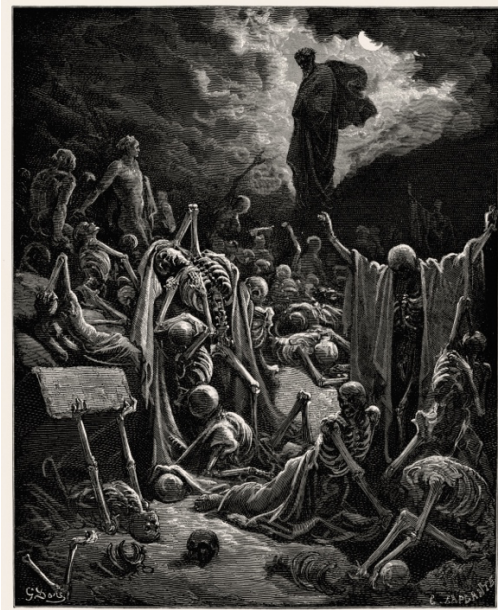


Introduction to the Prophets – Session Four



Scan of a Gustave Doré engraving "The Vision of The Valley of The Dry Bones" – 1866

Jeremiah (Continued), Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Nahum, Isaiah (40 – 66), Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi, and Joel ***The Priestly Story***

Readings for Session Four: As a reference, the following is list of readings that are used in the Session Four video. There is no requirement to read these independently of the video. Alternatively, you may want to explore other parts of some of these books.

Ezekiel 1:1 – 3

 Psalms 137: 1 – 4

 Exodus 25: 8

Ezekiel 11:14 – 16

 "I will be a sanctuary ..."

 Exodus 20:5

Ezekiel 18: 1 – 4

Ezekiel 18:20 – 24

Ezekiel 33:21 – 22

Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14

 The Valley of the Dry Bones

Zephaniah 1:12 – 14

Zephaniah 3:11 – 14

Nahum 3:1 – 7

Habakkuk 1:2 – 4

Habakkuk 1:5 – 9

Habakkuk 3:15 – 16,18 – 19

Isaiah (II & III) 40 – 66

Isaiah 40: 3 – 5

Isaiah 45:1 – 6

Isaiah 51:9 – 11

Isaiah 63:3 – 6

Haggai 2:3

Haggai 2:6 – 9

I will shake the heavens ...

Haggai 1:5 – 11

Zechariah 1:1 – 6

Zechariah 1:8 – 11

Many peoples and nations look to God ...

Zechariah 2:11

Zechariah 8:16 – 17

Obadiah 15 – 21

Jonah 3:1 – 10

Malachi 1:2 – 5

Malachi 1:11

Malachi 4:1 – 6

Joel 2:28 – 29

I will pour out my Spirit ...

The Historical Context of the Book of Jeremiah

The Assyrian Empire, which dominated the Syro-Palestinian region in the eighth to seventh centuries B.C., gave way to the Babylonian Empire in the late seventh century B.C. shortly after the reign of Josiah, king of Judah (640 – 609 B.C.). The prophetic call of Jeremiah is dated to the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, that is 626 B.C. There are few oracles in the book of Jeremiah that can be dated to Josiah's reign with certainty, but it is possible that the oracles in chapters 2 – 6 belong to the period when Josiah was king of Judah.

According to 2 Kings 22:3 – 23:3 a law code was discovered in the temple in 621 B.C.; this law code was authenticated as the word of the Lord by Hulda the prophetess, and King Josiah aligned the reform he had begun with the terms of this law. It is not certain whether the story of the discovery of the law code reflects an actual event or was a story created to support Josiah's reform, but whichever is the case, Deuteronomic law and the theology expressed in that law came to the fore in the late seventh century B.C. and played a major role in the shaping of Israel and its Scriptures in the exilic and postexilic periods. It is thought that the Deuteronomic law code of Deuteronomy 12 – 26, though in an earlier form, was the law code discovered at the time of King Josiah. The Deuteronomic law code has similarities to Josiah's reform, especially with respect to the centralization of worship. Jeremiah

may have supported Josiah's reform, but his prophetic message suggests that the reform of Josiah did not significantly impact the behavior of the people, for they continued to worship other gods at various shrines. The book of Jeremiah shows the influence of Deuteronomic theology and it is generally agreed that the book reached its final form through the hands of Deuteronomic editors.

