

**Preachers' Gatherings 2018**

# **Preaching Ezekiel**

**Booklet 2: Sermon Resources**

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**October/November 2018**

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Torrance, Glasgow,  
October 2018

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# **Ezekiel at a glance: summary of chapters**

**Showing nine-sermon series in Bold.**

## **I    Before the fall of Jerusalem: denunciation and warning. Prophecies of 593-587 BC**

### **A. Ezekiel's visions of God, and call (1-3)**

1. **Storm, chariot vision, radiant figure. Ezekiel heard voice, fell.**
2. **He told me to speak, + or – welcome, to Israel. Scroll written both sides. Lament.**
3. **Ate scroll. H.S. took Ezekiel to Tel Abib to warn both wicked and righteous.** Ezekiel is to be bound and dumb until God opens his mouth again (33.22).

### **B. Woe to Israel/Judah (4-24)**

4. **Make a model of Jerusalem, lie on your side as bearing their sin, eat only spelt bread.**
5. Shave and disperse your hair in thirds: famine, sword, scattering of Jerusalem.
6. Israel will fall, through famine, sword and plague.
7. Israel's end has come because detestable idols and practices.
8. E. is taken in vision to Jerusalem, shown idolatry of elders and women. God will deal with them.
9. Glory in temple. Mark those who lament the idolatry; angels sent to kill most of the others.
10. Ichabod: the Glory leaves the Temple by the chariot of ch. 1.
11. God will exile them but later return them with new heart and spirit. E. is returned to Babylon.
12. E. to pack and leave home via hole in wall: // king will leave and be taken, blind, to Babylon.
13. Woe to false prophets and female magicians. God will save his people from them.
14. To idolaters asking God's guidance: repent! Noah, Daniel and Job combined could not prevent judgement on the nation now.
15. Jerusalem is a useless vine.
16. (Vivid) Jerusalem, promiscuous prostitute, I'll strip you naked; yet later will remake covenant.

17. Two eagles (Babylon, Egypt) carry off cedar (king); yet later, Messiah = sheltering tree<sup>1</sup>.
18. Three generations, establishing it is the soul that sins that dies. But God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.
19. Mother Judah = (1) lioness w two cubs -> Babylon, (2) vine broken and taken to desert.
20. Don't ask Me for a word: in every generation you have chosen idols and broken my laws. I will exile you; yet later, restore you.
21. Lament, Ezekiel. I am going to kill righteous and wicked alike, using Babylon, because of your sins. Ammon too.
22. (useful list of) Jerusalem's sins. I will scatter and furnace them. Sins of leaders, priests, the wealthy.
23. (vivid) Prostitutes Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem): Babylon and Assyria will strip and abduct you.
24. Babylon besieges Jerusalem // cooking pot. E's wife dies but he must not mourn, for the same will happen to Judah in regard to the temple and Jerusalem and they must not mourn.

## **II. Around the time Jerusalem fell: concerning the nations. Prophecies around 587 BC**

### **C. Oracles against the nations (25-32)**

25. Oracles against Ammon, Moab, Edom & Philistia for hating Israel.
- 26 & 27. Tyre will be destroyed for hating Israel. Her funeral song.
28. **Oracles against Tyre for sin against God**, and against Sidon. But I will return and restore Israel.
- 29 & 30. I will make Egypt a waste, through Nebuchadnezzar, for letting Israel down; and strengthen Israel.
- 31 & 32. I will cut Egypt down like a cedar tree. They will go to the world of the dead.

## **III. After Jerusalem fell: promises of a new order. Prophecies of 587 to ca. 570 BC**

### **D. Salvation for God's people (33-37)**

33. Ezekiel to be a watchman to warn Israel. God reopens E's mouth (3.26). News of Jerusalem's fall -> people will know you are a prophet.
34. (Important) Rulers of Israel are bad shepherds. -> God will shepherd his people, placing David over them.

35. God will devastate Edom for her enmity against Israel.
36. **Later God will bless Israel with a new heart, mind and spirit and restore her, to the honour of His Name.**
37. **Dry bones, prophesied to, become bodies, come to life. Judah + Israel will be reunited, one kingdom with David as king.**

### **E. Final victory over God's enemies (38, 39)**

38. I will bring Gog here, tell him to invade Israel; and be angry when he does.
39. **Gog's doom to God's glory v.21. For Israel: mercy and return to home and to me, to my glory.**

### **F. Visions of a new temple, Torah and Eden (40-48)**

40. E. is taken in vision to Jerusalem. A man shows him the outer and inner three gates of temple area.
41. Holy and most holy places, external rooms, temple dimensions, wooden altar near MHP.
42. Two buildings near temple; temple area.
43. Vision: the glory returns to the temple. The people are to repent. The altar and its consecration with sacrifices.
44. East gate not to be used because glory returned through it. Who may enter. Regulations for Levites and priests: clothes, teaching, purity, possessions.
45. **The Lord's portion in the land. The prince's, & his offerings. Three festivals: New Year, Passover, Tabernacles.**
46. Prince, festivals, people's exits and entrances, daily offering, prince and land, temple kitchens.
47. **Deepening stream from temple to Dead Sea. Boundaries of the land.**
48. Division of the land. The Lord's portion. Twelve gates of Jerusalem. To be called The Lord is there.

*Note. Occasionally in the sermon resources I write 'wee exp.' or 'lively exp'. It means 'relax and explain in a brief, lively way.'*

*I have offered rather fuller notes on the first two sermons and more bullet-point-ish comments thereafter.*

*cpw*

# Preaching Series

Ezekiel is such a creative, startling communicator, the task in selecting a series is to embody his message while also representing the variety and shock of his messages.

## A. 9 sermons

1. Ch. 1 The Vision of God
2. Ch. 2&3 Ezekiel's call; the vocation of watchman
3. Ch. 4 Ministry that engages (the model of Jerusalem)
4. Ch. 28. 1-19 Judge of all the earth (the doom of Tyre)
5. Ch. 36 A new heart and spirit
6. Ch. 37 Everlasting life, a united people and their Prince (valley of dry bones chapter)
7. Ch. 39 The end of evil (Gog's doom to God's glory)
8. Ch. 45 Land, Prince and festivals: life in the Messianic kingdom
9. Ch. 47 The new Eden our true home

If you had to omit two, perhaps Nos. 7 & 8 would be the ones to choose.

## B. 2 x 7 Sermons

1. Ch. 1 The Vision of God
2. Ch. 3 The Vocation of watchman; Ezekiel's call
3. Ch. 4 Ministry that engages: the model of Jerusalem
4. Ch. 11 Punishment, hope and the departure of God's glory
5. Ch. 18 The justice of God: Ezekiel's main theodicy chapter
6. Ch. 19 The lioness and the vine: a political poem
7. Ch. 24 Siege of Jerusalem, death of Ezekiel's wife.  
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8. Ch. 28. 1-19 Judge of all the earth (the doom of Tyre)
9. Ch. 36 A new heart and spirit
10. Ch. 37 Everlasting life, a united people and their Prince (valley of dry bones chapter)
11. Ch. 39 The end of evil (Gog's doom to God's glory)
12. Ch. 43 Return of the Glory, renewal of worship
13. Ch. 45 Land, Prince and festivals: life in the Messianic kingdom
14. Ch. 47 The new Eden our true home

# Sermon notes for series A, nine sermons

## Section A: Ezekiel's visions of God, and call (ch. 1-3)

Fundamental to the benefits Ezekiel can bring us are:

- his disclosure of God's glory (ch. 1), and
- the place of preaching: exactly and only God's word (2.4,7; 3.4,10,11).

### Sermon 1 Ch. 1 Ezekiel's vision of God

**The issues.** The glory which prostrated him, which departed from the temple during his ministry (ch. 10) and whose return in the Messianic age he foresaw (43.1-5), became Ezekiel's master and framed his ministry. Not a series of theoretical formulae but a vivid, mighty, stupefying Person.

*Rationale for inclusion:* Ezekiel's encounter with God transformed his whole life.

