

EZEKIEL: VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

February 24, 2013

Preliminary Questions

- Why is the book of Ezekiel so difficult to read?
- What are some popular passages in the book of Ezekiel that you have been exposed to?

Resources

- Individual Commentaries
 - *** The Book of Ezekiel in 2 volumes (Daniel Block)
 - The Message of Ezekiel (Christopher Wright)

- One-Volume Commentaries
 - New Bible Commentary (ed. Wenham, Motyer, Carson, France)

- The Message of the Old Testament (Mark Dever)



Key Points

- Ezekiel is about God's glory, on display for all to see.
 - ▣ The demonstration of His glory, in the book of Ezekiel, is profoundly linked with the welfare of His people - Israel.
- Those who remain in sin/idolatry will face God's just judgment, whereas those who renounce sin/idolatry will enter into life with God.
- God, with unmerited grace, saves His people and fulfills His covenantal promises with them.



Interesting Factoids

- Ezekiel is not mentioned in the OT outside his book.
- Allusions to the book of Ezekiel in the NT are primarily found in the book of Revelation.
- The book of Ezekiel was debated (?AD90 - Council of Jamnia) as to whether it should remain in the canon.
- Ezekiel Ch. 1 (along with the Ten Commandments, Ruth, Habakkuk and sections of Exodus & Deuteronomy) is recited during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost (Feast of Weeks - Deut. 16:10), to commemorate the giving of the Torah.



Authorship

- Majority of scholars today would attribute the book's authorship entirely to Ezekiel himself
 - ▣ Although this does not rule out some level of editorial (redaction) work following the original composition
 - ▣ Any editorial work would have been done no later than the 2nd generation of the exile, following Ezekiel's death
 - exile lasted for 70 years
 - there is no reference to the exile's return to Jerusalem in the book of Ezekiel



Historical Setting

(2 Kgs. 23-25; 2 Chron. 36)

605 BC – Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) defeated the Egyptians, thereby taking over control of the Southern Kingdom - Judah (previously under Egyptian rule); Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) was on Judah's throne.

1st smaller deportation to Babylon - the “elite”, including Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1)

598/597 BC – As a result of Jehoiakim's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, a siege was laid upon Jerusalem. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, eventually took to the throne for only 3 months, remaining disloyal to Babylon.

1st major deportation to Babylon (**including Ezekiel**, Jehoiachin); Zedekiah appointed as “vassal” king of Judah



Historical Setting (2 Kgs. 23-25; 2 Chron. 36)

586 BC – Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who laid another siege on Jerusalem for 18 months, eventually destroying it (along with the Temple).

2nd major deportation to Babylon (including Zedekiah); Gedaliah appointed governor of Judah (no king!!!)



Structure of Ezekiel

Ch.1-24	Exilic Group in Babylon (before the fall of Jerusalem)	1. Ezekiel's call 2. Prophecies of judgment against Judah/Israel
Ch.25-32	Mainly during the 18-month siege of Jerusalem	Prophecies of judgment against foreign nations
<i>Turning Point – the Fall of Jerusalem (33)</i>		
Ch.34-39	Following the fall of Jerusalem & 2 nd major deportation	Prophecies of salvation, hope and restoration
Ch.40-48		Prophecies concerning the new temple and the restored community

*****Movement from doom/judgment to salvation/hope!**



Ezekiel the Person

- “schizophrenic”? “catatonic”? “neurotic”?
- The book gives us little biographical information
 - ▣ Generally, the biographical information that we have about prophets primarily pertains to the his message
 - ▣ “Ezekiel” – “hazaq” (strong/strengthen) + “el” (God)
 - ▣ An exilic prophet (1:1)
 - ▣ Priest (1:3) and Prophet (prophetic call of Ch.1-3)
 - Priestly influence reflected in the focus on the Temple
 - ▣ Married (24:15-18)
 - ▣ “Son of Man” designation (>90 times)



Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

□ Ch. 1-3 – Ezekiel’s call

□ Ch. 1 – the theophany – vision of God’s glory

- “most graphic/awesome description of God’s glory in OT”
- God transcends human description (“likeness”, “appearance”)
- God is omniscient (1:18 – eyes)
- God is omnipresent (1:15-21 – wheels)
- God speaks - definitive self-revelation (1:28)

□ Ch. 2-3 – Ezekiel called to speak to rebellious Israel

- Central role of the Spirit (2:2)
- Ezekiel accepts the call → eats the scroll (3:2-3)
- The people will not listen (3:6-7)
- The “watchman” theme (3:16-21 paired with 33:1-9)

Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

- Ch. 4-11 – Judgment against Judah/Israel
 - ▣ Ch. 4-5 - siege and fall of Jerusalem symbolized
 - A series of sign-acts – enacted prophecies
 - Israel will be judged because of her rebellion against God
 - ▣ Ch. 6-7 – judgment in particular against idolatry
 - Idolatry is the primary sin (1st of the Ten Commandments)
 - “mountains of Israel” represent the people of Israel
 - This oracle of judgment paired with the oracle of hope in Ch. 36
 - there is still hope for a remnant (6:8-10)



Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

- Ch. 4-11 – Judgment against Judah/Israel
 - ▣ Ch. 8-11 – vision of the departure of God’s glory
 - Ch. 8 – idolatry depicted right in the Temple
 - Ch. 9 – idolaters killed; remnant is saved
 - Ch. 10-11 – progressive departure of God’s glory from the Temple and from Jerusalem
 - Yet another promise of hope (11:14-21)
 - God will again gather His people
 - He will give them a new spirit and a new heart
 - The new community will be marked by holiness
 - Note the language of “covenant” (cf. Deut. 5-8, 29-30), but made NEW (cf. Jer. 31:31-34)



Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

- Ch. 12-24 – Further Woes/Judgment against Israel
 - Section book-ended by sign-acts
 - Ch. 12 – foretelling of the coming siege
 - Ch. 24 – death of Ezekiel’s wife
 - Ch.13-14 – judgment against the leaders of Israel
 - Including false prophets and elders
 - Salvation of the remnant (14:22)
 - The remnant is marked by personal righteousness (14:14, 20)
 - Ch.15-17 – parables about rebellious Israel
 - useless vine (Ch. 15), faithless bride (Ch. 16), covenant breakers (Ch. 17)
 - A messianic promise (17:22-24)

Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

- Ch. 12-24 – Further Woes/Judgment against Israel
 - ▣ Ch. 18 – Individual responsibility & God’s mercy
 - More on this later
 - ▣ Ch. 19 – demise of the Davidic dynasty
 - ▣ Ch. 16, 20, 23
 - Retelling of Israel’s history with some troubling imagery
 - Ch. 16, 23 – allegorical; Ch. 20 – not allegorical
 - Highlights the faithlessness and rebellion of Israel
 - SHOCK value - written to a community who has been far too complacent in her presumptions of God’s covenant.

Section 1 – Ch. 1-24

- Ch. 12-24 – Further Woes/Judgment against Israel
 - ▣ Ch. 21-22 – Israel receives well-deserved judgment
 - Babylon will be the instrument of God’s judgment (21:19)
 - 22:30 – “And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, ***but I found none.***”
 - What an indictment upon God’s very own people!



Section 2 – Ch. 25-32

□ “Negative Messages of Hope”:

Prophecies Against Foreign Nations

- Ch. 25-28 – prophecies against 6 nations
- 28:24-26 – a direct glimmer of hope for Israel
- Ch. 29-32 – prophecies against the 7th nation (Egypt)
 - Structured in 7 “mini-oracles”
 - Egypt is highlighted because it has always been Israel’s false hope (eg. Abraham, Hezekiah, Jehoiakim...)
- Key message: God delivers Israel from her oppressors!
- Brief sidebar on 28:13-19 – Prince of Tyre
 - Is this referring to Satan?

Turning Point – Ch. 33

- 33:1-20 – recap of the watchman theme (Ch. 3)
- 33:21 – news of the fall of Jerusalem
 - ▣ Followed by God's reiteration of why this is the case
 - The peoples' idolatry/rebellion
 - The peoples' hardness of heart



Section 3 – Ch. 34-39

- “Positive Messages of Hope”: Prophecies of Salvation
 - ▣ Ch. 34 – Israel’s shepherds judged; but Yahweh becomes Israel’s Good Shepherd.
 - ▣ 34:23-24 – a messianic promise!
 - ▣ Ch. 35-36 – Mt. Seir judged; Israel’s mountains restored
 - ▣ long-standing enmity between Edom (Esau) and Israel (Jacob)
 - ▣ The land is to be restored to Israel
 - ▣ 36:22-32 echoes 11:14-21 – new spirit, new heart
 - ▣ Ch. 37 – Israel once dead, now made alive.
 - ▣ The Valley of Dry Bones – a vision of resurrection/re-creation
 - ▣ Northern Israel to rejoin Southern Judah
 - ▣ divided kingdoms no more

Section 3 – Ch. 34-39

- “Positive Messages of Hope”: Prophecies of Salvation
 - ▣ Ch. 38-39 – Gog is judged/utterly defeated; Israel triumphs as a result of God’s might
 - ▣ Who is Gog?
 - ▣ Long tradition of hermeneutical acrobatics (cf. Hal Lindsey)
 - ▣ Key messages:
 - ▣ God fights for His people
 - ▣ God emerges victorious
 - ▣ God guarantees total protection for His people
 - ▣ This final and decisive defeat of Israel’s enemies is a fitting setup for the climax of the book of Ezekiel – Ch. 40-48

Section 4 – Ch.40-48

- Vision of the New Temple
 - 43:1-4 – the return of God’s glory to fill the new temple
 - Key message: God will dwell among His people forever!
 - 5 major elements of the New Temple
 - Structural considerations of the New Temple
 - No indications that the returning exile followed this “blueprint”
 - The Sacrificial System
 - Temple Personnel (priests and Levites)
 - Allocations of land/boundaries/tribes
 - Functions/regulations of the Prince
 - possibly a messianic figure?



