

Ezekiel

Week 1

EZEKIEL

Chapters 1-24: Visions of Doom
Temple
Glory Departs

Chapters 25-32
ALL NATIONS

Chapters 33-48: Visions of Hope
Perfect Temple

BABYLON

BABYLON

JERUSALEM

BABYLON

Ezekiel's wife Dies

Monday: Ezekiel 7-12

Tuesday: Ezekiel 13-16

Wednesday: Ezekiel 17-20

Thursday: Ezekiel 21-24

Friday: Ezekiel 25-28

Introduction

We've come now to the third preacher in our study of the Old Testament prophets. All three of these preachers have spoken to the city of Jerusalem. Each of them has been in a different place in time and has approached it from a slightly different angle. Isaiah preached during the reign of King Hezekiah and then watched the wicked turn made by King Manasseh. Jeremiah began his ministry during Josiah's reign and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. Both of these prophets preached their messages on the streets of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel spoke to Jerusalem, but from a very different perspective. Ezekiel was born during the reign of Josiah, as Jeremiah was preaching about reformation and the King was cleansing the Temple. Ezekiel was born the son of a priest and was most likely trained from an early age to know the Law (especially since Josiah had just found the book of the Law and reformed the Temple) and the rituals of the priestly sacrifices. As this young priest-in-training grew up, he watched the heat of reform grow colder and fires of Jeremiah's preaching grow hotter. At 25 years of age he was taken with the first wave of exiles, along with King Jehoiachin, to Babylon. Ezekiel's ministry took place completely in the foreign country of Babylon, among the exiled Jews.

For five years after his deportation, he lived as a priest without a Temple. His people were dazed and

confused. They were captives in a foreign land and their king had been deposed. They were beaten down and all had been lost; all except one glimmer of hope. Even though their king had been deposed, the Temple was still standing. God was still on His throne. It was just a matter of time before God would raise up His mighty arm and vindicate them, pushing the Babylonians back into their own country and exalting Jerusalem once again. Or so they thought.

The young Ezekiel was most likely inclined to believe in this line of thinking. After all, he knew the promises that Yaweh had made to Abraham and David. He knew that God would not be mocked by pagan Gentiles. As Ezekiel was taking a walk that day along the Kebar canal in his exiled detention camp, he may have been envisioning the defeat of the Babylonians and the restoration of his beloved city. Then it happened. God got hold of Ezekiel. God came to him in a terrible, dumbfounding vision of power and glory. But it wasn't the fiercesome image of beasts and fire that left Ezekiel dumbfounded. No, it was something far worse. God had told Ezekiel that all hope was lost for Jerusalem; that their worst fears were about to come true. Ezekiel was commissioned by God to be the bad guy and deliver a message of destruction to the people in Exile. The people had completely misunderstood their relationship with God and had treated His covenant with contempt, using it to elevate their own social standing and keep the poor and the foreigners out. God would no longer tolerate their syncretistic, watered-down, self-serving religion, and was going to finally remove His presence from the Temple and let the Babylonians completely destroy Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's style was unconventional and memorable, to say the least. For the next few years this young priest-turned-prophet would use bizarre visuals (like

starving himself, knocking down a model of the city, and burning a cooking pot), point his finger at the social elite, and ultimately watch the love of his life die, in order to get the point across. His words were powerful, his message was harsh, but his heart was pure and focused completely on the reality of the Yaweh he met by the canal. "We may be sure that the encounter at the water's edge transformed what may have been for Ezekiel a matter of intellectual worldview and professional training into the most intensely personal and experiential core of his whole life and identity."¹

The book of Ezekiel can be divided into three major sections

Part 1: Ezekiel preaches to the Exiles about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Doom and Gloom. (chs. 1-24)

Part 2: Ezekiel preaches against the sins of all the nations surrounding Jerusalem. "Jerusalem may have fallen, but you're next!" (chs. 24-32)

Part 3: Ezekiel preaches a message of hope and a vision for a resurrected and restored Jerusalem. Hope is reborn! (chs. 33-48)

This week we will focus on the Doom and Gloom (yippee!). Next week we will study Ezekiel's unique vision of the New Jerusalem.

(Footnotes)

¹ Wright, Christopher. Ezekiel. The Bible Speaks Today. P. 23

Monday: A Fiery Vision

Ezekiel 1-2

When did Ezekiel begin his ministry? (v. 2)

Where was Ezekiel and to whom was he sent to preach?

Chapter 1 gives a very detailed description of Ezekiel's vision. Either make a list of each part, or try to draw a picture of it.

What does this vision represent?

How would you feel if you had seen this vision?

