

Lesson for March 1, 2009

Old Testament Survey

The Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel, a priest, was God's prophet to both Judah and Israel during the Babylonian captivity. The events that he records cover a period of about 21 years from approximately 595 B.C. until 574 B.C. God used Ezekiel to teach the new generation who were born in exile the reason they were in captivity, to sustain their faith by prophesying the national restoration of Israel, the execution of judgment on their oppressors and the national glory they would enjoy under the future Davidic monarchy. Like all of God's prophets there was both a local message to the nation and a message regarding events to be fulfilled in the future.

Ezekiel, more than any other prophet, speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was different than His ministry in the Church Age. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell all believers and only a handful of believers in the Age of Israel were empowered by the Holy Spirit. In those cases, the Holy Spirit indwelt the believer temporarily in order to empower them to complete a specific task for God. Once the task was accomplished the Holy Spirit was removed from the believer. In theology, we call this ministry of the Holy Spirit, "endowment." (Psalm 51:11)

Ezekiel was given his prophetic messages through a series of visions and related these messages to the combined nation of Israel through parables and stories. Israel, as a nation, refused to listen to God's message and continued in their rebellion. In the process of prophesying coming events as related to the destruction of Israel's captors, Ezekiel gives us a glimpse of the fall of Satan (originally the highest ranking of God's angelic beings) and his final destiny.

The Angelic Conflict began as a rebellion to the authority of God by the most beautiful creature to come from the hand of God, Lucifer. Lucifer was the highest ranking of the angelic host. By an act of arrogance, Lucifer attempted to overthrow God and become the ruler of the angelic host. Of course, this didn't happen and Lucifer and the angels that followed him were tried and sentenced to the Lake of Fire. Apparently Lucifer, now called Satan, appealed the sentence and an appeal was granted. Mankind was created to resolve this conflict by showing Satan and the fallen angels that God was justified in His sentence. If only one person in history accepted the salvation solution offered by God in His grace, this would prove the fairness of His sentence. Of course, many have accepted the salvation solution found in Christ and every time another person trusts Christ as Savior, another witness is created for the prosecution.

Five "I Wills" of Satan

Isaiah 14:12-15 details the arrogance of Satan and his rebellion against God. In verse 13 Satan attempts to replace the authority of God with his authority (*I will ascend into heaven*). He also tries to take over the throne of God and set himself up as the ruler of the angelic host. (*I will exalt my throne above the stars (angels) of God*). He also wants to rule over the entire earth. (*I will sit in the mount of the congregation*). In verse 14 he continues with wanting to displace God as the Sovereign of the universe (*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds*). Satan wants to become God or at least counterfeit Him in every aspect. (*I will be like the Most High*).

Satan's Revolt

In Revelation 12:3-4 we are told that Satan led one third of the angels in his revolt against God. As a result of this revolt, Satan and the one-third that followed him were cast down to earth. (Ezekiel 28:15-17) Their rebellion against God led to a sentence to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. (Matthew 25:41) Hebrews 2:2, seems to indicate that there could have been a salvation solution offered to Satan and his followers, but was rejected.

Satan's Appeal

Since the sentence imposed upon Satan and the fallen angels was not carried out immediately, it is obvious that an appeal was granted and the sentence delayed. Mankind was created as a means to prove to Satan and his followers that God was fair and just in the sentence. (I John 3:18) The time frame of this appeal is from the sentencing in eternity past until Satan and the fallen angels are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:10)

The believer in Christ is involved in spiritual warfare as a result of Satan's appeal. It is by trusting Christ as Savior and executing His plan for our lives that we can become credible witnesses for the prosecution. Angels are observing us and when one person comes to know Christ as Savior the elect angels rejoice. Why? They rejoice because another victory for Christ has been won and it is additional proof that God is fair and just in His dealings, not only with mankind, but also with angels. So you see, that by studying, believing, and understanding the doctrine of angels, the believer can make application to his life. What is the application? You can glorify God by becoming a credible witness through the faithful execution of His purpose, plan and will.

There are two categories of angels since the rebellion in eternity. The one third who rebelled against God are now called “fallen angels” or “demons.” Those angels who remained faithful to God are called elect or holy. Both categories are organized similar to a military organization, which makes sense because we are told that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. (I Timothy 5:21; Mark 8:38; Matthew 25:41)

Elect angels have a specific relation to believers, and are observers of our lives. They rejoice in the salvation of a person and are said to be ministering spirits to the believer. Elect angels are given to every believer as guardians and they guard children. (Galatians 3:19; Acts 7:53; Luke 15:7, 10; I Corinthians 4:9; I Peter 1:12; Psalms 34:7; Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14)

Elect or holy angels are categorized as Michael the Archangel, (Chief Angel), Cherub, the highest order (cherubim, plural) and Seraph, the second highest in order (seraphim, plural). Michael is the head of God’s army, guards the nation of Israel and directly opposes Satan. (Revelation 12:7; Daniel 12:1; Jude 9) Gabriel is the only other elect angel named in Scripture. Gabriel protects heads of state, announced the birth of Christ, brought the message of John the Baptist’s birth and will announce the Rapture. (Daniel 8:15-27; Luke 1:11-33; I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Fallen angels (demons) are not given actual names in Scripture, but are very organized and active. They deceive unbelievers and believers alike, they perform miracles, they inflict bodily disease, they war against God and His elect angels and they indwell (possess) unbelievers. (Ephesians 6:12; Romans 8:38-39; Revelation 13:14, 16:14, 19:20; I Timothy 4:1; I Corinthians 10:20-21; Luke 8:36, 13:16; Matthew 4:24)

Ezekiel’s prophesy regarding the restoration of the nation of Israel looked far into the future to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. The characteristics of this age will be:

- 1) It will extend from the Second Coming of Christ to the Great White Throne Judgment
- 2) Jesus Christ will be the Great High Priest
- 3) Christ will rule on earth
- 4) Resurrected believers will reign with Christ
- 5) Universal peace will exist
- 6) Universal prosperity will abound
- 7) Longevity of life will be common
- 8) Perfect environment will exist
- 9) All covenants to Israel will be fulfilled
- 10) Universal knowledge of God will exist

During this age we call the Millennium, there will be three ruling factors: 1) conscience, 2) human government and 3) the theocratic rule of Jesus Christ. This dispensation will be the time in which “the lion will lie down with the lamb,” as peace will be restored to the animal kingdom. It will be a time of universal peace on earth, as all crime will be dealt with swiftly and severely under capital punishment. The nations that refuse to worship Christ will be punished. (Isaiah 11:3-4; 29:20-21; Zechariah 14:16-19)

God’s will for this dispensation will be to obey the righteous rule of Christ, live at peace, worship and serve God. Man’s failure will be that many who are born during this dispensation will reject Christ as Savior and outwardly refuse to obey His rule. Others will inwardly do the same and many of both groups will join Satan in the final battle against God at the end of this period. This should be an excellent lesson for us, that perfect environment and peace on earth cannot solve the problem of man’s sin nature.

Divine judgment during this dispensation will be that God and His army of believers will destroy Satan’s army and Satan and his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity. This will be the final proof to Satan and all fallen angels that God was just and righteous in His sentence. The Angelic Conflict will be resolved forever. (Isaiah 11:3-4; Jeremiah 21:29-30; Revelation 20:9-10)

Ezekiel also sees the restoration of the Temple in the future Millennium. This meaningful event was meant to give hope to those who were in exile. Ezekiel in a vision was taken on a tour of this Temple.