

I. Introduction to the Prophets and Israel's Apostasy

I want to invite you to turn to the book of Lamentations, which is the book right after Jeremiah. Last week, we started a study on probably the largest section of books in the Bible that all correspond together. I have made up my mind that you are doing so well in the Bible. I am just impressed out of my mind with those of you on Thursday night who are going through those books of the Bible, laying them out, and getting that in and doing so well with it. I do not want to waste this time. I want to make sure you get everything out of these books that you can continue to put into your Bible.

I told you that the prophets, the books of the section called the prophets, fall into two categories: the major prophets and the minor prophets. We talked about why that is. It is not because the major prophets have more to say than the minor prophets, but simply that the minor prophets are smaller books than the major prophets. They all come around and deal with the same issue.

I told you this last week: all of these books have in common that they deal with the apostasy that the nation of Israel is in. The nation of Israel, in their apostasy, falls itself into three sections. This is how the Bible divides up the prophets. The first section, I told you this last week, will be the section right before they go into the captivity. That will deal with the kings that have led Israel astray, all the false religion, and getting involved in Baal worship, all that they have embraced. During that time period, God is sending them the prophets.

Remember I told you, the prophets in the Bible are men whom God sent with His message. They did not have a Bible like you and I have. They did not have churches. It was a totally different structure. We talked about the Urim and the Thummim on Thursday night. That question was sparked by something I said last Sunday morning: the only three ways God spoke to people in the Old Testament was through one of three ways. He either gave the prophet or someone a dream that that person went and told. When I say that, I also preface that by saying God does not do dreams today. He did through the Urim and the Thummim, which we now know is something that the priest kept in the breastplate that had some kind of power that God gave it to answer their questions. There is a lot of speculation on that.

The last way was the prophets themselves. Not all of these prophets write things in the Bible, but every king from David on, right up to the very end, every king has a prophet, or in some cases more than one prophet, speaking to them what God tells them and trying to bring them back on course. I told you last week, and I showed you some examples, how as Israel got more and more into apostasy, they less and less appreciated the men that God sent them.

Then we made the parallels to where we are today, did we not? We talked about how the church today is much in the same state of apostasy that the nation of Israel was right before their demise. Of course, in like fashion, as you see the parallels between the two, that is why men who preach the Word of God today, men who will take the Word of God and tell you exactly what is wrong with what we do, just like the prophets, are not very popular today.

The prophet's job was a very tough job. If you want to describe the prophet's main function in just a few short words, it was "in your face," so to speak. They did not spare any words to the nation of Israel, and because of that, bringing those words to a people who did not want to hear the Word of God caused a lot of problems, and we talked about that too.

II. Lamentations: Christ Our Portion and the Meaning of Lament

We ended with Jeremiah last week, and Jeremiah writes a second book, the book of Lamentations. In the book of Lamentations, you are going to find that Christ is typified, and this is very important, Christ is typified as our portion. You find that in Lamentations 3:24, where it basically says:

Lamentations 3:24

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The book of Lamentations obviously is our word for lament. To lament is to be very sorrowful. To lament is to be broken. To lament is to be in despair. To lament is to be very distraught. It carries with it a gloominess of your situation because everything seemingly is up against you, and you seem like there is just no hope.

The book of Lamentations, as the book of Jeremiah, is what we call a pre-exilic book. When you go to Bible college, you know, you get with a scholarship, they all put these fancy words to it. I remember one time years ago, we had a class back in Ohio when I was just a young kid, and Mel was running it. They had this kid from Bible college, and they had asked him to do something. I even forget the thing, but he was talking about the books of the Bible, and it was obvious that when he was at school, he had learned a terminology that the school wanted. You never notice how people who are messed up in the Bible always say things differently, a little goofy. When you get with people who believe Acts 2:38 getting baptized saves you, they do not say "baptized." Have you ever heard it? They say "booktized." It is the stupidest thing in the world. It is almost like scholarship has to reinvent the word. I heard one guy one time preach on the book of Job, and he was convinced that it was not pronounced "Job," it was pronounced "job." His theme of his message was "get a job." It is just goofy stuff.

The word "exilic" is another one of those words. These guys like to say it with a little zap to it, "exilic." This guy got up and he said, "Now the Bible is based into three forms in the Old Testament. It would be pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic." It has a little zip to it that way when you say it that way, but nobody knows what you are talking about, but it sounds neat. So Mel got up after the guy and he said, "Now I know that most of you probably are wondering what pre-exilic and exilic and post-exilic means. It is real simple. It simply means before God kicked the snot out of them, while God was kicking the snot out of them, and after God kicked the snot out of them." You can relate to that, can you not? So this book is pre-exilic. It is before God kicked the snot out of them, but He is getting ready to really wail on them, I guarantee you.

This book is written by Jeremiah. In this book, he focuses on his lamenting over Israel's decision to reject God's Word and stay on a course of disaster. These two books go hand in hand. In this book, for the final time, right before the judgment of the Southern tribes, which is called Judah, two Southern tribes, by Nebuchadnezzar, he pleads again with Israel for their return to God. You want to put that heading someplace at the beginning of this book. Boil it down a little bit. The key verse here is Lamentations 1:5.

I want to read for you Lamentations 1, and we will come down through it here, and we will see how chapter 5 fits in.

Lamentations 1:1

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!

Now that is a key word there, "tributary." Who knows what "tributary" means? Raise your hand. I want to see how many people know that. Well, over here, I am sure you do. John knows it in the back. Phil probably does. Anybody? Oh, tell them back here. Okay, now how do I feel? Oh, I know. I am going to go to school. You do not know. You waited too long. It is a place where you hold water. Incredibly wrong. I do not know what they will tell you. What is it, honey? You are a school teacher. Tell me. It is a place where a full of water means, a full of water means. It is, but what does it form when it meets? That is the key. That is what the word "tributary" means. What does it mean? Who has your hand up over here? What is it? The tributary is off a river, but it is a split of a river, usually. Right. And what does that make it once it splits off the main river? A new river. A new river, but that is true. But in terms of the main river, what does it make it? Well, a branch is one thing. All right. But really, what she is saying, she is absolutely right. It makes it a secondary river. It is not the main river. A tributary is no longer number one. It is now number two. If you have the Missouri River, that is the main river. You have a tributary off that. Then it is a secondary river, as she said, but it is not the main river. What he is saying here, the way it is used in the old English style, is that Israel is no longer number one. She now is a tributary because another nation is going to take her over and become the main nation. That is how you learn. I will tell you, that is why sometime in your life, you have to get one of them Noah Webster dictionaries back there to learn how these words are used.

Lamentations 1:2

She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

I cannot read this and not see the nation of Israel, but I read this and I see my life, and obviously I hope you can see your life, that this is what happens when you put your faith and trust in the world and the people of the world. It is like the old saying is, your friends will leave you when your money runs out. That is what the world does. It says, "among all her lovers, she has none to comfort her." She gave herself to all these other religions, and now these, she took them over God of her youth, and now those religions are not coming to her help. They are no comfort. They

are no comfort. All the friends that she made with the world now have dealt treacherously with her. That is exactly what the world does. They become her enemies.

Lamentations 1:3

Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

Lamentations 1:4

The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

Now here is your key verse right here.

Lamentations 1:5

Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Lamentations 1:6

And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

Now Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, I cannot read this without seeing the parallel how in so many people's lives that are like the book of Lamentations or lamenting today in the heartache that they have in their own personal life. Lord, we come to you today and we ask you to take the great truths of this book and to teach us, give us exactly what we need, and we will thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for a sake we ask it. Amen.

III. The Wailing Wall and Israel's Blindness

The reason here is very good for their lamenting because the greatest nation on the face of the planet is now gone. The reason here for their lamenting is very purposeful because through this nation God had a plan that He was going to reach the world, and now that plan is gone. God's people were going to carry His name to the nations around this world. Now it is gone, and they are held captive by a Gentile nation. I cannot help but read this without seeing the brokenness of God's heart in all of this toward His people.

Then I cannot help but see how it translates into my own personal life, how God had a plan for you and me just as He had for the nation of Israel. God wanted His church to be the greatest church on this planet. He wanted His people to be endowed and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, that nothing would stop us to do what God wants us to do. But just like the nation of Israel now, through the prophet Jeremiah in his writings, are told to lament because they have lost everything that God had for them, and they are now about to go into captivity of the world. So many of God's people find themselves in that same scenario. So many of God's people find

themselves in the scenario of a broken life and all of the things that go along with that simply because they are afflicted because they have not done what God wants them to do.

In Jerusalem today, you have what is called the Wailing Wall. Most people do not really understand what it is. They hear the terminology a lot. If you would look at any part of a brochure of the land of Palestine or Israel or the Holy Land, or you will see any kind of news reels, you will find that the Wailing Wall is a high wall, and it only runs for a couple of hundred feet. That is where, if you would go there any time, day and night, they have it set up for daytime and nighttime, you will find Orthodox Old Testament Jews, and they will stand right up against that wall, and they will stand right up against that wall like this with their Old Testament in their hand, and they are reading the Old Testament. Many of them are weeping. Many of them are lamenting over the fact because that wall is the last remaining remnant of the temple. That wall represents the glory that Israel once had. That Wailing Wall represents the last part that is left of the temple that was the glory of the nation of Israel, and when they stand in front of that wall weeping and reading the Old Testament passages, they are doing that because they know that Israel has lost its glory, and they are sitting there or standing there praying, asking God to restore the nation and to give them again their glorious past.

