come in the form of doctrines that are accepted by the majority of the people, including pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc., but that actually do not have Biblical support. These

doctrines are often long held doctrines, thus very difficult roadblocks to remove, go over, or around. To attempt to do so is very often considered heresy by the current church world. Yet there are Biblical doctrines, very important doctrines, that to be understood, these roadblocks must be overcome.

One such roadblock that I would like to discuss this issue is the very commonly held "heaven-hell" doctrine. I pray that you will not turn me off at this point but will follow through the complete article before making your decision. At the very least, please use your Bible to prove me right or wrong.

The "heaven-hell" doctrine, as I like to call it, takes on different forms, depending on the particular denomination that is teaching it. It is difficult to refute such a doctrine in a short article such as this as there are at least 15 to 20 Scriptures that have been used to support this doctrine, each of which, in a comprehensive study, need to be answered. I assure you that they can be, but not in this short of an article. But let's begin at the beginning.

In Genesis 3 we have the story of the be-guiling of Eve by the serpent. God told Adam that if he were to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would die. The serpent contradicted this to Eve telling her "**Ye shall not surely die.**" (vs. 4) We know that Eve and Adam did not die as soon as they ate of the fruit as if it were poison, but they did surely die. Not only did they die but we all also die as a result of their sin. Rom. 5:12 tells us, "**Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men,...**" i.e. death was imputed to all of us as a result of Adam's sin. Verse 12 goes on to say, "**for that**" which is improperly translated and should read "**in which or in whom - all have sinned.**" i.e. we all sin because we die. Because of the mis-translation, it is usually read that we die because we sin. The point we need to look at now is that we die the death that we are all familiar with because Adam sinned and died and his death (not sin) was imputed to all of us.

There is no escaping this death. No man ever has, not even Enoch or Elijah, if one is to really look at the Scripture.

So what is this death? Virtually all of the Biblical authors who discuss death refer to it as sleep. Death was referred to as sleep up through the apostolic times and again briefly during the Protestant Reformation but has lost that meaning to most today. But a review of the word sleep, or slept, in your concordance will confirm the inspired Biblical authors use of the term.

The question then comes up, Is there consciousness among the dead? The Bible is quite clear as to the answer to this question. But because Christianity has been corrupted by Babylonian religion and Greek mythology and philosophy, the common belief today is around some form of man being made of two parts, a body that dies and a "spirit" that doesn't die. This is simply not Biblical. David says in Psa. 115:17, "**The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.**" Again David says in Psa. 6:5, "**For in death there is no remembrance of thee (God): in the grave who shall give thee thanks?**" Job asks and answers a question in Job 14:14, "**If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.**" The Septuagint sheds some light on this passage by rendering it, "**For if a man should die, shall he live again? Having accomplished the days of his life? I will wait till I exist again.**" (italics added for emphasis) Job understood that in death, he ceased to exist except in the mind of God but at the resurrection he would again exist.

Paul in the New Testament has the same concept of death that we saw in the Old Testament. Read I Corinthians 15, particularly verses 19-23. There are many other references in the same vein that room doesn't allow us to print out.

The point is that if a person ceases to exist, except in the mind of God, when he or she dies, then they nor any part of them goes to heaven or hell (as pictured by many people today). Admittedly there could be considerable argument over this statement, but I am convinced

that a close study of one's Bible, with an open mind, will show this to be true.

Two Scriptures in particular are usually used to refute this premise. The first is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Explanation of this parable is a study in itself and too lengthy to cover in this article. But first, it is a parable. How do we know this? Because Jesus said he would speak to the multitudes only in parables. See Matt. 13:10-15, 34-35, Mark 4:33-34, and Luke 8:10. Second, the considerable detail of the parable tells us it has a special meaning, that it is not a mere story of Lazarus going to heaven as is often thought.

The other Scripture is Rev. 20:14-15. Again a study into what the lake of fire actually is, like the above mentioned parable, is a detailed study. The book of Revelation is a book of symbolism. If one studies the word "hell" as used in the New and Old Testaments, there is nothing that describes "hell" as anything resembling a "lake of fire." I submit that the "lake of fire" then must be symbolic of something else. It is our job to find out what that is.

I am aware of a number of other Scriptures that are used to prove that there are people in both heaven and hell and that we all will go to one or the other when we die, or when we are resurrected. But I also believe that if each one is studied in context with an open mind, one would have difficulty convincing themselves that these Scriptures prove what is usually taught that they do.

The reason I am concerned is that roadblocks such as this one prevent people from accessing more important doctrines that help them understand the plan and purpose of God and make them a better servant of His. Let me present just a little of these doctrines, or teachings, that I feel are missed by the majority of people because of these roadblocks. Paul tells us in Rom. 6:5-6, **"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth**

we should not serve sin." There are at least a couple of things we learn here. First off, when we are resurrected, our literal body will be like His. He had the ability to access both heaven and earth; He had the ability to translate Himself from one place to another instantly; and to move through closed doors, yet be able to eat solid food. The importance of this becomes apparent when we understand better the job God has for those who attain to this level of resurrection. That there are different levels of resurrection is verified in Heb. 11:35.

Second, this passage gives us a glimpse of the difference between the Adamic nature we are born with and the Christ nature that comes with the first resurrection. (Rev. 20:4-6) This is not just a physical change but a complete change of our natures. We need to understand this, but cannot if we cannot go beyond what happens to us when we die.

