

## HAVE YOU NOW GOT THE MESSAGE?

**Today's Text:** Ezekiel Chaps 4-7

### Extracts:

[God said to Ezekiel], “**This will be a sign to the house of Israel... for I have laid on you the years of their iniquity... Take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and *make bread of them for yourself, ... using fuel of human waste in their sight.*” Then the Lord said, “*So shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them*” [Ezek. 4: 3, 5, 9, 12, 13]**

*Donald Rumsfeld was named Defense Secretary soon after George W. Bush was sworn in as US President in January 2001.<sup>1</sup> Following the terrorist attacks of 11 November 2001, it was Rumsfeld who led the planning and implementation of the military strategies that led to the swift ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and that of Saddam Hussein after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Soon after, both military and political analysts pointed out that American strategies could only have won the initial battles without plans to win the war (for peace and defeat of terrorists). As American casualties mounted in Iraq, criticisms of Rumsfeld's competence also grew. President Bush used every occasion to express his resolute stand behind his Defense Secretary. Early in 2006, eight retired generals called on Rumsfeld to resign. He rebuffed them. On November 1, 2006, the President stated that he would stand by Rumsfeld for the length of his term as President (ending in January 2009). However, on November 7, 2006, Americans went to the polls and the President's party lost control of both houses of Congress. The following day, President Bush announced the resignation of Rumsfeld!*

*What made the President change his mind so suddenly after standing behind his Defense Secretary over the years? It was because he had finally got the message. He no longer had the political cushion in Congress to ignore the people's disapproval of his military strategy in Iraq. There are signs all around you concerning your relationships with your spouse, children, siblings, wards, friends, colleagues and God. Have you even noticed them not to talk of doing something about them? What disaster are you waiting for before you deal with them? When are you going to get the message? These and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.*

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<sup>1</sup> Based on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Rumsfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Rumsfeld)

## 1. And it snowed in Malibu!

Southern California is the lure of retirees from the cold parts of the world because, apart from the Hollywood connections, there is beautiful (snow-free) weather all year round. The famous and rich live in Malibu in Los Angeles County. Since mid-January 2007, however, curious things have been happening that one cannot understand. Temperatures have dropped dramatically to below freezing point. Water pipes are bursting and the freeways are becoming too dangerously slippery to drive on. And, to everyone's surprise, it has snowed in Malibu! Does anyone know what is going on here?

Southern California is not unique on the subject of strange happenings around the world. Earthquakes and storms have been reported in diverse places. The *Tsunami* in Asia and the *Katrina* in America are too recent to soon forget. Terrorism is growing in Europe and is not directed only at Americans. Kidnappings and political murders are spreading in the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East. Wickedness has grown much worse. Parenting is turning bizarre. Recently, for example, I saw a television news report of a 9-year-old child who stole into a plane unnoticed and flew from one American city to another without a ticket and unaccompanied. The same child had reportedly had a previous record of stealing two cars. When his mother was interviewed, she said quite gleefully that her son was smart! What is going on?

In the movie, the *Ten Commandments* (1956), which is based on the book of Exodus, the Egyptian "scientists" explained that Moses did not actually turn the Nile water into blood; that what they had discovered was that flooding from the upper reaches of the river had muddied the water downstream. In other words, there was a logical explanation for the phenomenon, and it had nothing to do with God's plague on Egypt for refusing to set the children of Israel free from bondage. In like manner, scientists are already explaining away the erratic climatic changes all over the globe. They are saying that it has to do with global warming. I am still waiting for a scientific explanation for the growing wickedness!

When the disciples asked Jesus to tell them what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age, He told them [**Matt. 24: 3-14**]:

*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars....For nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.... And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.*

Clearly the Bible explains what we can see around us much better than all the knowledgeable people of the world are telling us. If that is the case, why is it that we are not getting the message? Why are we not preparing for the return of Jesus?

Before we can adequately address those questions, let us examine Ezekiel's experience with the people of Israel in the distant past.

## 2. The message behind God's signs to Ezekiel

God showed the prophet the following signs:

- The sign of the tile [Ezek. 4: 1-3]

God told Ezekiel to do a sketch of the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and lay a siege against it as if he was preparing for real battle against the city.

- The sign of Ezekiel lying on his side [vv. 4-8]

The prophet was to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days and the Lord would prevent him from turning from one side to the other until he had ended the days of his siege as in the first sign above!

- The sign of the defiled bread [vv. 9-17]

Here, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to bake bread on fire made with human waste! When the prophet protested, saying that it was abominable for him, God modified it by allowing him to use animal dung.

- The sign of the razor and the hair Ezek. 5: 1-4]

God commanded the prophet to use a barber's razor to cut hair from his head and beard. Using the scale for accurate balance, he was to burn one-third of the hair in the midst of the city, strike one-third with a sword around it, and throw the remaining one-third in the wind. Finally, he was to tie a small quantity of hair in the edge of his garment.