Our perception of God determines our lives and our ministries

*Glowing heart:* God's prostrating glory, royalty and omniscience

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* reverence for God. That their (our) sense of 'Thou God seest me' might be as real as if they could *see* him near them.

'Recognition of the master's prerogative is the mark of the true servant' (David Evans on 1 Kings 17.1).

### The sermon

The day Ezekiel records in his first chapter was a day he would never forget. He, King Jehoiachin and some others had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's army. They must have felt forsaken by God. Ezekiel was 30, the age at which he could have taken up his duties as a priest in the Jerusalem temple. His career had been brought to an end before it started. 'Can I still be of any use in God's service?' It is a heartache many of us face time and again.

Into that insecurity the barrier between heaven and this world was broken open, as in Rev. ch. 4. God gave him a vision.

It started by way of a windstorm – cloud, lightning, brilliant light coming from the north: the direction they'd come from when being brought here from Jerusalem. They hadn't been removed from God's care and interest. He was coming here too. And He wanted to show Ezekiel, and us, things about himself.

The storm revealed four creatures with human form but each with four faces, four wings, shining bright. Beside each, the wheel by which they travelled. The wheels were awesomely high, with eyes all round the rims.

Above the creatures and wheels, a sparkling platform. Then from above the platform, a voice. God was drawing aside that veil. Above the platform, a throne; and high above, on the throne, the 'likeness of a human form' (Ezekiel is writing with great care). From the waist and up, glowing splendour. Below the waist, fire. Surrounding Him: rainbow radiance. Ezekiel was being shown the 'likeness of the appearance of God's glory' and it prostrated him. He fell, face down.

What was it that God was showing Ezekiel about Himself? Think of the four angelic creatures each with four faces serving the forward movement of his chariot. They represented:

- The human face: the most exalted of God's creatures
- Eagle: king of the birds
- Ox: most exalted of the domestic animals
- Lion: king of the wild beasts

= He is Lord and Master of every creature. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and these who have been given greatness and dominion serve the advance of his purposes. The one on the throne is a consuming fire, yet also surrounded by rainbow brightness: he is judge of all the earth, yet always a God of mercy.

Notice how many eyes. Four creatures each with four faces: that's 32 eyes. The wheel rims were full of eyes. There is nothing God doesn't see. Not a sparrow falls anywhere in the world without his knowing and permitting it; it's mind-blowing.

You know when I sit and when I rise

You perceive my thoughts from afar

Before a word is on my tongue you know it ...

You know, this vision of God answers the greatest issue facing the Christian faith in our day: what David Wells calls the 'weightlessness of God.'

- In science Richard Dawkins etc. -> 'there is probably no God'

- In the media Dara O'Briain etc. mock the very idea of him

Their influence permeates the whole of UK culture: morality, media, politics, education: all are dominated by the weightlessness of God.

The same probably seemed so to Ezekiel and his fellow exiles. Has the god of Babylon conquered Yahweh? And this vision shows the thought is laughable. No, He had brought them there. He was with them to change the future of Judaism through Ezekiel's ministry.

And this is **our** God: reigning, watching over his people and his work. For the rest of Ezekiel's life the central issue was not whether he lived in Babylon or the holy land, or whether his vocation to be a priest was fulfilled or disappointed. The central truth was the existence in heaven of a throne, and on the throne the Lord God omnipotent.



Christian people need this perspective. Persecuted Christians need it (illustration given). You and I need it in our day most urgently, in order to see our lives, the world's life, the church's life from the vantage point of the sovereign kingship of God.

Looking back, here is the glowing heart of Ezekiel ch. 1: in exile, under God's judgement as a POW, Ezekiel saw such visions of God that he fell face down, overwhelmed. God wasn't absent or inactive. He was very much present and moving his purposes straight forward without deviation or diminution, and he is absolutely glorious.

And the objective for the lives of those who read this chapter or hear it preached? Awe of and confidence in God. We can be proud of him. How about you: is God weighty in our hearts and daily conversation?

## **Sermon 2 2.1 - 3.21 Ezekiel's call to service**

**The issues** Authentic ministry combines two things: a certain kind of person, and faithfulness to the message we are given.

*Rationale for inclusion:* ch. 3 combines the criteria for being a preacher with the particular call to be a watchman (a sentry alert to warn of danger) that is developed in ch.33.

*Glowing heart:* the responsibility of the servant

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* courage to share God's word with all the faithfulness it requires, all the fraughtness that it contains.

Outline of chapter. Block proposes:

- Vision of scroll, 2.8-3.3
- Commissioning, 4-11
- Preparation, 12-15
- Induction speech, 16-21
- Initiation, 22-27.

**The Sermon:** Ezekiel ch. 2.1 – 3.21

[On first sight the passage is difficult to grasp. I suggest you indicate its structure *during* the reading of the passage:

Ezk starts with his commissioning

(At 1.28b): The HS lifts him to his feet

(At 2.3) The first speech

(At 2.8) the vision of a scroll

(At 3.4) the second speech

(At 3.12) Ezekiel's spiritual preparation

**(At 3.16) Ezekiel's induction:** the special function or task of his calling, to be a watchman]

Last week we opened our hearts to Ezekiel's experience of God's glory from ch. 1. God isn't an impersonal doctrine. He is a Person, all creatures doing his bidding. His glory, his splendour is so overwhelming that it prostrated Ezekiel. In the next two chapters he explained how God took that moment to call him to be his spokesman.

You remember the historical situation. Seven years before Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonian army, Ezekiel was among a group of people the Babylonians exiled to deportation camps near Babylon. Ezekiel's message at this time was to be that Jerusalem will indeed fall because of the vileness of their sins. Ch. 8 records some of the detail of that. Here he puts on record how God called him to be something like his ambassador, conveying God's policy to his people.

Week after week for most of the year we sit under the ministry of a person who has likewise been called by God himself to be His ambassador to this village. The relevance of this for us, therefore, is twofold.

1. It is useful to see just what are the core issues for the Pastor in that call, and to consider our responsibilities as the people God is addressing through them. What is the agreement between our minister and us in this matter of preaching?
2. But also we have promised, all of us who are members here, to confess or profess Christ before people. This matter of witnessing is about keeping *our* promises too.

Let us then notice what Ezekiel ch. 2 & 3 say, about the calling to be a prophet or witness or messenger.

When you try reading Ezk 2 & 3, it seems repetitive. Ezekiel was a lawyer and priest, and that's the kind of way he wrote. In fact there are three stages here: the commissioning, the spiritual preparation and the induction.

To illustrate: my own progress to the ministry took a similar course. On 29<sup>th</sup> July 1972 the Presbytery of Glasgow *commissioned* me to be a minister. They handed me a copy of the Bible inscribed with the words 'Peter White was licensed to preach the Gospel.' I was then an *assistant minister for a year*. Then St David's Broomhouse in Edinburgh called me to be their minister and I was *inducted* into that charge. There are the stages: commissioning, being handed God's Word, preparation, and induction into the work. That's what is going on in Ezk 2 & 3.

As I've said, there is some repetition in Ezk's writing and rather than go through the (quite long) passage bit by bit in order, I'd like to draw attention to three special matters that speak directly to us – both as the objects of the Pastor's ministry, and as people commanded to confess Christ to an unusually unbelieving generation.

## Notice

1. The problem witnessing faces
2. The firmness witnessing requires
3. The destinies witnessing affects.

**1. The problem that witnessing faces** was writ particularly large in Ezekiel's day:

v.3 I'm sending you to a *rebellious* nation that has rebelled against me: they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day

v.4 The people to whom I'm sending you are *obstinate and stubborn*

v.5 they are a *rebellious* house

v.6 do not be afraid though they are *like briers and thorns* all around you and you live among *scorpions*. Do not be afraid, though they are rebellious

v.7 do not rebel, like that *rebellious* house

ch.3v.7 the house of Israel is not willing to listen to *you* because they are *not willing to listen to me*, for they are *hardened and obstinate*.

