

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
October 5, 2016

Ezekiel 12:1–13:23. The false prophets and their false optimism.

Revelation 3:14–4:11. From the Laodecian church to worship in Heaven.

Job 33:19–28. Suffering – pray for removal and/or for its sanctifying power.

COMMENTS.

Ezekiel 12:1–13:23. In the previous chapters, Ezekiel’s task had been to show the necessity of Jerusalem’s judgment because of her disobedience. Chapter 12 records signs given to Jerusalem regarding her impending captivity. The **first sign** is of baggage and hole in the wall (**12:1-16**). The baggage represents Ezekiel packing his bags and going to another place. The hole in the wall represents Zedekiah’s vain escape attempt. He would try to escape God’s impending judgment, but would be caught in God’s “snare.” The **second sign** (**12:17-20**) was of trembling while eating and drinking, which depicted the terror Israel would experience as the enemy plundered her land. “Fear” of the enemy would grip God’s people as they watched the decimation of their land. Following these two signs, Ezekiel delivered a series of messages to destroy the people’s faith in false optimism. The **first message** (**12:21-25**) was on the certainty of judgment. It was an attack on two popular proverbs of the people: “*proverb . . . The days go by and every vision comes to nothing.*” The point of this proverb was the belief that Ezekiel’s (and other prophets’) predictions of doom would not take place. It had the effect of labeling those prophets doomsayers; thus allowing the people to ignore their messages. False prophets had been contradicting the claims of God’s true messengers in both Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 28:1–4) and Babylon (cf. Jer. 29:1, 8–9). Their optimistic predictions would cease as God hastened to fulfill His word. He would remove false visions and flattering divinations. The **second message on the certainty of judgment** (**12:26-28**) addressed the proverb of the people that expressed false optimism, “*he prophesies about the distant future,*” expressing their doubt about the imminency of God’s judgment. Ezekiel said the judgment was not distant; it was standing at Israel’s very doorstep. God said, “None of My words will be delayed any longer” (cf. Ezek. 12:25). The second proverb, like the first, was giving false hope to a nation that needed a clear understanding of its dire condition. The **third message on the certainty of judgment** (**13:1-23**) was directed at Israel’s false prophets and prophetesses who were leading the nation astray. In a large measure they were responsible for the people’s misplaced hope much like today’s prosperity preachers.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Throughout the Word of God, false prophets are in sheep’s clothing and characteristically offer messages of hope. They are filled with encouraging words of optimism, which is what makes them so seductive. However, they do not accurately teach the Word of God, let alone emphasize life with God *by proper knowledge and by proper love*. Ezekiel compared them to jackals that lived as scavengers in the deserted ruins of the land. They cared only for themselves, they did nothing to improve the situation, and they lived off the fears of the people. In times of crisis, there are always religious opportunists who prey on weak and ignorant people who are seeking cheap assurance and comfort. It’s a serious thing to manufacture messages to make God’s people feel better instead of developing and teaching the Whole Truth, Total

Truth. Popularity or optimism for its own sake is never a test of truth. History shows that those who spoke the truth were usually rejected by the majority, persecuted, and even killed. It's easy for people to say, "Lord, Lord," but it's not easy to seek the Truth for its own sake and the Lord for His own sake *by proper knowledge and by proper love*.

Revelation 3:14–4:11. When Christ looks at the church in Laodicea (3:14-22), He sees a sorry contrast to the thriving financial center in which she lives. The Laodecian church typifies the modern American church. The Christians, while financially wealthy, in spiritual terms they are poor, naked and blind. Christ likens them to the local water supply, which is tepid and sluggish—neither refreshingly cold, nor piping hot. Christ speaks to each of the local churches in a way which is especially meaningful to them and their situation. Christians at Laodicea will recognize the reference to lukewarm water. Their water comes by aqueduct from springs a few miles away. By the time it arrives it has been in the sun for hours, and is warm and tasting of minerals. In contrast, the water at nearby Hierapolis is hot, with healing powers, while the water at Colosse is cool and fresh. Jesus says of the lukewarm church at Laodicea, 'I wish you were hot or cold—but in fact you make me sick!' But Christ has not given up on His church. He stands at the door, knocking and calling. They have only to open the door and welcome Him in, and He will again share their life (in time), and they will share in His reign in the next life. In 4:1-11, we are given access to a vision in Heaven. Chapter 4 asserts the sovereign authority of the Creator God. Surrounded by the adoring and powerful four creatures and twenty-four elders, the Lord God the Almighty is holy, sovereign, and worthy of all worship. For He has created all things, and all things exist because of His gracious, sovereign will (4:11).

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. The church at Laodicea needed to repent of its pride and return to loving the Lord first and foremost *by proper knowledge and by proper love*. Although verses addressed to Laodecian believers are often used to lead the lost to Christ, these verses are addressed to believers. The Lord was outside the Laodicean church! He knocks through circumstances and He calls through His Word. For what is He appealing? Fellowship and communion, the people's desire to abide in Him *by knowledge and by love*. However, the Laodiceans were independent and were living for the world: valuing their wealth, jobs, looks, human approbation, and human success more than their Lord. Unless they repent, they will end up as failures at life as such. All men, believers and unbelievers, irresistibly are drawn to and live for what they view as their greatest good. We all love what we view as our greatest good. The only question is the content of that good. The good that Christ offers or the "good" that Demas went after?

Job 33:19–28. Elihu continues to respond to Job’s allegation that God is silent. He says that God speaks in dreams and visions (15-18), suffering (29-22), and by a mediating angel (23-33). Elihu’s repetition of “pit” is to illustrate how God saves a person from death by breaking their pride and bringing them back to a place of obedience.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Note the agony and suffering in 33:19-22. In *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God sometimes uses pain to warn us, humble us, and bring us to the place of submission (Heb. 12:1–11). However, it is a mistake to say that all suffering comes from God, because we cause some suffering ourselves. Improper eating may upset the body and cause abused organs to protest with pain. And we must not say that all suffering is a punishment for sin. Elihu argues that sometimes God permits suffering in order to keep people from sinning and going to the pit. God gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from getting proud, and Paul learned to thank God for it (2 Cor. 12:7–10). Elihu hoped that Job would submit to God, accept his painful situation, and get from it the blessings God had for him. Nobody wants to be sick; everybody prays for healing. However, life in God by *proper knowledge and by proper love* enables the believer to pray that the pain would lead to greater insight into God and a greater spiritual life. It is one thing to pray for pain’s removal, it is another to pray for its sanctifying power. That’s what Paul learned to do with his thorn in the flesh. What might have been a weapon to tear him down became, by the grace of God, a tool to build him up! Had he lost that messenger of pain, Paul might have become proud of his spiritual achievements; and that pride might have led him into sin, evil, and apostasy.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don