

Ezekiel

Week 2

Monday: Ezekiel 29-33

Tuesday: Ezekiel 34-37

Wednesday: Ezekiel 38-41

Thursday: Ezekiel 42-45

Friday: Ezekiel 46-48

Introduction

This week we finish the prophecies of Ezekiel. Last week was a downer. Ezekiel's wife died and the city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed. This week we take a turn for the better. This week we get to see a series of visions that Ezekiel had that showed the coming glory of the restored Jerusalem. The dried up bones of death that Israel had become would be miraculously reanimated by the Spirit of God and lifted up as an example to the world of the magnificent power and faithfulness of Yahweh. In this new Jerusalem there would be a new Shepherd that would care for His sheep with a genuine concern for their wellbeing. There would be a restored Temple in which the glory of God would return and reign as the center of life in the community. Life would burst forth in a place that had been considered beyond hope and utterly desolate. In short, the second half of Ezekiel is a glimpse into the resurrection power of the Spirit of God!

There are two things to keep in mind when reading these prophecies:

- 1) **They are metaphors.** Ezekiel is not necessarily seeing a literal description of future events. The images that he sees, albeit vivid in detail, are representative of the quality and character of God's work in His people, not literal events.

2) **Ezekiel was a priest and had a priest-centered theology.** God always communicates to us in ways that we can understand and through images and analogies that make sense to us. Ezekiel had been raised and trained as a priest. For him, the Temple was the center of the universe and God was most represented in this physical structure. That is why God brought a vivid and explicit vision of the details of the restored. The point of this vision was not to give a blueprint for the people to build a new building. The point of the vision of this Temple was to communicate to a priestly-oriented prophet that the new order of things would be an order of perfection.

When God gave a vision of the Tabernacle to Moses in the book of Exodus, He gave him specifics in order that Moses could actually build the Tabernacle. This was not the intention behind the vision to Ezekiel. As a matter of fact, when Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem, he built a Temple that was very different than the one in Ezekiel's vision. Ezekiel's Temple was a metaphor for the perfection that would be found in the Kingdom of God under the perfect, resurrected, prophet-priest-King, Jesus.

Monday: Turn! Don't Burn!

Ezekiel 33:1-11

What is the responsibility of the watchman?

What is the responsibility of the citizens?

In what way was Ezekiel like a watchman for the people of Jerusalem? (remember, Ezekiel is not actually in Jerusalem. He is preaching to the Jerusalemites who are in exile in Babylon)

What is God's attitude toward the coming wrath against Jerusalem?

Towards the wicked in Jerusalem?

What is God's ultimate desire?

Read 2 Peter 3:9. What similarities do you see between today's passage and this verse.

Food for thought:

In the midst of pages of prophetic words of doom, gloom, anger, and wrath from the mouth of the Lord, this passage shines as a bright reminder of the deep heart of God. God does not delight in hurting people. Like the old saying goes when a parent spans a child, "this is going to me more than it hurts you," so it is with God. God created us for loving Him. Imagine how much pain it must have brought to His heart when He finally had to pull out all the stops of punishment against His beloved city.

We can use this message in application to our view of the world around us. In light of the depravity that is so apparent on our street corners, our billboards, our magazines, TV stations, and movie screens, it can be easy to become harsh and judgmental. When that happens to you, remember this passage. God does not take joy in punishing the wicked. He loves them. Our job as Christians is not to judge or condemn anyone. Only God can do that. Our job is to be the watchman, as Ezekiel was, and warn the people of the coming wrath of God. We are to remind them of God's love for them and invite them to repent of the sin that is killing them and enter into the joy of the Kingdom of God. Let's keep soft hearts this week.

Tuesday: Not for Entertainment!

Ezekiel was a professional preacher. Every day he would speak the words of the Lord to the people of Israel that were in captivity.

Read Ezekiel 33:30-33

What attitude did the people have toward Ezekiel and his message?

What was the problem with this attitude?

Think about examples of how you have seen this attitude at work in the church in our day. How often have you slipped into this kind of attitude?

Paraphrase the meaning of v. 33.

Food for thought:

How often we get comfortable in our American churches. Everything is going so well that we can become complacent and apathetic towards the sin that has infected us. Church becomes more of an entertainment venue about which we critique with a “thumbs up or thumbs down” mentality, rather than viewing it as an opportunity to come into the presence of the Holy God to be cleansed by His word. Evaluate your heart today. What is your attitude towards God’s Word? Do you take it to heart, or is it just a “love song” that makes you feel all warm inside? God loves you. He loves you so much that He does not want you to tolerate mediocrity in your life!

Wednesday: First Things First!

Ezekiel 36:22-32

What does the phrase “these things” refer to in v. 22?

In v. 26 what will God do for His people? What does this mean?

Why is God going to do these things?

Who is God trying to communicate with by doing these things? What is He trying to communicate?

