

## Ezekiel

### Context

Ezekiel prophesies at roughly the same time that Jeremiah does, in the early 6th century BC, during the time of the beginning of Judah's exile. What makes Ezekiel different is that he is in a different geographic location than Jeremiah. Jeremiah was in Jerusalem from before the first wave of exiles left through to the city's final destruction. Then he escaped to Egypt. Ezekiel, on the other hand, had been taken captive to Babylon with the second wave of exile in 597 B.C. He then started prophesying five years later.<sup>1</sup> Look at the **first three verses** of the book. So he has a different perspective on the exile since he experiences it in captivity in the land of Judah's enemies. His different location gives a different perspective and meaning to his message. We'll see that much of his message is the result not of experiencing things in the land, but through visions of the land Yahweh has given to him.

The redemptive-historical context is in some ways, strangely enough, similar to the book of Exodus. Maybe you'll remember that we saw how Yahweh was zealous to make Himself known among His people and spread His glory throughout all the earth. The same focus exists here, only with slightly different conditions. Now, Yahweh's people go not out of captivity, but into captivity for the glory of Yahweh's name. You see, they've profaned Yahweh's name in their own land and among the nations. Now, Yahweh is out to vindicate His name and show Himself holy and glorious. But, by the end, we'll also see that Ezekiel preaches that the salvation of the people, and their second exodus back out of captivity again, is also motivated by Yahweh's passion for His glory.

### Theme

With that, let's look at the main theme of Ezekiel's book:

*The glory of Yahweh has departed from His land, because He is jealous for His name. But His glory will return, because He is jealous for His name. Ultimately, His glory will be restored to the entire earth in the last days.*

If the book of Exodus was the announcement and introduction for Yahweh in all His glory onto the world stage, then Ezekiel is the vindication of His name, fame, and glory after years of practice on His part in the face of neglect on His people's part. All of it is meant to point forward to a day when the knowledge of the Yahweh's glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (to steal a line from other prophets Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). Granted, other prophets also get a lot of mileage out of such images. But in Ezekiel the language of the exodus is really pronounced, and not just in a few places, but throughout.

### Outline w/ Pivotal Texts

- I. Ezekiel 1-32 — Judgment/Removal: Against Judah and the rest of the nations
  - A. 1:1-3:15— The call and sending of Ezekiel
  - B. 3:16-7:27 — Announcement against Jerusalem (imminent judgment)
  - C. 8-11 — Visions of idolatry and the flight of the glory of Yahweh
  - D. 12-19 — Idolatry and the Lord Yahweh
  - E. 20-23 — Judgment coming closer and closer (warnings intensify)
  - F. 24 — The beginning of the siege of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup> His writings span from (ca. ) 593 to 571BC.

- G. 25-32 — Seven oracles against seven cities/nations
- II. Ezekiel 33-48 00 Grace/Restoration: A vision of the future
  - A. 33-37 — Three symbols of restoration announced immediately after the fall
    - 1. The Good Shepherd
    - 2. Dry Bones Resurrected
    - 3. Two Rods
  - B. 38-39 — The final battle (God and Magog typological; used in Revelation too)
  - C. 40-48 — Vision of the coming kingdom of God: the glory of Yahweh returns New Temple, New Jerusalem, New Heavens, New Earth

