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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Ezekiel 1:1-14

27. THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

A well known business man in the U.S.A. said some time ago that in spite of all his wealth and fame he was a troubled man. He worried about the future of the planet. He fears a nuclear holocaust, a disaster caused by pollution or a disease that is resistant to all known medicine. But the Christian does not share his fears that all will end with a catastrophe. You see, the Bible reveals that an unseen God is in control and that the future will play out according to the predictions of the prophets of Israel. Now Ezekiel is one of those prophets who speak's strangely but eloquently to the fears and hopes that mark our day. His words are both timely and insightful for our age. Now Ezekiel's book is the one of the most neglected in the whole of Scripture. How can we bring it to life and make it relevant for our day ? Well let's think for a moment about,

1. THE PERSON:

Ezekiel means "*strengthened by God*," which indeed he was for the prophetic ministry to which God called him. (3:8-9) Ezekiel was born in the years 622 B.C. during the reign of good King Josiah (640 -609 B.C.) and he was taken into captivity into Babylon in the year 597 B.C.

Like Jeremiah he was called from being a priest to being a prophet and he was thirty years of age at the time of his call. (1:1) This was the normal age for a priest to begin his ministry. (Num 4:1-3, 23)

2. THE PLACE:

Look if you will at (1:1 3:15) Ezekiel and his wife (14:15-27) were among 10,000 Jews taken captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:11-18) They lived in Tel-Abib on the bank of the Chebar river, southeast of Babylon. So you can see right away that Ezekiel was an exilic prophet. He was God's man with God's message to the exiles or captives in Babylon. Now Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. You see,

Jeremiah was God's prophet mainly to the Jews in Jerusalem, before the city of Jerusalem fell: Daniel was God's prophet, mainly to the court of Nebuchadnezzar in the land of Babylon. Ezekiel was God's prophet to the exiles in Babylon before and after the fall of the city of Jerusalem. So Ezekiel was
)the prophet of the captivity. 1, 2,

3. THE PERIOD:

Or, the timeline of the book. It will be helpful if you remember that there were distinct phases in the Babylonian captivity.

In 605 B.C. Daniel and other individuals of noble birth were carried away. (Dan 1:3, 4 2 Chron 36:6-7)

In 597 B.C. King Jehoiachin and Ezekiel, along with many others were taken to Babylon. (2 Kings 24:10-16)

In 586 B.C. after a long siege Judah's last king Zedekiah was carried away, the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and both Temple and City were burned. (2 Kings 25:1-7)

Now the events recorded in the first part of this book, that is until (Ch 24) take place between the second and third phase. So here is Ezekiel taken into captivity in 597 B.C. when he was twenty five years of age (1:1-2) he received his call to preach 5 years later. (1:1) So all this was six years before the destruction of Jerusalem. *Now have you grasp this ? Can you see this ?* Six years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is ministering to his people in Jerusalem and Ezekiel is preaching to the Jews in captivity in Babylon. And they are both saying the same thing. Judgment is coming.

Yet it's an amazing thing that though these people had already witnessed the Babylonians coming twice and taking people into captivity, they still refused to believe that God would allow His city to be destroyed. So there were false prophets both in Jerusalem and in Babylon who were saying "*Jerusalem will not be destroyed.*" You see, there were some people who were living in **Denial**. Even though they were in captivity, even though they were in dire circumstances, they really refused to see the situation they were in. *Does that not remind you of our nation ?* All of the things that are taking place around us, in our government, in our land I mean are we not as nation under the judgment of God. So to this people in Babylon

living in denial, ***Ezekiel is going to deliver a message of judgment.*** So in the first 24 chapters of the Book we have the Fate of Judah. But there is another group of people who are in exile. On the one hand there are those who are living in **denial**, they don't see the signs around them of the judgment of God, they are just going deeper and deeper into idolatry. On the other hand there are people who are in **Despair**. They feel like God has totally deserted them. They see the signs of the times. They see the dire circumstances they are in and they know that it is a judgment of God upon them. So they are living in despair. (Ps 137:1) So, to that group of people, ***God is calling Ezekiel to deliver a message of hope.*** For in (Ch's 33-48) we have a preview of when God returns to His people in great splendor and glory. So Ezekiel has a two-pronged message.

