

Route 66

Ezekiel: Then They Will Know

Part 26 – December 13, 2009

In the previous book, Lamentations, Jeremiah gives an eyewitness account of the final destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was the only prophet to see it, survive it, and record it. But, he wasn't the only prophet alive at the time.

Ezekiel is digging irrigation canals over on the Kebar River in Babylon.



Quick review: After King Solomon died, the Jewish nation split into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). These are the 19 kings of Judah (and the years of their reigns). The blue names are the kings who “did right in the eyes of the Lord”. The grey dots are the span of Isaiah’s ministry; the yellow dots are Jeremiah’s.

Now, during Jeremiah’s ministry, King Josiah is killed in battle with the Egyptians; his son, Jehoahaz is soon deposed to Egypt; and the Egyptians put Jehoiakim on the throne. Four years later, the Egyptians are crushed by the Babylonians. So, Jehoiakim switches allegiance to Babylon and surrenders his best and brightest men (including Daniel – our next book).

Seven years after this, the Babylonians and Egyptians are at it again, and Jehoiakim sides with the Egyptians! Bad move. Babylon again crushes Egypt, dethrones and deports Jehoiakim, does the same to his son, Jehoiachin, and exiles 10,000 Jews.

And among these Jews being marched to Babylon, is a 25 year old priest-in-training and his wife. He’s been hearing Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings, and he’s now experiencing their fulfillment. Five years of canal-digging later the book of Ezekiel begins ...

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 [BYOO-zigh], by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. - *Ezekiel 1:2-3a NIV*

And so begins 22 years of ministry as God’s “Watchman”.

The first vision God gives Ezekiel is a mind blowing, overwhelming presentation of God’s omniscience (all knowledge), omnipotence (all power), and omnipresence (all presence). Listen to Ezekiel’s frustration as he fights to find the words to write down to describe what is simply ... indescribable:

I looked, and I saw a windstorm ... with flashing lightning ... 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. ... Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright ... The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning. ... I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature ... Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around. ... and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. ... Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice ... When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. ... Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire ... -
Ezekiel 1:4-27 NIV condensed

The Lord really knows how to make a first impression! The Spirit has to raise Ezekiel back onto his feet so that God can commission him! God hands him a scroll with the sorrowful message he's to share, and then the Lord tells him to eat it.

And though it's filled with the woes and laments that are to come, because it is God's correction, the scroll tastes sweet. And then the Lord gives this traumatized, 30-year-old, ditch-digger a little pep talk, and sends him back to his people.

I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days — overwhelmed. - *Ezekiel 3:15 NIV*



Tel Aviv, the 2nd largest city in Israel, took its name from this passage (changing the Arabic spelling to Hebrew).

And they named it in 1910 (35 years *before* Israel became a nation), to symbolize the rebirth of Israel which Ezekiel predicts!

For six years, Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel, in Babylon, warn their people of the coming destruction ... to no avail.

Some of the things God has Ezekiel do to get their attention:

1. He draws Jerusalem on a clay tablet and sets up a miniature enemy camp around it with siege works, ramps, and battering rams. That's what will happen; then he tells them why ...

2. He lies on his left side for 390 days to represent 390 years of Israel's sin and rebellion against God. And then turns over and lies on his right side for 40 days to represent Judah's rebellious years under unrighteous kings.
3. And during those 390 + 40 days, God asks Ezekiel to prepare his food in a very distasteful, un-kosher manner.

... bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel." The Lord said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them." Then I said, "Not so, Sovereign Lord! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth." "Very well," he said, "I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement." - *Ezekiel 4:12b-15 NIV*

God knew the request was over Ezekiel's limit. He only asked so when the people were repulsed, Ezekiel could say, "You think this is bad; guess how He really wanted to symbolize your fate!"

4. Then he shaves his head and beard. He burns a third of the hair inside his clay tablet city, he strikes a third with a sword around the city, and he scatters a third to the wind.

And in the midst of all this he explains and predicts everything that Jeremiah later describes in Lamentations: siege, famine, plague, slaughter, exile, and cannibalism. (5:10; 7:15; 9:6; 12:11)

5. In one of his most remarkable illustrated predictions he packs his bags, digs a hole through a mud wall at dusk, covers his face, and leaves the compound.

Then he returns and explains:

The prince among them will put his things on his shoulder at dusk and leave, and a hole will be dug in the wall for him to go through. He will cover his face so that he cannot see the land. I will spread my net for him, and he will be caught in my snare; I will bring him to Babylonia, the land of the Chaldeans [kal-DEE-uhns], but he will not see it, and there he will die. - *Ezekiel 12:12-13 NIV*

Their "prince" is Zedekiah (the last king of Judah). They must have wondered which it would be: "I will bring him to Babylonia" or "he will not see it"? How can it be both?!

Jeremiah's eyewitness account will later fill in the details. Jeremiah had advised King Zedekiah that God would protect him if he surrendered to the Babylonians. But, Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole through the wall of the city at dusk. He made it all the way to Jericho before he was caught. And because he attempted to flee, Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes gouged out before he was taken to Babylon.

One of my favorite prophecies from Ezekiel's judgments upon the enemy nations, concerns waves of nations that will come against a powerful port city named Tyre:



They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. ... They will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. - *Ezekiel 26:4,12b NIV*

Now why would anyone do that?! It doesn't even make sense.

The end of that peninsula used to be an island a half mile off shore. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city, the people retreated to an impregnable fortress on the island. Another "wave" came in 332^{BC} when Alexander the Great and his men took everything they could get their hands on: stones, timber, and rubble and threw them into the sea to make a causeway. They conquered the city and changed the landscape forever.

This is just a small portion of the things Ezekiel said and did. He uses parables, poems, proverbs, and prophecies to try and convince his people to give up their idols and worship God. It's so shocking, that even in captivity they refuse to release the idols that they're holding onto and sacrificing to!

What idols are we holding onto and sacrificing to?

First, let's establish what true worship is. It *isn't* singing songs on Sunday mornings; songs can only *express* worship that exists on its own, apart from this setting. Worship is a devotion to something above all else, at all times. If a husband is faithful 99% of the time, we would conclude that he is *unfaithful*. So, worship is all about *total* devotion.

- An idol is anything that distracts our devotion.

Who or what will you sin for? That's idol worship. But, idols aren't always sinful things. In fact, many of our idols are good things that have simply been given an inappropriate priority. And we sacrifice to them; we sacrifice time, energy, money, and integrity to the very things robbing us of intimacy with God.

The Lord *demand*s our devotion because He's the only thing worth it! Everything else will fail us, rob us, and leave us empty.

- Worship is God's gift to us, not our gift to Him.

This is how we find our *greatest* joy. All of life's little joys can only remain joys if/when they're given a proper priority.

No less than 65 times in Ezekiel, God says a variation of: “Then they will know that I am the Lord”.

They refused to believe that God would go so far as to destroy His own temple and His holy city. They failed to realize just how serious God is about true worship. They thought they could just keep compromising their faith. And when the politics got worked out, they’d simply return home.

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!” - *Ezekiel 33:21 NIV*

This got their attention, and they surrendered their idols.

What would it take for God to really get *our* attention and get us to give up all *our* idols?

I like the idea of volunteering them!

Once the bad news comes, Ezekiel’s message turns to consolation and exhortation. If the people repent of their rebellion, God will redeem them, restore them, and return them home. He even sees the coming reign of the Messiah.

And in his vision of the valley of dry bones, God breathes his Spirit into His people and gives them new life and new hope.