It is no wonder that the reference in the Old Testament for the Wailing Wall was found in Lamentations 2:18. God prophesied and foretold that there would be a day when the wall would come down, and Israel's glory would depart, and they would weep. The Jews today have no clue. They have no clue that they are in the situation that they are in because of their sin and their turning from God. They actually believe today that they are where God wants them to be. They have fallen into every trap and pitfall that the devil has put in their path, and here they are, some 2,800 years after the events in Lamentations and Jeremiah, and they are actually believing that they are right with God. When they are up against that Wailing Wall, do you know what they are praying for? Do you know what they are asking God for? They are asking God to present them the Messiah, and they have no clue that 2,000 years ago they took the Messiah that God sent them; they rejected Him and crucified Him.

Acts chapter 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, that is what the messages are in those seven chapters: that this same Jesus whom you have crucified, God has made Lord and Christ. Now, some 1,900-2,000 years later, they are standing at the Wailing Wall, pretending they are all right with God, pretending that they are where they are supposed to be, when they have transgressed and thrown away and destroyed every concept that God gave them in the Old Testament. Yet they are praying for the Messiah. Do you know what Messiah they are going to get? If you know your Bibles from Thursday night, or you know your Bibles from our time in the Word of God, you know that they are going to get the Saul of their life before they get the David of their life. They are going to get the one that they think is their Messiah, which in truth is going to be the Antichrist, and then God is going to have to give them their true Messiah.

IV. The Missing Ingredient: Christ My Portion

It is a very sad book. Inspirationally to me, it pictures the misery of God's people who weep and wail at the disasters in their life but are simply never willing to change what they have got to

change. It is unbelievable to me. If I have learned anything in the years that I have been in the ministry, I have learned it is unbelievable to me how people can get absolutely in the worst messes you could ever hope to get in. God works it out for them to get out of it, and it only takes about three or four weeks, and they forget it, and they are headed right back down to the same path that got them in destruction. My week is filled with broken and ravished people. Somebody said years ago to me that the world never leaves a man any better than it finds him, and that is so true.

Just like Israel has thought that they are right with God, doing what is right with God, and they cannot understand why they are going through the persecution of this world, standing at a wailing wall that once was their glory, praying for the glory to get back, when all they have to do and all they ever had to do was just accept the One that God sent down. You know that is why you and I have the problems we have. Do you know how you can fix whatever problem you have got in your life? I do not care where you are at, what you are going through, what you are struggling with in life, I do not really care. I am telling you right now, you can fix where you are at and get where God wants you to be at by simply doing one thing.

Do you know what is missing? The theme of this book is "Christ my portion." Let me tell you what is missing in Israel's life. They have got all the ingredients except the main ingredient. They are missing one portion, and that portion is the Lord Jesus Christ. I am telling you right now, I deal with people in the depths of depression. I deal with people with unfulfilled lives, unfulfilled dreams, broken families. I have seen families that grow up that never get it. They just keep losing one child after the other. They just seemingly do not ever wake up and see what is wrong. They are like the nation of Israel. They have trials in their life, they have struggles in their life, they have financial issues in their life, they are not happy, but they keep propping themselves up with the idea that "I am okay, I am all right, I am going to make it." Yet in their own lives, I have seen it all my ministry. They have four or five kids, and one kid goes to hell after the second kid goes to hell, after the third kid goes to hell, and one after the other, the kids just go right out in the world, and the parents with this great big bubble in their head. At some point, they look back and say, "I wonder why." I will tell you what happened. You left out the key ingredient in your life: Christ my portion. You left out the most important portion for whatever reason, for whatever reason.

We live in a world of Christianity that needs to be returned. It needs to be called "Prozac Christianity." The Bible is not enough. So we live in a world where everything has to be supplemented to try to make you feel good. That is the world that we live in today. That is the world that Israel was. Just as that Jew was up against that Wailing Wall, deceiving himself, we come to churches today deceiving ourselves when in reality, there is nothing real. They are miserable on the inside. It all comes down to the fact that in Christianity today, there is something missing. I will tell you what it is: it is the most important ingredient. It is Christ my portion. The real issue, the real issue they are missing, is the free ingredient, and the recipe is life.

I had no way of planning all this, but I tell you what, you ladies that were here yesterday and heard Sandy's testimony. I asked her to give the testimony because I know that she has got a

great testimony, and her life is basically what I try to build into your life. She told the story. Let me ask you, did any of you ladies have a, did you have your little cheat recorder here and record her yesterday? Anybody at all? Because for whatever reason, it did not pick up on the tape. Did anybody? Nobody did, huh? Well, that is too bad. No, maybe not. We will just have to have you give it again. Where is she at? Is she hiding? Oh, there she is back there. She is behind that big guy in front of there. I cannot see her. But he is asleep, and do not wake him up.

The bottom line is, it is exactly what I am talking about. She talked about where she came from. She talked about, if anybody, she talked about, in that testimony I have heard a thousand times, she talked about all the things that could have kept her down. If anybody had a right to play the "poorest me" victim status, she did. Nobody really even would have followed her except God and the Bible. But the bottom line is, she realized that there, and she said it yesterday without even knowing she said it. I was sitting back there thinking of my sermon today, and I am thinking to myself, "Man, this fits right in, not in what I am going to say to the ladies, but it fits right into where this thing I am going tomorrow." Because she said it yesterday: she had everything in her life except the main ingredient, Christ my portion. That changed her life. It has changed your life. If you are honest this morning, we can have lady after lady, men after men, get up and say the same thing and go through the same testimony, maybe different circumstances, maybe the same thing did not happen in the same way. But the bottom line is this: something was missing in your life, and it is the same thing that was missing in Israel's life and is missing today. The main ingredient is Christ my portion.

V. God's Broken Heart and the Introduction to Ezekiel

I cannot read all of this in Lamentations without thinking and seeing that this is not a prophet lamenting over the nation of Israel. We are seeing through the prophet, and what you are seeing is the heart of God broken over His nation that He did everything for. The older I get in the Lord, and I just have to be honest with you, the older I get in the Lord, the more I am aware of all that God does for me. Maybe it just comes with maturity, maybe it just comes with growing up, I do not know. Maybe it comes from just hanging out with God and following your own preaching, I do not know. But the bottom line is, every day of my life I get more aware of how God takes care of me, how He is always there for me, how He has never left me or forsaken me. Then at the same moment, I think how good that makes me feel. We call them promises in the Bible. A promise is something when you get down in the dumps or you struggle with something that you go to your Bible and you read that Bible, and God will give you something to bring you back up. He will tell you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He will tell you, "casting all your care upon me, for I care for you." He will tell you all of those things, that whatever state you are in, be content. He will tell you, "My God shall supply all of your need according to his glory in Christ Jesus." He will tell you that. He does that to lift us up and to let us have something to hold on to.

But how many times? What do you think God holds on to when you and I give Him the short end of the stick? What do you think God does? How do you think, do you think He does not have feelings? Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. He was just hungry. The Bible says He was tempted

on all parts like we are, yet without sin. I guarantee you, God has feelings, for God so loved the world. The Bible says that God loved with a perfect love, and He hates with a perfect hatred. You have to find out what that means. But God has emotions. God has feelings. Otherwise, God would not want anything to do with you and me. Just like the world breaks your heart, the world does not break God's heart. I want you to get that. The world does not break God's heart. You and I break God's heart. Israel broke God's heart. I cannot help but see how the nation of Israel, God gave them everything and provided everything for them, and yet they turned their back on God, and then God comes down and deals with them, and He judges them. We have the inability to deal with the reality of life today. Because of that, as Haggai said, I gave you it in that list of the prophets. He says, "Life without God is a bag with holes in it." It just goes nowhere.

Then the next book we go to is the book of Ezekiel. I could stay on Lamentations all day today, and that is not my goal. The book of Ezekiel. In the book of Ezekiel, Christ is typified as the Son of Man. You will find that in the New Testament within the book of Luke. The book of Luke portrays Him as the Son of Man. Let me just add this to it: any time in the Bible where you find the term Son of Man, I will just tell you this, the context will always be in the Tribulation period, 100% of the time. In the Bible, the term Son of Man always is a reference to the Tribulation period. It just is.

Ezekiel writes his book during the exile. Yes, he is exilic. He writes it during the exile. We know that that exile runs for 70 years. We call it the 70 years captivity. The name Ezekiel means this, and this is very important: it means that he will be strengthened. That is key. Every one of these books has an underlying theme that I want you to get. In Lamentations, it was "you and I break God's heart." We saw that through the prophet. In the book of Ezekiel, there is another underlying theme that you need to learn, and it is in the name of Ezekiel itself: "He will be strengthened."

VI. The Babylonian Captivity: Three Phases

We talk about the captivity. We talk about the exile. What I am about to give you, I want you to get down in your Bible. If you are sitting at a table back there, you need to put it in right now and get it. This will be easy enough to follow. Maybe you want to write it down on a piece of paper and put it in later, but you need to get this in. If you want, I am going to walk you through the captivity, and I am going to show you that the captivity had three phases to it. You need to get these down so you understand how this relates to history because it is very important.

If you want to put this someplace in your Bible, my advice to you would be to put it in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 because the events in 2 Chronicles 36, about halfway through the chapter to the end, are the very events we are talking about. You will find all the players in it when you go look at it.

