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“Stand in the Gap”

Ezekiel 22

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Can one person really make the difference in a situation? The answer is yes! In Ezekiel 22, we read that God was looking for one person who would intercede on behalf of the Jewish people, because they had allowed spiritual and moral decay to compromise their lives, but he found no one. In a specific sense, this is a picture of how there is a gap between God and humanity that is caused by man’s sinfulness. God was looking for a man to stand in the gap, but he found no one, so he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to bridge the gap. In a generic sense, this is a reminder about how God has shown favor to a larger group of people because of the faithfulness of one person to stand in the gap and intercede on behalf of those he/she cares about. Don’t discount how you can be the one to stand in the gap for your marriage, your family, your friends, or your nation! God will often honor the one on behalf of the many.

### Historical Background

1. **Ezekiel 22:30** - *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.”*
  - a. The word “gap” can also mean breach, which is the word used in the ESV translation.
  - b. A breach is some kind of a compromise, failure or weakness that threatens something of value, i.e. breach in a dam or a breach of security or a breach of contract.
  - c. The people of Israel made themselves vulnerable because of various failures, compromises and weaknesses.
  - d. The breach for Jews was a spiritual failure and moral decay, and everyone had personal responsibility.
  
2. The Prophets Were Responsible For Moral Decay and Spiritual Failure

- a. [Ezekiel 22:25, 28](#) - *“The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. ... Her prophets plastered them with untampered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ when the LORD had not spoken.”*
  - b. The prophets were negligent in their responsibilities; they weren’t serving the people or using the Word of God to instruct the people.
  - c. The prophets took advantage of the people monetarily for personal gain.
  - d. The prophets were guilty of lying about visions and divinations, and they misrepresented God!
3. The Priests Were Responsible For Moral Decay and Spiritual Failure
- a. [Ezekiel 22:26](#) - *“Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”*
  - b. The priests were the spiritual leaders and we would call them pastors today.
  - c. The priests didn’t teach the Word of God concerning the difference between right and wrong.
  - d. The priests had basically cast God out of the Temple, by not giving God his rightful place and not teaching the people who he is.
  - e. Pastor Gary said: “The people didn’t understand the worth of God because the spiritual leaders had not been teaching them the Word of God. You and I will not really understand the immeasurable, magnificent worth of God unless we understand and know the Word of God. The neglect of teaching the Word of God in the nation of Judah is something that plagues churches today, and thus, plagues our own nation today. I say this to challenge myself as well as every other pastor in our country. If pastors don’t teach the truth of God’s Word, live the truth of God’s Word, and lead people in the truth of God’s Word, our nation is in big trouble! I get asked sometimes, ‘Aren’t you afraid if you’re too truthful you’re going to lose people [and] people are going to leave the church?’ ... I’m more afraid of what God thinks if I don’t! ... We preach the truth with compassion, but [we preach] the truth unapologetically.”
4. The Princes Were Responsible For Moral Decay and Spiritual Failure
- a. [Ezekiel 22:27](#) - *“Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain.”*
  - b. The princes were the government leaders.
  - c. The princes, like the priests, cared more about themselves than the people

they were meant to serve.

5. The People Were Responsible For Moral Decay and Spiritual Failure

- a. **Ezekiel 22:29** - *“The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.”*
  - i. **Proverbs 14:31** - *“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.”*
- b. Pastor Gary said: “Social justice can never be a substitute for the Gospel. We need to give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name; not a cup of cold water instead of Jesus’ name. Social justice by itself has become a religion to many people. And, by the way, it’s a real sly way that the enemy is helping people to feel good about themselves through serving others, which is a noble thing, while at the same time he’s deceiving them that neither they nor the people they serve need Jesus. [It’s] a tactic I’m convinced that the enemy is using. Helping people feel good about helping people can mask the deeper issue facing every human being, which is this, our sin and our need for a Savior. ... No human need is greater than the need for Jesus. So, if you have a burden to feed the hungry and to clothe those who are less fortunate than yourself and to be engaged in things like clean water initiatives and to serve in a AIDS clinic or to eliminate sex trafficking, do it. By all means do it. But, you better share Jesus in the process, otherwise you’re putting a band aid on a dying patient. We have to make sure that always Jesus is always exalted in the process of trying to help others.”