Food for thought:

In our society we have been deeply influenced by a philosophy of radical individualism. All the messages we hear in the media tell us to “look out for number one -- you,” “you are the master of your own destiny,” “If it feels right for you, then go for it!” As Christians we can easily dismiss the obvious anti-Christian message in these phrases, yet we tend to miss the deeper-lying root of the message that rings through our theology. Much of our talk of a relationship with God has to do with what God can do for us. God can heal you from your pain. God can deliver you from an addiction. God can restore broken relationships. While these things are all true and are the overflow of an authentic relationship with God, is it possible that these things have become the focus of our theology rather than the byproduct of it? In other words, has the church resorted to selling the gospel with the benefits of believing rather than the glory of God?

Here's the reality. God is God and we were created to worship Him and bring glory to His name. The quality of a church, or an individual life, should not be based upon the “happiness quotient” or the “customer satisfaction index” of the members. Rather, it should be based upon the level to which God was honored and His name was glorified by the congregation's, both collectively and individually, conduct and character. Let's make sure that everything we do is motivated by bringing honor and glory to God, first and foremost. When God is glorified and we are in a right relationship with Him, then the healing power of the gospel will flow freely through His people and overflow into the world. First things first!

Thursday: Dancing Skeletons

Ezekiel 37:1-14

What did Ezekiel see in the valley? What did this vision represent?

special note: the word "breath" and "wind" in this passage is the same word in Hebrew -- *ruach*. This word is also translated "Spirit". All throughout the Old Testament when the "Spirit of the Lord" would come upon someone, it was the "*ruach* of the Lord."

Try reading this passage and replacing the word "wind" or "breath" with "Spirit." Does this alternate reading bring any new insights to the text?

How would you have felt if you were Ezekiel watching this dance of the dead?

What was the point of this vision? (vv. 11-14)

What was the promise of hope being presented to Israel?

Food for thought:

Even in the darkest hours of life and circumstance, God can bring hope. How many times in your life have you been in a circumstance where you felt so empty that it seemed your bones were dried up and there was nothing left of life inside you? Perhaps you hit that desperate spot because of your own sin and you are suffering the consequences for your actions (much like the people of Israel). Don't despair. Even the bones can repent, turn to God, and have the breath of life breathed back into them. Or, perhaps your circumstances are not necessarily the result of your sin but are more like the suffering of Job or Joseph. Even in those moments God can breath meaning into them that are deeper and beyond our understanding. Don't forget. God is the one who created humanity by simply "breathing" into a lump of clay. If He could make life out of what was dead, how much more could He breath life and meaning into something that was once alive to begin with. Look for this resurrection hope in your life today and begin breathing in the wind/breath of life.

Friday: The River of Life

Earlier in his book, Ezekiel saw one of the most terrible visions that a Jewish priest of his day could have possibly seen. He saw the glory of the Lord depart from the Temple.

How must Ezekiel have felt in that moment?

Read Ezekiel 43:1-5_

How must Ezekiel have felt after he saw this vision?

Read Ezekiel 47:1-12

What does Ezekiel see in this vision?

Get a map of Israel (there should be one in the back of your Bible. If not, find a Bible Dictionary or a Bible Atlas). If the river that flows from the Temple is traveling east, what is the Sea that it will be touching? What is that sea like today? What will the river do to that sea?

What will be along the side of the river? What is unique about these things?

Special note: It is important to note that, due to the physical geography of Jerusalem, it would be impossible for a river to flow directly eastward and down to the Dead Sea. Remember, Ezekiel is not seeing a literal snapshot of the future, he is seeing a prophetic vision full of imagery. What is the significance of the imagery of this vision? What is it saying about the future of Israel?

Read Revelation 22:1-6 (you may want to read a little before it to catch a glimpse of the New Jerusalem that is described as well). What similarities do you see between John's vision and Ezekiel's vision?

The point of these visions given to Ezekiel and to John was to show the people that there is always hope when God is involved. God is the author and sustainer of life. When His name is glorified, He will live in the center of the city and life itself will flow from Him. When we have God at the center of life then we will eat from the fruit of the trees of life that bear fruit every month, not just one month out of the year. Life is eternally accessible in the Kingdom of God. May we begin to eat from this tree today, and continue to be nourished by its life-giving juice beyond our present circumstance!

For a Little Deeper Look

Who is Gog?

If you have paid any attention to recent hype over the book of Revelation and end times prophecies, then your ears may have perked up when you came across the prophecy against Gog of Magog in the book of Ezekiel. You recognize the name because it reappears in the the book of Revelation. In John's vision he sees Gog and Magog swooping down on Israel for the battle of Armageddon. Is Ezekiel talking about the same guy? Did this already happen? Is it going to happen? Is it just figurative? Do I need to even worry about this?

These are all good questions. We cannot fully address this topic in this devotional, but I thought you might like a couple things to chew on.