Most of the book of Jeremiah reflects the period of Babylonian dominance over Judah, especially during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. This was a period of turmoil that resulted from conflicting political policies in the royal court of Judah. Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne by the Egyptian pharaoh Necho II who deposed Jehoahaz. Jehoahaz assumed the throne of Judah upon the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. Josiah had attempted to prevent the Egyptians from assisting the Assyrians against the Babylonians, but he was slain in battle at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29). Jehoiakim began his reign as a vassal to Egypt, but when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.), he became a vassal of Babylon. Jeremiah's position is consistent with the latter group. Jehoiakim's policy of vacillation between these factions brought the Babylonians army to Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Jehoiakim died before feeling the full wrath of the Babylonians. Though the Babylonians did not destroy the city at this time, they did take the new king, Jehoiachin, into exile with several thousand leading citizens and they put Zedekiah on the throne of Judah. Zedekiah's reign was marked by the same divided policies of Jehoiakim and as a result, the Babylonians laid siege against Jerusalem in 588 B.C.; the city and its temple were destroyed in August of 587 B.C. Zedekiah attempted to escape but was captured by the Babylonians. They killed his family in his presence and then he was blinded and taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was most active as prophet during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

– Pauline A. Viviano (from *Jeremiah, Baruch: New Collegeville Bible Commentary*)

Chronology

1,300 b.c.e.	Moses leads Hebrews out of Egypt Joshua leads conquest of Canaan	Egyptian Dominance of Region
1010 – 970 b.c.e.	David	Assyrian Dominance
970 – 931 b.c.e.	Solomon	
722 b.c.e.	Homer writes the <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> 850 b.c.e. Fall of Samaria (Israel – the Northern Kingdom)	
700 b.c.e.		
650 b.c.e.		Assyria in decline - Egypt in Ascendancy
612 b.c.e.	Babylonians conquer Nineveh	Babylon in Ascendancy
597 b.c.e.	Nebuchadnezzar removes Hebrews to exile in Babylon.	
588 b.c.e.	Fall of Jerusalem (Judah - The Southern Kingdom) - defeated by Babylonians	
586 b.c.e.	Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem including the Temple.	
550 b.c.e.	Isaiah 40 – 55	
539 b.c.e.	Cyrus the Great [Persia] attacked and defeated Babylon	
538 b.c.e.	Some Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem	
520 - 515 b.c.e.	The second temple is built	
446 b.c.e.	Ezra reads from the Torah	
400 b.c.e.	Isaiah 56 - 60	
356 – 323 b.c.e.	Aristotle 384 – 322 b.c.e. Alexander the Great (Conquered the Persian Empire – 334)	
166 b.c.e.	Revolt of Judas Maccabeus	
31 b.c.e.	Pompey conquers Jerusalem for Rome 63 b.c.e. Octavius (Augustus) defeats Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium.	
	Augustus (Octavius)	63 b.c.e. – 14 c.e.
4 – 1 b.c.e.	Birth of Jesus	Roman Rule

New World View:

- I. There is still a future. But the future is based on what we do as individuals.
 - Each individual is responsible for himself – not the nation – not the ancestor, but the individual.

- II. There is still God’s Law and covenant – but there is a new understanding of covenant.
 - God didn’t want their sacrifice, their national shrines, their outward show
 - Not interested in guaranteeing their political power
 - He wanted their hearts – justice, mercy, and humility.
 - He wanted what was inside.
 - Religion (ritual) is still important, but it is no longer the only thing of importance.
 - God is not confined to a box in a temple. God is wherever His people are.
 - Each of us has the opportunity to have personal relationship with God.

- III. Monotheism: Universal God (radical ethical monotheism) – One God for all people.
 - In radical monotheism we are loyal to a Reality whose Wholeness is beyond our rational comprehension; nevertheless, with our consciousness we can experience conscious connection with this Unifying Mysterious Every-thing-ness.