Here is what you want to remember about the captivity. This is a major piece to your Bible. This is a major piece to your Bible to figuring out from a historical, prophetic, biblical concept. You have got to see this. This is not something you just want to yawn through.

Nebuchadnezzar, when he attacks Jerusalem, we talk a lot about the captivity and the Babylonian captivity in general. When Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem, he does it in a three-time manner. He does it three times over the course of several years.

1. The first time he attacks is in 606 B.C. When I say that, I say this along with that: this is where, generally speaking and teaching and preaching and the books that you read, this is where this is the one date that they use to talk about the captivity. This is basically where everything goes back to in time. Even though they did not all go into captivity in 606, there are two more deportations and two more attacks, this is where it starts right here. This is vital that you understand that. So when you are listening to me talk or reading a book someplace and it talks about the captivity of 606, you know that that is the first time that Nebuchadnezzar goes down. This is what happens during this time, and this is also important. This is where he defeats Jehoiakim, with an "M" at the end. There is going to be another one that is Jehoiachin, with an "N" at the end. This is Jehoiakim, as I get M&M's at the end. He defeats Jehoiakim and takes key people into Babylon. It is this first deportation in 606 B.C. that this is where Daniel goes down. Daniel is the next book we are going to look at, and Daniel was also written during the captivity. So you want to get that down. That is the first one in 606 B.C. This is where Daniel goes down to Babylon.
2. In 597 B.C., nine years later, Jerusalem during this time is under a military dictatorship. She is left to run pretty much on her own, but she is not her own anymore. Babylonian SS troops are in the streets. They kind of run everything. They basically leave her alone, but they do whatever they want to do. In 597 B.C., Jehoiachin, that is with an "N," he leads a revolt and tries to overthrow the troops that are in Babylon, and they are under a military dictatorship now. Nebuchadnezzar comes back again and crushes that revolt, and at this time, he takes more people into captivity. This is where Ezekiel goes into captivity. So you put a place to it in Ezekiel 1 where Ezekiel says, "I was down in Babylon by the river of Chebar," and God shows him this vision. You now have a time frame that that is just the second captivity. In fact, in my Bible, if you look at that passage, it will tell you that is the second deportation that he goes down in, just so I have all my time straight in my Bible. Now that is for me. Maybe you do not want to go to that detail. But if you do not, you will never be president.
3. Nine years after that, in 588 B.C., he comes back the third and final time, and this time the city again revolts. This time they board up the city to try to keep him out. Back in the old days, that was a pretty stupid thing to do, but Nebuchadnezzar, not being in any hurry, he just, what they do in the Old Testament, it is a term called "he lays siege to the city." Do you know what that means? He just puts his troops around it, nothing comes out, nothing goes in, and he starves them out. They may have a storehouse of food and water, but they shut down all of the food coming in. They shut down the water system, so they only can exist. In this case, they go for, he lays siege for two and a half years, and he basically starves them out. This is what you find in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36. This is where you remember the story: finally, after the siege breaks and they go into the city, this is where they take Zedekiah, who is the last king of Israel. These kings during this particular time are puppet kings. They have no real power. They are just left in power to run things, keep the lights on, keep the things moving, keep the buses going, and all that stuff, keep the airports open, but they have no real power. They are under a military dictatorship.

To pay Zedekiah back for the revolt that he tried to lead, and this story is found in the Bible in 2 Kings and also 2 Chronicles, this is where they take Zedekiah, they bind him in chains, they bring out his sons before him, they kill his sons before his eyes, and then Nebuchadnezzar, being the kind soul that he is, takes two hot poker, burns out Zedekiah's eyes that he never sees again, and then carries him in shackles and fetters down to Babylon for the captivity, third and final time. At this point, the city falls on July 19th, and the city and the temple are burnt to the ground August 15th, 586 B.C., and this is the official end of the nation of Israel as we know it.

The book of Ezekiel, basically as the book of Daniel, is a fulfillment of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Thursday night, I particularly gave you a verse in Lamentations 5:16, and I want you to look back at that. I will just flip back, and this is Ezekiel and Daniel, or the fulfillment of this particular these two books, because what he says in Lamentations 5:16, and some of you should already have it marked in your Bible if you heard it Thursday night, he simply says this, and this is the official demise of the nation of Israel:

Lamentations 5:16

The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

The phrase there, "the crown has fallen from our head," is now a picture that the kingdom of heaven is gone. From this point on, and we talked about this, Joe asked a great question the other Thursday night, and it led into a tirade, but that is all right, I have got to get my stress out just like you have to get yours. Your wife yells at you, you yell at your kids, and I yell at you, so it works out good, does it not?

"The crown has fallen from our head." Prophetically, most people do not understand how this all plays out, but again, we are living in the day and age where our battle today, our wars today, are right back over in the Middle East. Babylon is modern day Iraq, Baghdad. Saddam Hussein fancied himself being Nimrod reborn, the first leader of Babylon. When we talk about the cons of Nebuchadnezzar, he also fancied himself of being reincarnated as Nebuchadnezzar, and that is where he got the idea that he was going to destroy the Jews and that he was a world power. Of course, that was an illusion; he really was not. He saw how quickly that all went to pieces. But Nebuchadnezzar, Baghdad, Iraq, Babylon, Saddam Hussein, they are all right there at the same time period in the same place. That is where it all is. That is where it was in the Old Testament.

VII. Ezekiel's Object Lesson and God's Judgment

In the book of Ezekiel, a great prophecy is laid out under the concept of the Son of Man, and it is a great thing. It is a great concept here that really lays itself out, and it is found in the form of an object lesson. The theme of Ezekiel is going to be the second coming of Christ and the millennium, and that is really the way it all works out, and that is how this thing really puts itself into being.

I want to read for you Ezekiel's object lesson. I told you last week that each one of these guys had an object lesson that they had to follow through with, and it was a situation where this is

what he did. Look at Ezekiel 24:15. Here is his object lesson. Jeremiah walked three years naked. Now here is Ezekiel's object lesson.

Ezekiel 24:15-18

15 Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

Here is the key: God takes his wife. Did you notice that this is where our word "stroke" comes from right here? You see that thing in here? "He took her with a stroke." That does not mean that she, in the modern day, died of a heart stroke. It means that a stroke of God, in other words, God took a stroke. A stroke is like a golf swing. God took a stroke, He took her home, took her out. I do not know where she went, but He took her. Today we use the word "stroke." That is where it comes from in the Bible. The Bible says He took her with a stroke, and yet he is not to weep, and he is not to cry. He is not to let any tears run down, and he is to be pretty much hard-nosed about it and cannot cry at the death of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:17-19

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning; and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

19 And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?

Now you see that? See how God used that? That is a clear one there. His wife, God says, "I am going to take your wife with a stroke. Do not weep, do not cry. Just go on with life and go tell the people that I told you not to weep and cry." What does that do? The people say, "What does this mean to us?" Do you know what he says? He lets them have it. In other words, God lets them have it. The next verse there says, "And the word of the Lord came unto me," and wham, He lets them have it. He talks about the fact that they are not weeping over it. It is an object lesson. You are casting away God. You are throwing away everything God did for you, and you are happy about it. You are making joyful. You are having parties. You are making merry over the fact that the One who gave everything for you and did everything for you, you have now thrown out of your life, and you do not feel remorseful about it at all. So do you know what He is saying? "I am going to come down and I am going to judge you. I am going to kill your kids. I am going to kill your husbands. I am going to kill your wife. I am going to kill your dogs. I am going to kill

your cattle. I am going to kill your sheep, and a nation is going to come in here and ravish over you, and I am not going to weep over it." That is the message.

You would think people would get that kind of message, but they did not. They have not got it yet. You would think they would, but that will come to reality when you start working with people. People just do not get it today. What has God got to do to some of you? Kill you before you get the message? We are such shamers when it comes to God. We get in a jam and, "Oh God, help me!" And then we get feeling better about it. We do better about it, and it is right back to the drugs. It is right back to the bottle. It is right back to the world. It is right back to this, and you just think God is okay with that. No. God is the God of the second chance, there is no question about that. But let me stretch that a little bit farther: He is the God of the third, the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth chance too. But there comes an end to it, that God says, "Man, you are not going to get it." For the nation of Israel, He gave them close to 600-700 years of chances. He gave them 30 kings. I do not know how many prophets to get them turned around, and finally God said, "That is it." If there is anything you go out of here with today, and you better grasp and get your little head around today, is the fact that yes, He is a God of love, and He is a God of grace, but there comes an end to His fooling around with you, and then He will drop the hammer. I always tell my grandkids that. I always look at them and say, "Oh look, you fool with me, and I will tramp off, drop the hammer on you." Their response is mostly like our response to God or any authority: "Grandpa, you do not have no hammer. Nana would not let you hit me with a hammer." Well, there comes an end to it.

Listen, see how it works. God tells him not to weep or mourn. People say, "What does that mean, Ezekiel? Why, what does that mean to us? Why did God tell you when we all wept for our loved ones when they died, and we wail and mourn?" If you have ever been to a Jewish funeral, they really get into it. But why in the world was God trying to tell us? He said, "Because it is a picture of you losing God and everything that God has for you. It is a picture of your unrighteousness, and you are not weeping, and you are not broken because you have to portray the very One who loved you and took you in and nurtured you as a little child and brought you up unto Himself into His bosom like His wife, and then married you. What did you do? You took everything that He gave you and you went chased after somebody else."

