

Week-2

The Prophecy of Ezekiel

“All Things Weird and Wonderful”

While the people of God were being marched off to Babylon, the psalmist says their tormentors mocked them. “You people love to sing praises to your God. Well, let us hear some of your songs now!” But the psalmist writes, “How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4)

That was the historical context in which the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel lived out their extraordinary lives and ministries as prophets. Ezekiel and Daniel were about the same age. Daniel was taken into Babylon as a captive when he was about fourteen. Ezekiel was taken about nine years later when he was twenty-five. He preached in the slave labor camps, the only prophet who ministered directly to the captives. God did not want His people, even when they were in captivity, to be without a prophet. Therefore, He commissioned young Ezekiel to go into captivity and minister to the exiles. A key verse in the book is: “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.” (Ezekiel 22:30)

God wanted a man among the captives who would “stand in the gap” between God and His people. He commissioned Ezekiel to be that man.

Apocalyptic literature

“All Things Weird and Wonderful” is a good title for the Book of Ezekiel because it is filled with some weird and wonderful prophecies. There is a sense in which Ezekiel, himself, was a weird and wonderful prophet. As you compare the prophets, you see that Daniel, Ezekiel, and the apostle John were exiles when they wrote the Books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and The Revelation. Daniel and Ezekiel were exiles in Babylon and John was exiled by the Romans to the island of Patmos. All three men wrote what scholars call “apocalyptic literature”. The word “apocalypse” means, “to pull back the veil” so that people can see things they otherwise would not be able to see.

This apocalyptic literature, also called eschatological literature, not only takes us behind the veil, but it takes us into the future. Eschatology (eschat = “last things”) means “the study of the last things”. An eschatological prophet shows us what will happen when God brings to an end human history according to His plan. Scholars refer to the plan of God for ending human history as the doctrine of the last things, or eschatology.

An Outline of the Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel’s prophecy, which is very well organized, can be outlined this way: Ezekiel prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem.

As a captivity prophet, part of his mission objective was to counteract the message of many of the false prophets, who preached that there would be an early return from captivity because that was what the captives wanted to hear. Jeremiah mentions a false prophet named Hananiah, who contradicted Jeremiah and said that the captivity was not going to last seventy years but only two years. Jeremiah confronted him and predicted that he would be dead before that year had ended. The prophecy of Jeremiah was literally fulfilled. (Jeremiah 28:11-17) Apparently, there were a lot of false prophets preaching that message.

In the first twenty-four chapters of his book, Ezekiel refuted this false prophecy and emphasized the fact that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel preached that there was no way to avoid the Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem.

In chapters twenty-five through thirty-two, Ezekiel prophesied against Babylon, the nation that would destroy Jerusalem. He followed this with a hope - filled prophecy that Jerusalem would rise again. (chapters 33 – 40) The final eight chapters of Ezekiel contain an eschatological prophecy. He prophesied that on the same spot where Solomon's temple stood, there would be another temple built, which is referred to as the millennial temple.

Ezekiel's Commission

Most of Ezekiel's sermons came to him in the form of visions, many of which also can be found in The Book of Revelation. Ezekiel's first revelation begins, "I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. ... Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. ... I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. ... The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." (Ezekiel 1:4–6, 10, 15, 21)

The four creatures are the important part of the vision. The Apostle John also mentioned these creatures in the Book of Revelation, when a door opened into heaven in his vision of heaven. Around a throne he saw in heaven were these same four living creatures. The first was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third like a man, and the fourth was like an eagle. (Revelation 4:6,7) Some scholars believe this shared vision of Ezekiel and John is a summary of the revelation of God in the Scriptures. When God first revealed Himself to man at Mount Sinai, He roared like a lion. The next way God revealed Himself to man was through the great sacrificial system described in Exodus and Leviticus. The ox represented the animals that were sacrificed for the sins of the people. The man among these four living creatures takes us to the Gospels, where God becomes a Man. God lived among us for thirty three years. Some say the eagle represents deity. This Man, Who lived among us, was "very Man of very Man and very God of very God," as the creeds say. The incarnation of Jesus Christ was the pinnacle of God's revelation of Himself to this world.

The wheels could represent the ongoing, continuous revelation of God, which perhaps even included the prophets who proclaimed the revelation, since the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. Those are some possible interpretations of this first vision of Ezekiel. When Ezekiel received his commission from God (chapter 2), it was after he had seen this vision. This could be called "the coming experience" of Ezekiel. Do you recall the coming experience of Isaiah? All the great prophets and men of God in the Old Testament had coming and going experiences. Certain experiences brought them to God, and then they had experiences as they "went for" God.

The prophets and men of God in the Old Testament had a coming experience that sometimes lasted many years, as in the case of Moses. He had eighty years of coming experiences and forty years of going experiences. That is why his forty years of going were so dynamic; those forty years of going were preceded by eighty years of coming.

In chapter one, the great vision of the four living creatures and the wheels was Ezekiel's coming experience. At the time of Ezekiel's commission, the people of Judah had lost their vision of God. They did not have Jerusalem, they did not have the temple, they did not have the Word of God, and they did not have any worship helps. So, the spiritual leader in that period — Ezekiel — needed to

have a supernatural vision of God. God gave Ezekiel a vision of Himself in several ways. First, Ezekiel said again and again, "The word of God came to me." That is true of all the prophets. Ezekiel also said, "The hand of God was upon me." Ezekiel is known as the prophet of the Holy Spirit because he makes reference to the Holy Spirit more than any other prophet. But, what made Ezekiel unique among the prophets was that the heavens opened for him and he actually saw the glory of the Lord.

God gave this vision of Himself in order to keep His people from perishing. It is also the vision that God gave to Ezekiel so he could minister as a prophet in those very difficult times and in a very difficult place - those slave labor camps in Babylon.

Spiritual Watchman

A great sermon of Ezekiel's is recorded in chapter three. This sermon is called "The Watchman of the House of Israel." The metaphor is based on the culture of walled cities that were often besieged by ruthless conquerors. Solomon uses this same metaphor when he writes that unless the Lord keeps the city the watchman stays awake in vain. (Psalm 127:1) There were always watchmen stationed in watchtowers at night watching and listening for signs and sounds of an enemy. Ezekiel's metaphor is also rooted in the solemn responsibility of watchman to warn their citizens when an enemy appeared. Ezekiel's watchman sermon begins: "At the end of seven days the Word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the Word I speak and give them warning from me. ... If you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.'" (16-17, 19)

When Jeremiah rebuked the false prophets of his day, he said, in effect, "You never did warn the people about their sins and try to deliver them from all this calamity." Ezekiel goes further and says, "As a prophet, if you warn the people and they persist in their wickedness, they will die in their wickedness. But you will deliver yourself. But if you fail to warn them, God will hold you responsible."

The apostle Paul believed that in his day. He wrote: "We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

The devotional application for us is: If you share the Gospel with someone and they believe, then you have been a fragrance of life to that person. But if you share the Gospel with someone and they reject it, then you are a fragrance of death to them because you have made it impossible for them to say, "I did not know. I never heard." If we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we

should join Ezekiel in believing that we are "watchmen" over the souls of those whose lives intersect our lives. That is why Ezekiel emphasized the Holy Spirit in his preaching. Ezekiel, like Paul, found his sufficiency for his awesome task in the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote: "Our sufficiency comes from God." Paul believed that when he shared the Gospel with people like the Corinthians, it was nothing coming from him, and everything coming from the Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 2:3-5) Only God can make us competent enough to be spiritual watchmen.