

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
October 9, 2016

Ezekiel 19:1–20:49. Israel’s past and present rebellion.

Revelation 9:1–21. Fifth and sixth trumpet.

Job 34:31–37. Elihu thinks Job needs even more testing!

COMMENTS.

Ezekiel 19:1–20:49. In **Ezekiel 19** God tells Ezekiel to raise a lament for the princes of Israel (**19:1**). They have been like young lions—one getting caught in Egypt and another captured and taken to Babylon (**19:2–9**). These images describe the fates of kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. Ezekiel, then, pictures a strong and healthy vine. This vine has been pulled up and transplanted to a desert situation. Its strength to rule is gone (**19:10–14**). This is a reference to King Zedekiah, whose rebellion provoked the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem. In **Ezekiel 20** we have Israel’s past and present rebellion. When some of the elders in exile came to inquire of the Lord, God refused to answer them. Instead He told Ezekiel to review the nation’s rebellious history. From the very beginning, when the Lord confronted His people in Egypt, they resisted His will by clinging to their idols. After He had delivered them from bondage and given them the law, they rebelled in the wilderness. Though the Lord prohibited that generation from entering the promised land, He preserved their children and warned them not to follow in their fathers’ footsteps. However, the children, while still in the wilderness, sinned against the Lord. When He finally established them in the land, they worshiped Canaanite gods at pagan sanctuaries. Ezekiel’s idolatrous contemporaries were no different. Consequently, the Lord would purify them through judgment and exile. Once He had removed the rebellious worshipers of idols, He would restore the nation to the land. The people, then, would repudiate their former behavior and worship the Lord in purity. This will occur in the Millennium.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. As noted above in **chapter 19**, the people of God are compared to a lion and a vine. Had the nation of Israel obeyed the Lord, it would have become and remained a mighty lion and a fruitful vine that would have brought glory to the name of the Lord. Israel would have been a “light unto the Gentiles” and many would have trusted in the true and living God. However, because they did not walk in the Lord *by means of proper knowledge and proper love*, God chastened them and scattered them. Consequently, God’s chosen people had no temple, priesthood, sacrifice, or king (Hosea 3:4–5). Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah, came as the lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5) and the true vine (John 15:1), “a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32), and the rightful heir to the throne of David (Luke 1:68–69), but His own people rejected Him. Some of the same patterns we see in these Jews we also see in contemporary “American Christianity.” It seems that that the one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history. History teaches us the mistakes we are going to make. The Jewish historians, prophets, and psalmists were honest enough to declare the sins of the nation and write them down for future generations to read! Why? So that future generations wouldn’t make the same mistakes that they made. But, alas, God’s people haven’t begun to learn the lessons, let alone obey them. The core reason is lack of love. No one can serve the Lord with a pure and

alacritous heart except in a second-person relational love with God *by proper knowledge and by proper love*. And history shows us that all attempts without the combination of knowledge-and-love of God leads to apathy or legalism. There simply is no other way to heal our fractured disordered thinking and disordered desires than for them to be integrated around the goodness of God as such.

