

The Mark

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Date: 06 May 2019

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[0 : 0 0] The passage that we read from Ezekiel this evening, it's not a jolly or a happy passage. It's looking towards a sort of judgment of God upon not only the city of Jerusalem, but by extension upon those who are meant to be his own people, those who are meant to be the Israelites, the kingdom of Judah and so on, and even the temple of God itself.

As we look at the chapters surrounding this particular chapter 9 and 10, we see the abuses which have crept in to the temple and amongst even the ancients of what were meant to be the Lord's people.

So the judgment isn't just on Jerusalem, it isn't just on the city or the temple or the people. By extension, it's upon the whole world. But the Lord is causing the prophet to see that he himself makes a distinction.

Throughout salvation history, we see this. The Lord makes a clear distinction between those whose hearts have been moved to love him and serve him and who groan and sighs.

We read here in verse 4 of the state of things in the world, even in the church perhaps, those in other words whose hearts are his and those who are not. And this distinction, of course, we have it all the way through, as we say, salvation history.

[1 : 2 0] Jesus himself makes a mention in Matthew 25 of the separation of the sheep and the goats and the separating out of the wheat and the tares and so on. And from the earliest distinctions in Scripture, we've got, you know, where Noah, of course, is redeemed from out of the world that is completely destroyed by the flood.

And he's brought into the ark and his family and all the creatures and the animals and they're saved from that deluge. But the rest of the world is destroyed.

And amongst all those that would have been destroyed, there'd be some who are very, very bad indeed and some who are not as bad as some others and some who are young and some who are old, just as we read in this passage here, likewise in Ezekiel, that the Lord sends his destroying angel to go through, destroying angels to go through, smite, you know, slay utterly old and young, maids and little children and women that come not near any man, any person, any woman, upon whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary.

You know, as Peter said, the judgment first begins at the house of God, where shall the unrighteous and the ungodly and the sinner appear. So, not everyone who is within the temple precincts is righteous.

Not everyone who is in Jerusalem is righteous. Not everyone who is called a Jew or an Israelite outwardly is righteous. Not everyone who belongs to the church of Jesus Christ is righteous in the sight of God.

[2 : 4 6] But the Lord makes the distinction. With Noah, as we said, when he's going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he brings Lot out of it and those are his family who will come.

Now, Lot, as you know, if you read the biblical man, it is not exactly a saint of the Lord in anything other than the purely scriptural sense. His character leaves a lot to be desired.

His behavior is very much tainted and affected by the world. And yet the Lord saves and redeems him from out of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, even though all the rest is destroyed, including members of his old family who refuse to come with him.

Likewise, when the Passover is instituted and the blood marks the doors of the posts and the lintels and so on, those covered by the blood, Hebrews, Israelites, though technically, theoretically, if any Egyptians were covered by the blood and the doors and lintels and doorposts, if they had obeyed the command of the Lord, they too would have been covered by it.

But the point is the Lord makes a distinction between those who will follow and obey him and those who will not. So wherever judgment comes, Old Testament or New, we find this distinction being made.

[4 : 01] And, you know, we read in Isaiah 26, for example, in the last two verses, Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.

Hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment until the indignation be overpassed. For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

The earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain. Of course, this was the charge that the Lord lays upon Jerusalem and upon Judah and so on.

You know, the iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great. Verse 9, the land is full of blood. The land shall disclose its blood. And when it says to the Lord's people, you know, hide yourself away for a little while.

Obviously, it's not a little while, the judgment of God. But as Jesus says in the New Testament, you know, except those days had been shortened and made less than they were going to be, even the elect wouldn't be saved.

[4 : 58] But for the elect's sake, they have been shortened. Shutting your doors about you. No house, no roof is going to save you when the wrath of God falls. What do we mean?

What does it mean in Isaiah about entering into your chambers and shutting the doors and hiding yourselves, as it were? Well, I would suggest to you that this is a spiritual application of what the Lord says repeatedly to his people in the Sermon and the Month to make their relationship, their calling and election sure, to enter into their closet, into their secret chambers and work that relationship with the Lord.

Make that time with the Lord. Build that relationship with the Lord. Entering into the secret places, entering into the secret chambers, shutting the door, being alone with the Lord, or building up that relationship, will cause the Lord to have mercy, to have favor upon those who seek him.

He says, seeking you shall find, asking it shall be given unto you, and their heart of stone will be replaced by a heart of flesh, a heart that desires, that loves, that serves the Lord.

And the Lord seeing and knowing those who have such hearts, those who are yearning for righteousness, as Jesus said, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

[6 : 21] Then he will see them. He will know them, and he will mark them. Now we'll come to in just a minute some of the parallels between the prophet Ezekiel and what we see in the final fulfillment of things in Revelation.

