

The Prophets

Lesson #43

Ezekiel 1:1-8:18

Outline

I. ***Ezekiel's Commission (1:1-3:27)***

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 - a) The living beings (1:4-14).
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- B. The Lord's charge to Ezekiel (2:1-3:27).
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 5. Ezekiel: a watchman to Israel (3:16-21).
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II. ***Judah's Iniquity And The Resulting Judgment (4:1-24:27)***

- A. The initial warnings of the watchman (4:1-7:27).
 1. Prophetic dramas depicting the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-5:17).
 - a) The brick and the plate (4:1-17).
 - b) The division of hair (5:1-4).
 - c) The significance of the symbolic acts (5:5-17).
 2. The coming judgment on the land of Judah (6:1-7:27).
 - a) Destruction of pagan religious shrines (6:1-14).
 - b) The imminency and comprehensiveness of the curse (7:1-13).
 - c) The response to the curse (7:14-27).
- B. The vision of the exodus of God's glory (8:1-11:25).
 1. The idolatry of the house of Israel (8:1-18).
 - a) The image of Jealousy (8:1-6).
 - b) Idol worship of the elders (8:7-13).
 - c) Tammuz worship of the women (8:14-15).
 - d) Sun worship (8:16-18).

Notes

Ezekiel 1:1-3:27

- The vision of God's glory (1:1-28).
- The setting of the vision (1:1-3).
 - Ezekiel begins with the event that catapulted him into a prophetic role. It was not uncommon that dates were given according to a

man's age when personal reminiscences were being reported (cf. Genesis 8:13).

- Note that divine visions were equated with "the word of the Lord" and were just as authoritative as an oral message.
- "The hand of the Lord was there upon him" connotes the idea of God's strength on behalf of the person involved (3:14). God was preparing Ezekiel to receive a vision that would provide the necessary framework for understanding the rest of the prophecy.
- The description of the vision (1:4-28).
 - The living beings (1:4-14).
 - A common motif in ancient Near Eastern literature is of conquering gods coming on the clouds (cf. Psalm 18:9-14; Nahum 1:3-6).
 - The Lord confronted Ezekiel with this glorious vision to impress on him the majesty, holiness and wonder of the God who was about to execute judgment on the people of Israel.
 - Against the backdrop of the awesome holiness of God visualized here, Ezekiel saw the wickedness of Israel and thereby understood why God had to judge His sinful people. God continued to appear to Ezekiel in this same fashion to encourage him that he was His servant.
 - The wheels and their movement (1:15-21).
 - There was one high and awesome wheel beside each of the four living creatures (cf. 10:9) that had the general appearance of a sparkling precious stone with a rim full of eyes.
 - When these wheels were functioning, they gave the impression of a wheel being in the midst of another wheel. The wheels moved in conjunction with the living beings, going in any direction, lifting up off the earth and standing still. This emphasizes God's omnipresence (cf. Zechariah 4:10).
 - The expanse (1:22-28).
 - The separating expanse between the creatures and the enthroned figure functions similarly to the expanse created by God in Genesis 1:7-8 to separate waters above from waters below.
 - Ezekiel describes the elements from bottom to top, as if he were fearfully raising his head to glimpse what is before Him. He uses the word "like" or "likeness" 16 times to express degrees of separation between what he sees and hears from its reality.
 - The mention of the rainbow relays the nation of God's faithfulness, just as it had done to Noah (Genesis 9:13). However,

God's fidelity to His promises applies equally to providing the blessings as well as enacting the curses.