Revelation 9:1–21. In this reading, we have the fifth trumpet (9:1-11) and sixth trumpet (9:12-21). At the blowing of the **fifth trumpet**, a star falls, and as it nears the earth it gradually takes the shape of a person who has a key that unlocks the shaft of the abyss, from which Satan and his forces are released upon the earth. The satanic forces are likened to a plague of locusts (9:3). This judgment will fall upon those who rejected God and not upon the natural order (9:4). The seal of God, which is upon God's servants, protects them from the torturous sting of the satanic attack. The description of the locusts (9:7–10) is interesting. They are centaurlike creatures with lionlike features, while the iron breastplate makes them more insectlike. A peculiarity is the scorpion's tail they possess. The crowns they wear symbolize invincibility and their human features make them all the more grotesque by lifting them out of the realm of the purely animal and enduing them with fallen human intelligence. They have a leader whose name, in both Hebrew and Greek, is the Destroyer (9:11). Destruction is their ultimate goal, of course, but in this visitation they are not allowed to kill, only torment. Indeed, many suffering but unrepentant humans would like to escape the consequences of their actions in death, but are not allowed to do so (9:6). They must reap what they have sown because they will not accept God's grace. With the blowing of the **sixth trumpet**, a voice is heard coming from the upper part of the golden altar. The voice commands the angels who held back the Euphrates to release it and as it rushes toward the west it becomes a vast army of two hundred million mounted soldiers (9:14–15). It is interesting to note the role played by the angels in all of this and how God accomplishes His will through them. It is also important to note that nothing happens without God's appointment; the angels act at God's command at the precise moment and the judgment is unleashed. These mounted soldiers are agents of destruction and are commanded to kill, not just torment, as was the case with the locusts. The horses are colorfully described as fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow, belching out fire, smoke, and noxious fumes (9:17). Like the locusts, they had serpents' tails, which were used with devastating effect (9:19). This sixth trumpet, or second woe, ends with an important theological observation on John's part (9:20–21). He notes that those who were not killed in the first six plagues learned nothing from their experience. Just as in the case of Pharaoh, who continued to harden his heart as God sent the plagues upon Egypt, so here, mankind refuses to acknowledge God as God. Their evil ways include the worship of demons, idolatry, murder, occult practices, sexual immorality, and theft. Jesus' commands to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37–40) are violated here by the refusal to acknowledge God in worship and obedience, and by violating our fellow human beings by murder, theft, and sexual abuse. All of this calls forth the mighty judgment of God.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Consider the extent of evil and misery on this earth that would be instantly eliminated if man would just respond to God's call to live in God *by proper knowledge and proper love*, a love of God that always extends to others as one participates in God's own knowledge and love. Consider how different our political candidates would be if they lived in God *by proper knowledge and by proper love*. It certainly would be a different world altogether.

Job 34:31–37. In this third speech, Elihu responds to two questions which he has heard Job ask. The first one has to do with the value of virtue (34:2–8), the second one with the unanswered cry of the afflicted (34:9–16). While Elihu’s previous comments are addressed to men of understanding (34:10), this last section (34:31–37) is apparently addressed to Job. Elihu argues that Job cannot dictate the terms governing God’s activities. When a person admits guilt and repents, God can forgive him without Job’s approval. Quite obviously, Job would not disagree with this claim, but such an admission would make him vulnerable to Elihu, who insists that penitence leads to forgiveness and deliverance. The fact that Job continues to suffer, Elihu reasons, proves his sinful stubbornness. Not only is Job guilty of stupidity, according to Elihu, he speaks without knowledge and is guilty of rebellion. As with the other participants, Elihu is forced to picture Job as a vicious sinner if his theological assumptions are to stand. His wish that Job might be tested to the utmost (34:36) reflects Elihu’s insensitivity, again showing that Elihu’s theological position is more important than Job. Job is clearly expendable.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love. Note how Elihu tries to throw Job’s own words back in his face: “I am innocent” (10:7) and, “What have I gained by obeying God?” (9:29–31; 21:15). Job did make the first statement, but the second is not an accurate quotation of his words. Job never did bargain with God as Satan said he would (1:9, 21; 2:9–10). Although Job did buckle under the pressure, understandably so! it was not the case that he had worshipped God for material gain, we have God’s own testimony to that fact in the first chapter. Elihu is using Job’s words against him to prove his own judgments on Job. In fact, note how Elihu concludes that Job needs even more testing (34:36). What a hateful heart! Obviously, Elihu was not a man walking in God *by proper knowledge and proper love*—and neither are we when we wish pain and hardship on other believers. Moreover, it is likely that many of Elihu’s accusations against Job were likely unrecognized projections of his own heart—as is also with us when we condemn others.

Life in God by proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don