The Specific Meaning Of Ezekiel 22:30

6. God was saying through Ezekiel that he didn’t want to pour out his wrath; his desire was to show mercy, but he couldn’t find anyone who was willing to partner with him.
  - a. **2 Peter 3:9** - *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*
  - b. **Ezekiel 33:11** - *“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ ”*
  - c. **John 3:16** - *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*
7. Pastor Gary said: “How do you think Ezekiel felt writing [22:30]? ... Ezekiel was a righteous man. And, by the way, so was Jeremiah, [who] was another prophet who was living at the same time as Ezekiel. Ezekiel was living in Babylon and

prophesying, and Jeremiah was living in Judah prophesying. And also, by the way, Daniel... [was] also in Babylon at the same time as Ezekiel, [and so were] Daniel's three friends: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. There's at least six righteous people! What do you mean God? ... What this tells us is that the breach... is bigger than any one human being can solve. So, the specific reference here, is something larger than any one human being can solve. [The] fact is that this passage is a Messianic passage. This is a verse that specifically points to the problem of the human condition, [which is] that we are all sinners and the gap that exists between God and man is a result of our sin. [The] gap can only be bridged by Jesus. Try as hard as you might, but you can't bridge that gap in your own effort or in your own energy. That gap between a holy God and sinful humanity cannot be closed on the basis of anything we try to do. ... Jesus is the only one who can close the gap between a holy God and sinful humanity. This is what makes Christianity different than every other world religion. Every other world religion teaches that you have to try to do something or be something or become something in your own efforts in order to try to get up God [and] bridge the gap. Try to be a good person, do a lot of good works, do a lot of penance, do a lot this and do a lot of that. ... Christianity is the only world religion that says, God knowing that we can't bridge the gap in and of ourselves, he came to us. ... Jesus Christ [came], God in flesh, to die on a cross, and he extends his arms on the cross, in a sense, bridging that gap between God and man, [and] taking the hand of God and the hand of man and bridging that gap by his sacrificial death on the cross."

- a. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** - *"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all..."*
- b. **1 Peter 3:18** - *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God..."*

#### The Generic Meaning Of Ezekiel 22:30

8. Pastor Gary said: "The fact that God was seeking and searching for someone is an indication for us... that there are times when God honors the one on behalf of the many."
  - a. Pastor Gary shared three biblical examples:
    - i. Aaron
      1. **Numbers 16:41, 44-45, 48** - *"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron... And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' ... And [Aaron] stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped."*
    - ii. Moses
      1. **Exodus 32:1, 4, 7-8, 10-11, 14** - *"Now when the people saw that*

*Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ... And [Aaron] received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' ... And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it...' Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them...' ... Then Moses pleaded with the Lord... ... So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He do to His people."*

iii. Paul

1. Acts 27 provides the account of Paul and how he interceded and prayed on behalf of everyone (276 men including Paul) on the ship, that they would be rescued.
  - a. [Acts 27:23-24](#) - *"For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who said with you.'"*

9. Pastor Gary said: "Think about yourself as perhaps, that one person who might stand in the gap. Maybe for your marriage, [or your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, community, church, and country], and think about how God honors one person! ... God is looking for men and women who will say, 'I'll stand in the gap. I'll be that one who will pray, [intercede, do what is right when others won't, stand alone, if necessary, to honor God and seek his face on behalf of other people]. ... God is looking for people who will pray... who will not lie down and let the moral decay of our day not have its way. ... Don't give up any ground to the enemy. Fight for your family and stand in the gap. Set the spiritual example. Pray without ceasing. Cling to what is good. Abstain from what is evil. Serve others. Love Jesus. Stand in the gap. May it not be said of us, 'I sought for someone, but I found no one.' Stand in the gap and watch what God will do!"

## Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ezekiel 22:23-31](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss the Scriptures and the reasons why the people, the prophets, the priests, and the princes were responsible for the spiritual and moral decay. (See #2 through #5 above)
  - a. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the priests. (See #3e above)
  - b. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the people. (See #5b above)
3. Spend time talking about the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning the specific meaning of [Ezekiel 22:30](#). (See #6 above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks and the Scriptures he shared regarding the fact that only Jesus could be the one to bridge the gap between man and God. (See #7 above)
5. Read and discuss each of the three examples Pastor Gary shared regarding one person standing in the gap for others. (See #8 above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's encouragement to be a person who is willing to stand in the gap. (See #9 above)
7. How has the Holy Spirit led you to stand in the gap and intercede for an individual or a group of people?
8. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)