## Theme Texts

### Ezekiel 1

Let's move right into the text. Now, we don't have the time at this moment, but I would really recommend that everyone read Ezekiel 1 at some point this week. It is an awesome revelation of the glory of Yahweh. When it comes to Yahweh's self-revelation of His glory, Ezekiel 1 has few parallels in all of the Bible. For now, let's just look at **verse 26 through 2:1**. Those of you with ears to hear will recognize the language of Exodus 24, Isaiah 6, and Revelation 1 and 4. Those are the chapters in the Bible where a prophet describes a vision of Yahweh's glory that is given to him. You'll notice a number of things in those texts, as well as this one. First, Yahweh's Himself is not described, only His surroundings and "garments" are. These people are not seeing Yahweh Himself, but a manifestation of His glory. Second, the person having the vision of Yahweh's glory falls on his face in fear and worship. How might we too be humbled, and our lives changed, if we kept these visions of Yahweh's glory ever before us as well. Third, Yahweh consoles these people, and tells them not to fear. They rightly do fear, for they are sinners, but Yahweh is abundantly gracious, merciful, and kind. Lastly, they are seeing Jesus! **Revelation 1** explicitly calls itself the Revelation of Jesus Christ and **John 1:14** tells us that "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" **Hebrews 1** tells us even more explicitly that Jesus Christ is "*the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person*" In other words, *Jesus Christ is the fullest expression and manifestation of the glory of God.* If you want to encounter God, go to Jesus. No other major religious leader ever even claimed to be the expression of God's glory.

Further, in the context of John's Gospel, Jesus says that His greatest work of demonstrating the Father's glory *was on the cross*. Speaking of His cross in **John 13** He said, "*Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. 32 If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.*" The effect of Jesus glorifying God and God glorifying Jesus is told to us in **John 17**, when Jesus prays, "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*"

The point of all this is as follows: The only place to see God's glory, and who He is in all of His manifold perfections is in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The place where God's glory most specifically shines forth from Jesus is in His death and resurrection, which was accomplished to give sinners, as I just read, *eternal life* and knowledge of God. To say it as bluntly as possible, *the only way to know God and have eternal life is in the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ.* To claim that there are other ways to knowing God and inheriting eternal life, is to

*belittle* the glory of God as He's expressed Himself in Christ, and defame the greatness of who He is. What we are about to see is that is *exactly* what the people of Judah did.

### **Ezekiel 5-7**

Well, you can read the rest of Ezekiel's call to ministry in chapters 2 and 3. In chapters 4-7, we see the beginning of announcements against Jerusalem for their idolatry. Even though Ezekiel is already in exile, he still, nonetheless, foretells Jerusalem's final destruction. I said earlier, this destruction is motivated by Yahweh's zeal for his own name's sake. Turn to **chapter 5**. Look at **verse 13**. **Chapter 6, verses 9-10**. **Chapter 7, verse 27**. We could go on looking at verse after verse in Ezekiel, but I think you get the idea. The exile, like the exodus before it, is Yahweh's proclamation of His holy character.

### **Ezekiel 20**

In fact, Ezekiel reminds us that Yahweh's motivation behind all of His actions has been for the sake of His own name. Turn to **Ezekiel 20**. Why hadn't Yahweh destroyed His people while they were still in Egypt, already rebelling against Him and His servant Moses? **Verses 8-9**. Why didn't Yahweh wipe them away when, even after His great deliverance, they rebelled against Him in the wilderness? **Verses 13-14**. Now, as we just read, it's that same motivation that has brought Judah to an end. *But* Yahweh will also bring His people back from exile! Again, it won't be because of their own righteousness, but because of Yahweh's zeal for His own name's sake. **Verses 41-44**. Whoa! Yahweh's motivation is to deal with His people that most glorifies His own name. *That*, dearly beloved, is *good* news! Woe betides us all if God were to deal with us only according to our own merit and worth! But His dealings with us are premised upon His own desire to bring Himself glory and lift up the worth of His name! Again, I point you back to the gospel. In Christ, God gets the glory, and we get the salvation! It's the best of all worlds.

Did you notice there in **verse 43** how this should result in great contrition and humility in the hearts of the saved? Look at that. There are many who say that Christianity is arrogant because of its truth claims. Well, while I don't doubt that *some Christians* are arrogant, it's not fault of their doctrine that they are. It's no fault of the gospel. They are because they don't entirely comprehend, and misapply the gospel. But *the gospel itself* can't be blamed for breeding arrogance. Worked into it is everything to *prevent arrogance*. Paul brings together well these two ideas of God's public demonstration of His righteousness and the Christian's humility. He says in **Romans 3:25-27** that, "*God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.*"

We need to take a long hard look at the gospel, and come away humbled and contrite, as we read here in verse 43. God forbid that we should boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to us, and us to the world. For in Christ one's own works of righteousness avail for nothing. But a humble, trusting faith in God's Son regenerates and gives new life in Christ (cf. Galatians 6:14-15). You can also read Ezekiel 16:60-63 for another powerful text on this idea.