What instructions did the Lord give to Ezekiel in chapter 2?

Read Ezekiel 3:15. How did Ezekiel react to his vision and commission?

Food for thought:

The vision Ezekiel had of the Lord in chapter 1 is very bizarre, to say the least. Many people have attempted to explain it over the years. If you are interested in the subject, read the For a Little Deeper Look section for some explanation of the vision.

For our purposes today, the whole point of the vision was twofold. First, God is all-powerful. He is not something or someone to be trifled with. In the same way that Isaiah was “ruined” by his vision of the Lord, so Ezekiel, and we, are called to recognize the greatness of God and bow in humility before Him. Too many times we become comfortable with God and treat Him with contempt or apathy. God is the almighty source of everything and His very presence demands our worship. How well are you worshipping God these days?

Second, the key to the vision is the wheels. Ezekiel was in Babylon, hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem and the Temple of Yahweh. By seeing the vision of the Lord “traveling on wheels” Ezekiel was reminded that God is not stationary, or localized, or bound to one particular city. God is the God of the whole universe, there is no place that He is not. On the one hand, this omnipresence of God can further enhance our fear and respect of the Almighty. On the other hand, we can take comfort in the nearness of God. Because God is “on wheels” He can be near us, wherever we are. Take comfort today to know that the Almighty God of the universe loves you and wants you to be near Him.

Tuesday: Formula for Destruction

Ezekiel 16:49-52

In chapter 16 Ezekiel draws an analogy between a promiscuous, unfaithful woman and the city of Jerusalem. He also says that Jerusalem had “sisters” named Samaria (the Capital of the Kingdom of Israel) and Sodom (the city where Lot lived that was completely destroyed in Genesis).

From vv. 49-50 make of list of the sins that Sodom committed.

How did Jerusalem compare to her sisters?

What was God’s challenge to Jerusalem; what did He ask her to do?

Food for thought:

There is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. It seems that the greatest sin that Israel committed, next to idolatry, was the mistreatment of the needy. Look again at the list of accusations brought against Sodom:

arrogance: having or showing an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance, merit, ability, etc.; conceited; overbearingly proud

Collins English Dictionary. 2000 (electronic ed.). Glasgow: HarperCollins.

overfed: having a surplus of the basic needs.

unconcerned: this is a Hebrew phrase that is difficult to translate. It literally reads, "an abundance of quietness, peace, or inactivity." Listen to the different ways it has been translated:

prosperous ease (RSV)

spoiled (CEV)

abundance of idleness (KJV)

complacent in their prosperity (NAB)

careless ease (NASB)

laziness (NLT)

Read Jesus' parables in Luke 12:16-20; Luke 16:19-31.

Where in your heart and in our church do we need to repent of these sins and "bear our disgrace."

Wednesday: Accountability

Ezekiel 18

Verses 5-17 create three portraits: a righteous man, a wicked son of the righteous man, and a righteous son of a wicked man. Compare and contrast these three portraits.

According to vv. 19-29, who is responsible for sin?

Who will suffer for sin and who will be rewarded for righteousness?

In vv. 30-32, what does God call the people to do?

What does it take for this to happen?

Now it is time to evaluate your own heart. Whether you had parents or were raised by a relative or were raised by the system, someone had an impressionable role in your life as a child. Perhaps you were blessed with “good” parents who only made a few mistakes. Or, perhaps you had parents or some adult who abused you or led you down some destructive paths. In either case, these adults did what they did, and you didn’t have a choice in it. There are two questions to ask.

1. Have you forgiven them?
2. Have you gotten past it and taken responsibility for your own actions?

God is going to test your life based upon your decisions, not your parents. Let’s ask God for a “new heart” and a “new spirit” today.

Much of modern psychology has been invested in studying the effects of parents on the development (healthy or unhealthy) of the individual’s psyche. My parents were _____, therefore I’m the way I am. While this is true to a great extent, it is also a terrible trap that can lead to irresponsibility, excuse making, a victim mentality, and an inability to change. This is not just a modern phenomenon. The people of Jerusalem were suffering the same malady. In Ezekiel 18, the prophet preaches against this dangerous philosophy and practice.

Read the following excerpt for a great summary of vv. 1-2.

God asked Ezekiel about a **proverb** being circulated. This proverb – **The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge** – must have been well known in Israel because Jeremiah also quoted it (cf. Jer. 31:29-30). The proverb’s point was that children

were suffering because of their parents' sins. True, Jerusalem was suffering, but as stated in the proverb the people thought they were suffering not because of *their* sins but because of their *parents'* sins. So these people were blaming God for punishing them unjustly (cf. Ezek. 18:25).