- The Lord's charge to Ezekiel (2:1-3:27).
 - The recipients of Ezekiel's ministry (2:1-5).
 - The term "son of man" first occurs in 2:1. It is used 93 times in Ezekiel and it indicates the frailty and weakness of a human being humbled before the mighty and majestic God. It also underscores God's sovereign right to command and direct His subjects any way He chooses.
 - God's evaluation of Ezekiel's audience hardly inspires confidence that his words will meet with their approval.
 - Ezekiel's encouragement in the ministry (2:6-7).
 - Ezekiel's audience is described with metaphors indicating their ability to hurt him sharply and painfully (cf. 28:24).
 - God's charge to Ezekiel, "thou shalt speak my words unto them," highlights the prophet's constraints: he has no choice in determining either content or audience.
 - The nature of Ezekiel's ministry (2:8-3:11).
 - The prophetic call presents Ezekiel with his own opportunity to rebel like his companions or to obey in the face of certain persecution and hardship. The decision must be immediate.
 - The Lord's charge to Ezekiel emphasizes the absolute necessity of hearing, understanding and assimilating God's message prior to going forth as a spokesman for the Lord.
 - God would make Ezekiel's name ("God hardens") truly meaningful. He fully prepared Ezekiel for his task by making him more determined than the people of Israel -- as sharp and hard as flint.
 - The word of the Lord had to become part of Ezekiel (cf. Jeremiah 1:9) before he could "go" and "speak." His task, in part, was to remove any remaining hope the exiles had for a swift return to their homeland.
 - The conclusion of the vision (3:12-15).
 - Ezekiel's transportation was not a case of hypnotism, autosuggestion or the parapsychic phenomenon of bodily levitation. Rather, his transportation was in a vision, experienced under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit.
 - Ezekiel closes his account of his call to be a prophet with a clear indication that he was deeply angered at God's plans for him.
 - Ezekiel's condition and the period of seven days were instructive to the exiles: mourning for the dead normally took seven

days (Genesis 50:10; Numbers 19:11; Job 2:13), as did the length of time for a priest's consecration (Leviticus 8:33).

- Ezekiel: a watchman to Israel (3:16-21).
 - Ezekiel's role as a watchman was corrective and beneficial. A watchman in Old Testament times stood on the wall of the city as a sentry, watching for any threat to the city from without or within.
 - If he saw an invading army on the horizon or any dangers within the city like fire or riots, he would immediately sound the alarm to warn the people (2 Samuel 18:24-27; 2 Kings 9:17-20).
 - Ezekiel must be a watchman for all persons indiscriminately, he is not permitted to take his message only where it might have the greatest effect. God calls him to faithfulness, not fruitfulness.
- Ezekiel's muteness (3:22-27).
 - Ezekiel's commission concluded with a second glimpse of God's glory. For the first time since this vision commenced, Ezekiel is given maneuvering room to obey.
 - Ezekiel's muteness would last approximately seven and one-half years, until the fall of Jerusalem (cf. dates in 1:1-3 with 33:21-22). Yet he would deliver several oral messages in the intervening period (cf. 11:25; 14:1; 20:1). So he would remain silent, except when God opened his mouth to deliver a message.

Ezekiel 4:1-24:27

- The initial warnings of the watchman (4:1-7:27).
 - Prophetic dramas depicting the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-5:17).
 - The brick and the plate (4:1-17).
 - The exile's hope for a quick return to Judah rested in the belief that Jerusalem was the eternal city, protected by God, to which He would soon bring them back. This very first action shatters the basis for such a hope. Not only does God know about the catastrophe coming upon the city, He will not come to its rescue.
 - The 390 years is probably a rounded number and represents the period of time between the building of the first temple and its destruction in 586 B.C. It served as an unspoken indictment of Israel's long history of sin and idolatry, for which she is not being brought into judgment. An unmistakable connection exists between the number 40 and the number of years Israel wandered in the wilderness (Numbers 14:33-35).

- In addition to his meager rations, Ezekiel was to bake his bread over a fire made unclean from human dung (cf. Deuteronomy 23:12-14). This unclean manner of preparing food described the captivity that would follow the siege and fall of Jerusalem. The captives would eat the defiled foods of the foreign nations to which they would be banished.
- The division of hair (5:1-4).
 - Shaving of the hair was a customary mourning ritual among foreign nations (cf. Isaiah 15:2-3; Jeremiah 41:5; 48:37), but Israelite men, and especially priests, were forbidden to cut their hair in mourning for the dead (Leviticus 19:27; 21:56; Deuteronomy 14:1-2).
 - Ezekiel's drama portrays a carefully laid plan being brought to completion: no inhabitant of Jerusalem will escape this judgment, for God says that He will pursue them with a drawn sword (cf. Leviticus 26:17, 24-25).
- The significance of the symbolic acts (5:5-17).
 - God, rather than any foreign army, is the enemy behind the city's demise (cf. 4:3). Jerusalem will be the center of international attention -- punished because of her rebellion, not praised for her righteousness.
 - As a result of this judgment, God's justice would be satisfied and the people of Jerusalem would know that the Lord had executed his wrath. The punishment was certain.
- The coming judgment on the land of Judah (6:1-7:27).
 - Destruction of pagan religious shrines (6:1-14).
 - God interrupted Ezekiel's muteness to announce judgment on Judah's mountains, hills, ravines and valleys. Ezekiel set his face against these four geographical features of the land, for it was in them that the pagans normally established their religious shrines (cf. 2 Kings 23:10).
 - God always accompanies His pronouncements of judgment with the proclamation of a way to escape -- by turning to the Lord and following His ways (cf. Jeremiah 18:7-10).
 - Reverting to His theme of impending judgment, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to demonstrate joy because of the coming judgment. Clapping the hands and stomping the feet signify either joyful praise or derision over sin and judgment (21:14-17; 22:13; 25:6; cf. Lamentations 2:15; Nahum 3:19).
 - The imminency and comprehensiveness of the curse (7:1-13).
 - In communicating this prophecy to Ezekiel, God draws on language used earlier by Amos. Before Amos, the concept of the "day of the Lord" was apparently of comfort to the Israelites. In