Section 4 – Ch. 40-48

- Vision of the New Temple
 - ▣ Varying approaches to interpretation through the ages
 - Literal, dispensational, Christological, ideational
 - I lean towards the Christological/ideational approach
 - Representation of theological realities in concrete terms
 - God's re-gathering of His people
 - God's dwelling place with His people forever
 - Perfection of God's plan (perfect symmetry of the Temple)
 - Healing, Holiness, purity, worship
 - ▣ Clearly forms the basis of John's vision in Rev. 20-22
 - But John's vision "ups the ante"
 - There will be NO Temple in light of the mediatory work of Christ!!



Themes and Applications

- ***God's glory

- “glory” – “kabod” – “weightiness/worth”

- Trace God's glory through the book of Ezekiel

- Glory in judgment; glory in salvation

- in the book of Ezekiel, God's glory is inextricably tied in with the welfare of His people.

- eg. 39:21-22

@ God is passionate for His own glory – are we?

@ Does “magnifying God's worth” permeate all that we do, whether inside or outside the church?



Themes and Applications

- God reveals Himself
 - ▣ recognition formula: “they will know that I am Yahweh”
 - occurs 72 times in the book of Ezekiel
 - ▣ all that God does serves to make Himself known
 - apart from God’s self-revelation, we would not know Him
 - ▣ not limited just to the Israelites, but to all the nations
 - there is certainly a missional undertone here (eg. 37:27-28)

@Take some time to thank God for making Himself known to you

@Are our missional endeavours fuelled by a zeal for God’s glory to be made known in all the earth?



Themes and Applications

- God's holiness manifested in His hatred of idolatry
 - ▣ "kadoche" – separation/distinction
 - ▣ THE attribute of God – God's "god-ness"
 - ▣ Although there is nothing in all of creation that can compare with His overwhelmingly great god-ness, yet Israel chose idols over Yahweh again and again
 - Ch. 8, 16, 23...

@ What are your idols – the things/persons which take up more "space" in your heart than God?

("Counterfeit Gods" – Keller)

Themes and Applications

- God's enduring faithfulness through covenant
 - ▣ God will always be the faithful benefactor in spite of the faithlessness of His people
 - *"I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant." (16:59-60)*
 - ▣ A certain hope in our certain God
- @ Thank God for His ongoing faithfulness in your life in circumstances of despair, in times when you have turned your back to Him in disobedience and unbelief



Themes and Applications

- Commentary on the Leadership
 - ▣ Corrupt Prophets & Leaders (Ch. 11, 13, 14, 24, 34)
 - Responsibilities: speak the true Word of God to the people, lead by example, protect the flock
 - But did none of these
 - ▣ VS. The faithful watchman (Ch. 3, 33)
 - Duty to warn:
 - The wicked of impending judgment and need for repentance
 - The righteous from backsliding
 - not responsible for the peoples' responses

@ What kind of a leader are you? Do you “turn a blind eye” when a brother/sister is living in sin?



Themes and Applications

- Individual responsibility regarding sin
 - ▣ Each one is accountable for his/her own iniquities
 - *“...the soul who sins shall die...” (18:4, 20)*
 - *“I will judge each of you according to his own ways” (33:20)*
 - No one’s final destiny is a mindless product of circumstances; take responsibility, no blameshifting allowed!
 - ▣ Do not presume on God’s loving kindness if one remains unrepentant in sin (of which Israel was guilty)
 - Just as there are covenant promises, there are covenant curses
 - ▣ Yet, God is on the side of life
 - *“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked?” (18:23)*

@ What sins are you holding onto and not letting go of?

Other Important Themes

- The Spirit of God
 - “ruah” – wind, spirit, breath
- The Messianic hope
 - the new cedar (17:22-24)
 - the good Shepherd (34:20-24)
 - the coming King (37:24-28)
 - the Prince figure in the new Temple

Key Points

- Ezekiel is about God's glory, on display for all to see.
 - ▣ The demonstration of His glory, in the book of Ezekiel, is profoundly linked with the welfare of His people - Israel.
- Those who remain in sin/idolatry will face God's just judgment, whereas those who renounce sin/idolatry will enter into life with God.
- God, with unmerited grace, saves His people and fulfills His covenantal promises with them.
- This is the "gospel" in Ezekiel! Yet Ezekiel anticipated an even greater fulfillment of the good news that was to come – **JESUS CHRIST!**