But remember what we have here in chapter 9 and on into chapter 10 is not just in isolation. It's connected in with the chapters that have come before her. Chapter 8, that we looked at on a previous occasion some time ago, describes some of the abominations taking place in Jerusalem and even in the temple itself.

And now the Lord is visiting judgment. These angelic beings, they're described just as being men, but it's obviously angelic beings coming out from the north gate of the temple in towards the sanctuary and meeting with the Lord.

Six men came from the way of the higher gate which lagged toward the north. Every man a slaughter weapon in his hand. And one man among them was clothed with linen with a writer's ink horn by his side.

And they went in and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the Lord God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen which had the writer's ink horn by his side.

[7 : 33] He said, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of it.

Now, first of all, that sigh and that cry. Notice there's that inward groaning and yearning, the sighing within. You know, Romans talks about sighs that are too deep to be uttered with which the Spirit intercedes.

I think it's Romans 8, 26. Yeah, here we are. Romans 8, verse 26. Likewise, the Spirit also help with our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Those that sigh within longing for the cleansing, the purification of the evil, this fallen world. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness. That's what is the case within.

The sigh indicates what is within. And that cry for all the abominations that will be done in the midst of it. That is it, giving voice, giving vent to note that inner feeling.

[8 : 44] Who do they cry to? Well, you can cry all you like to the fallen world and you can preach righteousness as Noah did. And as elsewhere, it's implied that Lot was a future of righteousness and that he stood for what was right.

Maybe he did, compared to the rest of those in Sonnen. But the fact of the matter is that for the most part, until and unless the Lord moves somebody's heart, all the pleadings will fall on deaf ears.

They did in the days of Noah. Not a single person outside his family came into the ark with him. But nevertheless, they cry out, they cry not only to the world, but they cry ultimately out to the Lord.

How long, O Lord? How long? So that sigh, that is what is within, and that cry, that is what comes out, the outward expression of it, for all the abominations that be done in the midst of it.

Now when it says, set a mark upon the foreheads of the men, sigh and cry, well that in the original Hebrew, the word that's translated as mark is literally, it's the Hebrew letter tau, that's the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

[9 : 53] I don't know if your own Bible in front of you will have, if you look at Psalm 119, for example, it's divided into all these different sections, each one headed by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And in that particular psalm, each section in the original Hebrew begins with, each verse of that section begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And so tau is the very last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And this is a tiny little insignificant mark, the last of all letters. Perhaps that implies that this is almost one of the last things the Lord does. Like, you know, where in the parable of the wheat and the tares, and the reapers say to him, well, we go in and pull out the tares just now.

He says, no, no, don't do that. In case you've damaged the good seed that's growing there. But rather, let them both grow together. And then at the last day of the harvest, then you pull out the tares and gather them up and chuck them into the fire that we plant.

Then you harvest in the good wheat afterwards. The Lord only makes this separation at the very, very end. And perhaps this is one reason why the mark is in the original, the letter of the last letter of the alphabet.

[11 : 06] This tiny, insignificant, seeming letter. And yet the distinction between those who will be appointed to be destroyed and those who will be appointed to be spared.

Sleigh utterly old, young, both maids, little children or women. It sounds horrendous to us. And it is horrendous. Because the effects of sin and separation from the Lord are horrendous.

All that the Lord is unleashing here is the outworking of what sinful man has chosen. When man chooses to turn away from the Lord, to have nothing to do with the Lord, to want nothing of the Lord, the only alternative is death with all its horrors.

If you turn away from the one who is alive in all its fullness, you have only death in all its emptiness. So whether one is old or young or male or female, little children and so on, all of this, the fearful effects of sin, the ultimate sin, of which of course, the sin of unbelief, is that which destroys our hope of salvation.

if we refuse even to hold on to the only means of our salvation, there's nothing for us that lost us. And that unleashes death in all its fury.

[12 : 29] But come not near anyone upon whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary. Now it's not entirely clear from the context in chapter 9 whether those with the slaughter weapons are falling immediately upon the heels of the man with the writer's ink or whether, as we have at the end of chapter 9, when he comes, he says, I have done as thou hast commanded me, whether that's the signal for the others now to go through the city.

Probably it's more likely that because he would need to finish his work. He would need to finish marking all the Lord's people before the agents of death could be unleashed.

Now this, this giving account of the job being done, I have done as thou hast commanded me to do, this of course is entirely, it's spiritually attested, it's what we find, you know, the apostles doing, for example, when the Lord sends them out by two and two, we read Mark chapter 6, verse 30, the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus and told him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.

And Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast and how the servants go out to gather in the guests and so on. Luke 14, in verse 22, and the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded and yet there is room.

This reporting that the job has been faithfully fulfilled, even our Lord himself sets this example. In John 17, at verse 4, he says, I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

[14 : 06] The report of completion is part and parcel of the Lord's work of separation. That when the work is done, when it is fulfilled, it is all, as it were, reported in to the Lord himself.