A message of judgment to those who are in denial, and a message of hope to those who are in despair. In the middle of that, in (Ch's 25-32) we have the foes of Judah and there are prophecies concerning the nations around them. One of the key phrases of the book is " *the glory of the Lord* " (1:28 3,12, 23 10:418 11:23 43:4-5 44:4) Where-ever God is there is glory. " *Glory*, " means " *the radiance or brightness of God.*" Ezekiel is the book of God's glory. You see, the book begins with Heavenly Glory in the opening vision (Ch 1) it ends with Earthly Glory in the vision of the New Order (Ch's 40-48) and in between it tells of Departing Glory. (8:4 9:3 10:4, 18, 19 11:22-23) Thus we see,

(4) THE PATTERN:

Of the book, emerging before us. *Before the Fall of Jerusalem: (Ch's 1-24 24:1, 2:44) During the Fall of Jerusalem: (Ch's 25-32) After the Fall of Jerusalem: (Ch's 33-48)* So here is Ezekiel in distant Babylon able to see events in Jerusalem through the power of the Spirit of God. Notice firstly then,

(1) THE FATE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

(2) Ch's 1-24

Here is Ezekiel the priest (1:1) unable to exercise his ministry since he was far away from the temple and the altar, but now God opens the heavens and calls him to be a prophet. Do you see here,

(a) THE CONSECRATION OF THE MAN OF GOD:

I say that because we read " *Then came I to them of the captivity at Tel-abib that dwelt by the river of Chebar and I sat where they sat.*" (3:15) In other words Ezekiel obeyed the Lord. Now this consecration

1. Commenced with a Vision:

This is very often the case when God calls his men to preach. Do you remember Isaiah ? He says "*In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne*" (Is 6:1) Do you recall John on the island of Patmos ? The Lord gave John an unfolding of future events. But do you recall before of all that, do you remember what happens in chapter one ? The Lord gives John a vision of the glorified Lord Jesus. My before

Ezekiel undertakes his discouraging and disheartening ministry God wants him to get a little glimpse of His glory. I mean we are told what this vision is. (1:28) My if you don't understand anything else about this vision and believe me there's a whole lot there not to understand. But you can understand this. What Ezekiel gets in (Ch 1) before he starts his prophetic ministry, he gets a vision of the glory of the Lord. That's what this is }11 about. What did Ezekiel see that day?

(a) The Whirlwind: (1:4)

Did this not symbolize God's judgment on Jerusalem ? Babylon was coming out of the north. The storm cloud with its fiery lightning meant destruction for Jerusalem.

(b) The Cherubim: (1:5-14)

For Ezekiel identifies these " *living creatures,*" later as the cherubim. (10:20) Do you what the cherubim do ? One of their duties is to help in the administration of the government of God. (1 Sam 4:4 Ps 80:1 99:1) The four faces speak of their characteristics, the intelligence of man, the strength of the lion, the service of the ox, and the heavenliness of the eagle. Some see in these faces the four Gospels.

Matthew, writing to the Jews pictures Christ as a Lion, the Messiah. Mark, writing to the Romans pictures Christ as an Ox, the Servant.

Luke, writing to the Greeks, pictures Christ as the perfect Man. John, writing to the whole world, pictures Christ as the Eagle, the mighty God. Certainly these creatures could move quickly to accomplish the will of God

(c) The Wheels: (1:15-21)

Wheels. Wheels within wheels. How strange and mystical. The size and circle of the wheels was vast. They seemed to reach down to earth and touch the very heaven. They were like a child's gyroscope. They were "*full of eyes*," (1:18) picturing the omniscience of God as He rules His creation. (Prov. 15:3) The wheels connected the cherubim with earth and all of this of the government of God. These fearful wheels are the wheels of divine government and that government touches both earth and heaven.