### **Ezekiel 8-11**

Keeping with this theme of God's glory, let's turn back to **chapter 8** now and look at a very interesting event. In chapter 8 Yahweh gives Ezekiel a vision of what's happening back in Jerusalem. It's a vision of the idolatry that is taking place there. In verse 5 Ezekiel sees idolatry at a place called the "altar gate" then in verse 7 at "the door of the court," then in verse 14 at "the north gate of the temple," and finally in verse 16 in "the inner court of the temple." The point of all this is that the closer one got to the most inner court of the temple, the place called "the holy of holies," the more holy the land was supposed to be, the more specifically hallowed for the worship of Yahweh. You can read about this in Leviticus. But here, Ezekiel sees more and more idolatry as the visions get closer to the "holy of holies" in the temple!

It's because of this we see the following. Look at **chapter 10, verse 4**. In this context, the glory of the God of Israel, there is a manifestation of fire and smoke-cloud that dwelt in the holy of holies. It represented a particular physical manifestation of Yahweh on earth, and is what made the holy of holies the most holy place on earth.<sup>2</sup> Hopefully you remember from our study in Exodus and 1 Kings. The cherubim were statues of angels, carved in gold, that covered the ark of the covenant which was also in the holy of holies. The glory of the God of Israel rested above these cherubim. So what Ezekiel is seeing here is that Yahweh is leaving His dwelling place, His sanctuary, and move to the threshold of the temple.

What Ezekiel sees next is hard to describe. In the following verses he sees a vision of real live cherubim, which are very large heavenly creatures, angels, not statues this time, driving a sort of wheeled throne. It's a sort of like a heavenly chariot, and the seat is empty. This isn't the first time he's seen this. You can read more about this chariot in chapter 1 as well. Look at **verses 16-17** here.

What's going on here? What's the purpose of this chariot? **Verses 18-19**. What's happening here is that this divine chariot, taxied by awful creatures, is coming to the temple to pick up the glory of Yahweh, and escort Him away.

This vision is sad, consoling, and frightening all at the same time. It's sad because it represents Yahweh's displeasure with the people's covenant unfaithfulness and that He will no longer dwell in the temple. That means that the temple is no longer holy, and sacrifices are of no use to be made there anymore.

However, it is also consoling. Look at **11:6**. That the glory of Yahweh is portable like this means that ultimately one needs neither land, nor temple, nor sacrifices in order to know God and worship Him as such. These things, land, temple, and sacrifices were just means to that greater end of knowing Yahweh with the mind and worshipping Him with the heart. It doesn't matter where you are geographically to do this. That is really what makes Ezekiel, chapter 1 so exciting. Ezekiel is in *Babylon* when he sees his vision of the glory of the God of Israel, and has continued to remain there this whole time. Yahweh is not confined by space. His glory fills the whole earth. In other words, Yahweh Himself is the people's dwelling place, not a land or temple. Soon, nonetheless, He will bring His people back to that symbolic land (cf. vv17-21) in safety, to know Him again through those means.

But first, because of the people's sins, they will be scattered, and the destruction of the temple is a hair-raising verdict from heaven against them. Look at **verses 22-23**. Here Yahweh's glory leaves the city, and rests on the mountain opposite the city. The mountain is a

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<sup>2</sup> Of course this is some how metaphorical. Even Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, recognizes this in 1 Kings 8:27 when he says, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!"

place of attack. Like a lioness that perches herself on a rock to pounce on her prey, Yahweh will next turn on Jerusalem and destroy the city where He once dwelt. That's why it's frightening.