Now, of course, this marking of the Lord's people, the implication is that the angels themselves with the slaughter weapons in their hands would not be able to distinguish in and of themselves were it not for the mark which is placed upon those who are the Lord.

So, this is a mystery, this doctrine of election of all those who will ultimately be redeemed by the Lord in his hearts. He will turn to them. It is a deep mystery that is hidden from the angels too.

Now, clearly, the man with the writer's ink horn, he knows. He's got direction. He's able to see, to identify, to perceive the hearts, the spirit and soul of each individual one.

He marks them all. But apart from him, who then reports back that the job is done, the other angels would not know. It is hidden from the angels. It is hidden from those doing their work.

[15 : 20] But we read, you know, in 2 Timothy 2, verse 19, Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his.

The Lord knoweth them that are his and let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. Now, of course, Ezekiel is having, being given a vision, of course, of that ultimate separation between those who are the Lord's and those who are not.

He is seeing a head, if you like, to end times. And one reason we say that it is end times is that if we go into chapter 10 and then we say, I looked and behold in a firmament that was above the head of the cherubim still appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.

And then the cherubim needs to go in a mountain. It's not dissimilar from the vision that Ezekiel has in chapter 1. But in chapter 1, if we just read the last two, three verses of chapter 1, you'll see a major distinction.

Above the firmament was over their heads was the likeness of a throne as the appearance, chapter 1, verse 26, this is, the appearance of a sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.

[16 : 39] I saw as the colour of amber as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward and from the appearance of his loins even downward. I saw as it were the appearance of fire and it had brightness round about.

As the appearance of the bull that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord and when I saw it I fell upon my face and I heard a voice of one that spake.

Now, what we find in chapter 1 there is upon the throne and around the figure that is upon the throne, the figure of the almighty of the Christ that he sees there, there is the presence of the rainbow, the rainbow, the ball that is in the cloud in the day of rain, which is what?

Well, when the Lord gives it to Noah, it is a token of a covenant of mercy. But by this stage in Ezekiel where the judgment is being poured out upon the earth, the time for mercy has passed.

The opportunity of mercy is no longer there because that time has ended. Now is the separating out of the sheep from the goats, of the wheat from the tares, of those marked with the mark of the Lord and those not.

[17 : 59] Now, of course, as we said, Ezekiel is given this vision, looking ahead towards the end times and of course, revelation in many ways mirrors that which the prophet is himself given.

If we were to turn, for example, to the revelation chapter 7, we'll see it, verses 2 and 3, I saw another angel ascending from the east having the seal of the living God and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea saying, Hurt not the earth neither the sea nor the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

And I heard the number of them which were sealed and sold 144,000. Obviously, symbolic number for all the tribes of Israel that are mentioned there. These are the redeemed amongst the Lord's people.

We go on then into chapter 9 of Revelation and we find here, we'll just read these first few verses. It said, The fifth angel said, I saw a star fall from heaven onto the earth.

To him was given the key of the bottomless pit and he opened the bottomless pit and there arose a smoke out of the pit as the smoke of a great furnace and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

[19:17] They came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth and unto them was given power as the scorpions of the earth of power and it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth neither any green thing neither any tree which of course locusts would normally totally devour but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads and to them it was given they should not kill them but that they should be tormented five months and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he striked a man and in those days shall men seek death and shall not find it and shall desire to die and death shall flee from them and the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle and their heads were as it were crowns like gold their faces were as the faces of men their hair as the hair of women their teeth were as the teeth of lions and they had breastplates as it were breastplates of iron the sound of their wings was the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle their tails like the scorpions and there were stings in their tails and their power was to hurt men five months and they had a king over them which is the angel of the bottomless pit whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon but in the Greek tongue hath this name

Apollyon now this is a vision of the unleashing of judgment upon the lost they cannot touch these locusts who have the king Apollyon or whether they cannot touch those who are sealed with the mark of God's grace they want to perhaps but they can't who rather is given into their hand all that are given into their hand are those who have not the seal of the Lord upon them and this Apollyon or Abaddon of course this is symbolically metaphorically pointing to the evil one the devil who has been given control been given as it were power over all those who have not given themselves into the hands of the Lord you see that's the only two possibilities it's not a wide range of what you choose and different colours and shades and flavours of religion or different gurus or prophets or salvation there is the Lord and there is the devil and we're either given into the hands of the Lord and his grace and his mercy or we're given completely into the hands of the evil or life and all its fullness or death in fact not even deaf men seek for death but they cannot find it and this indicates to us this illustrates and points out to us again that the nature of eternal torment and this is what the Bible teaches about how it is eternal torment that we seek for death but cannot find it because we're already in a state of separation from God but already in a state of death