Is that the pastor's problem with us? Well, sin is not totally rooted out of us nor rendered impotent at any stage in this life. If part of our calling is to mortify sin, theirs is to *call* us to mortify it. Paul did that: '*Since you have been raised with Christ, put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, evil desires, greed, anger, ill will; do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self*' (Col.3).

That's not all that (in our case) Nigel is called to preach, of course. He is to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He is to preach the whole will of God.

Nor is the problem of sinfulness the only or even the main truth about us who are Nigel's congregation. We are new people in Christ who love Scripture and he has the joy of reminding us of the loveliness of our Saviour and the greatness of our salvation.

Nonetheless, if we ask in what way Ezek. 2 & 3 is relevant in our circumstances, the fact of hearers' sinfulness is the problem Nigel and we face. His

responsibility is not to modify his message. Ours is to respect his calling, to be receptive to his preaching and to be committed to obeying the Lord's voice.

Similarly, as we profess Christ among our unconverted families and friends and at our work, sin and unbelief is the problem we face. It makes some people mock God in sheer rebellion. It draws men and women into different kinds of sin: sometimes respectable, and in some people obvious and degrading. But the core is true of all of them: sinfulness. That is what makes them blind and deaf to Christ and the Gospel.

So that's the first point. The *problem* that witnessing faces – Nigel does with us, and we do with unconverted acquaintances – is the problem of sin in the human heart.

## **2. The firmness that preaching and witnessing requires.**

You can see that so clearly in our passage. 'Do not be afraid of them ... You must speak my words whether they listen or fail to ... I will make you as unyielding and hard as they are ... Say to them, "This is what the sovereign Lord says" ... If you do not warn them, I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn, you will have saved yourself.'

As for how Ezekiel's call works out *for Christian preachers*, look at Acts 20.19-27: 'Although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews, I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you ... I have declared that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus ... I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.'

With regard to *our own witnessing*, don't you think that we are a quietist generation of Christians? In our men's group one of us said,

'my neighbours know I go to church, they know I'm a nice person, they know I'd help them if they needed it – but is that enough?'

Well, see God's command to Ezekiel:

v.4 SAY to them what the sovereign Lord says

v. 6,7 do not be afraid: you must speak my words to them, whether they listen or not

ch.3 v.4 go to the house of Israel and speak my words to them

v. 7-9 they are hardened and obstinate; I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.

That isn't quietism. Think what the first Christians were like:

Acts 8.1ff: Persecution broke out against the church ... all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria ... those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Acts 4.23ff: (After being beaten for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead), Peter and John went back to their own people and raised their voices in prayer: 'Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to *speak your word with great boldness.*'

Full of the Spirit, the early church knew that they were called to bear witness; and that witnessing calls for firmness.

Could we pray that we will take an opportunity this week to speak to someone about the Saviour?

Then, how are we going to resource ourselves for this? The vision in 2.8 – 3.4 guides us. A hand stretches out and gives Ezekiel a scroll, containing God's words, to eat and digest. Let us read, mark, learn and inwardly digest holy Scripture so that, more and more, our thinking, our very blood is **Biblical**.

- So we've thought about the problem that witnessing faces .. the firmness that it requires .. and finally:

### **3. The destinies at stake**

Look at 3.17-21.

'I've given you as a watchman' – Ezekiel's ministry was a *gift* to Israel – 'for the house of Israel. So hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me. When I say to a wicked man 'you will surely die' and you don't warn him or try to dissuade him from his evil ways, he will die for his sin (that's thought to mean, be liable to an early or violent death) BUT I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn him, you will save yourself.'

I'm sure the Day of Judgment isn't going to be comfortable for many of us. You know what St Paul says about that:

'The foundation is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on that foundation using gold, silver, precious stones .. OR wood, hay or straw, the Day will reveal it. The fire will show the quality of each person's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will be saved; but only as one escaping through the flames.'

Do you know Amy Carmichael's vision 'The Cry of the Blood?' She was a missionary in India running a kind of retreat centre but here is the vision she had about our call to be 'watchmen,' or sentries, or lookouts:  
(read Cry of the Blood, selections)

Looking back, we have seen that Ezekiel ch. 2 + 3 speak to us of

1. *The problem witnessing faces*: the sinfulness of the human heart
2. *The firmness witnessing requires*. The hardening caused by sin calls for boldness, openness and clarity from us. 'Enable your servants to speak your message with great boldness,' prayed the first Christians.
3. *The destinies witnessing affects*. If we saw a neighbour's house burning and they hadn't realised, wouldn't we alert them and do all we could to rescue them from the flames? Friends I don't know what is the reality corresponding to 'the worm that does not die' and 'eternal punishment' and 'thrown into the lake of fire' but we disserve our families and friends if we fail to tell them there is a hell to flee and a heaven to gain at the last.

Pray

## **Section B. Woe to Israel/Judah (ch. 4-24)**

How to embody 21 chapters of vivid denunciation, appeal and warning, often acted out and sometimes almost pornographic, in one sermon? I have chosen this chapter as representing dramatic prophetic action. And what for our lives? Does God still discipline? What is shown here of God's heart?

### **Sermon 3 Ch. 4      Ezekiel makes a model of Jerusalem under siege**

**The issues.** It took the ministry of ch. 4-24 in order for the truth about their sinfulness to sink home. It was that painfully achieved change of heart about the reasons for the exile, that gave Israel a future and a heart. The chapters are hard reading. Including the note of judgement makes hard preaching (if you don't find it so, avoid it and seek God for a tender heart till you do). But we are disobedient if we do not include it.

In our preaching, do we not owe it to our people to intrigue them? Is there any more important matter on which to do so, than the danger of judgement? Is not a hard heart that likes the idea of judgement, the worst kind of spirit for preaching it? I'm sure this acted sermon attracted people's curiosity and that they got the message. And so simple! But demanding on the preacher ...

*Rationale for inclusion:* If we are to 'cover' Ezekiel in 9 sermons, this one on ch. 4 has to bear the weight of the whole of ch.4-24. Their message is, God was

quite right to exile them and destroy all they stood for; they must be brought to the point of accepting responsibility, taking on board their disgusting sinfulness (see note on *to'ebah* in Booklet 1, theology, on sin).

If our series is to embody the variety of Ezekiel's ministry, moreover, it must include an example of dramatic prophetic action: what the Bible Project calls 'sign acts.' How relevant is this one, for the spirit of our age surely reflects the attitude in Jerusalem then: 'God won't act in judgement.'

*Glowing heart:* God means what he says when he warns of judgement, and he wants people to know that.

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* to take on board that God acts to discipline and punish as surely as he has acted in salvation. To see this passage in the framework of both the Cross and Heb. 12.5-13.

## **The Sermon**

*Introduction.* All Judah – those still in Jerusalem *and* those in exile – were hoping against hope that Jerusalem would not fall. YHWH was stronger than Bel, wasn't he? It was treason to think otherwise. Jehoiakim and then Jehoiachin had bought Babylon off at the cost of their own deportation (2 Chron. 36.5-10); perhaps they would get away with it.

*Brief content.* In Babylon, the people were intrigued. There was the priest Ezekiel making a clay model of Jerusalem – with siege works round it. Lying on his side there bearing 390 + 40 years of Jewish sin??? Baking poor man's bread+ lentil buns on a cow dung fire as his diet: duh?

Divisions.

- The model of Jerusalem's siege
- The diagnosis of Jerusalem's sin
- The warning of Jerusalem's starvation
- The cost of faithful witness

Conclusions.

1. God meant his warning. Worse *was* to come. Jerusalem did starve and fall. It *was* because of their sin (see e.g. 2 Chron. 36.11-16). It is not popular to speak of God's judgement. But Acts 17.31 is true: God has set a day for judging the world by the Man he has appointed. He warned of it then, and warns of it now, looking for a change of heart among people.
2. It is not easy to bear this witness; it was costly for Ezekiel. But we are 'careful to warn of wrath to come lest we participate by silence in their guilt' (Don Carson on 3.16-23); lest we leave folk unwarned.