May I give you just a little bit of a piece of advice today on personal experience? I speak to every child of God in this room today. I am going to give you a good piece of solid advice based on 40 plus years of experience and 60 years of living on planet earth: never get so cold and hard in the things of God in your life. Never allow yourself to get so indifferent. Never get your head stuck someplace where you cannot see the light of what God is trying to show you. Never let your self-righteousness or your anger or your bitterness or your out of control or whatever, never get to the point in your life that God cannot with just a moment of time reach down and squeeze your heart and bring tears to your eyes. That is a good piece of solid advice. Never get to the place that God, at a moment's notice, when we get proud, we get arrogant, we get self-righteous, we get wicked, we get back to the world, we forget what God did, that God cannot come down and just with a blink of His eye melt your heart and bring tears to your eyes to bring you back to God. That is Israel's condition, and that is the condition of Bible Christianity today.

We weep over sad movies. We weep over things that are not real. We weep over losing an animal. We weep over losing a pet, but we do not weep over our sin. We do not weep over the fact that we are saved now 10, 15, 20 years, and you still have won nobody to Christ. We do not weep over that. Do you know why? Because right now God is squeezing your heart, but just 15 minutes outside that door, you can get the Chiefs game on. You can get life going again and forget all of the things that God is touching you with right now. I am giving you that on personal experience. As David said in Psalms 119:136:

Psalms 119:136

Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Israel had got so indifferent. Israel had gotten so self-righteous. Israel had gotten so into themselves. They had got to the place where they are looking at themselves as the pinnacle of God's people when they are absolutely destitute in every form and fashion to what God was, and they cannot now accept the message of God's man. They have got to get rid of him. They put Jeremiah down in a dung pit because they did not like his message. They put him down in prison because they did not like what he said. It did not match up to what they wanted. You can play with preachers. They are just mortal men like you and me. You can play with the prophets of God in the Old Testament just because of the fact that they are mortal men. But there is one whom you will never play with for long, and when He draws a line in the sand, it is drawn. My advice to everybody in this room is: do not ever get so cold and hard about the things of God. Do not ever get so self-righteous in who you think you are that God cannot squeeze your heart, bring tears to your eyes.

I am going to tell you something else. I was a 19-year-old kid that thought I had the world by the tail, and I knew everything that was going on. I had been raised in church. I knew better, but I thought now because I had been out in the world and I did what all I did, and I had it all together, and I did not need God in my life, and I had forgotten all the little things that God had done for me in my life. I forgot the hand of God. I look back on it now, but then at that time, when I was 17, 18, and 19 years old, I thought that I had the world. I had everything going my way. I had my plans in life, and it really did not include God. All God had to come down and do, He took my daddy and put him in a casket, and I will tell you what, do not you tell me, do not you tell me God cannot get the tears out of you. He will get them. He will get them. He will take something or somebody in your life that meant so much to you, that you have thought about in your life, that you did things all your life, and you will say, "Wow, why? He is gone. She is gone. I do not have him anymore." You will think back of the great times that you had and all the wonderful memories you had, and when you walk and you think to yourself, "Wow, now they are, but they are in heaven. I will get to see him again." Do you know what? God is up in heaven right now thinking about all the wondrous times He used to have with you before you stuck it to Him. It breaks His heart, but He loves you so much.

I used to hear old Mel Sabaka saying, I did not know what he was talking about back then, but I used to hear him say, "God loves you so much, and His commitment to get you to heaven is so real and so true that He will get you home to heaven if He has got to do it in a wheelchair or a

hearse, but He will get you there." Do not get so cold and hard that God cannot reach down and touch your heart about something in your life that you know is the right thing to do. Do you know what we do? I told you this Thursday night, you see it all across the world today in Christianity. Do you know what we do? We do not want to do what is right with God, but we want to maintain our respectability. So do you know what we do? We find other people who are Christians who do the same things that we do so we can band together. It is called in the Bible, "birds of a feather flock together," and then we become each other's support system. We can talk about what we do not like. We can talk about the things that we can have a little band together, and we pretend, we pretend that we really have a relationship with God when all we have is a relationship with other people who are as out of fellowship with God as you are. That is all you have got.

Do you know why people go to big churches? Nothing is wrong with big churches, but do you know why a lot of people go to big churches? Because they do not like accountability in their life. That is why. She can get lost in a big church. Do not fool me. I read the book before you even found the first cover in the index. I was shaming God when you still were crapping in your diapers. I know every trick in the book because I pulled most of them. I know exactly how it works. I know the fact that when you come to a church like this, there is an accountability factor. You cannot keep coming here and not do something for God and not get worried about it. So what happens? You find yourself someplace to go where you know what? You can go once every six weeks or every eight weeks or whatever the case. There is no accountability. There is no responsibility. You do not have to give a dime. Nobody knows who you are, and you can walk around and say, "Yeah, I go here," and everybody goes, "Wow!" But in reality, it is a run and an escape from the very relationship with God that He wants you to have. You fool me, you sell that to somebody else. I have been in too many of those things, and I ran. I ran from God for 19 years of my life. I read every turn and trick in the book. I told God was after me every turn.

I was telling the girls yesterday, I think it was yesterday morning, I told the ladies yesterday, Mel Sabaka saw something in me, and I do not know what he saw, but he never gave up on me. When I was a young kid in high school and did not go to church anymore and did not want nothing to do with it, every Tuesday night was our visitation at the church. He would send a group of young people over to my house every Tuesday night to invite me to church. I was rude to them. I did not want to talk to them. I looked around, would not turn the TV off, would not let them in the house. I did everything in the world to keep them from coming, but he kept bringing them to me. Finally, I thought I was going to be smarter than all of them. Do you know what I did? I told my mom, I said, "You know what? When they come and I see their car pull up, I am going out the back door, and I am going down the alley, and I will be back when they leave." I had a great plan, but you see, the greatest plan you will ever get will never be greater than a plan that God has for you. So when I thought I was so smart and I had an escape route, they came to the front door, I shot out the back door, and there was Mel Sabaka standing waiting for me.

Let me just say something to you: if a mortal sinner of a man like he was, saved by God's grace but still a man, still mortal flesh and blood, has his issues, if a mortal man can figure out my little stupid plan and wait for me out the back door, what in God's name do you think God has got on

you today? You will never get away from Him. You will never go out the back door with Him. He will stand there and meet you every step of the way. He would not let me go. He would not let me go. Somebody said, "Well, I am sure glad you really, you really made the decision." I am not sure I made the decision. I just think He wore me out so much, I had no other choice. I do not think I made any decision. I just had no other option. I was worn out. I could not run any farther. I could not hide anymore. Finally, God took what had been pent up in my life for so many years and rode down there with that casket and just squeezed my heart, got my attention. I wonder what it will take in your life to get your attention. I am telling you, never get so cold, my dear folks, my dear people, never get so cold and hard about the things of God and so caught up in yourself that God cannot squeeze your heart and bring those tears.

VIII. God's Broken Heart and the Introduction to Ezekiel

I cannot read all of this in Lamentations without thinking and seeing that this is not a prophet lamenting over the nation of Israel. We are seeing through the prophet, and what you are seeing is the heart of God broken over His nation that He did everything for. The older I get in the Lord, and I just have to be honest with you, the older I get in the Lord, the more I am aware of all that God does for me. Maybe it just comes with maturity, maybe it just comes with growing up, I do not know. Maybe it comes from just hanging out with God and following your own preaching, I do not know. But the bottom line is, every day of my life I get more aware of how God takes care of me, how He is always there for me, how He has never left me or forsaken me. Then at the same moment, I think how good that makes me feel. We call them promises in the Bible. A promise is something when you get down in the dumps or you struggle with something that you go to your Bible and you read that Bible, and God will give you something to bring you back up. He will tell you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He will tell you, "casting all your care upon me, for I care for you." He will tell you all of those things, that whatever state you are in, be content. He will tell you, "My God shall supply all of your need according to his glory in Christ Jesus." He will tell you that. He does that to lift us up and to let us have something to hold on to.

But how many times? What do you think God holds on to when you and I give Him the short end of the stick? What do you think God does? How do you think, do you think He does not have feelings? Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. He was just hungry. The Bible says He was tempted on all parts like we are, yet without sin. I guarantee you, God has feelings, for God so loved the world. The Bible says that God loved with a perfect love, and He hates with a perfect hatred. You have to find out what that means. But God has emotions. God has feelings. Otherwise, God would not want anything to do with you and me. Just like the world breaks your heart, the world does not break God's heart. I want you to get that. The world does not break God's heart. You and I break God's heart. Israel broke God's heart. I cannot help but see how the nation of Israel, God gave them everything and provided everything for them, and yet they turned their back on God, and then God comes down and deals with them, and He judges them. We have the inability to deal with the reality of life today. Because of that, as Haggai said, I gave you it in that list of the prophets. He says, "Life without God is a bag with holes in it." It just goes nowhere.

Then the next book we go to is the book of Ezekiel. I could stay on Lamentations all day today, and that is not my goal. The book of Ezekiel. In the book of Ezekiel, Christ is typified as the Son of Man. You will find that in the New Testament within the book of Luke. The book of Luke portrays Him as the Son of Man. Let me just add this to it: any time in the Bible where you find the term Son of Man, I will just tell you this, the context will always be in the Tribulation period, 100% of the time. In the Bible, the term Son of Man always is a reference to the Tribulation period. It just is.

