

THE BIG READ (36)

Jesus in Ezekiel

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The Law (of Moses) contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The second section, the Prophets, was divided into two parts:

The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) gives us God’s perspective on the history of Israel from the conquest of the Promised Land until their exile from it.

The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve) explains why the history of Israel turned out the way it did.

B. Getting Started with Ezekiel

1. Who is Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was among the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon in 597BC following a rebellion led by King Jehoiachin.

This was the second deportation. The first was in 605BC when Babylon took control of Judah. Among those taken then from the royal family and nobility was Daniel and his three friends (see Daniel 1:1-6).

Ezekiel was from a priestly family and was due to begin service as a priest on his 30th birthday.

Instead of taking up his responsibilities at the temple in Jerusalem, he was called by God to be a prophet to God’s people who were with him in exile in Babylon, while he was by the River Kebar.

“In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month – it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin – the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.” (Ezekiel 1:1-3)

“He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said, “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nations that has rebelled against me;

they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezekiel 2:1-5)

Ezekiel would preach to the exiles for the next 20 years (the length of time he would have served as a priest). During this time Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed.

"Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting." (Numbers 4:3)

2. What is Ezekiel about?

The book of Ezekiel contains the words and symbolic actions of the prophet to the people of Judah in exile.

Chapters 1 to 32 were spoken prior to the Fall of Jerusalem.

In Ezekiel 33 news reaches the people in exile that Jerusalem had fallen, and the remaining chapters of Ezekiel contain words spoken by the prophet over the next 15 years.

"In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, 'The city has fallen!' Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he open my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent." (Ezekiel 33:21-22)

News about the Fall of Jerusalem is the turning point in the book.

Prior to Jerusalem's destruction, the message Ezekiel preached was that God's judgment was coming to Judah and Jerusalem, and to the nations that surrounded them.

When this happens those in exile will know Ezekiel was a true prophet (2:5), and that God was the LORD.

"And they will know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 6:10)

After the Fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel had a message of hope that God would transform and restore a remnant of Israel to a right relationship with Him.

By announcing God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem for her sins, and God's promise of a future restoration, Ezekiel was calling the remnant of God's people in exile to repent of their sins and to trust in God who will do all this.

3. How does the book of Ezekiel explain why the history of Israel turned out the way it did?

It was because of the people's rebellion.

"He said, 'Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day.'" (Ezekiel 2:3)

"And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezekiel 2:5)

"Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." (Ezekiel 2:6-8)

"Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house." (Ezekiel 3:9)

"But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house." (Ezekiel 3:27)

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE." (Ezekiel 48:35)

2. Ezekiel breaks down into 2 sections.

Chapters 1-32: The glory of God departs in judgment

Chapters 33-48: The glory of God returns in mercy

3. In Ezekiel 1-32 we see the glory of God depart in judgment.

After God appears in His glory to Ezekiel and calls Him to a prophet in chapters 1-3 the rest of this section divides into two parts.

In chapters 4-24 Ezekiel announces God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezekiel is given a vision of God's glory departing from Jerusalem because of the nation's rebellion, and with His withdrawal death, destruction and exile will quickly follow.

In chapters 25-32 Ezekiel announces God's judgment on the nations surrounding Judah and Jerusalem.

The nations are judged for the shameful way they have treated God's people. These prophecies are given during the time of the siege on Jerusalem.

Through this judgment, both Judah and the nations will know that He is the LORD.

4. In Ezekiel 33-48 we see the glory of God return in mercy.

When the news reached the exiles that Jerusalem had fallen, Ezekiel's message turns from judgment to hope.

In chapters 33-39 we see that as God's glory returns, God's Shepherd-King will appear, God's people will be given new life, and all God's enemies will be defeated.

"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:23-24)

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:24-28)

"Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

"I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him." (Ezekiel 38:21-22)

In chapters 40-48 we see that when God's glory returns, two things will happen:

God will be with His people, symbolised by a new temple.

God will bless His people, symbolised by a return to Eden.

"The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple towards the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar." (Ezekiel 47:1)

"When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river... Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:7, 12)

D. Jesus in Ezekiel

1. Jesus is the Glory of God.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Life is found in Him.

"No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life." (John 6:46-47)

2. Jesus is the Faithful Watchman.

He, like Ezekiel called for repentance and warned about God's judgment.

"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." (Ezekiel 3:17)

3. Jesus is the Man who stands in the gap.

"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 that I would not have to destroy it, but found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD." (Ezekiel 22:30-31)

He is the mediator who stands in the gap to deliver His people.

4. Jesus is the Shepherd God provides to lead His people.

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them for all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness." (Ezekiel 34:11-12)

"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:23-24)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:14-16)