## Section C. Oracles against the nations (ch. 25-32)

‘The Lord might be disciplining us but what about the cruel tyrants he’s using for the purpose: isn’t he going to deal with them?’ Ezekiel’s oracles against the nations assure his people that he really is Lord of Lords and king of kings, and the destiny of nations is as much under his say-so as their own.

### Sermon 4 28.1-19 Ezekiel predicts the fall of proud Tyre

**The issues.** 25.1 marked a major break. Till then the fate of Jerusalem was the issue. Ch. 25-32 consist of judgement oracles against the nations. This brings hope to Israel and forms the transition to the promises of salvation in ch. 33-48. But God’s people should not think themselves better than the nations. The reasons for judgement (social sins, pride, idolatry), and the punishment, are common to believer and unbeliever.

Ch. 25-32 are carefully structured. The two halves either side of 28.24-26 are almost identical in length (and given 97 verses each) with seven ‘mini-oracles’<sup>1</sup> before it and seven oracles against Egypt after it. The arrangement is geographical.

*Rationale for inclusion:* Do the impenitent wicked get away with it indefinitely? Is there a sanction to being God’s settled enemy?

*Glowing heart:* We live in a just universe. God’s justice often seems slow by our standards but ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’

*Objective for our hearers’ lives:* confidence in God in the face of injustice, tyranny and evil.

### The Sermon

*Context.* This chapter brings us to a new section of Ezekiel. Up till now he has been warning that Jerusalem will fall because of the sins of God’s people; the climax is in 24.25-27, Jerusalem’s imminent fall. Ch. 25-32 form a series of messages promising that God will also judge the nations who are their and his enemies. The oracle (a weighty burden of a message warning of punishment) against Tyre takes three chapters, of which this is the final section.

*Content.* The ruler of Tyre’s great pride – the sin called hubris – has led him to regard himself as one of the gods. This is to tilt not just at Israel but at God, and Tyre will be brought to a horrible end. A prophecy that came true, as we shall see.

*Relevance.* Has any age been so characterised by hubris as ours? Think of the scorn of God in the media and among the new atheists and comedians.

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<sup>1</sup> Block vol. 2 p. 5. The oracles are short before the divide.



Think of the God-negating pride of so many of the leaders of the nations.  
Think of our own hearts.

*Proposition.* It is so important to open up our consciences as well as our world view to what God teaches here.

*Divisions.* The passage's structure is:

1-10 Judgement on the prince of Tyre

- Preamble and accusation (1-5)
- Sentence (6-10)

11-19 Lament over his fall

- Preamble; his wealth and exaltation, 11-14
- His hubris, and the Lord's sentence, alternated x 3, 15-18
- The impact of his end, 19

*Conclusions*

1. Pride goes before a fall
2. Our God truly is Lord of all history
3. Ezekiel used a story all his hearers will have been familiar with. The Jews will hear echoes of Gen.1-3 in these verses; in the fall of Tyre and the nations round about, echoes of the Gilgamesh epic. When we are preaching or gossiping the gospel, use people's language, use stories they can identify with.
4. There is evidence for the existence of God in the fulfilment of these three chapters about Tyre. Ezekiel prophesied:

- a. Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the mainland city (26.8): *he did*.
- b. 'Many nations will come against her' (26.3): from Alexander the Great and for 1600 years till her final fall in 1291, that happened.
- c. 'Make her a bare rock' (26.4): Alexander made a causeway out to the island and left it as bare rock.
- d. 'Fishermen will spread nets over the site' (26.5): to this day fishermen dry their nets on the rocks that once formed her foundation.
- e. 'They will dump your stones and timbers into the sea' (26.12): Alexander's engineers built the mole out to the city using the remains of the ancient land city of Tyre, laying them in the water.
- f. Never to be rebuilt (26.14): remarkable given the abundant water supply nearby, yet true, it never has been.

The challenge a god must meet is, 'if you are gods, tell what will occur in the days ahead.' (Is.41.23). God did that in respect of the city of Tyre. He alone has done that, and the promise of Tyre's fall is but one example out of many.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that demands a verdict*, Vol.1. San Bernardino, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972, p. 285-91 and 332.

## Section D.      Salvation for God's people (33-37)

Once God's warnings came true and the people were in exile under discipline, he speaks to them in quite a different spirit. There will be a second exodus from captivity to the promised land. A new order of things is promised, the core of which is the change of heart that must happen if God's new society is to come about. It is heartening to explore the heart-replacement and additional inner resources promised in the Gospel according to Ezekiel.

### Sermon 5   Ch. 36      A new heart and a new spirit

**The issues.** *Alert!* This glorious, seminal passage demands homework. What are the assurances about the land referring to: a land for the ethnic people Israel? Or shall we spiritualise them? What relationship with the modern state of Israel? Is the passage about the covenant (the word is not mentioned, although it is in ch. 34 which introduces the theme and in ch. 37 which develops it) and if so, is it the old one reinstated or the new covenant initiated? How to break down a passage so full of promises and allusions into a digestible sermon (less is more)? First grasp ch. 34-37 as a unit, especially the covenant of peace (*berit shalom*) in 34.23-31.

*Introduction.* Now we are in the fourth main section of Ezekiel, written after Jerusalem fell, foretelling the salvation to come. The theology in v.16-38 is so rich and concentrated, most preachers will probably opt to focus on those verses (Wright starts a new section of his book here<sup>3</sup>). Taking the whole chapter, on the other hand, would have the advantage of a wider perspective on Ezekiel's grand message, God's reversal of previous judgements and restoration of his honour.

v. 16-38 'contain the essence of Ezekiel's theology'<sup>4</sup>; the passage is 'unmatched for its theological intensity and spiritual depth'<sup>5</sup>.

*Rationale for inclusion:* Having warned his people in both Judah and Babylon that worse is to come and Jerusalem will be destroyed (ch. 1-24), having assured them that God will deal with his and their enemies (ch. 25-32), Ezekiel spells out in wonderful Gospel detail the salvation that will come on the far side of the Jewish captivity. In ch. 36 he focuses on the change in the human heart.

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<sup>3</sup> Wright p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> Craigie ad loc

<sup>5</sup> Block p. 365

*Glowing heart:* 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you.' (36.26, 27)

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* conversion, renewal, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, confidence in the Gospel, appreciation and appropriation of its many-sided benefits.

The Sermon: on v. 16-38

*Introduction.* This is a very exciting passage. It represents the core of Ezekiel's good news after 24 chapters of denunciation. The people are in exile, remember; Jerusalem has just fallen, as he had warned. What demoralisation. Ezekiel comforts and assures the people by prophesying the new stage in God's salvation of people that will attend the Messianic age.

*Brief Content.* Ezekiel foretells a new kind of covenant. The kingdom of God will no longer be in the form of a nation state but of a radical inner transformation of men and women: a worldwide, international kingdom among the nations. Ezekiel 'anticipates the day when the boundaries of physical Israel will be coterminous with the borders of the spiritual people of God'<sup>6</sup>.

*Relevance.* It is hugely encouraging to appreciate the immensity of the newness that is ours in Christ, under God's new covenant. But also a challenge to our behaviour and motivation: what are we living *for*? (read Ezek.36.27)

*Divisions.* Notice, in the Gospel according to Ezekiel:

- *The change it produces.* -> expound 'I will replace your stony hearts with a new heart and spirit', tender and responsive, 'and put my Spirit in you.' 'I'll be yours and you'll be Mine'. On our newness compare eg Eph.4.22-24 which should be translated in the indicative not the imperative!; Col.3.9b-11; Rom.6.6-11.
- *The behaviour it inspires.* -> expound 'I'll cleanse you'; 'you will live My way'; 'you'll hate your sins'
- *The honour it serves.* -> expound 'previously my people tarnished my reputation; it is only for my reputation that I am going to act; it's all so that, 36 & 38, 'then the nations will know that I am the Lord; then my people will *know* that I am the Lord.' Are you quite clear what you are *for*?
- *What it offers humankind.* Here truly is the only solution for the fallen human race: the fundamental cleansing, heart transplant and infusion of the Holy Spirit which God offers us in Christ. Social programs are

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<sup>6</sup> Block p. 361

good but you cannot heal humankind's ills with economic, social and educational programs. The answer is in God alone. Only he can remove hearts of stone and give hearts of flesh: tender, alive, responsive hearts.<sup>7</sup>

- [could explore, land rights for Israel are predicated on personal and national spiritual renewal]

*Conclusion.* Pause and consider the boundlessness of the 'Gospel according to Ezekiel'. What God has done in your heart. What behaviour strategy you are committed to in Christ. What is your great motive in life now.