Ezekiel writes his book during the exile. Yes, he is exilic. He writes it during the exile. We know that that exile runs for 70 years. We call it the 70 years captivity. The name Ezekiel means this, and this is very important: it means that he will be strengthened. That is key. Every one of these books has an underlying theme that I want you to get. In Lamentations, it was "you and I break God's heart." We saw that through the prophet. In the book of Ezekiel, there is another underlying theme that you need to learn, and it is in the name of Ezekiel itself: "He will be strengthened."

IX. The Babylonian Captivity: Three Phases

We talk about the captivity. We talk about the exile. What I am about to give you, I want you to get down in your Bible. If you are sitting at a table back there, you need to put it in right now and get it. This will be easy enough to follow. Maybe you want to write it down on a piece of paper and put it in later, but you need to get this in. If you want, I am going to walk you through the captivity, and I am going to show you that the captivity had three phases to it. You need to get these down so you understand how this relates to history because it is very important.

If you want to put this someplace in your Bible, my advice to you would be to put it in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 because the events in 2 Chronicles 36, about halfway through the chapter to the end, are the very events we are talking about. You will find all the players in it when you go look at it.

Here is what you want to remember about the captivity. This is a major piece to your Bible. This is a major piece to your Bible to figuring out from a historical, prophetic, biblical concept. You have got to see this. This is not something you just want to yawn through.

Nebuchadnezzar, when he attacks Jerusalem, we talk a lot about the captivity and the Babylonian captivity in general. When Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem, he does it in a three-time manner. He does it three times over the course of several years.

4. The first time he attacks is in 606 B.C. When I say that, I say this along with that: this is where, generally speaking and teaching and preaching and the books that you read, this is where this is the one date that they use to talk about the captivity. This is basically where everything goes back to in time. Even though they did not all go into captivity in 606, there are two more deportations and two more attacks, this is where it starts right here. This is vital that you understand that. So when you are listening to me talk or reading a book someplace and it talks about the captivity of 606, you know that that is the first time that Nebuchadnezzar goes down. This is what happens during this time, and this is also important.

This is where he defeats Jehoiakim, with an "M" at the end. There is going to be another one that is Jehoiachin, with an "N" at the end. This is Jehoiakim, as I get M&M's at the end. He defeats Jehoiakim and takes key people into Babylon. It is this first deportation in 606 B.C. that this is where Daniel goes down. Daniel is the next book we are going to look at, and Daniel was also written during the captivity. So you want to get that down. That is the first one in 606 B.C. This is where Daniel goes down to Babylon.

5. In 597 B.C., nine years later, Jerusalem during this time is under a military dictatorship. She is left to run pretty much on her own, but she is not her own anymore. Babylonian SS troops are in the streets. They kind of run everything. They basically leave her alone, but they do whatever they want to do. In 597 B.C., Jehoiachin, that is with an "N," he leads a revolt and tries to overthrow the troops that are in Babylon, and they are under a military dictatorship now. Nebuchadnezzar comes back again and crushes that revolt, and at this time, he takes more people into captivity. This is where Ezekiel goes into captivity. So you put a place to it in Ezekiel 1 where Ezekiel says, "I was down in Babylon by the river of Chebar," and God shows him this vision. You now have a time frame that that is just the second captivity. In fact, in my Bible, if you look at that passage, it will tell you that is the second deportation that he goes down in, just so I have all my time straight in my Bible. Now that is for me. Maybe you do not want to go to that detail. But if you do not, you will never be president.
6. Nine years after that, in 588 B.C., he comes back the third and final time, and this time the city again revolts. This time they board up the city to try to keep him out. Back in the old days, that was a pretty stupid thing to do, but Nebuchadnezzar, not being in any hurry, he just, what they do in the Old Testament, it is a term called "he lays siege to the city." Do you know what that means? He just puts his troops around it, nothing comes out, nothing goes in, and he starves them out. They may have a storehouse of food and water, but they shut down all of the food coming in. They shut down the water system, so they only can exist. In this case, they go for, he lays siege for two and a half years, and he basically starves them out. This is what you find in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36. This is where you remember the story: finally, after the siege breaks and they go into the city, this is where they take Zedekiah, who is the last king of Israel. These kings during this particular time are puppet kings. They have no real power. They are just left in power to run things, keep the lights on, keep the things moving, keep the buses going, and all that stuff, keep the airports open, but they have no real power. They are under a military dictatorship.

To pay Zedekiah back for the revolt that he tried to lead, and this story is found in the Bible in 2 Kings and also 2 Chronicles, this is where they take Zedekiah, they bind him in chains, they bring out his sons before him, they kill his sons before his eyes, and then Nebuchadnezzar, being the kind soul that he is, takes two hot poker, burns out Zedekiah's eyes that he never sees again, and then carries him in shackles and fetters down to Babylon for the captivity, third and final time. At this point, the city falls on July 19th, and the city and the temple are burnt to the ground August 15th, 586 B.C., and this is the official end of the nation of Israel as we know it.

The book of Ezekiel, basically as the book of Daniel, is a fulfillment of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Thursday night, I particularly gave you a verse in Lamentations 5:16, and I want you to look back at that. I will just flip back, and this is Ezekiel and Daniel, or the fulfillment of

this particular these two books, because what he says in Lamentations 5:16, and some of you should already have it marked in your Bible if you heard it Thursday night, he simply says this, and this is the official demise of the nation of Israel:

Lamentations 5:16

The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

The phrase there, "the crown has fallen from our head," is now a picture that the kingdom of heaven is gone. From this point on, and we talked about this, Joe asked a great question the other Thursday night, and it led into a tirade, but that is all right, I have got to get my stress out just like you have to get yours. Your wife yells at you, you yell at your kids, and I yell at you, so it works out good, does it not?

"The crown has fallen from our head." Prophetically, most people do not understand how this all plays out, but again, we are living in the day and age where our battle today, our wars today, are right back over in the Middle East. Babylon is modern day Iraq, Baghdad. Saddam Hussein fancied himself being Nimrod reborn, the first leader of Babylon. When we talk about the cons of Nebuchadnezzar, he also fancied himself of being reincarnated as Nebuchadnezzar, and that is where he got the idea that he was going to destroy the Jews and that he was a world power. Of course, that was an illusion; he really was not. He saw how quickly that all went to pieces. But Nebuchadnezzar, Baghdad, Iraq, Babylon, Saddam Hussein, they are all right there at the same time period in the same place. That is where it all is. That is where it was in the Old Testament.

X. Ezekiel's Object Lesson and God's Judgment

In the book of Ezekiel, a great prophecy is laid out under the concept of the Son of Man, and it is a great thing. It is a great concept here that really lays itself out, and it is found in the form of an object lesson. The theme of Ezekiel is going to be the second coming of Christ and the millennium, and that is really the way it all works out, and that is how this thing really puts itself into being.

I want to read for you Ezekiel's object lesson. I told you last week that each one of these guys had an object lesson that they had to follow through with, and it was a situation where this is what he did. Look at Ezekiel 24:15. Here is his object lesson. Jeremiah walked three years naked. Now here is Ezekiel's object lesson.

Ezekiel 24:15-18

15 Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

Here is the key: God takes his wife. Did you notice that this is where our word "stroke" comes from right here? You see that thing in here? "He took her with a stroke." That does not mean that she, in the modern day, died of a heart stroke. It means that a stroke of God, in other words, God took a stroke. A stroke is like a golf swing. God took a stroke, He took her home, took her out. I do not know where she went, but He took her. Today we use the word "stroke." That is where it comes from in the Bible. The Bible says He took her with a stroke, and yet he is not to weep, and he is not to cry. He is not to let any tears run down, and he is to be pretty much hard-nosed about it and cannot cry at the death of his wife.

Ezekiel 24:17-19

17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

18 So I spake unto the people in the morning; and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

19 And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?

Now you see that? See how God used that? That is a clear one there. His wife, God says, "I am going to take your wife with a stroke. Do not weep, do not cry. Just go on with life and go tell the people that I told you not to weep and cry." What does that do? The people say, "What does this mean to us?" Do you know what he says? He lets them have it. In other words, God lets them have it. The next verse there says, "And the word of the Lord came unto me," and wham, He lets them have it. He talks about the fact that they are not weeping over it. It is an object lesson. You are casting away God. You are throwing away everything God did for you, and you are happy about it. You are making joyful. You are having parties. You are making merry over the fact that the One who gave everything for you and did everything for you, you have now thrown out of your life, and you do not feel remorseful about it at all. So do you know what He is saying? "I am going to come down and I am going to judge you. I am going to kill your kids. I am going to kill your husbands. I am going to kill your wife. I am going to kill your dogs. I am going to kill your cattle. I am going to kill your sheep, and a nation is going to come in here and ravish over you, and I am not going to weep over it." That is the message.