that day, Israel's enemies would be routed and God would elevate her to a position of fame and prominence. Amos turns that traditional belief on its head (Amos 5:18-20).

- In the last half of this section, Ezekiel's tone becomes more shrill, pointed and frantic. The degree of calamity that befell Israel from the Assyrians will be minor compared to what is about to come upon Judah.
- God is bringing the destruction; in doing so, He turns both a blind eye and deaf ear toward them -- just as they had done to Him for so long. The suddenness of judgment is illustrated by the inability one had to regain what one had sold because of the quickness of the coming discipline.
- The response to the curse (7:14-27).
 - The last half of this chapter vividly describes the reactions of the Judeans to this swift and violent judgment.
 - Moral dissipation, famine, and disease had so decimated the nation that they would be unable to muster an army when the trumpet sounded for battle. Therefore the Babylonians would easily approach Jerusalem for the siege (cf. Leviticus 26:7).
 - Judah had profaned her sanctuary. The "ornament" refers to Jerusalem and her temple; "my secret place" likewise refers to the temple when connected with the full discussion of Jerusalem's fall.
 - "Chains" were prepared to bind the captives for deportation to Babylonia. This was their recompense for the violent crimes they had committed. As the Judeans were leaving, the worst foreigners among the nations would enter and possess the land, profaning their holy places. The land would come under Babylonian dominion.
- The vision of the exodus of God's glory (8:1-11:25).
 - The idolatry of the house of Israel (8:1-18).
 - The image of Jealousy (8:1-6).
 - From the chronological notices of 1:1-3 and 8:1, it appears that Ezekiel received his vision about fourteen months into his symbolic siege of Jerusalem. He was still lying daily on his right side, bearing the iniquity of Judah (cf. 4:6).
 - In this vision Ezekiel saw the contrast between God's glory in the sanctuary and the extreme moral and spiritual corruption of the nation's leadership. The latter was the main cause for God's judgment on Jerusalem.
 - The presence of the "image of jealousy" undermined the command to revere God as the one and only God of Israel (cf. Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

- Idol worship of the elders (8:7-13).
 - Though the exact location where Ezekiel was to dig in relation to the temple structure is unknowable, the means of entry suggests it was purposely hidden and secret.
 - These elders collectively represented the appointed leaders of all the tribes. Since the days of Moses, this group provided religious leadership (cf. Numbers 11:16-25). Their own treasonous activity toward God could not help but manifest itself among those they led.
- Tammuz worship of the women (8:14-15).
 - Tammuz, an ancient Akkadian deity, was the husband and brother of Ishtar. Tammuz, later linked to Adonis and Aphrodite by name, was a god of fertility and rain, similar to Hadad and Baal.
 - In the seasonal mythological cycle, he died early in the fall when vegetation withered. His revival, by the wailing of Ishtar, was marked by the buds of spring and the fertility of the land. Such renewal was encouraged and celebrated by licentious fertility festivals.
 - At the time of this vision, the land of Palestine would have been parched from the summer sun, and the women would have been lamenting Tammuz's death.
- Sun worship (8:16-18).
 - Ezekiel identifies the location of these abominations in vs. 15 clearly: these are occurring on the very steps of the temple itself in the shadow of the altar. Joel marks this location as the place of public weeping before God for national sins (Joel 2:17).
 - The desecration of this sacred place is overwhelming. However, as horrific as these abominations had been, God provides a final evaluation: these abominations were a "light thing" compared to Judah's social sins.
 - All these abominable, idolatrous rituals brought the wrath of a holy God. He would judge without compassion. He would refuse to listen to the people's cries for mercy, even though they shouted with a very loud voice. This is a sad reversal of the initial care and concern He showed His people in Egypt (Exodus 2:23-25).