## **Sermon 6 Ch. 37      A new life, a united people and their Prince (The Valley of dry bones)**

**The issues.** Ch. 34-48 is a beautifully constructed unit. Ezekiel first prophesies the work of the Spirit in the messianic age (37.1-14), then prophesies about the reconciliation that will result (37.15-15-23) and the reign of the coming Messiah, developing what he has already written about that in ch. 34.

*Rationale for inclusion:* Ezekiel makes a limited number of Messianic promises and it is essential to include one of them. This is a truly great chapter, immense alike in its power to grip and its threefold message.

*Glowing heart:* The Spirit can bring the dead to life; Jesus covenants to shepherd them.

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* to choose the fullness of the Spirit (1-14), the new unity between people (15-23) and the Prince of Peace as shepherd (24-28) which the Gospel according to Ezekiel offers in this fabulous chapter.

The Sermon

*Introduction.* This famous and powerful passage about the valley of dry bones inspired, of course, the American spiritual, 'Dem bones, dem bones dem dry bones, Hear the Word of the Lord'. Just what we do Sunday by Sunday.

*Context.* The situation in life of the Jewish people then (*show map*) was that they were POWs in Babylon, gathered into a series of ghetto deportation colonies in Mesopotamia 600-1,000 miles from their homeland. They had lost everything due to their sin: land, temple, Jerusalem the delight of their eyes, the Davidic king. They were miserable and ashamed (Ps.137.1ff). They had caused the death of the Jewish nation and they were living in its graves (v. 11 & 12).

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<sup>7</sup> paragraph depends on Block p.365-367.

*Brief Content.* God gave Ezekiel this overwhelming vision, a promise about the reunification of God's long-divided people, and reassured them that the Davidic promise would come more true than they had ever imagined.

*Divisions.*

*The Valley of dry bones, 1-15.* Lively exp the gruesome sight: bits of skeletons, clearly long-dead, 'Can these bones live?' -> Lord, you know (they can't). First command (4-8): Prophecy to them (?! - silly to: impossible; but do what God says). Lively exp them moving, clicking, joining, sinews and skin – many, many corpses. Second command: Prophecy to the four winds / Spirit (Gen.2.7), 9b,c: see how it is a prayer. The way God appointed for his spiritually dead people to come to life was to proclaim God's message to them even while they were dead, and to call on the H.S. to beget life in them as he preached.

Notice God's work requires both things: obediently preaching to the dead (do I trust the power of the Gospel?), and calling the H.S. in through prayer.

Result: 11, 12, 14a came true. The next emperor (Cyrus) gave them permission to return to the holy land and encouraged them to rebuild the temple so they could pray for him; and you only have to skim-read Ezra and Nehemiah to see how under Ezekiel's preaching they had come to life as a nation. A great army of them returned to rebuild the Jewish people and the Jewish faith, and we read there of them hungry for God's teaching (Neh.8.8) and radically, with tears, putting their lives right. See the *power* and potential of preaching God's word.

The point for us is, this is God's pattern for spiritual awakening. For, when do we next read of demoralised and broken people, spiritually dead, being brought to life by a Word from God and the H.S.? – John 20.19 & 22 read:

'The doors being locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came, stood among them and said 'Peace be with you.' And when he had said this he breathed on them and said to them 'Receive the H.S.'

The next time? – Day of Pentecost.

Another time? Here this morning

This is what distinguishes true Christians from all else: not just an outward connection with the church or a profession of faith, but knowing the power of Christ at work in their daily life. 'You ask me how I know he lives – He lives within my heart.'

This is about *more* than simply coming alive to Jesus, as we see from the effect of Ezekiel's preaching and praying:

*They* went back to the land of Israel, built up the spiritual community, amended their lives where that was needed

About *our* deadness and spiritual struggles. I bring you good news. The H.S. can bring renewal, give victory over those besetting sins, bring the dead to life through your witness. All it takes is to be willing; to ask for the Holy Spirit in each regard: and to get on with that newness that he gives. How about you?

1. *The reuniting of the two sticks, 15-23.* Lively exp the dramatic prophetic action. Surely Jesus had this in mind when he spoke of one flock, one shepherd (John 10)? If Eph.2.1-10 speaks of the fulfilment of v. 1-14, the Eph. 2.11-22 shows the fulfilment of *these* verses: Gentiles and Jews in Jesus' fold, the uniting power of the Gospel.
2. *The shepherding ministry of God's Davidic king servant, 24-28.* Plenty of pastoral work for this part of the sermon to do. Block p.423 is quite brilliant on the way 'this oracle reinforces Ezekiel's complex view of the Messiah' as David, My Servant, Prince/chieftain (*nasi*), King, One Shepherd. For detail see 'Messiah' in theology section of booklet 1.

*Conclusion.* Don't miss the opportunity this chapter provides, wee exp.

## **Section E. Final victory over the enemies of God and his people (38, 39)**

"(Not) tied down to particular dates or events. Rather they are word pictures of spiritual truth regarding the security of the people of God, to whom these chapters extend the guarantee of divine protection ... the spirit of Gog is evident in many persecutors of the church over the centuries ... many aspects of it foreshadow the final cataclysm as foretold by John in Revelation" (Mackay pp. 300, 303).

Notice the great outcome and intention: seven times in these two chapters, 'then they will know that I am the Lord.'

### **Sermon 7 Ch. 39 The end of all evil**

**The issues.** Chapters 38 & 39 are something else. Some of the imagery is horrific and exegetical difficulties abound. See the discussion of Apocalyptic in Booklet 1.

*Rationale for inclusion:* Quite a bit of Ezekiel's imagery is extreme, and if we are to embody his ministry in a few representative sermons we must include some of it. This chapter provides it, in prophesying 'a final great showdown between good and evil' (probably!) in which 'God will give victory and

salvation to his faithful people' (McConville, *Exploring*, p. 96). It draws on themes from other prophets (eg v.9,10 reflect Isaiah 2.2-4) and Revelation in turn draws on it (Rev. 20-7-10). Maybe Paul did too (2 Thes. 1.8,9; 1 Cor. 15.24). In view of popular attitudes to the existence of both God and evil (eg Stephen Fry's words about a God who allows a child to suffer), it is happy to have Scripture giving us reasons for trusting that God will rid the universe of evil in a way that all will agree is just.

*Glowing heart:* 'Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies' (Shr Catechism qu. 26).

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* the peace of heart that flows from trusting God's promise that the lives and impact of the wicked are limited by God and that he will in his time rid the universe of all evil.

## **The Sermon**

*Intro.* We come today to a passage of extraordinary, even bizarre vividness and drama. Gog and Magog are the stuff of legend (and sometimes the happy hunting ground of nutters) yet it has a tremendous message for God's embattled people, OT and New.

*Context.* For 2 weeks we have explored aspects of our great salvation; now we face the fact that it will repeatedly be assaulted in this world. Ch. 38 has prophesied that Gog, prince of Magog, will lead a huge alliance of armies against unsuspecting Israel as they live peacefully in their land; but that God will act massively against them to their utter defeat.

*Content.* Ch. 39 foretells such a slaughter of these enemies that it will take *seven* years to burn the weapons, *seven* months to bury the bodies; and God inviting the birds and animals to feast on their flesh and blood at his table(!). That will show his glory to the nations. His people's captivity will finally end and he will never turn his back on them again.