You would think people would get that kind of message, but they did not. They have not got it yet. You would think they would, but that will come to reality when you start working with people. People just do not get it today. What has God got to do to some of you? Kill you before you get the message? We are such shamers when it comes to God. We get in a jam and, "Oh God, help me!" And then we get feeling better about it. We do better about it, and it is right back to the drugs. It is right back to the bottle. It is right back to the world. It is right back to this, and you just think God is okay with that. No. God is the God of the second chance, there is no question about that. But let me stretch that a little bit farther: He is the God of the third, the fourth, and the

fifth, and the sixth chance too. But there comes an end to it, that God says, "Man, you are not going to get it." For the nation of Israel, He gave them close to 600-700 years of chances. He gave them 30 kings. I do not know how many prophets to get them turned around, and finally God said, "That is it." If there is anything you go out of here with today, and you better grasp and get your little head around today, is the fact that yes, He is a God of love, and He is a God of grace, but there comes an end to His fooling around with you, and then He will drop the hammer. I always tell my grandkids that. I always look at them and say, "Oh look, you fool with me, and I will tramp off, drop the hammer on you." Their response is mostly like our response to God or any authority: "Grandpa, you do not have no hammer. Nana would not let you hit me with a hammer." Well, there comes an end to it.

Listen, see how it works. God tells him not to weep or mourn. People say, "What does that mean, Ezekiel? Why, what does that mean to us? Why did God tell you when we all wept for our loved ones when they died, and we wail and mourn?" If you have ever been to a Jewish funeral, they really get into it. But why in the world was God trying to tell us? He said, "Because it is a picture of you losing God and everything that God has for you. It is a picture of your unrighteousness, and you are not weeping, and you are not broken because you have to portray the very One who loved you and took you in and nurtured you as a little child and brought you up unto Himself into His bosom like His wife, and then married you. What did you do? You took everything that He gave you and you went chased after somebody else."

May I give you just a little bit of a piece of advice today on personal experience? I speak to every child of God in this room today. I am going to give you a good piece of solid advice based on 40 plus years of experience and 60 years of living on planet earth: never get so cold and hard in the things of God in your life. Never allow yourself to get so indifferent. Never get your head stuck someplace where you cannot see the light of what God is trying to show you. Never let your self-righteousness or your anger or your bitterness or your out of control or whatever, never get to the point in your life that God cannot with just a moment of time reach down and squeeze your heart and bring tears to your eyes. That is a good piece of solid advice. Never get to the place that God, at a moment's notice, when we get proud, we get arrogant, we get self-righteous, we get wicked, we get back to the world, we forget what God did, that God cannot come down and just with a blink of His eye melt your heart and bring tears to your eyes to bring you back to God. That is Israel's condition, and that is the condition of Bible Christianity today.

We weep over sad movies. We weep over things that are not real. We weep over losing an animal. We weep over losing a pet, but we do not weep over our sin. We do not weep over the fact that we are saved now 10, 15, 20 years, and you still have won nobody to Christ. We do not weep over that. Do you know why? Because right now God is squeezing your heart, but just 15 minutes outside that door, you can get the Chiefs game on. You can get life going again and forget all of the things that God is touching you with right now. I am giving you that on personal experience. As David said in Psalms 119:136:

Psalms 119:136

Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Israel had got so indifferent. Israel had gotten so self-righteous. Israel had gotten so into themselves. They had got to the place where they are looking at themselves as the pinnacle of God's people when they are absolutely destitute in every form and fashion to what God was, and they cannot now accept the message of God's man. They have got to get rid of him. They put Jeremiah down in a dung pit because they did not like his message. They put him down in prison because they did not like what he said. It did not match up to what they wanted. You can play with preachers. They are just mortal men like you and me. You can play with the prophets of God in the Old Testament just because of the fact that they are mortal men. But there is one whom you will never play with for long, and when He draws a line in the sand, it is drawn. My advice to everybody in this room is: do not ever get so cold and hard about the things of God. Do not ever get so self-righteous in who you think you are that God cannot squeeze your heart, bring tears to your eyes.

I am going to tell you something else. I was a 19-year-old kid that thought I had the world by the tail, and I knew everything that was going on. I had been raised in church. I knew better, but I thought now because I had been out in the world and I did what all I did, and I had it all together, and I did not need God in my life, and I had forgotten all the little things that God had done for me in my life. I forgot the hand of God. I look back on it now, but then at that time, when I was 17, 18, and 19 years old, I thought that I had the world. I had everything going my way. I had my plans in life, and it really did not include God. All God had to come down and do, He took my daddy and put him in a casket, and I will tell you what, do not you tell me, do not you tell me God cannot get the tears out of you. He will get them. He will get them. He will take something or somebody in your life that meant so much to you, that you have thought about in your life, that you did things all your life, and you will say, "Wow, why? He is gone. She is gone. I do not have him anymore." You will think back of the great times that you had and all the wonderful memories you had, and when you walk and you think to yourself, "Wow, now they are, but they are in heaven. I will get to see him again." Do you know what? God is up in heaven right now thinking about all the wondrous times He used to have with you before you stuck it to Him. It breaks His heart, but He loves you so much.

I used to hear old Mel Sabaka saying, I did not know what he was talking about back then, but I used to hear him say, "God loves you so much, and His commitment to get you to heaven is so real and so true that He will get you home to heaven if He has got to do it in a wheelchair or a hearse, but He will get you there." Do not get so cold and hard that God cannot reach down and touch your heart about something in your life that you know is the right thing to do. Do you know what we do? I told you this Thursday night, you see it all across the world today in Christianity. Do you know what we do? We do not want to do what is right with God, but we want to maintain our respectability. So do you know what we do? We find other people who are Christians who do the same things that we do so we can band together. It is called in the Bible, "birds of a feather flock together," and then we become each other's support system. We can talk about what we do not like. We can talk about the things that we can have a little band together, and we pretend, we pretend that we really have a relationship with God when all we have is a relationship with other people who are as out of fellowship with God as you are. That is all you have got.

Do you know why people go to big churches? Nothing is wrong with big churches, but do you know why a lot of people go to big churches? Because they do not like accountability in their life. That is why. She can get lost in a big church. Do not fool me. I read the book before you even found the first cover in the index. I was shaming God when you still were crapping in your diapers. I know every trick in the book because I pulled most of them. I know exactly how it works. I know the fact that when you come to a church like this, there is an accountability factor. You cannot keep coming here and not do something for God and not get worried about it. So what happens? You find yourself someplace to go where you know what? You can go once every six weeks or every eight weeks or whatever the case. There is no accountability. There is no responsibility. You do not have to give a dime. Nobody knows who you are, and you can walk around and say, "Yeah, I go here," and everybody goes, "Wow!" But in reality, it is a run and an escape from the very relationship with God that He wants you to have. You fool me, you sell that to somebody else. I have been in too many of those things, and I ran. I ran from God for 19 years of my life. I read every turn and trick in the book. I told God was after me every turn.

I was telling the girls yesterday, I think it was yesterday morning, I told the ladies yesterday, Mel Sabaka saw something in me, and I do not know what he saw, but he never gave up on me. When I was a young kid in high school and did not go to church anymore and did not want nothing to do with it, every Tuesday night was our visitation at the church. He would send a group of young people over to my house every Tuesday night to invite me to church. I was rude to them. I did not want to talk to them. I looked around, would not turn the TV off, would not let them in the house. I did everything in the world to keep them from coming, but he kept bringing them to me. Finally, I thought I was going to be smarter than all of them. Do you know what I did? I told my mom, I said, "You know what? When they come and I see their car pull up, I am going out the back door, and I am going down the alley, and I will be back when they leave." I had a great plan, but you see, the greatest plan you will ever get will never be greater than a plan that God has for you. So when I thought I was so smart and I had an escape route, they came to the front door, I shot out the back door, and there was Mel Sabaka standing waiting for me.

Let me just say something to you: if a mortal sinner of a man like he was, saved by God's grace but still a man, still mortal flesh and blood, has his issues, if a mortal man can figure out my little stupid plan and wait for me out the back door, what in God's name do you think God has got on you today? You will never get away from Him. You will never go out the back door with Him. He will stand there and meet you every step of the way. He would not let me go. He would not let me go. Somebody said, "Well, I am sure glad you really, you really made the decision." I am not sure I made the decision. I just think He wore me out so much, I had no other choice. I do not think I made any decision. I just had no other option. I was worn out. I could not run any farther. I could not hide anymore. Finally, God took what had been pent up in my life for so many years and rode down there with that casket and just squeezed my heart, got my attention. I wonder what it will take in your life to get your attention. I am telling you, never get so cold, my dear folks, my dear people, never get so cold and hard about the things of God and so caught up in yourself that God cannot squeeze your heart and bring those tears.

XI. The Call to Stand in the Gap

Ezekiel prophetically breaks down around the captivity and the time and the restoration, and I think it is a great deal. It is a great concept because I am going to tell you something: what you find in the book of Ezekiel is this: God sends them into captivity. He chastises them terribly, but it is one of the greatest character qualities of God because in this book of Ezekiel, He is telling them all that He is going to do, but then He is also telling them what He is going to do in their future when they get right with God. You see the great thing of God is, God may whip you. He may whip me. He may chastise you and me, and He may bring judgment down on me and you, but God will never bring judgment down on me and you without showing you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, that God will get you out of whatever situation He allowed you to get into. That is one of the greatest concepts of God in the Bible, popped through the whole Old Testament. The nation of Israel was God's chosen people. You and I are God's chosen people. God wants you and me to do a work in the New Testament like He wanted them to do a work in the Old Testament. They failed, went into captivity, failed miserably, and a judgment of God fell on them. Some of you and some of me, the judgment of God has fallen on, if you are honest, and you know there have been times in your life when God has whacked you, that you have not been what you are supposed to be. Yet at the same time, God never whacked you without giving you the hope of coming back out of it and getting restored with God. Oh, I love Him for that one.