Revelation 2 and 3 speak of "him that overcometh" or overcomers. Paul calls this the "prize of the high calling of God" in Philippians 3:14. This is a subject that I don't ever recall hearing from a denominational pulpit. When I have asked other Christians about it, generally it is assumed that this is salvation, or justification itself. I believe that it is close to the most important subject a Christian can study. The subject of sanctification ties into this but again, because of this roadblock, the assumption is usually that justification and sanctification are the same because there is no real need for a Christian to become a better Christian as all receive the same reward. I Cor. 3:8, 14-15, II John 8, Matt. 16:27, and most especially Rev. 20:6 refute this assumption.

Rev. 21:2 speaks of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to the earth, not the earth or the people of the earth going up to it. If we study to see what this new Jerusalem represents, I think we will be able to see that it is something for the earth and the people on the earth. Though we often read of "the Kingdom of Heaven," the inference is that it will be located on the earth. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus ask that

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth , as it is in heaven.”

I realize this has been very brief and that the subject deserves considerable more study, something I hope we are able to do as we move forward.

It is not my intent to pick an argument with anyone on this subject and I realize that the vast majority will disagree with me. My intent is to at least cause some to re-evaluate their thinking so that we can deal with some subjects in this column that are deeper than is usually dealt with. My problem is that this and other “roadblocks” hinder or obstruct this teaching. It is important enough, I believe, to risk offending someone with this article. I pray I will not offend, but it is important that these deeper teachings, or doctrines be taught, thus we must attempt to remove these

GREECE

In Acts 16:9, the apostle Paul is on his way to Bithynia from Mysia but he tells us the Holy Spirit suffered them not to go. He then sees a vision in which a man of Macedonia asked him to come to Macedonia which Paul and his company immediately did. The Macedonia that he went to is today a part of Greece. This was Paul’s second missionary journey and he not only went to Macedonia but also went to Athens and Corinth in Greece or Achaia as well, and then went to the same area in his third journey.

At the time Paul visited this area, it was all under Roman rule. However, it had all been under Greek rule prior to the Romans conquering the area in 146 B.C. and was much more affected by Greek culture than the Roman culture. So what Paul found when he was there was a people probably better educated than most and steeped in Greek philosophy and mythology. The Greeks were the first to establish a successful democracy. Part of their success could probably be attributed to their education. It was home based at the beginning of the students schooling, but then, especially with the young men, more advanced train-

ing was provided in different ways. Basically, the whole population was literate.

The origin of the main body of Greeks appears to be not clearly known. There were various invasions from time to time that probably contributed to the make up of the Macedonians and Greeks of Paul’s time including an invasion by the Celts.

Alexander the Great was from Macedonia and launched his attempt at world domination from there. The city of Thessalonica is named after his sister. Following his death, the rule of the area varied among his successors as they often fought each other for control of various areas or countries.

The Greece we know today is a relatively new nation, but basically with the same people who have lived there for many generations. It achieved independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829, and at first was a monarchy, then a military dictatorship and finally a parliamentary republic was established in 1974. It is slightly smaller than the state of Alabama and supports over 10 million people. The terrain is mostly mountains with ranges extending into the sea as peninsulas or chains of islands. The climate is temperate with mild wet winters and hot dry summers.

Crops grown include wheat, corn, barley, sugar beets, olives, tomatoes, wine, tobacco, potatoes, beef and dairy products. Industries include tourism, food and tobacco processing, textiles, chemicals, metal products, mining and petroleum.

Cities we find mentioned in the New Testament include Philippi, Neapolis, Apollonia, Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth, though in Paul’s time these were in several different countries including Achaia, Macedonia and Thrace. Churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth were all recipients of epistles from the apostle Paul which we now have in our New Testament.

Acts 17 gives us some idea of the religion of the people. Paul is in Athens, currently the capital of Greece, and we’re told in verse 16 that the city was given wholly to idolatry. They even

had an altar to an unknown god in case that they missed one. Paul encountered a couple of sects of philosophers who took him to Mars Hill, or Areopagus, where men met to discuss their philosophies and that of others because, they said, Paul was telling something new and they wanted to hear what it was. We're told that the two sects were Epicureans and Stoicks. The Epicurean's goal was to discover a practical guide to happiness. Their founder was Epicurus whose search was for pleasure, not absolute truth and experience what his test, not reason. The Stoicks were pantheists which means they believed that the universe and man were manifestations of a greater reality that they considered to be God, not the creator. Paul told them that he perceived that they were too superstitious, or religious in all things. They were so concerned about being sure that they worshipped the right gods that they even had an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Paul then proceeded to tell them who the real God was that was unknown to them and that He was the creator and did not need anything, including their help, but rather it is He who gives to all life, and breath, and all things. He went on to tell them that the day will come when God will judge the world through Jesus Christ, whom He raised from the



dead. This was too much to swallow by most as some mocked and others said they would have to hear more on the matter, however a few did believe. Unfortunately, because Greek culture had such a major effect on the world at that time, many of the doctrines of Greek philosophy have been adopted by Christianity and have become a part of so-called Christian teaching. So it becomes important that we not only know what the Bible teaches, but we need to at least have some knowledge of Greek philosophy to be able to separate the two. The early Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle took a lot of their philosophies from the Babylonians and Persians and developed their own doctrines, or philosophies, from them. **JRL**