



Ezekiel

Resurrection from Exile

Session 26

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the significance of the Babylonian context in Ezekiel's prophetic ministry.
- Define the Spirit's role in the new covenant.
- Explain the meaning of the valley of dry bones in chapter 37.
- Describe the meaning of Ezekiel's vision of the temple in chapters 40-48.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah anticipated God's Servant who would provide atonement for sin by suffering on behalf of the people and who would reign in righteousness and peace. Jeremiah expected a new covenant in which God would change the hearts of His stubborn people so that they could be a faithful covenant partner and fulfill their mission to bless all nations. Ezekiel contributes one more major component to the prophetic message. Outline:

- 1:1-3:15: Ezekiel's call and vision
- 3:16-7:27: Ezekiel's role and message
- 8-11: God's glory leaves the Temple
- 12-24: The exile symbolized
- 25-32: Oracles against foreign nations
- 33-36: Divine leadership and restoration
- 37-39: The valley of dry bones
- 40-48: The new temple

EZEKIEL THE PRIEST-PROPHET

So far, we've divided our prophets geographically, but Ezekiel is different—he was in *Babylon* when God called him! Nebuchadnezzar deported the Jews out of Jerusalem in three waves—the first in 605 (Daniel & co.), the second in 597 (King Jehoiachin), and the third in 586. Ezekiel was among the second wave of deportees, so that he was a prophet to the exiles. He's called as a prophet in 593 BC (his 30th birthday!) and ministered until around 571 BC.

Ezekiel was also a priest, which explains his preoccupation with the Temple and the presence of God in this book. He emphasizes the glory of God leaving the Temple, the desecration of the Temple by Judah's false leaders, and the rebuilt eschatological Temple. Additionally, his ministry is more theatrical than Isaiah's or Jeremiah's, communicating God's message through dioramas (4:1-3) and symbolic acts like lying on his side (4:4-8) and cooking food over dung as a sign of the food the people would eat during Jerusalem's siege (4:9-17).

GOD'S MOVING OUT!

Chapters 1-3 describe Ezekiel's calling. In ch. 1, Ezekiel has a vision of strange angelic creatures and the throne of God. **What's the significance of the wheels under God's throne? What about His leaving out the east gate of the Temple? Why does God's presence in Babylon tell us about Him?**

A HEARTBROKEN GOD

Like the other prophets, Ezekiel tells of the coming Day of the Lord and condemns false prophets, idolatry, and corruption. We often focus on God's wrath and anger in His judgment of Judah's sins, but Ezekiel 16 tells us more. Did God's people make Him angry with their sin? Yes. Did they incite His wrath? Yes. He is a God who punishes evil. But they broke His heart. God had done everything to raise up Israel, marry her, give her a hope and a future, and they spurned Him repeatedly. Yet, in all this judgment, God reaches out His hand *again*. He promises an everlasting covenant—not like the covenant He made with Moses, which is never called everlasting—which can be compared to 11:17-21, where God says He would give His people a new heart, just like Jeremiah's prophesied.

A GOOD SHEPHERD

In ch. 34, Ezekiel takes up an indictment against the shepherds of Israel, or her leaders (priests, false prophets, sinful kings). Instead of shepherding the flock of God, they took advantage of

them for their own gain. The people of the nation had been poorly shepherded and were wandering like a scattered flock in a wilderness full of bears and wolves. Because of poor leadership, the people treated prophecy as entertainment and nothing more. Individuals within the nation would be accountable to God for their sin, but God also holds the shepherds responsible, since they were the ones leading the people in this foolishness. **How would God handle the bad shepherds in Israel?**

THE GOSPEL OF EZEKIEL

The covenant future of the nation appears again in ch. 36, where Ezekiel states clearly that God would directly change the hearts of His people so that they would become the faithful covenant partner they were always meant to be (cf. 11:14-21). Instead of having wicked hearts of stone, God will give them hearts of flesh. **What is Ezekiel's biggest contribution to the prophetic message?**

What is the significance of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37? What does it tell us about how Ezekiel understands the return from exile?

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TEMPLE

The final nine chapters of Ezekiel detail the dwelling place of God with His people, but in a very Leviticus-like way—with a description of a Temple. This section makes sense, since the exiles had been promised a return from Babylon but had no physical Temple, and so a rebuilt and glorious Temple was necessary for their renewed relationship with God.

Arguments for this temple being a literal, future building:

- (1) The meticulous detail of Temple measurements.
- (2) A physical building would bookend Ezekiel's vision, which began with the glory of the Lord leaving the Temple and ends with His glory entering this Temple.
- (3) New Testament texts such as Revelation are interpreted as prophesying a literal temple building yet to come.

Arguments for this Temple being symbolic of spiritual realities:

- (1) This section is introduced in 40:2 as “visions of God,” a header used elsewhere only in ch. 1 and chs. 8-11 (*KTC*, 594). If we interpret those visions symbolically, we should be consistent and interpret this one symbolically.
- (2) The impossible scale of this Temple. Ezekiel's temple is almost one square mile, which is considerably bigger than the space available in Jerusalem. The Temple Mount is currently 35 to 45 acres, while 640 acres make up the space needed for this Temple to be literal. If taken literally, it would extend beyond the ancient city limits. Additionally, this temple has no height, unlike the Tabernacle and Temple instructions.
- (3) To argue that this third Temple will be constructed in *our* future, after the advent of Christ, is precluded by the New Testament. It seems to be a step backwards to go back to a literal Temple from Christ and the church (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). In Ezekiel's Temple, offerings (including those for sin and guilt, 40:39; 42:13; 43:19, 21-22, 25; 44:27, 29; 45:17, 19, 22-25; 46:20) are made, and they aren't made as a memorial but as an atonement (45:15, 17). Christ's once-for-all sacrifice makes this impossible. Such sin and guilt offerings are superseded by the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament and are explicitly prohibited by the New Testament and new covenant realities.

Ultimately, Ezekiel's temple vision points to what spiritual realities?

CONCLUSION

Summary of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel envisions the day when God would _____ and
_____ through the son of David in a _____
_____ and a _____.

Consider these thoughts this week:

- Do you see examples of treating prophecy or preaching as entertainment? How can we avoid this temptation in our lives?
- How do God's promises of shepherding His people, raising exiles from the dead, and a future temple point to the New Testament?

HOMEWORK

- Read pp.327-345 in *Old Testament Theology* by Paul House
- Watch The Bible Project's videos on [Ezekiel 1-33](#) and [Ezekiel 34-48](#)
- Read Ezekiel 1-16, 34, 36-37

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