So in light of that, Ezekiel breaks down prophetically around the captivity and in time, yes, the restoration. Here it is. We will get into detail on this on Thursday night when we get to this point, but right now, here it is:

Chapter 1 through Chapter 24: The destruction of Jerusalem.

Let me just add this: it is not pretty, but then it never is when God judges you. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:11:

Hebrews 12:11

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

That is true of Israel. It is true of you and me.

Chapter 25 through Chapter 35: Deals with the judgment of the four Gentile nations, all connected with the Antichrist.

I love it. God uses the Gentile nations to whip His people and chastise them, then comes back and destroys the nation for messing with His people. You have got to love it. You talk about poetic justice. I love it.

Chapter 36 through Chapter 40: The greatest chapters in the Bible on the restoration of the nation of Israel.

Chapter 40 through Chapter 48: The greatest eight chapters in the Bible on, after God restores them, the inheritance that God gives them, the millennial reign of Christ.

It shows you the great concept that simply this: God will never, never, never judge you for your sin while giving you an avenue to get out in time. The judgment may take some time. He may have to whack you. You may be hard-headed. You may not break. You may not bow. But at a certain point in your life, when a person gets right with God and they get that thing worked out, in all of our life, God, and Israel too, same thing, you see it consistently: He whacked them in the captivity, but then He brings them back and He restores their glory in time.

For me, there are so many messages in Ezekiel that time would not permit us to even give you a list of them. Because of the content of Ezekiel, because of the time frame and the nation of Israel and all the particles here that make this thing such a solid story, Ezekiel, as all the prophets, is just absolutely filled with great sermons. I have sermon after sermon after sermon that I have preached out of the book of Ezekiel. One of my favorite sermons is the one I am not going to preach it to you this morning, but I am going to talk to you about it, and I will show you the outline. It is in Ezekiel 22:30. Personally, I think it is one of the greatest messages in the Bible for the day and age that we live in. I really do.

Do you know why I like the prophets? This is not a statement, this is more of a confession. Do you know why I like the prophets? Because you do not have to really wonder about what they are trying to say. I like a preacher who, when he preaches, you do not have to sit there wondering what he meant by that. I like a preacher that, this is my own personal thing now, I cannot speak, I am not speaking for you, I like a preacher that gets in your face. Well, thank you. I will write the rest of your dismiss you too. Stay here, and I will get in your face for a while. That is just me, and I guess the reason I like that is because I know me. I know how rotten I really am. I know how vile I really am, and I also know if it was not for the grace of God and God putting an in-your-face man in my life, I would probably be in hell this morning. So I appreciate "in your face." People do not do that today.

While we are on the same subject, this is why our church will never get to be 5,000, 4,000, 2,000. Our church will probably never get to be 300, 400, 500. "In your face" preaching is not for today, just like it was not for Israel's day right before the captivity. But I cannot help that. I told the people down in Joplin when I preached down there, it was a good place for me just to go and let off some steam, but I told them, I said, "I hate the 20th and the 21st century." I feel like Paul, a man born, Paul said, "I am a Jew born out of due season." Do you know what he meant by that over there in Acts? He basically meant that he, in his mind, he was doing the wrong thing. He did not want to go to the Gentiles. His burden was to go to the Jews, and he probably thought much like I think, or maybe I think like he thought. He certainly did not think like me. I think like him. If he thought like me, he would not have got anything done. But anyway, that is another sermon we will not preach this morning.

I look at that thing and I think to myself, he sees, I am thinking just like he is thinking. He hated what he had to do. He would have much rather, in fact, it got to him so bad that he finally disobeyed God and went to the Jews and really cut short his ministry. But God is in all of that, and God knew exactly what He was doing. But my point is this: he would have rather went to, he would have rather been born 50 years early and went to the nation of Israel than when he was born and went to the Gentiles because he was a Jew. I think part of the problem with that is that

he persecuted Jews. Before he got saved, he killed Jews for believing in Christ. He put them in prison. He tortured men, women, children who believed in Christ. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was a scribe. He went and rounded these people up. In fact, on the very road to Damascus, when he is going down there to, when the Lord met him, he is on his way to put more Christians in jail. I think deep down inside his heart, from looking at his life and studying his life, I think that bothered him all of his life that he wanted a chance to go back to the very people that he persecuted and be their man for God instead of us lowly Gentiles. Well, thank God that God put him the way He did because we always see the big picture now, but I do not know how he felt.

Let me tell you something, if I had had my choice to be born, I would not have been born in the 20th century. I would not have been born in the 21st century. I would have backed up my birthday in 1950. I would have backed that up by about at least 100 years, maybe 200 years, been born in 1850, maybe 1750. I am out of step in this world. I hate to even say things like this because people take the wrong idea, and I am not really talking about you guys because you are here, but I will tell you what, Christianity makes me want to puke today. I see some of the wimpiest God's people, men and women who just drive me nuts. I would have rather been born back when a man's word was his word, when a Christian stood for something that he knew what he was standing for. This Christianity today is just a little feminine movement that everybody wants to get along, and nobody make anybody mad, nobody rock the boat. That is not my world. I am out of step. Put me back in 1750. I will follow Whitfield. I will be like the guy that used to open the concert for Elvis Presley. Get me, warm up the crowd for you, then turn with Luther on him. That was my thing. I loved the preaching, a place where you preached out there and 30,000 people got saved. I loved the preaching, a place where the power of God came down at Jonathan Edwards. He did not, all he did was read his message, and people fell on their face weeping and ran forward and got right with God because it was the power of God that was on men's lives. Those days are gone. You do not minister to people anymore today. You kiss their rear ends is what you do. You coddle them along. You wipe their little runny noses when they get their thumb either nose out of joint when they are over in the corner and they are suffering their thumb. You say, "Here, we will put a little sugar on it. Now that tastes better, does it not, hon?" Yeah, it does. I do it. I really do. I have got 15 flavors of sugar back there in my briefcase, and I just put a little bit on whenever I have to, but I hate it. I hate it. I absolutely hate it. I am just being honest with you, I hate it. I hate the phoniness. I hate the games that people play. I hate the antics that people go through. It just drives me nuts, and I am just venting. But I am just telling it, when I get into the Old Testament like this, it just sets me off because I do not want to be here. I would rather be back there. I will tell you what, I would rather be where people would want to kill you face to face for what you preach and what you believe instead of just stabbing you in the back and running out the door. That is where I am at with it.

One of my great messages is found right here in Ezekiel 22:30. Here is what he says.

Ezekiel 22:30-31

30 And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

31 Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

I look at that and I think to myself, verse 30 is a great verse. It is a great sermon. God was looking for a man. God is looking for a man that will stand for Him. A long time ago, years ago, I read a book. I do not even remember who wrote it, but it was written by an old English saint many, many years ago, and I like reading books like that because it puts me back in the world that I live. I do not know what you daydream about. I daydream about preaching in places where people accept the Word of God. I do not know what you daydream about. Some of you guys are in the fantasy football. I am in the fantasy preaching, and you put your little teams together. I put my preaching team together. We have got a horse and buggy, and Whitfield is in the back seat, and Sam Jones is in the front seat, and I am over here on the left side. Bob Jones Senior is over here. We are going to kick the hell out of them this afternoon, boys, and that is what we do. You play your games, I play mine. I understand.

But I read this book many, many years ago. This guy, I only book ever found by him, never really found anything about him, and he said that he found out that there had been a prevailing spirit of falsehood in each of the seven periods of church history. I do not know if you know it or not, but every period of church history had a spirit of falsehood, a bad doctrine that it had to deal with. One of them was, "Did Christ really resurrect from that grave?" Another one came along, "Was the virgin birth?" Another one that came along in time was, "How do you really get saved? Baptism for salvation." Another one that came on down the line was pre-millennialism versus amillennialism, or all the other trash that is out there. Then along came Calvinism after the Reformation with predestination, and then came eternal security that became an issue back in the early charismatic movements came out. Then the one that we are up against today, the one that we are up against today, that is the spirit of falsehood in our world that has done more damage than all the rest of them put together, is the authority of the Word of God. "Did God write a perfect book, and if He did, can I get a copy of it?" The answer today that is "no" in most circles.

This old boy said that the job of every child of God on planet earth, in whatever period of time he lives in, is to figure out what is the prevailing spirit of his day that is against God, and then with all his might, stand against that spirit. In Revelation 2:13, we are right in the middle of church history here in Pergamos, and the word Pergamos means "much marriage," and it is a time when Christianity was married to the world, much like the time we are living in today. I was reading down there a number of years ago in verse 13, and a strange, unknown character appears, and then he is gone. His name is found one time in the Bible. You never find anything about him before. You never find anybody after, but he just shows up in this passage that has to do with everything going to hell in a handbag and the whole church being connected to the world and everything goes along with it. Right in the middle of all this hell and tearing God's Word apart, you find this guy, and his name is Antipas, and it says something like, "Antipas, my faithful martyr." That is all it says. I got so intrigued by that one time, I did not know this, so I just went through manually everything in my Bible to try to find it, and I could not find it. I did everything I could find, and then I finally found a book one place that did give the names of people what they mean, and I finally found this guy, Antipas. Do you know what his name means? Do you

know why God put him right where He put him in a day and age like you and I are, right where he is at? Do you know why God put him there? Do you know why God chose this little guy, just put him with one little thing there? You never read anything more about him before, you know, really about after him, but his name says it all. Do you know what his name means? It means "against everything."