God saw that this false **proverb** had to be refuted. Yet, as with all false doctrines, a kernel of truth in the teaching made it seem plausible. In the Ten Commandments God indicated that He was "a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Ex. 20:5). This same threat was repeated in Exodus 34:6-7 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Even Ezekiel had traced God's coming judgment back to the people's past actions (cf. Ezek. 16:15-29). But the point of these passages was that the *effects* of sin are serious and long-lasting, not that God capriciously punishes the innocent for their ancestors' evil ways.

Blaming others for their misfortunes, the people were denying their own guilt. This was wrong because every individual is personally responsible to God. **For every living soul belongs to Me, the father as well as the son.** Those who are guilty will receive their own deserved punishment. **The soul who sins is the one who will die** (cf. 18:20). The people of **Israel** could not rightly charge God with injustice.

¹Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 18:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Thursday: Stand in the Gap

Read Ezekiel 22:23-31.

What would have stopped God's wrath from being poured out on Jerusalem?

For a story that demonstrates the same principle, read Genesis 16:16-33.

Food for thought:

In the mid 1990's, Promise Keepers (A national Christian Men's ministry) gathered a million men in Washington D.C. called "Stand in the Gap." Why do you think they called it by this name?

Today we are reminded of another recurring theme in the Old Testament (and New). God's people are called to be a shining light in the dark world around them.

If just one person had stepped up to the plate in Jerusalem, then God would have spared them. We saw Him do this with Hezekiah and Josiah. Both of these kings brought religious reform to the city and kept the destroyers at bay for a little while longer. In Ezekiel and Jeremiah's day, there were no good men left.

There are two points to think about.

- 1) Many times, in our culture, we place an emphasis on the personal benefits of salvation and forget about the cultural impact that the gospel can have. We don't have a good relationship with God just so that we can go to Heaven. This doesn't just happen in a vacuum. When we are filled, we overflow. We impact our society, if we are connected and interacting with our society.
- 2) Are we willing to stand in the gap, or are we hiding in a hole, just waiting for the second coming. Many times we can slip into an isolationist mentality and not want to be involved in the community in order to have a positive impact upon it. As bad as our culture is, there is still enough of the remnant of God presence to make a difference. Let's ask God for the strength and courage to be Gap Standers.

Friday: God of the Nations

Ezekiel 25-32

In chapter 24 the darkest moment in Ezekiel's life and in the nation of Israel's history occurs. Ezekiel's wife dies, and Jerusalem is finally destroyed. No matter how you slice it, this was a dark and desolate moment.

How would you have felt that day?

How would you have felt about God?

About yourself?

About the future of your nation?

Food for thought:

For centuries the people of Jerusalem had been told that they were the people of God, that the Temple was God's earthly dwelling, and that God was the Lord Almighty, God above all gods. Now where was He? Were the Babylonian gods actually more powerful than Yahweh? Were the people actually just another nation among many that was doomed to extinction? Where was the hope?

The next two sections of Ezekiel answer this question. Today we will focus on the message in section two of Ezekiel (chs. 25-32) and all of next week will be devoted to the message of hope found in section three.

Chapters 25-32 are prophecies and laments concerning the nations surrounding Judah. **God.** These messages against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt can be summarized in the following paraphrase:

“You nations have observed the fall of Jerusalem. It may seem that the God of Jerusalem has been defeated. You may feel secure that you have been right all along and that your strength has prevailed over the Israelites. Let me remind you of something. I still love my people. They are my people and I am disciplining them right now. You however, have never been my people and you have rejected me from the beginning. Jerusalem may be down for a moment, but, rest assured, I will restore them and they will be glorious. Your fate is another story. I will judge you in the end. You may have won the battle, but Jerusalem will win the war!”

The take home, and the message of hope from this section is simple: God is the God of all nations and is in control of all events. As the children of God, it

is our job to not allow the circumstances of our lives to dictate our feelings towards God. No matter how bleak the situation may seem, God is still on His throne. Remember, His throne has “wheels” (ch. 1)!

Spend some time worshiping God and thanking Him for His eternal faithfulness.

For a Little Deeper Look

The Vision

The vision of Yaweh in chapter one is indeed a bizarre and confusing picture to be sure. There are two important points to keep in mind when reading this passage.