## Ezekiel 14

We've talked a lot about idolatry lately in this class. But I'd be really surprised if any of us have any wooden or metal carvings at home, made by man's hands, that we bow down to and worship. Therefore, the practical admonition for us can sometimes be lost here. But look at **Ezekiel 14:3**. Did you hear that? Yahweh sees not only the idols we contract, but the idols in our hearts too.

Let me define idolatry for you in its simplest terms. Idolatry is taking anything other than the true God and turning it into a **commodity**, meant to bring the person security in this world. That's what it is: using any thing people were using them for: security, contentment, hope in this dangerous world. The draw of the idol is that you get to control it and set the terms of the relationship! You don't necessarily have to bow down to it or call it your "god" in order for it to be an idol. You just need to rest your confidence and security in something that you think you control! In the Apostle Paul's words, it's trading the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25).

Is the admonition to flee from idolatry practical now? What sort of things do we turn into idols, in our hearts, even if we don't call them idols with our lips, or bow down to them on our knees, or lift our hands up to them in prayers?

Let's continue to think about contemporary idolatry. J. I. Packer, in the fourth chapter of his book *Knowing God*, makes the case that idols are not only images of false gods, but also images of the true God. These images do not only exist in physical form, but also in our **minds**. Anytime we speculate and guess what God is like, without being guided by His own revelation of Himself, we are guilty of idolatry! Packer says this: "All speculative theology, which rests on philosophical reasoning rather than biblical revelation, is at fault here... To follow the imagination of one's heart in the realm of theology is the way to remain ignorant of God, and to become an idol-worshipper."<sup>3</sup> Packer tells us that we are therefore summoned to "recognize that God the Creator is transcendent, mysterious and inscrutable, beyond the range of any imagining or philosophical guesswork of which we are capable and hence a summons to us to humble ourselves, to listen and learn of him, and to let him teach us what he is like and how we should think of him."<sup>4</sup> We are compelled to "to take our thoughts of God [*from* God], from His own holy Word, and from no other source whatsoever."<sup>5</sup> As we read in Jeremiah last week, this is exactly what the people of Judah did not do. They didn't listen to God's word, and so, as expected, ended up in idolatry. It all started with not listening to God's Word. Packer is advising us not to make the same mistake and end of in the same place.

But we need to be careful here. Idolatry does not only come from false objects of security, and speculative theology, but also simply by osmosis from the **social context** we live in. Let me explain. None of us have perfect knowledge of God. No matter how well our parents, churches, schools, our own study have taught us, we are all deficient in our knowledge of God in some way. We've been unavoidably influenced by our society, experiences, and our own form of logic to think of God in ways determined by that society, those experiences, and that

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Page 43.

logic. Now, throw our own sinfulness and selfishness into the mix, and we are all prime candidates to shape God in our minds the way we want Him to be!

“We were made in His image, but we must not think of Him as existing in ours.”<sup>6</sup> We are all necessarily impacted by our surroundings and can easily craft a false god in **our minds** sincerely believing that we are worshipping the true God. John Calvin rightly said that the heart is factory of idols.

What can we do? Well, the remedy is always the same! Return to the word of God. We should think of our minds as though they were **cups full of water** that we can’t just dump out. We’ve had teaching and experiences and sins that we can’t just jettison from our lives. As mentioned, these teachings, experiences, and sins have contributed to, at least slightly, an aberrant view of who God is. No one is immune from this. Well, if you can’t dump dirty water out of a cup, how do you purify it? You pour more and more fresh water in, to dilute the dirty and cause it to overflow out of the cup. It will take time, and you’ll never completely clean the water in the cup 100%, but you can certainly make improvement. Our minds are the same way. We need to continually pour the fresh water of God’s word into our minds, to flush out all the effects and influences in our minds that cause us to see a skewed vision of God, and understand Him in aberrant ways. Again, in Packer’s words, “The mind that takes up with images is a mind that has not yet learned to love and attend to God’s Word.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Ezekiel 34-37**

Well, we need to get along here in Ezekiel. Let’s now look at the promises of restoration. Turn to chapter 34. Now there is so much good stuff in chapters 34-37, and so many wonderful prophecies about Christ that we could be here the rest of the day. So let me just point you to a few passages, make a few comments, and leave you to discover the richness of this section of Scripture on your own.