(d)The Firmament: (1:22-27)

This was a beautiful "*platform*," above the wheels and the cherubim, containing the throne of God. My God is still on the throne, and His will is being accomplished in this world even if we do not always see it.

(e) The Rainbow: (1:28)

There was a rainbow in the storm. Certainly this told Ezekiel that God's mercy and God's covenant would not fail His people. (Gen. 9:11-17) Warren Wiersbe says, " Noah saw the rainbow after the storm, John saw it

before the storm, but Ezekiel saw it within the storm." What is this vision of glory all about ? It tells us that God is at work in the workpjudging the sins of His people, but still keeping His covenant of mercy. Do you see what happened to Ezekiel as the result of this vision ? "*And when I saw it I fell on my face.*" (1:28) My isn't our God an awesome God ? Does He not know everything ? Is He not everywhere ? Can He not do anything ? No wonder, Ezekiel is on his face. He sees the glory of the Lord and the glory of the Lord is the outward manifestation of the Divine Presence. 1. But this consecration,

2. Continued with a Voice:

You see, God Stands us on our Feet: (2:2) and then God Sends on our Way: (2:3) You see, God called Ezekiel to be a watchman, fed him with the Word (Jer 15:16) and filled him with the Spirit. Could it be that like Ezekiel you also have seen a vision and heard a voice ? Is God calling you to be a watchman ? Will you respond in the words of the hymnwriter ?

**My eyes look up to Thee;
May I more clearly see
Thy glorious Throne.
Falling before Thy grace,
Humbled upon my face,
May I Thy call embrace,
Thy Word make known**

(b) THE CONDEMNATION OF THE CITY OF GOD:

And that takes in a vast number of chapters from (Ch 4 — Ch 24) Now Ezekiel more than any other prophet not only communicated his message verbally, but visually. In other words, Ezekiel was to act out by signs that Jerusalem was doomed. For example,

1. He was to take a slab of clay, draw a picture of Jerusalem on it and lay siege to it with model battering rams and so forth. He did this in total silence, watched by the crowds who were doubtless asking, " *What's the old prophet doing now ?*" (4:1-3)

2. Perhaps the hardest thing concerned the death of Ezekiel's wife. He was not even allowed to mourn because when Jerusalem finally fell, the people would be so stunned that they wouldn't be able to believe it and wouldn't even cry. (24:15-24)

You see, if in the opening chapter we see the *Glory of God Revealed*, then in these (Ch's) we see the *Glory of God Removed*. Now why did Jerusalem fall ? Well, a year after the first vision (8:1) God gave Ezekiel another vision, this time of the sins of the people back in Jerusalem. The glory appeared again (8:2) and God took the prophet in vision to the holy city. There he saw a four-fold view of the sins of the people. He saw an image set up at the north gate of the temple, possibly of Astarte,

the foul Babylonian goddess. (8:5) He saw secret heathen worship in the hidden precincts of the temple. (8:6-12) Ezekiel saw the Jewish women weeping for Tammuz. Tammuz was supposed to be the son of the Queen of heaven (Semerimus) who was supposed to die and be raised from the dead each spring. (8:13-14) Then, as now in Romish and other religious circles the favourite divinity of women was the virgin and her child. These newish women in the temple were not weeping for their sins, nor were they were weeping to the Lord, they were weeping for Tammuz. Still again, Ezekiel saw the high priest and the twenty-four courses of priests worshiping the sun. (8:15-16)

My is it any wonder God planned to destroy the city ? Idolatry, immorality and ingratitude marked its people. (23:1) Of course, the glory of the Lord could not remain in such a wicked place. The glory had come to the temple, (8:4) but in (9:3) the glory moved to the threshold of the temple. The throne of glory was now empty. It would become a throne of judgment. Then, in (10:4) the glory of God moved above the threshold of the)house, hovering there before judgment was going to fall. In (10:18) the glory moved with the cherubim off the threshold to the eastern gate of the temple (10:19) and finally in (11:22-23) the glory moved out of the temple to the top of the Mount of Olives. " *Ichabod, the glory has departed.*" (1 Sam. 4:21)

Why was the glory removed ? Because God cannot share His glory with another. The idols and the sins of the people had driven Him away.