1. This is not an attempt to literally describe what God actually looks like. This vision is a metaphor designed to describe certain aspects of God's nature to Ezekiel in ways that Ezekiel could understand. God is an infinite Spirit that has no concrete boundaries, therefore any 'picture' of God in the Bible is metaphor, simile, and anthropomorphism intended to relate a theological truth more than a physical reality.
2. The imagery in the vision is bizarre to us because we are 21st century Americans. To a 6th century B.C. Palestinian who had lived his entire life under the oppressive forces of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, this imagery was commonplace. We will explain this in what follows.

There are four major parts of the vision that need explaining.

1. The Beasts.
 2. The Wheels
 3. The Throne
 4. The Spirit
-
1. **The Beasts.** In ancient Mesopotamian religion it was believed that there were large creatures, called cherubim, that stood on the earth and held up the heavens – the place where the gods live. These creatures served and protected the gods. Creatures like this would have

been carved in the temples and the throne rooms all over Babylon. By seeing these creatures, Ezekiel was clued into the fact that he was coming into the presence of deity. The creatures were set in a square configuration, each in a corner, facing away from each other. This configuration represented the four corners of the earth. With this, the vision was telling Ezekiel that the deity above the cherubim was the God who reigned over every living creature on earth.

- 2. The Wheels.** The wheels are what make this theophany (vision of God) unique. There are four sets of wheels, each set being two wheels that intersect at 90 degree angles. The point of this vision is that the four creatures (and ultimately God Himself) is not stationary, but has the freedom to move in any and every direction, at any time. The beasts can see in all directions (remember, they have four faces, one on each side) and the wheels face in all four directions. This is a radical concept for the ancient world because the common pagan belief was that the beasts were stationary and that gods were fixed to a locality. Each city had its local deity and they were limited in scope. This vision of Yaweh demonstrated to Ezekiel that God was not limited to Jerusalem but was able to go anywhere on Earth that He desired. This would take on special significance when, in chapter 10, the glory of the Lord departs from the Temple.
- 3. The Throne.** Above the four beasts there was a throne that was seated on a crystal platform.
“Being crystal, this great platform had

a transparent quality, so that Ezekiel could see through it to what was higher still – what looked like a throne. In contrast to the gleaming whiteness of the platform, the throne was a brilliant, rich blue, as though constructed from one of the most precious stones of the ancient world, lapis lazuli. And on the throne, with all the added brilliance of contrasting fiery amber in the centre and all the colours of the rainbow around the radiant edges, was a figure like that of a man. Ezeikiel is careful to qualify all his descriptions here with repeated use of ‘appearance of’, ‘something like’Here, in anthropomorphic reversal, God appears in the likeness of a human being, albeit in glowing, fiery splendour that anticipates the transfiguration of the incarnate Son of God himself and certainly provided the imagery for John’s great vision of the heavenly throne in Revelation 4. Only now, it seems, does Ezekiel almost blindingly realize what he is looking at. This is no Babylonian diety attended by its guardian sphinxes. This is none other than Yahweh himself, very much alive and well and still on the throne. Yehweh is here in Babylon! The shock of the realization drains the last dregs of adrenalin from Ezekiel’s trembling body and he collapses face down, unable to look any longer....nothing will ever be more significant for Ezekiel than this encounter with the living God; his whole life and message will be more

uncompromisingly God-centred than any other prophet's. Yet all he can bring himself to say at this point is: This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."²

4. **The Spirit.** The final piece of the vision is that the beasts – wings and all -- as well as the wheels are covered with eyes. This symbolizes the all-seeing presence of God as well as the Spirit of God. Ezekiel recognized that it was the Spirit of God that moved the entire vision. It is important for the understanding of the continuity of the entire Bible to be aware of how important Ezekiel understood the place of the Spirit of God in His theology. The Spirit is that which gives life, which motivates, which animates, which directs, fills, and empowers. This is the same Spirit that came upon all the great leaders of Israel, the Spirit that descended upon Jesus at His baptism, the Spirit that was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost, and the Spirit that fills us when we put our faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the thread that binds it all together.

What about Satan?

Read Ezekiel 28:11-19. This will be a short statement, but one that should be stated for clarification. Many people have quoted this passage as a reference to the history of Satan. It is important to note that nowhere in the context of Ezekiel was this passage ever intended to have anything to do with Satan. Ezekiel was speaking to the king of Tyre and was using a culturally common expression of comparing his greatness to that of Adam and Eve. In the same way Adam and Eve fell because of pride, so did the king of Tyre fall.

Remember, always, always, always, read scripture in it's context. Even if you've heard great messages about a particular passage that seem to make a lot of sense, always make sure to check them against the context. Hopefully, through the reading of Ezekiel, you can see that chapter 28 is dealing with nothing more than a human being who got too big for his britches.

(Footnotes)

² Wright p. 51