But what message was God sending to the people of Israel with those signs? In His own words [Ezek. 5: 5-9]:

*This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries around her. **She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries around her. ... Therefore, ... I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations.***

The judgment was going to take the following forms:

- Jerusalem and Israel would be judged in the midst of the other nations [Ezek. 5: 8]. Their pride had budded and “violence ha[d] risen up into a rod of wickedness” [Ezek. 7: 11]. Therefore, “the end ha[d] come upon the four corners of the land,” and God was going to judge them according to their ways and repay them according to their abominations [vv. 2,3].
- For defiling God’s sanctuary, Jerusalem and Israel would be diminished, and God would neither spare nor pity them [Ezek. 5: 11].
- One-third of the disobedient people would die of pestilence and famine, a third would die by the sword and another third would be scattered into exile [v. 12].
- The judgment should serve as an example to the rest of the world [v. 15], that God is not a respecter of persons but a God of justice [Rom. 2: 6, 11].

We know from reading the rest of the Old Testament that the people did not get the true message from God’s warnings. Instead, they grew worse in sin and disobedience and all the judgments that God had warned them about came upon them. But have we got the message ourselves? Why is it so difficult for us to get it?

### 3. Why we don’t get the message

Among multiple reasons, the following should be noted:

#### a) *Some of us love to remain ignorant!*

Some of us have chosen not to know, especially as they consider new knowledge as inimical to their current social status. For example, King Agrippa [Herod Agrippa II] refused Paul’s offer to accept Christ because he might have considered Christianity a threat to his kingly dynasty [Acts 26: 1-28]. Many top scientists that have won international honours and awards on research based on Darwinism and evolution may be unwilling to accept Christ because of the perceived damage to their reputation among their professional colleagues. Yet, people perish for lack of knowledge [Hos. 4: 6], and “the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” [Prov. 9: 10].

Some people do not even know what they are doing, not to talk of knowing its implications. For example, during the trial of Jesus, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, determined to set Him free because He was innocent. The people refused but instead preferred Barabbas, the murderer. When Pilate could not convince the people, he condemned Jesus to death and washed his hands, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person.” The people replied, “His blood be upon us and on our children!” [Matt. 27: 15-26]. They could have been among the people that Jesus had in mind when He prayed to God from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do” [Lk 23: 34].

b) *Some people cannot learn from others' mistakes*

Does history repeat itself or people repeat history? The latter is closer to the truth because some people hardly learn from other people's errors. It is remarkable that people revel today in the same sins that led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The same problem of homosexuality was also there in Paul's times when "the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful, *and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due*" [Rom. 1: 27].

A variant of this problem is when some people are unable to process fast-moving developments. In other words, they are myopic (short-sighted) and cannot see far beyond that moment. They will tell you, "when we get to the bridge, we shall cross it!" What if the bridge is physical death and hell or a failed dream?

c) *Some people hate to hear the truth!*

Some people are scared of the truth, especially if it will require them to work harder or change their pleasurable but evil way of life. For example, some lazy students go for easy elective courses so that they do not have to study hard. However, sooner than later, they accumulate a low GPA (Grade Point Average) which is worth little or nothing vis-à-vis their career ambitions! How can you preach holy living to a prostitute in a lucrative line of sex work?

In the Scriptures, we have the example of King Ahab of Israel who would rather listen to 400 prophets who told him what he loved to hear (lies) than the young prophet Micaiah "because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" [1 Kgs 22: 6-8]. According to an African proverb, "the fly that will not heed the undertaker's warning will be buried with the corpse!"

d) *Some people are arrogant or hardened of heart!*

Some people know that what they are doing is wrong. They also know the repercussions of their choices. Yet they persist because they are too proud to take correction from others. In another case, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt knew that the plagues were destroying the economic and social fabrics of Egyptian society but he did not let the Hebrews leave Egypt because his heart was hardened, saying, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?" [Ex. 5: 2]. Lucifer lost his privileged place among the angels in the sight of God because of pride [Is. 12: 12-15]. As we approach end times, the same devil is instigating apostasy among

believers. That is, some Christians (both clergy and laity) are merely holding on to the outward profession of the faith while denying its truth [2 Thes. 2: 3-4; 2 Tim. 3: 1-7].

#### 4. Conclusion: There is yet hope!

In spite of the wickedness of the people of Ezekiel's time, God assured the prophet that He would leave a remnant that would escape the sword or that would spread the truth of His word even when they were scattered abroad [Ezek. 6: 8, 9]. We would later see the exploits of exiles like Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego when their faith was challenged by the pagan rulers of Babylon/Persia.

For us, Jesus has spoken through His disciples when He said, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear" [Matt. 13: 16]. Therefore, we need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling the churches [Rev. 2: 29]: that Jesus is right now standing by the door of your heart and knocking. If you hear and open, He will come in to dine with you and you with Him [Rev. 3: 20].

In order to get the message, here are some simple short steps that you need to take:

- *Repent*, if you have not already done so, for "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" [Rom. 10: 9];
- *Know God's will for you and follow it* by renewing your mind [Rom. 12: 2]. Commit your works to Him and you will be established [Prov. 16: 3];
- *Read the signs of the times. Jesus is coming back soon.* We may not know the *day or the hour* [Matt. 25: 13] but we know the times and they are right now!

Have you now got the message?