

# Ezekiel 16 - Mistakes We Make in Times of Tragedy

**Hook (1005-1007)** – Tragedy has been a part of every life since the beginning of time. Currently,

1. Internationally – Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and many others, natural disasters
2. Nationally – Combat deaths, shooting sprees, accidents, natural disasters
3. In our church and community – Women with breast cancer, Lissette Nobles' heart problems, families dissolving, and people rejecting the Faith.

How should Christians handle such times of tragedy? Equally important, what should be NOT do?

Trusting in the Wrong Things

Failing to Trust and Obey

## Mistakes We Make in Times of Tragedy

Mourning the Wrong Things

Losing Hope

**Book (1007-1010)** – Ezekiel 16:15-27

**Look (1010-1040)**

### Trusting in the Wrong Things

**V15** – However, the Lord had another word for Ezekiel on this terrible day.

**VV 16-17** – Ezekiel had been ministering to Jewish exiles in Babylon for four years and was probably about 34 years old. His message had been unpopular and his friends few, but he did have a young wife to cheer him and stand with him in the hard times. She was the delight of his eyes. Yet God said that He would take her away from the prophet. The phrase “with one stroke” (מִגֶּפֶה maggephah) was often used to describe a plague (Exodus 9:14). The delight of Ezekiel’s life was about to die, but the Lord forbade him to mourn her.

In the ancient Jewish culture, early death was common, and funeral rites involved the tearing of garments, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and weeping and wailing. Mourners went barefoot, fasted and even employed professional mourners to communicate their grief. Ezekiel was denied all of this. He could only suffer silently on the inside.

Why did God allow the faithful wife of his faithful prophet to suffer an early death? He used her death to teach His people in the most poignant way possible that they were about to lose the things that they held most dear. Though innocent of wrongdoing, Ezekiel had to pay a great price for the sins of others. Christians always do.

### Illustration

Pillars of Life – John Venable speech to a public high school group – family, faith, friends, finances, function in life. One young man, dressed in black and sitting cross-armed and alone, sneered “what if I reject the stuff about faith?” John replied “then the other pillars have to be strong enough to carry the extra load. What he knew, and we know, is that faith is really the only pillar on which to build a life. Everything else will eventually pass away.

### Discussion/Application

What do we put our trust in? Our job, our family, our retirement, one of the other “pillars”?

### Mourning the Wrong Things

**V18** – Despite knowing that his wife would soon die, Ezekiel went on with his usual priestly ministry. In the morning he shared God’s word with the people, and in the evening, after he had come had for the day, his wife died. The following morning, Ezekiel behaved exactly as the Lord had commanded.

**V19** – Ezekiel’s strange behavior at the tragedy of his wife’s death was a sign to the Israelite exiles, and they recognized it. Leaders of the people came to him to ask what it meant.

**VV 20-24** – The prophet shared his experience with the people. He easily could have resented them since it was their obstinacy, and that of those who remained in Jerusalem, that caused Ezekiel’s tragedy, but he did not. Just as Ezekiel’s wife was the delight of his eyes, so the magnificent temple in Jerusalem was the delight of the eyes of the Israelites. It was so large and beautiful, and the Lord Himself lived in it, so that the people could not imagine that it would ever be lost to Israel. Nonetheless, God was promising the Jewish exiles that Jerusalem would be taken and the temple destroyed. Even more, the exiles had many friends and family members still living in Jerusalem; they were truly the delight of the eyes of these people. These people, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, would also die.

When the exiles suffered these twin tragedies, the loss of their temple and their children, they were to behave exactly as Ezekiel did; without shedding a tear. Instead they were to bemoan their sins, the very things that had caused all of this trouble.

Why did God forbid Ezekiel from paying his respects to his beloved wife? Because He wanted Ezekiel to serve as a good example to the people.

1. Ezekiel was right to mourn the loss of his wife, because while he loved her he trusted and obeyed God. Ezekiel was innocent of the blood of his wife.
2. The people were wrong to mourn the loss of the temple and even the loss of their families in Judea, because their sin caused the destruction of the temple and the deaths of their loved ones. The people were guilty, and they were to mourn the sin which had brought this calamity upon them.

#### Illustration

Plato – “Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a man.”

#### Discussion/Application

What do we mourn? Why? Do we mourn things that our own sins have caused? Do we mourn things that we have not received that we never should have asked for to begin with?

#### Failing to Trust and Obey

Note that throughout the verses above, Ezekiel obeyed God. He continued to work, serving the people as the Lord had commanded and knowing that He would somehow make things right.

#### Illustration

On 9/11/2001, I was in Washington State at Madigan Army Medical Center on Fort Lewis. As we suffered that national tragedy, many people were glued to their television sets, immobilized with sadness and fear. The temptation to do the same was strong, but I asked myself “how can I best respond to this situation? What can I do to support my nation and defeat the people who did this?” The answer came to me instantly, and I went back to work.

#### Discussion/Application

Do we use tragedy as an excuse to stop trusting God? Do we use tragedy as an excuse to disobey? Do we let our faith lapse in hard times such as sickness? Do we fail to do our duty?

#### Losing Hope

**VV 25-27** – As noted in 3:24-27, Ezekiel was to live differently from the other prophets. While they typically moved among the people, he was to stay in his house until the Lord gave him a specific prophetic

utterance. Then he was to go forth, speak the word of the Lord, and return home. On the day that Jerusalem fell to Babylon, a man would escape from the city and travel to Babylon. There he would tell the exiles that their beloved city had finally fallen. On the day that Ezekiel heard the news, his ministry prophesying against Judea would be over and he was allowed to live normally again. More importantly, Ezekiel's message would change. He would speak of judgment against Israel's enemies, and restoration for the people of the Lord. His "muteness" lasted about seven years.

### Illustration

Little Pilgrim's Progress – Christian and Hopeful and in the dungeon of the Giant Despair. They are surrounded by the bones of those that the giant has beaten to death, and they themselves are starving and beaten. The giant gave them small vials of poison to end it all, and Christian, beginning to lose hope, considered taking it. He was beginning to lose hope.

### Discussion/Application

Have we lost hope? In which areas of life? Is it a selfish, sinful hope that we never should have had to begin with? Is it good and godly hope that we must rely on the Lord to sustain?

China Bible smuggling story - Are we hoping in the Lord, or in what we expect Him to do for us?

### Took (1040-1045)

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### Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

Trust in the Lord

Mourn our sin and the sins of others

Obey God

Hope in Him

**Additional Reading** – MDHarrisMD.com

### Elements of Closing Prayer