Their sins may have been hidden from the people, but God saw them, and God judged them. " *khabod, the glory has departed.*" Is this not happening today ? As you travel around the United Kingdom how heart breaking to see so many churches closed, others falling into decay, others sold for bingo halls. Why ? The glory has departed and the lampstand has been removed. What a solemn warning to us corporately. Moreover, God will remove His glory and His blessing from our lives unless we serve Him faithfully with honest and pure hearts. (1)

(2) THE FOES OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Ch's 25-32

Now the background here is important. When Jerusalem fell all the neighbouring countries were thrilled. One Bible scholar writes,

The phrase ' Hip ! Hip ! Hooray ! ' comes from the delighted cry ' Hip Hip, which is made up of the three initial letters of 'Jerusalem is fallen ! ' in the Latin language so the phrase was an Anti-Semitic celebration.
(Unlocking the Bible by David Pawson p, 628)

You see, so many people were delighted by the destruction of Jerusalem. During the great days of their nation, the Jews had been a separated people and this irritated their neighbours. The Jewish claim that Jehovah was the only true and living God meant, that the other nations worshipped dead idols. So you can imagine that these nations that surrounded Judah were thrilled with the Babylonian invasion. A glance at the map will show that

Ezekiel dealt first with the nations on the east, Ammon, Moab and Edom then with those on the west Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon and finally with the nation to the south Egypt.

It's interesting that Ezekiel didn't have a message of judgment against Babylon, you see God used Isaiah (21:1-9) and especially Jeremiah (Jer ch 31 & 40) for that job. My the neighbours of Judah were delighted with the fall of Jerusalem. ***Do you remember Psalm 137 ?*** Look at it for a moment. (Ps 137 1-9) You say " *how awful.*" Well, the Edomites took babies by the ankles and smashed their brains out against the walls of Jerusalem. And the Psalmist is crying from the heart, " *We want you to suffer in the same way as we have suffered.*" So this is a description of God's paying back these surrounding nations for exploiting the fall of Jerusalem. Now some of these predictions are remarkably detailed. Let's just take one where Ezekiel predicts the downfall of Tyre, located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Now Tyre was actually two cities, one on the coastline some sixty miles north west from Jerusalem and the other on an island a half mile out in the Mediterranean Sea. *Can you see the Sin of Tyre:* (26:2) Tyre had rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem, the reason ? It meant that her trade caravans going from north to Egypt in the south would no longer have to pay tax. *Can you see the Judgment of Tyre:* (26:3-5) Ezekiel predicts that one day Tyre will be razed to the ground, the whole city will be thrown into the city, and the place where Tyre stood will be a place for fishermen to dry their nets. Now this is amazing, because

no other city has ever been thrown into the city, either before or since. But it came true. In 322 B.C. Alexander the Great came marching down towards Egypt with his great army, but the people of Tyre got into fishing boats and went out to the island that lay half a mile from the shore, knowing that Alexander had an army but not a navy. But Alexander was not called " *The Great*, " for nothing. He built a land-bridge leading from the coastline to the island. Do you know how he did it ? He threw the debris of the old city into the water, he literally scraped the coastline clean.