Revelation 14 we read that of how the 13 I beg your pardon we then read of the false prophet and the antichrist who seeks to put his own mark on people and he sort of eats and imitates what God has done and he tries to put his own mark on people and we read in chapter 30 in verse 11 we read I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth he had two horns like a lamb he stake as a dragon verse 16 and he cause it all both small and great rich and poor free and bond to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads and that no man might buy or sell save he that had the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name so he is trying to irritate God by having a mark of his own but notice how the privilege of having his mark is you can buy and sell and trade in other words you can have this world and all that it contains you can have trade you can have money you can have pleasure you can have all the things some of which God forbids and some of which God simply blesses if they are right and good and wholesome things but the thing is that all in this world which is good is good only because

God has given it and designed it and intended it to be and all in this world which is evil is because men have turned away from the Lord but the devil is here saying oh you can only have the things of this world if you take my mark upon you and so nobody could buy or sell or trade or accumulate wealth unless they had his mark on their right hand or on their foreheads and then into chapter 14 we read in verse 9 in Revelation the third angel followed them saying with a loud voice if any man worship the beast and his image and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb and the smoke of their torment ascended up forever and ever and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast and his image and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name here is the patience of the saints here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me write blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth yea saith the spirit that they may rest in their labours and their works do follow them so in other words the devil is seeking to give people a choice to be you know jammed today you know have the world and have everything here and now and the Lord is saying anybody that gets his mark on them they will be destroyed they'll drink the wine of astonishment and judgment and so on it is a direct challenge the Lord makes just as in the days of Joshua that's what he said to his wife choose this day whom you will serve there is not neutrality there is not a middle way there is the Lord and there is the evil one and the distinction becomes clearer and clearer the further we go on and just in case it is not clear it's not clear to the angels exactly who is who but the Lord marks his people and preserves them beforehand notice you'll find in the Old Testament and in the New that before the Lord unleashes his judgment he makes sure the safety and security of his own people before he sends the flood he gets Noah to build the ark and brings them into it before he sends the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah he brings Lot out of it before he destroys the wicked in the days of Ezekiel he marks his own people and protects them before he sends the angels of the locusts he marks his own people he protects and he goes before them the Lord is our refuge the Lord is our protector the Lord the Lord is the one who alone is able to bring us through these judgments which his word reveals consistently throughout shall undoubtedly come upon the world you see this is one reason why if we were to think of others who follow perhaps their own connect form of religion like Jehovah's Witnesses for example would teach that this world if only people try to be good will get better and better and better and in this world this world which we have around us this will eventually become a paradise of God that's what they look for and long for and I don't think

I'm misrepresenting their teachings that's what they aim for this world to become a paradise now God clearly teaches in his word that that is not going to be the case it will have to be destroyed this world because of the sin and evil that is in it he will cause it to be burnt up to melt with fervent heat he will create a new heaven and a new earth likewise we see in Ezekiel here how the problem is in and through the temple and Jerusalem itself in other words the church of God itself is infected with all the sin of the world and this is again one reason why other for example branches of the church we might say that might cause you to put your trust in the church and in its sacraments to say if you're brought within the fold of mother church that's you that's you you're okay you get your sacraments you get the priest to look after you you get the church will be your mother your protector and so on the church is riddled with the same kind of sin there is no denomination no branch of the church including our own which can say oh we're okay we're the Lord's true people you know because every field has wheat and tares and in every branch of the church is mixed between those who are the Lord's and those who are not it is not in the temple it is not in Jerusalem it is not in the church it is in Christ alone that our salvation is days of the Passover it wasn't those who were racially Israelite but those who were covered by the blood who were likewise saved and protected from the angel of death it is those with the mark of the Lord upon them who are protected when we then go on into this chapter 10 we see the man with the ink on to gather up the coals and scatter them over the city and if you scatter burning coals over any place it's going to go up in flames pretty much that's what was going to happen in Jerusalem but Jesus warns his disciples that these kinds of judgment will come these fearful days will come and that rather than be a cause for being terrified if they put their trust in him they don't have to fear let's just finish with what the Lord says to his disciples in Luke chapter 21 we read from verse 25 then shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and the stars and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity the sea and the waves roaring men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth for the powers of heaven shall be shaken and then shall they see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory and when these things begin to come to pass then look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh when the judgment comes when the judgment comes the salvation when death and destruction comes

[30 : 09] Christ has already gone before to save and redeem his people when these things begin to come to pass look up for your salvation draweth nigh our salvation is in Christ alone that is what the name Jesus means it's the name Joshua Jehoshua Jehovah is salvation our saviour is in Christ alone and we trust and believe that he will mark everyone that is his that which is changed within them that which is found without them within and without the sighing and the crying the desire for the Lord the hungering and thirsting after righteousness if it is there at all it is only he who has put it there so when he begins to come and when all the judgments begin to unfold then look up for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe it let's pray