The Suffering Servant

(Isaiah 53:1 – 12)

53 Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.
⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,

struck down by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,
 crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
 and by his bruises we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have all turned to our own way,
 and the Lord has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.
⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
 yet he did not open his mouth;
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
 so he did not open his mouth.
⁸ By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
 Who could have imagined his future?
 For he was cut off from the land of the living,
 stricken for the transgression of my people.
⁹ They made his grave with the wicked
 and his tomb with the rich,
 although he had done no violence,
 and there was no deceit in his mouth.
¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.^[e]
 When you make his life an offering for sin,
 he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
 through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see light;
 he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
 The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
 and he shall bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
 because he poured out himself to death,
 and was numbered with the transgressors;
 yet he bore the sin of many,
 and made intercession for the transgressors.

Here the prophet does not specify the identity of the servant. Given that Deutero-Isaiah (*Isaiah II*) often calls Israel “my servant”, the servant may be Israel as a whole. But other readings are also plausible. Is the prophet referring to a past, present or future figure? Is an individual meant, or a collective? These questions have been the subject of heated debate for centuries. Definitive answers seem to be beyond our reach.

In any case, the text newly emphasizes a type of vicarious punishment. That the unnamed servant suffered for the sake of others (53:4) and was injured in punishment for their guilt is an extreme version of the concept that Ezekiel so firmly rejected [see below – *Refuting Popular Beliefs*]. From a historical perspective, it is unlikely that the exiles' excessive guilt is what evoked this theological idea. As with the annual scapegoat ritual in the now-vanished Temple, they could understand their guilt has having been transferred to another party.

– Marc Zvi Brettler (*How to Read the Jewish Bible*)

Ezekiel – Refuting Popular Beliefs

18 *The word of the LORD came to me: ² What do you mean by repeating this proverb upon the soul of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are blunted”? ³ As I live, declares the LORD GOD, this proverb shall no more be current among you in Israel. ⁴ Consider all lives are Mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine. The person who sins, only he shall die.*

The proverb “Parents eat sour grapes and their children’s teeth are blunted (*set on edge*)” might be rendered into modern English as “The parents eat Snickers® and the children get cavities.” It must have been popular, since it appears also in Jeremiah 31:29: “In those days, they shall no longer say, ‘Parents haven eaten sour grapes and children’s teeth are blunted.’” The two prophetic books, however, give a different meaning to this proverb’s disuse. In Jeremiah, the proverb will only become false in the future – in the idealized time of the eschaton. But according to Ezekiel, the proverb is already false; he understood God to say that now, in his own time, “all lives are Mine [and will be judged so individually]; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine [as individuals]. The person who sins, only he shall die.”

Ezekiel therefore refutes the proverb at length. First, he treats the case of a righteous man who begets a wicked son, who in turn begets a righteous man (18:5 – 20). From this case he concludes: “The person who sins, he alone shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone” (18:20). Then he proceeds to telescope these three generations into one teaching that when the wicked people repent, or righteous people become wicked, God will judge them according to their later behavior. This is another way of saying: Even though you have been exiled for your sins, all is not lost. Indeed, “It is not My desire that anyone shall die – declares the LORD GOD” (v.32). This leads to the unit’s grand conclusion: “Repent, therefore, and live!”

We can imagine that the exile community was feeling a huge burden of guilt. If so, this unit (chapter 18) must have meant a lot to them.

Ezekiel's address is so long, detailed, and repetitive because he is refuting not only a popular proverb, but also an authoritative set of beliefs. (*The Torah*) describes God as visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third, and upon the fourth generations ...Other biblical texts suggest that retribution functions on a corporate level, so that the community as a whole receives rewards and punishments. (e.g. – Deuteronomy 11:13 – 21). Thus, Ezekiel is arguing against two beliefs found in a variety of biblical texts – intergenerational punishment, and corporate (communal) responsibility and retribution. That is why he needs to make his point so forcefully.

– Marc Zvi Brettler (*How to Read the Jewish Bible*)

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