*Understanding these chapters.* The sheer number of sevens indicates that we are dealing with something symbolic: not that there will be no literal fulfilments of this prophecy but that there will be many through history, culminating in a final and total one. There are 7 'Thus says the Lord', 7 'so that the nations (or Israel) will know that I am the Lord', 7 terrible weapons in God's armoury (just note them: earthquake, sword, plague, bloodshed, torrents of rain, hail and burning sulphur); 7 words for enemy weapons, 7 years are required to burn all their weapons (providing fuel) and 7 months to bury the dead (and feed all the birds and animals). History is littered with Gogs aiming for the 'final solution' to Jew and Christian. The wickedness has been terrible but none has succeeded and Ezekiel 38/39 promises none ever will. God wins, to his people's final safety and his final honour.

## Chapter outline

*Gog and his ilk will be defeated and destroyed, 1-16.* Whether it be Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes (the Maccabean revolt), Nero, Adolf Hitler or the final Armageddon, God will judge and conquer our and his enemies.

*All nature will feast on their flesh and blood at God's table, 17-24.* The impenitent wicked who persist in enmity to God and his people will ultimately experience exclusion from their presence and destruction.

*Every captivity of God's people will end, 25-29.* No more captivities, inhibitions, prison or persecution for the sake of the Gospel. No one will make them afraid. God will leave none behind: 'all that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away' (John 7.37). He had turned his back on them in sending them to captivity; 'I will never again turn my back on them, for I will pour out my Spirit on them,' says the Lord (v. 29). The saints will persevere.

*All for his glory: 38.16b, 23; 39.6b, 7 & 8, 22, 28.* Shorter Catechism 1 to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. (as explored in ch. 40-48...)

*Conclusion.* Be confident: God really is Lord of history, stands by his covenant, is God of grace. That wicked person at your place of work, that tyrant who oppresses the church in x country: if they do not repent their time will come. What a God we have: Romans 11.33-36.

## Section F. Visions of a new temple, Torah and Eden (40-48)

What is ch. 40-48? It is a vision (40.1-4) of what life in the restored and renewed Israel will look like, put in terms meaningful to Ezekiel. His ministry started with a vision (1.1-4); it finishes with one. He told of God's glory departing from the Jerusalem temple (ch. 9); he promises the return of the glory. He has already prophesied the two great miracles of the age to come: God's people made new and God in their midst. Now he spells out aspects of the new age. Block calls it a 'glimpse of spiritual possibilities based on the reality revealed in ch. 1 and answering the abuse exposed in ch. 8-11'<sup>8</sup>.

This section of Ezekiel is detailed to an extent many will find a bit odd, eg in the exact measurements of parts of the future Temple's outbuildings. The dimensions of the temple and the city are dominated by multiples of five, implying that this is a scheme of spiritual principles rather than an architectural and urban plan to be literally fulfilled. It spells out the principles by which God's kingdom would be run: God at the centre of their lives, their

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<sup>8</sup> Block II p. 497



Prince providing the offerings, upright business practice, the grace of God flowing from his presence in an ever-deepening flow, incomers as welcome as insiders. Rev. ch. 21-22 speak of its final fulfilment.

Is it then eschatological? There are features which militate against such an interpretation. It lacks terms like 'in that day'; the Prince has children and has to present a sin-offering for himself; the new temple is portrayed as a fact rather than as something requiring construction. Perhaps bifocal is the best word.

- It is an idea, 'a theological constitution for the new Israel. YHWH announces the righting of all wrongs and the establishment of permanent, healthy God-Nation-Land relationships ... Where God is, there is Zion ... Ezekiel lays the foundation for the Pauline spiritualisation of the temple'<sup>9</sup>.

- It is also eschatological. Things promised here await heavenly consummation. The mountain (40.2) is Zion and also a new Sinai, and the Prince (*nasi*) is Messiah: both king and priest. Ch. 40-48 prophesy the reconstituted nation functioning as a genuine theocracy. The present era is an in-between period sandwiched between two temple epochs<sup>10</sup>.

See Booklet 1 on this section, especially the quotation from Levenson p. 13.

## **Sermon 8 Ch. 45 Life in the Messianic kingdom**

**The issues.** In ch.40 Ezekiel has introduced the third 'visions of God' (40.2). The first were his overwhelming encounter visions (1.1), the second were the airlift to see the Jerusalem atrocities cause God's departure (8.3). The third visions promise that the Lord will return to a renewed temple and make his home among his people. All that went wrong will be put right:

*Then:* the temple was desecrated, the Lord departed and Jerusalem fell.

*In the new age:* the temple will be consecrated, the Lord will return and God's people will be renewed with Jerusalem at the centre.

*Rationale for inclusion:* ch. 40-48, as we have shown in booklet 1, is no appendix but integral to and the climax of the book. They foretell the resolving of issues that Ezekiel has raised earlier, and the blessings of the Messianic age. Some of 40-48 is fairly exhaustive, even exhausting; I have suggested this chapter in preference to others so as to beget hope rather than lose it!

*Understanding ch. 40-48.* It was given to Ezekiel to provide three visions in one document: a new society after the exile; a new age; and a transcendent order beyond history. See Booklet 1.

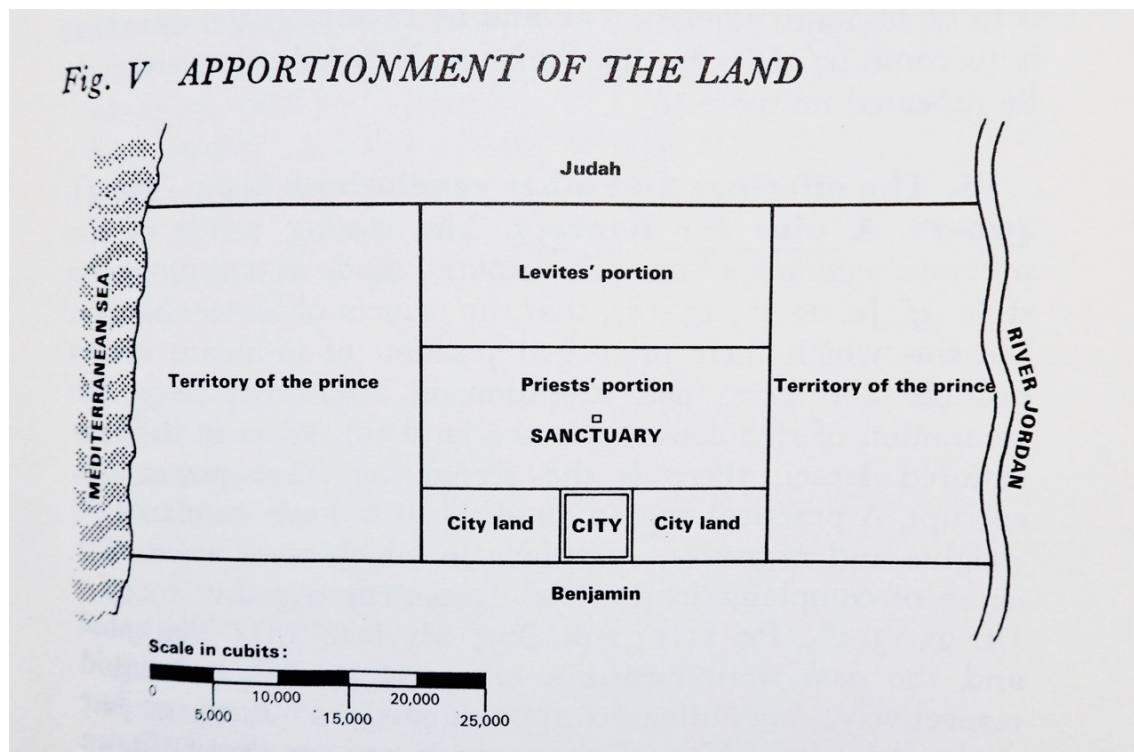
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<sup>9</sup> *ibid* p. 506

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* p. 504.

*Glowing heart:* Where God reigns, all manner of things shall be well.

*Objective for our hearers' lives:* to live by the values of God's kingdom, their eyes on the next life.



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**The Sermon.** Is the Christian faith adequate for the ills of human society?