Do you know what my problem is? I am against everything that God is against, and I make no apology for it. The Bible says that God is looking for a man. Do you know what He is looking for a man to do today? He is looking for a man to stand. He is looking for a man that will stand for the truth of the Word of God. In fact, when you come on down through here, He says God is looking for a man who will stand, and he stands in the gap and make up the hedge. Do you know what that gap is and that hedge is? Over in Normandy in 1944, when the D-Day, one of the things that they got into that never showed from the aerial photographs was the great Norman hedgerows. Those things were like 30 or 40 foot high. They had been there for a thousand years, and they were long, thick, about maybe from the wall to here wide, and maybe 60 feet high, and they were where the Norman farmers over the hundreds and hundreds of years had just piled all the brush when they cleared the fields, and they actually had circuted out all of the different lands by these hedgerows, and you could not get through them. So the troops were trying to get across and go into attack, and all these Germans were dug in these hedgerows, and you could not bomb them out, you could not shoot them out, and it was absolutely the most murderous thing that our troops ever did. It was not until some sergeant got the idea of taking a Sherman tank and putting big claws on the front of it that when he ran into that hedgerow, he would dig underneath the roots and then keep pushing it through and bust a hole in that thing. Once they broke the hole in the hedge, the Germans had no defenses because we could just pour through.

Do you know what has happened in American Christianity? There is a hole in our defenses. Nobody is holding the line in the gap of the hedge, and the enemy is pouring through. Nobody is taking a stand anymore. The average Christian does not even know for sure if they are saved. You throw a Bible at the average Christian who has been saved 10 or 15, 20 years, and ask them to show you how they got saved and show you the verses in the Bible, they could not even do it. How in the world are you going to stand for anything when you do not even know what you believe, what you want, what you believe? That is what is wrong today, and God is looking for a man that will stand. You may have to stand against your family. I know young men in this church that when they started coming to this church, their families turned against them.

God is going to put you into circumstances. They are going to make you. Sometimes God lets you go so far and learn so much and grasp so much, and you think you really have it all together, and you really do. Then do you know what God will do? God will bring some circumstance in your life, some person in your life, some relationship in your life. Do you know what that relationship does? It is the reality check because if you do not perform with a circumstance in a situation like you think you do in your heart, you are wasting your time. What good is it if you believe a lot of things, but when push comes to shove, no matter who it may be, you cannot stand on what is true? You are not any good to God. What, you just work in situations that work out for you? "God, put me into the fight as long as there is no battle. Where is your weapon? Well, I do

not want to be in a real war. I just want to kind of stand up here and where do we get those medals that everybody is wearing? That is what I want to get, and where do you get, where is the polish for my helmet?"

That is what good you are. Standing for God is the dirtiest, filthiest, grimmest, merciless job you are ever going to get into in life. It is going to be what the prophets did. There was a breach in the line, and the people were, that Baal worship was pouring through into the Old Testament nation of Israel, and God sent some man to stand in the gap, to make up the hedge, to stop it. I am not in any illusion, and please do not misread anything I have said this morning. I do not look at myself as the second coming of Bob, that I am going to stop anything. I am not. This church is not. I do not intend to stop anything. I do not have the ability to stop it. I only have one thing I can do, and that is what I am going to do. I cannot stop it. I cannot even prevent it. I cannot even lessen it. All I can do is by my own choice, die trying. Die trying to stop. But he says, "I found none." There was none in 606 B.C. when God needed men to fill up the gap. There is none today when God needs to fill up the gap. It is a situation where Christianity is not made up of men anymore. We saw it in the book of Judges, did we not, where He could not find a judge to deliver Israel, so He got a woman, Deborah. We see it down through the history where the nation of Israel, and it parallels into where we are at today, the only thing that will make this church strong, and I speak to men and women, are men and women who are willing to stand on the Word of God for what is right in the face of people who do not want to do what is right, whether it be your friends, whether it be your family, whether it be your people to work with, and that who it may be. Somebody has to exercise leadership. Somebody has to say, when it is in total confusion, somebody has to stand up and say, "Follow me."

Do you know the 31st Infantry Division? It has got a patch on their arm that was earned all the way back in World War I, and back in World War I, it was a very disastrous time, and it was very confusing. Living in a trench for six months and being shelled 24/7 and no food with rats and dead bodies rotting all around you, morale was not high. But the 31st Infantry Division had to make an attack the next morning, and it went down in history as one of the greatest attacks because everybody was afraid. Everybody was shell-shocked. Everybody was grumbling. But there was one guy, a lieutenant, that they all respected, who was always head and shoulders above everybody else. That morning, when the flare went up and the whistle blew, and those 60,000 American boys climbed up out of those trenches, it was because one guy stood up and yelled and screamed to the top of his lung, "Come on, boys, follow me!" To this day, that infantry division has a patch with a sword on it that simply says, "Follow me." What God needs is somebody that will stand up in the midst of adversity. Somebody that will take a stand in the midst of their family. Somebody that will take a stand in the midst of what is going on in this world when wrong is wrong and right is right. Stand up and simply say, "Follow me."

XII. Conclusion: Play the Man

I will give you my life verse for ministry, and maybe this will help you someplace down the line, I do not know, but this is my verse for ministry in my life. It is found in 2 Samuel 10:12, and it is a verse that for me is very fitting because it is a verse that was given by an Israeli general, Joab,

in the midst of a heat of battle. In this particular battle, Israel is greatly outnumbered. The enemies are all around them, but Joab never saw, he was a great war general, he never saw how he was outnumbered. He always got the idea that him and God made up the majority. Right in the middle, when he is under attack, he says to one of his subordinates, he says, "You attack that way, I am going to attack this way. If they get too much for you, call me, I will come help you. If they get too much for me, I will call you, you come and help me." Then he gives this verse. This is my ministry verse. This ought to be the verse of every man in this church, but it will not be. It will not be.

2 Samuel 10:12

Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good.

Do you know what he said in the midst of overwhelming odds? He said the same thing that God should say to your heart and my heart: "Play the man." Be the man that God wants you to be, that He saved you to be in the face of adversity. Do not let your friends influence you. Do not let anybody influence you. Do not let your people at work influence you. Do not let anybody take you off the task of what God has called you to do. Play the man.

You do not know who Latimer and Ridley were, do you? Latimer and Ridley were two guys back in the toward the end of the Dark Ages, about in the 1400s-1500s. They were burned at the stake. They were burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church because they were Bible believers, and they would not compromise. They would not quit preaching the Word of God, and they burned him at the stake, Latimer and Ridley, side by side. Do you know what Latimer said to Ridley as the flames started to come up? He quoted that verse, and he says, "Master Ridley, play the man! Play the man!" God is looking for a man. God is looking for a man that will be real. He says down there, "Be of good courage, let us play the man for our people and for the city of our God." Then I love this, "and the LORD do that which seemeth him good." Do you know what he is saying? May I put this into a new modern translation for you? He is saying, "You play the man. Let the chips fall where they may." If it is the right thing to do, play the man. If it is the right attitude to take, play the man. If it is the right thing to stand for, play the man. If it goes against your friends, play the man. If it goes against your family, play the man. If it goes against your wife, play the man. If it goes against everything in this world, play the man. Let the chips fall. God is looking for a man. That is Ezekiel. Ezekiel tells the nation of Israel, "You are getting clobbered. But God will clobber you, but God will always make a way to restore you." That is the prophet's job: taking the message to the people of God.

Next week, we get into the next book that deals right along with this in the Exilic time. They go hand in hand. We talk about the book of Daniel, where Daniel deals with going into the first part of the captivity. I am going to show you why. I am going to show you next week how you always spot how the devil works. When you look at the captivity, there is a mind behind this that shows you this just was not Nebuchadnezzar. There is a mind behind that captivity that shows you that there is something going on here in the spiritual world that is much, much, much, much deeper than what appears in the history books. We will see it when we get to Daniel next week.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. Truly, Lord, help every man and woman in this building today. Help us to realize, Father, that you have called us. You have given us the job to do just like you did Israel. Father, we have to play the man. Lord, it breaks my heart that so many years ago in 606 B.C., when your people were going into apostasy and going into Baal worship and your hand of judgment was about to fall on them, that you could not find a man that would stand before you and make up that hedge in a gap. But, Lord, it has got to be heartening to you today in your church, in this church, and Christianity in general, that we cannot find men and women that will stand for you no matter what the cost, no matter what friends they lose, no matter what happens, no matter who says what, no matter what the circumstances are, that simply because the Bible is right, and this is what the Bible says to do, we play the man. We play the man for our people and for our God, and then let God do whatever He wants to do. Let the chips fall. Lord, I have followed that verse all of my life. Lord, it is not a popular road, but I am not interested in being popular with people. I am not interested in pleasing men. I am not interested in being popular and being courted by people or being in the court of great preachers where we all sit around and talk about how great we are. I am only interested in one thing, and that is the day before I stand before you, you look down at me, and with my sword, with its dents and its hammered and my sword with its nicks of all the stupid things I have done in life, but yet through it all, you have the ability to say to me, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." That is all I want in life. Help me be the man. Help these men play the man. Help these women play the man and take a stand up against that which is not pleasing to you in this world that we live in. Father, we will thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for the sake we ask it. Amen.