

17 – 18 Bible Study # 4

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The Prophet Ezekiel

Ezekiel 593-571 BC Exilic

- Was born into a priestly family in 623 BC and lived during the reforms of King Josiah of Judah (640-609 BC)
- Witnessed the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the growing power of Babylon beginning in 626 BC
- Lived through the foreign control of Jerusalem by Egypt (609 BC) followed by the first Babylon incursion (605 BC)
- Witnessed the first deportation to Babylon in 603 BC of many leading members of the Jewish community including the prophet *Daniel*
- Witnessed the looting of Jerusalem and the temple in 597 BC

Ezekiel (Cont)

- Was deported at age 25 during the second Babylonian Exile in 597 BC along with 10,000 members of the community
- Trained in the laws pertaining to the temple and to sacrifices
- Was married and had his own home in a colony of transplanted Judeans in Tel Abib by the *Chebar*, a canal of the *Euphrates* river south of *Babylon*
- Was forbidden by God to mourn his wife's death
- Received a call to serve Yahweh as a prophet in 593 BC

Ezekiel (Cont)

- Stood at a critical point between the old age and the new age in redemptive history
- Prophesied the end of the old temple and the beginning of a more glorious temple
- Offered a prophetic critique of the popular ideology that hoped for a speedy restoration to Israel
- From 593 to 571 BC spoke God's word to thousands of deportees who were eking out a meager existence in Tel Abib

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 1:1-3**

- The prophet experiences a vision in the 5th year of the 2nd Exile (in which **King Jehoiachin was exiled**) while living by the *Chebar* River in Babylon (600 BC)
- At that time **Zedekiah** was on the throne in *Jerusalem* and **Jeremiah** was pleading with him not to rebel against *Babylon*
- Let us briefly review the historical context from 2nd Kings 24-25*

2nd Kings 24

- **2nd Kings 24:1-2**

- The **first exile in 605 BC** was during the reign of King Jehoiakim (later died or was assassinated)
- Also during this time the young **Daniel was taken to Babylon**

- **2nd Kings 24:3-6**

- The exile was punishment for the sins of Manasseh,
- Jehoiakim died and was replaced by his son Jehoiachin

- **2nd Kings 24:7**

- The Babylonians captured all that the King of Egypt had captured earlier in Judah

2nd Kings 24 (Cont)

- **2nd Kings 24:8-12**

- **Jehoiachin** surrendered to the King of Babylon and was **taken into captivity** in the **second Exile 597 BC**

- **2nd Kings 24:18**

- The 21 year old **Zedekiah** (third son of Josiah) is made **puppet King of Judah by the Babylonians**
- **Ezekiel's vision in Babylon** is occurring at this time, some **five years into the second exile** with Zedekiah on the throne in Jerusalem

2nd Kings 25

- **2nd Kings 25:1-7**

- The Prophet **Jeremiah** told **King Zedekiah** that he should **submit to the king of Babylon** (Jeremiah 21:1-10) as he was the instrument of God to punish Judah for their sins
- Unfortunately, **Zedekiah does not heed this message** and attempts to flee by night but **was captured, witnessed the death of his sons, was blinded and taken to Babylon**
- Let us return to the Book of *Ezekiel*

Descendants of Josiah and last reigning kings

Josiah

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Jehoahaz(1)

Ruled 3 months,
exiled by Neco to Egypt
where he died



Eliakim(Jehoiakim)(2)

Ruled 11 years,
Enthroned by Neco
against Jeremiah's advice
criticized by Jeremiah
for loyalty to Egypt
died or assassinated
1st Exile 605 BC (Daniel)

Mattaniah/Judah(Zedekiah)(4)

Ruled 11 years
Rebelled against Babylon
which brought about
destruction of temple and
Jerusalem **3rd and final Exile**
586 BC

Jehoiachin/Jeconiah/Coniah (3)

Ruled for 3 months
Exiled to Babylon **2nd Exile 597 BC**
(Ezekiel)

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 1:4-14**

- The book continues with a magnificent awe-inspiring vision of the “glory” (Hebrew *kabod* abundance, honor, glory) of God
- In his vision Ezekiel sees a windstorm, an immense cloud, flashing lightening, and brilliant light coming from the north
- In this “great cloud” he sees God upon His cherubic throne with animal-like angelic images of a man, lion, eagle and ox

Ezekiel (Cont)

- These are the four graded symbols of the creative power of God
 - Man is a symbol for wisdom
 - Lion is a symbol for ferocity
 - Ox is the symbol for brute strength
 - Eagle is the symbol for speed
- The four cherubim could move like lightening in any direction the Lord wanted them to move
- The differences in the four denote the sovereignty of God over the “four corners” of the earth (that is all of creation)*

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 1:15-25**
- The wheels within the wheels remind us of the moving chariot
- This is one of the images Ezekiel is so famous for presenting
- This vision shows the coming of the Divine Warrior
- Yahweh is approaching on his chariot of war to bring judgment on his people
- It reflects the power of God upon his throne to include his wisdom, ferocity, strength and speed beyond imagination