*Context.* Ezekiel is forecasting life in a restored Israel after the exile. To this point he has predicted a new temple, the return of God's glory and regulations for sacrifices and priesthood.

*Content.* Now he moves our attention to part of the restored holy land: the portion which will be reserved for the Lord and contain the new Jerusalem and the new Temple: which to our surprise will be in different places.

*Outline of chapter*

1. The central area of the new holy land, 1-8a.
2. Good government in the new holy land, 8b-17.
3. The worship festivals in the new holy land, 18-25.

*Development*

1. *God's centrality in the life of believers, 1-8a.* See diagram. Ezekiel's vision sets seven tribes north and five tribes south of the central area reserved for Jerusalem, temple, priests, Levites and prince. The prince's area is to west and east of a central area within the central area. It is a perfect square with the city to the south surrounded by a green belt, an area for the priests that contains the temple, and the land set aside for the Levites. This is 'theological

geography' – land allocation with a message to it. Nothing less than perfection for God, hence the perfect square; and God is to be absolutely central to the life of his people. Obviously it calls us to put God at the centre of our lives, both individually and as a worshipping people. But it does more than that. Just as tithing is a statement not merely that God gets the first tenth but also that all our money is his, so the centrality of space reserved for God's home is to be a symbol that the whole land – the whole of life – is God's, and his people belong to him.

2. *Justice and righteousness in the life of believers, 8b-17.* Previous kings had laid hard burdens on the ordinary people (8,9). This was not to happen in the new Israel. The king has become a 'prince,' one who serves rather than dominates, and who lives by the Sinai covenant and God's laws. The germ of a whole polity is found in 8-17. The prince must give a lead in justice, even to regulations for standard weights and measures so as to prevent fraud (10-12). As tax collector he receives the people's offerings and is responsible for the provision and maintenance of all that enables worship in the sanctuary (13-17).

3. *Cycles of worship in the life of believers, 18-25.* Twice a year the temple is to be purified (18-20). Passover gives opportunity so the people may ever remember they are a redeemed people and how much that required of God: his mighty hand and outstretched arm (21-24). Christian believers likewise regularly remember their redemption and its cost in the Lord's supper, and in glory will still call Jesus the Lamb and marvel at the marks in his hands and side. Finally the Feast of Shelters, the regular tribute to the Lord who provides, is to be celebrated each autumn at the time of ingathering of crops; a time of rejoicing, and a reminder (by the shelters) of their redemption and pilgrimage. Christians likewise do well to make times, such as harvest festival, to praise the Lord for his bounty.

*Conclusion.* Let us, guided by Ezekiel's vision, ensure that God is at the heart of our lives; submit to the reign of our Prince of peace who will never abuse his people; under that reign conduct our affairs honestly without business trickery or exploitation; give ourselves to worship God as his redeemed people (Passover); be glad and grateful as represented by the feast of ingathering. Let our lives be as holistically his as is portrayed in this symbolic chapter.

## Sermon 9 Ch. 47 The new Eden our true home

**The issues.** The vision of the river is surely a symbolic image, a picture with a message; it does not seem right to me to take it literally. ‘No amount of exegetical finesse or insistence on “what the Bible literally says” can transform the poetry of this passage into a ... realistic account of an event in time’<sup>11</sup>. The amount of water coming from the sanctuary is only as much as can pour out of a jar. The river starts well above the water table. It multiplies in volume in a short distance without contribution from tributaries. As Ezekiel and his tour guide returned, suddenly many trees were now growing where there were none before: and bearing fruit every month. The water made the Dead Sea non-salty rather than the other way about. But that is not to say that what *is* promised is untrue. Here is a tremendous message.

*Rationale for inclusion:* I have chosen the passage about the river that grows miraculously as it flows from the temple, turning the Dead Sea into the Sea of Life, because ‘When God’s presence is established at the centre, the blessing of that presence flows out to transform the wilderness with life-giving waters’<sup>12</sup>. As I see it the message has application in different eras:

- Those returning from exile experienced rivers of God’s grace as they built the second temple and listened to the word of God being explained (Ezra-Nehemiah).
- Jesus used the image to speak of the effect of his ministry on believers and *their* ministries (John 7.37).
- John used the prophecy in Revelation’s picture of the river of the water of life (Rev. ch. 22).

We perceive repeated fulfilments of the whole chapter: as the Jews returned home, as Jesus came, and in the next life.

*Glowing heart:* God in his grace can turn our spiritual barrenness into rivers of blessing.

*Objectives for our hearers’ lives:* That they may drink of Jesus, ever more and more; and may look to the consummation of this prophecy in the life to come as Revelation encourages. ‘Before their eyes will be that day when the Lord will receive his faithful people into the peace of his kingdom, will wipe away every tear from their eyes, will clothe them with a robe of glory and

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<sup>11</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Louisville John Knox 1990 p.231 quoted in Wright p. 356. I owe the points that follow to Wright, *ibid* (and he to Block p.700f!), although I have put them in my own words.

<sup>12</sup> Peter C Craigie *The Daily Study Bible: Ezekiel* Edinburgh St Andrews Press 1983 p.313

rejoicing, will feed them with the unspeakable sweetness of his delights, will elevate them to his sublime fellowship – in short, will deign to make them sharers in his happiness'<sup>13</sup>

## The Sermon

*Context.* We are in a section that tells of 'visions of God' (40.2) that he gave Ezekiel promising waves of renewal after the return from exile that would soon take place.

*Content.* Two visions occupy this chapter:

- a *river* flowing from the temple, cleansing the land and making it flourishing and fruitful;
- the *territory* that would be theirs and its allocation equally to all, Jew and foreigner alike.

*Relevance.* We are reading promises that will meet our needs, empower our service and bless our future in God's purposes. It deserves careful and hopeful attention.

*Chapter divisions.*

1. The river flowing from God's mercy, 1-12.
2. The home promised to God's people, 13-23.

*Development.*

1. *The river flowing from God's mercy, 1-12.* Ezekiel's tour guide shows him a wee trickle of water from under the south side of the temple and altar, flowing east ... 500m it is ankle deep. Another 500: knee deep. Another: waist deep. By a fourth Ezekiel would have had to swim: he'd have been out of his depth (!) in it. (modern versions hide the fact that there are three 'beholds' as well as the 'do you see this?' – it was startling, made him think).

Back to the river bank – hey, lots of trees now! All the way to the Dead Sea and makes that dead water fresh! Lots of fish – in the Dead Sea!!! Fishermen spreading their nets everywhere. Fruit trees of all kinds bearing fruit every month, never withering, *because the water comes from God's presence v.12.*

Evocative points: the river starts at altar i.e. place where God provided for atonement. Ps. 46.4 the river of God's presence and grace makes glad the city of God; Ps.65.9, Joel 3.18, Zech.14.4-9, Gen.2.10 hence my choice of 'A new Eden': a new creation. River of God's grace healed the land.

For Ezekiel's audience: = promise of renewing people and land thanks to God's mercy. Relationship with God flowing from altar, opens the door to healing of the land. Note: till now, new temple and ritual protect God's

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<sup>13</sup> J. Calvin *Institutes* 3.9.6, McNeill edition vol.1 p. 718.

holiness; now He shows his determination to bless his people with wellbeing and abundant life. (Block p. 702)

NT: (a) Messiah's day: Feast of Tabernacles was seen as symbol of outpouring of HS in Messianic era fulfilling various scriptures incl. our passage. Zech ch. 14 was read at the beginning of the feast of Tabs. See what Jesus made of this truth, John 7.37f. 'The beginning of all true Christianity is to discover we are empty, guilty sinners. There is a full supply of pardon, mercy and grace for all penitent believers. In him we find peace, hope, comfort: grace according to our need, satisfaction.' (Ryle on Jn 7.37). Increasing depth – the Spirit can assume more and more control of our lives.

(b) Next life: Healing of nations (Rev.22.1-5): river reverses the curse, life-giving abundance.