First in **chapter 34** Yahweh says that He will give His servant David to shepherd His people. Now, of course, He doesn’t mean David literally, but one like David, in David’s kingly line. Look at **verses 23-24**. Of course this is Jesus Himself, the Good Shepherd (cf. John 10).

In **chapter 36** you can also read about the gift of the new heart, just like in Jeremiah. Look at **36:25-27**. So we are seeing here that Yahweh’s solution for the salvation of His people is to give them a savior, Jesus Christ, and new hearts (which we know to be the work of the Holy Spirit living inside believers).

All of this will be like a resurrection of Yahweh’s people. Look at **37:12-14**. This, as you may know, is Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones. By the word of God and the movement of His Spirit, the dead come to life!

One particularly exciting passage is **37:24-28**. As we read this text, see if you can hear the covenant with David, the covenant with Moses, and the covenant with Abraham all converging and being fulfilled in Christ. That last line is, I believe the promise of the Holy Spirit dwelling among, and living in the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ. *Notice that it is through Spirit filled believers that the nations will know God.*

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<sup>6</sup> Page 42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Ezekiel 38-39

The book closes out with a couple eschatological visions. Chapters 38 and 39 describe the end-times defeat of all of Yahweh's enemies.

## Ezekiel 40-48

Chapters 40-48 describe a mammoth sized temple that will be rebuilt since the old one has been destroyed. Now, I do not believe that is a literal prediction. Rather, it's meant to give the people in exile hope and to prophesy a future reality even greater than the temple. It's meant, in vivid and dramatic fashion, to emphasize the return of Yahweh's glory, after having seen it leave in chapters 8-11. Look at **43:1-5**. We can't get lost in the details of the vision to miss the main point of the vision. The vision is meant to teach that Yahweh has returned to dwell with His people forever, and the description of the temple is meant to encourage the captives in exile and give them hope. Look at **verse 7 and verse 9**. The same is true with the description of the city. Look at **48:35**. The vision is a means to impress upon us the awesomeness of what it means that Yahweh dwells with His people!

The same point is made in **Revelation 21** as well. Let's turn there as we close our time together. Look at **verses 2-3**. Notice that the glory of the city is that Yahweh is there, dwelling with His people! In describing this city, to make that point of Yahweh's immediate presence with His people, John ironically employs the exact opposite vision than Ezekiel does. To press upon the people the magnitude of how wonderful it is that Yahweh dwells among His people, Ezekiel described a huge, magnificent, awe inspiring temple. But to make the same point, John says this: look at **Revelation 21:22-24**. John actually says that *there is no temple*. This is because the temple separated people from God as much as it united them to Him. You see, even though the temple meant that Yahweh dwelt among His people, it also meant that He couldn't dwell with them *immediately* and had to be separated from them, because of His holiness and their sins. Remember, He dwelt in the most inner court, the "holy of holies" where no one could go, but one man, once a year, and not without the blood of a sacrifice. Well here, in Revelation 21, John still wants to emphasize that Yahweh dwells with His people, but John also gets the privilege ( and what to be pure joy) of announcing to the people that Yahweh can dwell with His people *without need for a temple* any longer. This because, His Son Jesus Christ has taken away His people's reproach by dying on the cross for their sins and rising again from the grave granting victory over death and eternal life in the unmediated, unhindered, uninterrupted presence of Almighty God for all who turn to Jesus in faith and declare Him Lord of all. Amen!

## Conclusion

Jeremiah and Ezekiel sure have been exciting! They are some real heavy hitters of the Old Testament. Well, we are not done yet. Daniel is just as exciting! Get ready for His message as well. Next Week!