Do you see (26: 4) " *I will also scrape her dust from her.* " After this was done, his army went across and defeated the people of Tyre. If you could go the site of the old city of Tyre today, you will find its just bare rock, with fishermen spreading their nets on it, just as Ezekiel had prophesied. My isn't God's Word amazing ? I mean here we see a prophecy against the King of Tyre in whom we see the Devil himself. (28:11-15) My isn't it great to know that God is still on the throne ?

You see, one of the key phrases in the book of Ezekiel is this, " *Ye shall know that I am the Lord* " (28:22-23) This is the heart of the book. Gentile nations will know that the Lord is God by the judgments they experience, Israel will know that the Lord is God by the captivity they endure. Do you know something ? God achieved His purpose. **He sent them into Babylon the capital of idolatry, and the Jews to this very day have never again entered into the worship of foreign gods.**

(3) THE FUTURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE Ch's 33-48

Now remember when we come to this final section of the book, Jerusalem has fallen. (33:"x.1) And after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. there was a complete change in Ezekiel's preaching from judgment to joy, from gloom to glory, from pessimism to optimism for here Ezekiel predicts Israel's return and restoration. My there is a bright future for the nation of Israel. Now some Christians prefer to interpret Ezekiel (Ch's 33-48) symbolically applying these descriptions " *spiritually*," to the church today rather than literally to Israel in the future. But we have been interpreting Ezekiel's word literally up to this point. What right then do we have to change our approach and start interpreting his words symbolically ?

As Dr. David Copper said, " *When the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, then we need no other sense.* " Now remember Ezekiel is preaching to the exiles in Babylon and he is speaking of a time when God will do a new work and His glory will return to the land. *The Glory of God was Revealed*: the opening chapters. *The Glory of God was Removed*: the middle chapters: but *the Glory of God will be Restored*: the final chapters. For notice in these final chapters,

(a) *THE NEW NATION: Ch 37*

Perhaps the most popular passage in the book is

(Ch 37) made famous by the Negro spiritual. Do you know it ? "*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones hear the Word of the Lord.*" Now remember at this time both Israel and Judah were ruined politically. Assyria had scattered Israel and Judah had just been captured by Babylon. Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted a return from captivity. But Ezekiel's vision goes even further down the years. In the vision he saw very many bones in the valley or battlefield. (37:1-2) It was a picture of utter defeat, the bones of the armies drying and unburied. What a picture of the Jewish people. But through the power of God's Word (37:7) and through the power of God's Spirit (37:9) life was given to them.

Now this does not teach a bodily resurrection or even the salvation of the Jews. It pictures a future revival of the nation when the Jews will be brought out of the Gentile nations where they have been scattered, and the old division of the nation into two will be a thing of the past. (37:15-28) Israel will have its national sovereignty restored. Now has this not happened ? On the 14th May 1948 this nation that lay dormant and dead for two thousand years was raised, and the modern nation of Israel entered the family of nations again. Of course, Israel is dead spiritually but one day when Christ returns " *all Israel shall be saved.*" (Rom 11:26) (a) But notice,

(b) THE NEW VICTORY: Ch's 38-39

For these chapters deal with the famous " *battle of Gog and Magog.* " Now it's important that we do not confuse this war with the Battle of Armageddon in

(Rev 19:11-21) which takes place at the end of the seven year tribulation period. Nor is it the same battle involving Gog and Magog mentioned in (Rev 20:7-9) for that will take place after the thousand years reign of Christ. When then will this battle take place ? When the Jews are safely in their own land (38:8, 11, 12, 14) in the " *latter years.*" (38:8) When that will be ? Will you keep in mind that when the church is raptured, many events will unfold quickly in the world. It seems that the old Roman Empire will be restored, headed by the Anti-Christ. He will agree to protect the Jews for seven years. (Dan 9:27) Now during the first three and a half years of the tribulation period Israel will enjoy rest in the land, protected by the Anti-Christ. But probably Russia and her satellites will want the great wealth of Israel. (38:12-13)