2. *The home promised to God's people, 13-23.* For Ezekiel's time there were the principles of equality and inclusivity as they returned from exile. For ours: there is room for all in the Messianic kingdom. Is 56.3-8 let not the Gentile or the eunuch say there's no space for me. There is a home for all who choose: security, belonging to God and each other. More: the land belongs to God, and the equality prevents social injustice.

**Looking back**, what attitudes will grow in our people?

- From ch. 1-24, a sense of his majesty and that God really is the God with whom we have to do -
  - The awareness that besetting sin grieves his spirit and that, however competent the service we render him, the glory departs from it.
  - The awareness that lamenting over sin, and courageous faithfulness, gladden his heart.
- From ch. 25-32, that God's hand really is over the nuclear button, global warming, all history. Possibly we will fry; but if we do it will be because it is the right thing to happen in the justice of God. The earth might warm until both Norfolk and the western isles are under 3 metres of water; but that happens it is because God has called time on them. The safe place to be is in the hands of God.
- From ch. 33-48, that the Lord God has given us a tremendous saviour and a holistic salvation. Worldwide he has begotten, in the church, an international nation with new hearts, minds and the Holy Spirit and a wonderful Shepherd as their Prince; there are riches to explore and his

love for us to trust all our lives; even that is as nothing compared to the unblemished joys of the life to come, in which each chapter is better than the one before.

Friends, our God is too small. Think of Ezekiel's first vision. Frighteningly bright, flaming fire, glowing halo, King of kings, all creation at his service, living, active, going where he sovereignly pleases, Saviour among his people even in their sin-incurred exile. This is our God.

## Bibliography

- If only buying one book: **John B. Taylor** *Ezekiel* London Tyndale Press 1969
- For exposition, my favourite is **Peter C Craigie**, *Daily Study Bible: Ezekiel* Edinburgh St Andrews Press 1983. It covers the whole book in order and in equal detail throughout. It's reminiscent of Jim Philip's notes: spiritually discerning, reasonably detailed without losing sensible overview. **C.J.H. Wright** *The Message of Ezekiel* in the 'Bible Speaks Today' series, Leicester, IVP, 2001, is extremely helpful on the passages he covers. He took the unusual step of going through Ezekiel not in order but by theme. This involved omitting some passages. Most are briefly treated in two appendices; a third appendix was omitted and I can forward it if interested. Great exposition of the passages he deals with, not so easy if looking for help on individual verses especially ones he omits. If you use a 'go through Ezekiel in order' series such as I have chosen, it involves constant use of the Contents page to find the next passage.
- For an introduction and overview full of information, questions and summaries I found **Gordon McConville** *Exploring the Old Testament vol 4 The Prophets* London SPCK 2002 stimulating and useful. He covers all the writing prophets, Ezekiel on p. 83-107
- For academic detail: **Daniel Block** *Ezekiel* 2 volumes 1997 and 1998 in the NICOT series Grand Rapids Eerdmans. Mentor (Christian Focus, Fearn) published **John L Mackay**'s two volumes this year, 2018. Block is a bit more open, enlightening, dealing with exactly the text; I would find it more useful in sermon preparation. Mackay is a bit more difficult to read both as to style and the appearance of the text but is more Christian-committed and points out Christian/NT connections in the 'Reflection' sections which follow each passage. Both are excellent. If you have the time and money, buy both.
- Online **James Philip**'s Daily Bible Reading notes are excellent and available at [thetron.org](http://thetron.org) under Resources.
- The **Bible Project** provides some materials in addition to the two videos on Ezekiel. Its video on Exile as a theme in Scripture, all the way from Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden, meshes with Ezekiel. See also pp 34,35 below.



## Additional reading list

P.R. Ackroyd *Exile and Restoration* London SCM 1968. 'Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC.' Ground-breaking. He gives a great overview of the period, the social and thought life of the Hebrew people during the Babylonian exile and of Ezekiel's contribution. Time and again, later writers lift his material. Some discernment needed inasmuch as he accepts eg the documentary hypothesis.

Don Carson's four talks on Ezekiel at the Crieff Fellowship January 2014 are a great example of powerful preaching on Ezekiel.

J. Grassi *Ezekiel 37 and the NT NTS* **11** 1964 p.162-164 is a stimulating brief paper suggesting how Matthew, John and Paul used Ezek. Ch. 37 when saying Jesus' resurrection opened up the Messianic eschatological era.

P. Joyce *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* Sheffield Academic Press 1989. An enlightening exposition of key theological issues such as the theodicy of ch. 18 and especially the need for a new heart, God's promises of the same and the need for our response.

J.D. Levenson *Theology of the programme of restoration of Ezek. 40-48*. Missoula Scholars Press 1976. Mind-stretching exploration of motifs: the stream, the architecture, the garden of Eden, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Abarim, Torah, the Nasi (Prince), the society of the end time, priesthood in the liturgical kingdom, the program (sic) in the restoration period.

H. McKeating *Ezekiel* Sheffield Academic Press 1993. Full of help on the structure of Ezekiel, Ezekiel the man, his dating series, his theology, the vision in ch. 40-48 and his messianism.

W. Zimmerli *The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel* Interpretation **23** 1969 p. 131-157. A shorter way into his contribution than his enormous two volume commentary. He really takes the text seriously. Concludes 'this isn't yet the message of the Son of God who went to death so that people, via turning in faith, turn to life. But he is a messenger on the way to the Son.' A good intro to Ezekiel's thought.

For an Overview movie with commentary that builds up to an A4 page, (downloadable) see The Bible Project on line. Pages 34-35 give lo-res image.

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18<sup>th</sup> October 2018

# The Bible Project Overview

thebibleproject.com Ezekiel Read Scripture Poster



created by the Bible Project



### JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

**14, 18, 20**

**EZEKIEL AS LAWYER**

GOD, HAVE MERCY!

TOO LATE!

GOD

NOAH, DANIEL, & JOB

- ISRAEL'S JUDGMENT IS DESERVED
- GOD'S GOODNESS DEMANDS HE BRING JUSTICE
- THEY'VE REACHED A POINT OF NO RETURN

### 25-32 JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS

PHILISTIA AMMON MOAB EDOM

EGYPT

VIEWING THEMSELVES AS GODS

TYRE

BABYLON'S COMING FOR YOU TOO!

ALL BROUGHT DOWN BY BABYLON...

### 33 JERUSALEM HAS FALLEN!

### HOPE FOR ISRAEL

**36** A NEW ISRAEL WITH A NEW HEART

**37** VALLEY OF DRY BONES

AN IMAGE OF ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL STATE: EXILE & DEATH

THE ONLY HOPE IS FOR GOD TO REMAKE HUMANS TO LOVE GOD & OTHERS.

### 38-39 HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

GOD DEFEATS EVIL AMONG THE NATIONS

**GOG**

ANCIENT KINGDOM FROM GENESIS 10

DESCRIPTION OF GOG = DESCRIPTION OF KINGS OF TYRE & EGYPT

ARCHETYPE OF HUMAN REBELLION

THESE SCENES ARE FULL OF SYMBOLS & IMAGERY ABOUT GOD'S final defeat of EVIL

EARTHQUAKE FIRE

### 40-48 HOPE FOR ALL CREATION

**40-46** VISION OF A NEW TEMPLE

THE MEANING of the VISIONS?

- 1) LITERAL BLUEPRINTS OF NEW TEMPLE IN THE FUTURE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.
- 2) SYMBOLIC DEPICTION OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.

DEAD SEA VALLEY

**47-48** NEW GARDEN OF EDEN: "THE LORD IS THERE"

For **Introduction**, see Preaching Ezekiel **Booklet 1**  
containing: The Vision, The Remit, The Resource, Ezekiel at a glance,  
Why preach through Ezekiel? Map, The Historical Setting, Authorship and  
Unity, Date, Ezekiel the man, Structure, Ezekiel as scholar: the Bible's  
link-man, Sequence of thought, Theology, Ezekiel's impact on Judaism,  
Chart: Date and contexts of the writing prophets.

For similar resources on other books of the Bible,  
see the Preachers' Gathering website:  
<http://preachersgathering.org>