Ezekiel (Cont)

- He heard a voice from above and sees God sitting on a “movable chariot” throne
- In the ancient world kings often traveled about their kingdom and into battle on very elaborate chariots
- So here is the image of God on a similar chariot throne which would have been understood by the people *

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 1:26-28**

- When *Ezekiel* looks up he sees one in a human form sitting on the throne of God
- This is obviously God speaking to him
- Some see this as a vision of the *Incarnation (the word becoming flesh)*
- We are beginning to see images of God in this human association
- This vision of God's glory will remain with Ezekiel throughout the rest of his ministry

Ezekiel (Cont)

- God's appearance to him in a foreign land confirms His sovereignty and freedom which cannot be restricted to any one place, including the temple
- The glory of God speaks of the uniqueness of God's revelation as He reveals to the prophet what He is about to do to the temple in Jerusalem*

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 2:1-10**

- God calls this image of the prophet the “**son of man**” and sends him to speak to the “**people of Israel**” (a reference to the dispersed Israelites, as well as the captive Jews, and those still in Judea)
- It is parallel to what we will see in **Daniel** which talks about “*one like the son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him*” (**Daniel 7:13***)

Son of Man

- The term “son of man,” could be understood in the following five different ways:
 - A human being
 - The son of Adam (man)
 - A prophet (Elijah, Jeremiah)
 - The messiah
 - The divine figure and messiah from Daniel 7:13-14
- The key to understanding the importance of the term “Son of Man” can be seen in the often used phrase, “He who has ears to hear let him hear,” which allowed everyone to interpret “son of man” from his own point of view (Mt 13:43 *)

Ezekiel (Cont)

- God calls them a nation of rebels who are also imprudent, stubborn and hardheaded
- He tells Ezekiel not to be afraid or dismayed of their response since they are a rebellious house
- Further, that He will make Ezekiel's head harder than theirs
- He commands Ezekiel to open his mouth and eat a written scroll with His words written on the front and back (like the 10 Commandments – Ex 32:15), also see Rev 5:1;10:9-11 *

Ezekiel (Cont)

- Ezekiel's prophecy (from here through Ezekiel 30) will show that those exiled in Babylon are not going back to Jerusalem any time soon
- In fact, he teaches them that they are living under **three misconceptions**:
 - **First**, that they are in exile for the sins of their fathers who rebelled against the Lord
 - **Second**, that they will soon return to Jerusalem when the Lord has mercy on them for it is unfair for them to be in exile for the sins of their fathers
 - **Third**, that they will soon return to Jerusalem

Ezekiel (Cont)

- Ezekiel was instructed by God to tell the people that:
 - They are in exile due to their own sinfulness
 - God is not unjust in this punishment, rather He is very merciful by allowing them to live
 - They will not return to Jerusalem any time soon as it and the temple is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians
- Unfortunately, as we know, the sin of polytheism by Manasseh has continued right up through Zedekiah*

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 3:1-27**

- God continues to call Ezekiel to eat the scroll that will be as sweet as honey in his mouth
- He reminds Ezekiel that the people of Israel will not listen to him as they had refused to listen to the Lord God
- He tells Ezekiel that He is going to make him a “watchman” over the House of Israel and He directs him to act as a warning to them by pointing out their sins

Ezekiel (Cont)

- Here God presents Ezekiel with a real challenge
- He says that he must point out to the people their the sins so they may repent and live
 - *If Ezekiel fails to warn the people of their sins, he will be held accountable for the death of the people*
 - *If they fail to heed his warning and remain in sin, he will **not** be held accountable*

Ezekiel (Cont)

- God calls Ezekiel to shut himself in his house where he will be tied up to prevent him from prophesying to the rebellious people
- When he is allowed to speak again he says:
 - *“Thus says the Lord God; he that will hear, let him hear: and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house”*
- Look at **Isaiah 6:9-10; Mt 13:14-17** *

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 4:1-8**

- God calls Ezekiel to build a model of the city of Jerusalem and then lay a siege around it
- He is then told to lay on his left side before this model for 390 days to demonstrate the number of the years that the House of Israel will endure in their punishment
- Then Ezekiel is to lie down on his right side for 40 days to depict the number of years the House of Judah will endure their punishment
- This was a prophetic act symbolizing the eventual destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the punishment of God's people *

Ezekiel (Cont)

- **Ezekiel 4:9-17**

- The next symbol will be the need to eat a very poor form of bread known as “Ezekiel’s Bread”
 - Bread was normally made from wheat or barley
 - When there was not enough of these grains the people mixed in all sorts of other stuff
 - This would usually occur during a shortage of grain, a famine or during a siege
 - Look for Ezekiel bread in your favorite grocery store!
- The same would apply to the shortage of water

Ezekiel (Cont)

- This is what will happen to the people in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege
- God initially called Ezekiel to bake this bread over human dung to show the severity of the coming famine
- After the prophet protests that he can't do this, God relents and allows him to use cow dung instead, (a common practice in poor countries around the world)
- This was to depict how bad the situation will become for those remaining in Jerusalem during the siege *