1. Have you noticed a great deal of similarity between the book of Revelation and Ezekiel? When God gave the vision to John on the island of Patmos, He kindled the imagery that had been strong in the Jewish community for 500 years from the book of Ezekiel. The Jews were still looking for the perfect Temple, the good shepherd, the one King, the river of life that turns the Dead Sea into a fishing resort. It had been five hundred years since Ezekiel had spoken these words and nothing had really changed. When God gave the vision to John, He was reinterpreting the vision of Ezekiel and telling John, "hold on, it's still coming."

2. There is a great deal of symbolism in the prophecies about Gog. Scholars are divided over

whether this is a literal army and battle or whether it is symbolic of all the enemies of Israel being ultimately defeated by God, for his glory. Ultimately, the climax of the Gog oracles is that the land will be purified and the worship of God will be undefiled as it should have been from the beginning.

Here is a commentary that might be helpful.

We do not know for certain of a historical ruler called Gog. The lands that he ruled—Magog, Meshech and Tubal—are probably to be located in the region of Asia Minor and the Black Sea—see note to v 1. These lands would thus lie at the farthest reaches of the world of the Middle East. It may well be that Gog and his nations are symbolic of the people of the world who are arraigned against the people of God. (The book of Revelation refers to Gog and Magog in this sense in Rev. 20:8). Viewed in this way, the oracle becomes a warning that, even after their return from exile, the people of Israel would at the same time experience immense forces against them. Yet these forces would be routed, and their destruction would be great.

The intensity of the imagery in the oracle—the great armies and the huge numbers of fallen—has led some interpreters to see this oracle as predicting a specific final battle. However, if we compare this oracle with *e.g.* those against Egypt in 32:1–16 and Tyre in 28:11–19, we find a similar extravagance of symbolism.

The implication of the oracle is that in future days the people of God would experience the massed forces of evil ranged against them. The odds would seem insurmountable, but the power of God would protect his people. The enemy would be routed. This

victory still lies in the future for us, but the crucial blow has been struck at the cross of Calvary.

38:1–23 The Lord tells Ezekiel to proclaim to Gog: ‘I am against you, Gog. You and your allies will suffer a rout (38:2–5). Get ready, for in years to come you and your hordes will invade the land of Israel (38:7–9). At that time you will scheme to plunder and pillage a rich, peaceful land (10–13). You and your numerous allies will advance from the far north. I will bring you so that nations may know me (14–16). I spoke of you in the past through my servants the prophets (17). When you attack Israel, there shall be a terrifying earthquake with accompanying violent storms. In afflicting you with these I shall make myself known to many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord’ (18–23).

39:1–16 ‘On the mountains of Israel I will knock your weapons from your hands. There you will fall and provide food for the birds and beasts of prey (39:1–5). I will make my holy name known to Israel. The nations will know that I am the Lord, holy in Israel. This shall surely happen (6–8). It will take the inhabitants of Israel seven years to use up the fallen weapons as fuel for their fires (8–10). The burial ground of Gog will be called the Valley of Hamon-Gog. It will take the people of Israel seven months to bury them all and cleanse the land’ (11–16).

39:17–29 Ezekiel is also to proclaim and call to all the birds and animals: ‘Prepare for the great sacrifice. You will eat flesh and drink the blood of these armies till you are glutted (17–20). Nations shall see what I have done. Israel will know that I am the Lord their God, and the nations will know that they (Israel) had gone into exile because of their sins (21–24). I will restore Israel from captivity and thus show myself holy. Then they will know that I am the

Lord their God. I will pour out my Spirit upon them’ (25–29).

Notes. 38:1 Meshech and Tubal were probably situated in Asia Minor (*cf.* v 6). The name ‘Magog’ appears as one of the sons of Japheth in Gn. 10:2; 1 Ch. 1:5 and is thus the name of a people. The word ‘Magog’ may simply mean ‘land of Gog’.

38:5 ‘Cush’—Upper Egypt. ‘Put’—Libya. **38:6** ‘Gomer’—a land in Asia Minor. ‘Beth Togarmah’—Armenia. It can be noted that the sons of Japheth in Gn. 10:2 included Gomer, Magog, Tubal and Meshech. **38:12** ‘the centre of the land’—Jerusalem (*cf.* 5:5). **38:17** ‘Are you not the one I spoke of ...?’—This question could be taken as another indication that Gog is symbolic. The implication here is that Israel had already been warned of such an event. **39:9** ‘Seven years’—the number seven (also in 39:12—‘seven months’) symbolizes the completeness of the event. **39:12** ‘Burying them in order to cleanse the land’—anyone who touched a corpse was rendered ceremonially unclean (Nu. 19:11). **39:18** ‘Bashan’—a region east of Galilee renowned for the quality of its cattle and oak-trees. **39:25–29** This section does not denote yet another gathering of Israel. It can be seen as summing up God’s intentions for his people. ¹

(Footnotes)

cf. compare

¹Carson, D. A. 1994. New Bible commentary : 21st century edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.). Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA