

① 【The Reason for Jerusalem's Destruction】

Ezekiel was the son of a priest, but about 2,500 years ago, he received a calling from God to be a prophet in Jerusalem. When Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonian army, he was taken to Babylon along with the people of Judah, and there he spoke God's word to the exiled people of Judah. Although his prophecies are often apocalyptic in nature and thus difficult to interpret, I believe this book has much to teach us. Although the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon, the Bible's consistent message is that this was not because the kingdom of Judah had a weak army or because its economic policies failed, but because the people of Judah did not obey God and engaged in idolatry. Therefore, God used Babylon to strike Jerusalem. It was not Babylon but God who destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

●After the war, there was a book that young people scrambled to read called *What Will Heal Japan's Wounds*. It was written by Professor Tadao Yanaibara, who had served as president of the University of Tokyo. He was a Christian belonging to the Non-Church movement. In that book, he wrote something to the effect that, “Japan did not lose to the United States; Japan was destroyed by God. There is nothing but God that can heal that destroyed Japan. There is no way for Japan to recover except by truly returning to God.”

But in Japan today, there are probably very few people who see things that way, and if you were to say something like that, people would probably laugh at you. And most people are turning away from God and returning to idols.

② 【Social Sins and Religious Sins】

Ezekiel 22:4 states, “You are guilty of the blood you have shed, and you are defiled by the idols you have made.” Furthermore, verses 7 through 12 describe in detail the depravity of the people of Jerusalem: “Fathers and mothers are despised within you; foreigners living among you are oppressed; orphans and widows are mistreated within you. ...Some commit abominable acts with their neighbors' wives; others commit shameful acts by defiling their daughters-in-law; and still others violate their half-sisters. Among you are those who take bribes and commit murder; those who lend money at exorbitant interest rates and oppress their neighbors with usury. ‘You have forgotten Me,’ says the Lord God.” Reading this, you might think, “What a people with such low social ethics the Jews are!” but I believe modern-day Japan is no different. This is presented as a warning, and the Jews are used here as a model.

●Pastor Yasuo Enomoto comments on this passage as follows: “One of the causes of God’s judgment is the decline of social ethics. The root cause of this decline lies in the decline of religious ethics; it can be said that the problem stems from the loss of the fear of God. ... Today, there is much talk about various social problems, but I believe the root cause lies in the fact that the power of faith and religion has become very weak. Religion is ... the driving force that purifies social life.”

From the very beginning, the Bible clearly states that because people did not obey God, their relationship with Him was destroyed, and as a result, their relationships with their neighbors were also destroyed. It is just like the ribs of an umbrella extending radially from the center; the farther they are from the center, the greater the distance between each rib. When the relationship with God is destroyed, relationships with others are also destroyed. Religious sin comes first, and as a result, social sin follows. This is the common message of the Bible. The Ten Commandments are structured in the same way. The first through fourth commandments concern the relationship between God and humanity, while the fifth through tenth commandments concern relationships among people. And when the first commandment is broken, all the subsequent commandments are inevitably broken as well. The first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deuteronomy 5:7). To break this commandment is to make oneself a god. When one becomes a god, one turns the true God into a slave who must obey one’s every wish; one fails to observe the Sabbath, fails to honor one’s parents, kills those one dislikes, commits adultery, steals from others, covets what belongs to others, and tells lies. To truly acknowledge God as God and to serve Him is our human nature, our life’s work—and something that is very difficult to achieve.

③ [The Importance of Revering God]

Verse 26 states, “The priests have violated my law and defiled my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, nor have they taught the difference between the clean and the unclean; and they have turned a blind eye to my Sabbaths.” (Ezekiel 22:26) The sin of the priests lies in their failure to distinguish between the holy and the common and to teach the difference between the clean and the unclean.

The phrase that appears most frequently in the Psalms is “Fear God.” It is also written, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7). In the Old Testament, it is said, “No one can see me and live” (Exodus 33:20), and when God spoke to the people at Mount Sinai, they said, “If we hear the voice of the Lord any longer, we will die” ” (Deuteronomy 5:25). Only the priests were allowed to carry the Ark of the Covenant, which was carried by poles threaded through its rings; Uzzah, who touched the Ark, was struck down and died. This was to teach that humans cannot touch the holy God.

The very structure of the temple reflected God's holiness. The temple was divided by six layers of walls into the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, the Courtyard of the Priests, the Courtyard of Israel, the Courtyard of the Women, and the Courtyard of the Foreigners. This teaches that approaching the holy God requires considerable preparation, and that people cannot approach Him lightly. The priests were not allowed to stand before God without wearing their sacred garments. "When he wears them... he will not incur guilt and die when he approaches the altar" (Exodus 28:43). This teaches that modesty and propriety are required when standing before the holy God. These priestly garments symbolize Christ. Anyone who appears before God without putting on the robe of Christ will be struck down. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place once a year, carrying the blood of the sacrifice. One must not appear before God empty-handed; one must always bring an offering. Christ was crucified and became the one and only sacrifice. Thus, the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was removed, and anyone can now enter the Most Holy Place. However, this does not mean that the Most Holy Place has ceased to exist, for God's holiness remains unchanged. This teaches us that without Christ's sacrifice—that is, without receiving the Lord's Supper—we cannot stand before God. People today have lost their fear of God, and even Christians today no longer fear Him. Within the church, pastors and congregants are suing one another, and the church and the daycare center are in litigation. People vent their anger inside the sanctuary, judge others, and hurt people with their words.

●When my friend, Pastor K, took the exam to become a minister in the United Church of Christ in Japan, he wrote an essay stating, "The church must be a holy place." However, during his interview, the chair of the ministerial certification committee told him, "Your ideas are dangerous!" The committee argued that the church is not a holy place and that we must not draw a distinction between the sacred and the secular. Is that really the case? Surely that would lead to the secularization of the church.

The mystical elements are steadily being lost from the church, and everything has come to revolve around human beings—human reason, intellect, and works have become everything. Since a certain seminary teaches that the Bible was created by humans and the church, people are losing faith in the Bible itself. Are we not placing objects on top of the Bible or resting our elbows on it?

●A non-Christian friend of Professor Enomoto's once attended a seminary camp, where he saw a professor sit with a Bible placed under his buttocks. Upon seeing this, the friend quietly left. And why wouldn't he? If the Bible is nothing more than that, there's no point in believing in it. Even non-believers would take offense. A Christian friend of mine told me that when he was a child and stepped over the

Bible, his father, upon seeing it, quickly pulled out his belt and struck him. Christians in the old days were people of principle.

To put it simply, people today have lost their fear of God. While academic study of God has flourished, they no longer worship Him. They do not kneel before Him. They do not confess their sins. Even the word “sin” is no longer spoken; instead, it’s called “discrimination.” This is foolish. Sin runs much deeper than that; it is a distorted attitude toward God. It is not understanding God, not recognizing one’s own sin, and failing to comprehend either God’s love or human love. Jesus has come to be seen merely as a friend, or as someone who simply listens to our wishes and grants us grace. I want to say “No” to this kind of church. We must reclaim “divinity,” “mystery,” and “religiosity.” The decline of religiosity leads to the decline of society. I want to listen with reverence to these words: “They do not distinguish between the holy and the profane; they do not teach the difference between the clean and the unclean; and they have closed their eyes to my Sabbath.” If asked whether I fear God, I must admit that I am not doing a very good job of it. I want to be someone who truly treats God as God, worships Him, and obeys Him.