Gesenius whose Hebrew lexicon has never been superseded says that " *Gog,* " is undoubtedly the Russians. He also identified " *Meshech,* " as Moscow and " *Tubal,* " as Tobolsk. Will this invasion be put down to Russia's Anti-Semitism ? No, they are coming to capture the wealth of Israel and to control the world of the Middle) East. But God will intervene and destroy the army of Russia. My so great will be the defeat that it will take seven months to bury the dead. (39:12) The Anti-Christ will hasten to Israel's help only to discover that Russia is no longer a world power, and then he will set himself up in the Jewish temple as the world dictator, thus breaking his covenant with the Jews (Dan 9:27)

This will be " *The Abomination of Desolation,*" spoken of by Daniel the prophet. One thing is certain, there will be a

new victory. The northern invader will come to a terrible end on the mountains of Israel. (a) (b)

(c) THE NEW TEMPLE: CH'S 40-46

Now I want you to notice that the temple here could not be the heavenly temple since Ezekiel was taken to Israel to see it. (40:2) It could not be Zerubbabel's temple since the glory of God was not present there. It could not be the eternal temple since the Lord and the Lamb are its temple. (Rev 21:22) Therefore this must be an earthly millennial temple. Now this is the last of seven great Biblical temples.

1. The Tabernacle of Moses: (1500-1000 B.C. Ex Ch 40)
2. The Temple of Solomon: (1000-586 B.C. 1 Kings Ch 5-8)
3. The Temple of Zerubbabel: (515 B.C. to A.D. 70 Rebuilt later by Herod, Ezra Ch 6, John Ch 2)
4. The Temple of the Body of Christ: (4.B.0 to A.D. 30 Jn 2:21)
5. The Spiritual Temple: the church, (from Pentecost to the Rapture Acts 2)
6. The Tribulation Temple: (From the Rapture until Armageddon Rev Ch 11)
7. The Millennial Temple: (Eze 40-48, Joel :18 Is 2:3 60:13 Dan 9:24 Haggai 2:7,9)

What will be its purpose ? To provide a dwelling place for the cloud of glory of (43:1-7) and to provide a center for the King of Glory. (43:7) My the Lord's promise to

occupy a future temple reminds us of our present privilege of being temples of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 6:19)

(d) THE NEW LAND: Ch's 47-48

The temple has been rebuilt, the glory has returned. Rivers of blessing flow from the temple. The tribes are regathered and set in the land in order around the sanctuary. My the promises made to Abraham will be fulfilled and his descendants will possess and enjoy their land. The Messiah that Israel rejected at His first coming will be received and honoured. (43:6-7) And God will fulfil every kingdom promise found in the pages of the prophets. My the last words of Ezekiel ring on and continue to ring until Christ comes again to make his visions a reality. Looking at the city and at the temple and at the nation Ezekiel cries, " *the name of the city from that day shall be The Lord is there.*" **Jehovah- shammah.**

Isn't it great to know that the Lord is there with you right now ?

***One of the names of the Lord our God
Which speaks of His love and care Is called
in the Hebrew Jehovah-shammah And it
means " the Lord is there."***

***In your hours of sorrow and times of grief
When your soul seems so filled with despair
Reflect on the words of " Jehovah-shammah,"
And know in your heart "He is there."***

*When you're flat on your back or you're suffering pain
And you're feeling that life is not fair Start
counting your blessings from "
Jehovah-shammah," Just think of His love,
"He is there."*

*When your plans go awry or your dreams fall apart
When your burdens are heavy to bear Lean hard on
the promise of " Jehovah-shammah," You are never
alone " He is there."*

*When the Devil's temptations press hard on your soul
And he deviously seeks to ensnare Run quickly to
Jesus, your " Jehovah-shammah," Then your battle
is won "He is there."*

*When your heart overflows with thanksgiving and praise
And your pour out your love in your prayer There's
rejoicing in heaven by " Jehovah-shammah," For He
hears and we know "He is there."*