

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
October 10, 2016

Ezekiel 21:1–22:31. Babylon, the Sword of the Lord.

Revelation 10:1–11. The testimony of the Mighty Angel.

Job 35:1–8. The immanence of God.

COMMENTS.

Ezekiel 21:1–22:31. **Chapter 21** describes the judgment of God that would sweep through Judah like a raging forest fire. By bringing the Babylonians toward the land, the Lord would draw His sharp and polished sword. Flashing like lightning, this sword would bring destruction throughout the land. On his way to Palestine Nebuchadnezzar would reach a fork in the road, with one branch leading to Jerusalem and the other to Rabbah, a prominent Ammonite city. To determine his course of action, he would use various methods of divination, including drawing marked arrows from a quiver, consulting his idols, and examining livers. The Lord would cause all indicators to point toward Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar would besiege and conquer the city and take its people into exile. Meanwhile the Ammonites, though arrogant and hostile, were not to think that they would be spared. The Lord’s sword of judgment would fall upon them as well. **Chapter 22** contains a description of the sins of Jerusalem, ranging from the social to the spiritual: bloodshed (**3, 9**), idolatry (**3, 4**), misuse of power (**6**), ill-treatment of various social groups (**7**), desecration of Sabbaths (**8**), paganism (**9**), sexual misconduct and incest (**10–11**), bribery and extortion (**12**), and simply ignoring God (**12**). The punishment due would involve the dispersal of the people throughout the lands. Ezekiel had a duty before God to confront Jerusalem with all her detestable crimes and proclaim to her: ‘You are a city which has made itself guilty through bloodshed and unclean through idolatry. You have hastened your end by doing so. You will be an object of derision among the nations. Many strands of corruption are within you, but I will put an end to it (**6–13**). You will be dispersed among the nations. Then you will come to know that I am the Lord’ (**14–16**).’

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Note the last sentence above. Note how this lack of knowledge is tied to sin and evil. Of course sin and evil are always a result of seeing evil as good, a good greater than God. There is no solution to their disordered thoughts and desires apart from walking in God *by proper knowledge and by proper love*. One cannot know God experientially while living in moral or spiritual defilement, and the only reason people live in defilement rather than in God is because they view the defilement as a greater good than God in some way. Note the extent of the defilement in **22:5**: “Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous [defiled] and full of tumult.” Is this not the case with our country during this political season? Consider the political candidates; they only exist because the people selected them as their good. When we do cast our ballot, it needs to be based on our second-person relationship with God rather than be manipulated by fear.

Revelation 10:1–11. Now John sees a mighty angel holding a little scroll open in his hand. When he speaks, his voice is like the roar of a lion and the rolling of sevenfold thunder. John is forbidden to write down what he says. The seventh trumpet is about to sound. It will herald the end of all things. All will be fulfilled, just as the prophets foretold. John is given the little scroll and told to eat it. The gospel message which is to be proclaimed in these last days is sweet to taste, for it is good news of salvation. It is bitter to preach, because it declares judgment on an unbelieving world. John consuming of the scroll is tantamount to the assimilation of its message. Whatever the contents of the scroll may be, John must make them a part of himself. Only as the sentiments of the scroll become a part of his own life will it accomplish what God desires. The message for the communicator is to assimilate the message. In this regard, there is a practical lesson for the pastors that can be seen even in Aristotle's canons of rhetoric; the philosopher called for ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos reflected the credibility of the witness. John's venerable age, consistency of conviction, and long-term service to the Lord were sufficient ethos. Logos represented the content itself; and since the content is part of divine revelation, sufficient logos is insured. Pathos referred, however, to the internalizing of the message of the logos, accentuated by the ethos of the messenger, and thus gives the persuasive power and the empathy needed in effective communication. The preacher, like the prophet, can only be an effective spokesman for God when he thoroughly internalizes the message. The pathos of that message not only includes understanding its message, it also embraces the application of the message first to the preacher's own life. Apart from internalizing it, the teacher will not be able to pull wisdom from the knowledge for the enlightenment of real as such.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. As we walk with the Lord, and assimilate His message, the effect, especially with regard to the gospel, is both pleasurable and distasteful. For those who are willing to receive God's redemption in Christ, the message of the gospel is sweeter than honey. 'It is the aroma of life unto life. But to those who have rejected the gospel and who have continued to be determined in their rebellion against God, it is the aroma of death unto death' (2 Cor 2:15). We are all ambassadors of Christ, we represent Christ to a dying world and as we witness we will enjoy the sweetness of the message of God's grace as well as experience the distaste of its bitterness when we see people, especially our loved ones, reject God's good grace. While we, like John, understand the necessity of judgment for all who reject God, we, like John, and like God, are not willing that any should perish. So the message of the gospel is sweet to our taste but bitter to our stomach. As we walk with the Lord by *proper knowledge and proper love* we will experience God's own attitude regarding both those who accept Him and reject Him as we partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This also applies to fellow believers and Christ's attitude reflected in His messages to the church, from the sweetness of the Philadelphian church to the sickening feeling Christ had in His stomach about the church of Laodocia.

Job 35:1–8. In his third speech, Elihu responds to two questions which he has heard Job ask. The first one has to do with the value of virtue (2–8). Elihu returns to Job’s claim that he is innocent but that such innocence is profitless (35:2–8). His reply is not simply directed to Job, but also to his friends. Elihu argues that human behavior does not affect God. Whether man is sinful (6) or righteous (7), God is neither harmed nor benefited. Man’s good or evil affects only himself and other men. Elihu has both insulated and isolated God. By emphasizing God’s transcendence, he has protected God from the actions of men. God is neither helped nor hurt by man. Elihu has, in effect, sacrificed God’s immanence on the altar of transcendence. In the closing chapters of Job, God would demonstrate that He is very immanent. God cares for the birds and beasts and they even seek Him (metaphysically all animals seek existence, even if not cognitively, and Existence is Esse/God (Ex. 3:14)) even when men made in the image of God do not cry out to God. In sum, in this reply to Job’s statements, Elihu posited that God cares little about human behavior. He drew a picture of a dispassionate, distant deity who does not respond to the wicked even when they are in trouble and cry out to him. Since he put Job in that category, it was quite reasonable that Job received no satisfaction from God.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Living in the presence of God is living in His immanence (nearness). Every Christian should have a daily life of consciously living in the wonder and loving presence of God. This can only be effectively accomplished *by proper knowledge and by proper love!* The believer who believes in God but only lives in God’s transcendence (greatness, otherness) does not enjoy a personal relationship with God—such was the case with Elihu. If we have to ask ourselves if we are living in His presence, then we are not. Those who do walk with God *by proper knowledge and by proper love* bask in His love as they communicate to God (God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ) throughout the day as they enjoy His loving grace. Those who have no idea of what I am talking about may have a 1st person (“I”) relationship with Christ or a 3rd person relationship with Christ (“He”), but it is not really personal—it is not immanent, it cannot really be personal. Again, apart from 2nd person relationship with Christ, *no relationship, by definition, can be personal.* Like Elihu, God is viewed as dispassionate and far away, more of a concept than a Person, more of a Tool (problem solver) than a Person, more of a doctrine than a Person.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don