

Surveying the Text: Ezekiel

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INTRODUCTION:

In taking a book of the Bible a week, we are not really doing justice to any of them. We can certainly give an orientation. We can describe the basic themes. We can perhaps give you a taste for the book, such that you want to pursue a deeper reading on your own. But that said, of all the books that we are not doing justice to, we are *really* not doing justice to the book of Ezekiel. The best way to sum it up is by comparison to another book in the Bible that many struggle to understand as well. One scholar has said, rightly, that the book of Revelation is simply a Christian rewrite of the book of Ezekiel.

THE TEXT:

“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Eze. 36:24–28).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

The book of Ezekiel is a covenant lawsuit brought by Jehovah against the house of Israel. And at the heart of Israel’s running violations of the covenant, culminating in her judgment at the hands of the Babylonians, was the fact that Israel needed to be born again. In our text, God promises to deal with this problem once and for all. He will bring them out of exile. He will sprinkle clean water upon them. He will cleanse them from all their filthiness—note that their problem is definitely moral. God will then take away their stony heart and give them a new heart, a regenerate heart. Note that this is a promise given to Israel, God’s *people*. Obviously, individuals would have to be involved, but the promise is to the nation.

OVERVIEW OF EZEKIEL:

Ezekiel was taken off to Babylon as a young man in the first captivity, which occurred in 597 B.C. The city of Jerusalem did not fall completely until a few years later, in 586 B.C. Thus the first part of Ezekiel’s ministry had reference to the pending fall of Jerusalem, even though he was not ministering from within that doomed city, the way Jeremiah was. You can divide the book into three main sections. The first concerns the fall of Jerusalem (1-24). In the second section, Ezekiel turns to prophesy against the surrounding Gentile nations (25-39). Note that this means that God’s moral standards are authoritative over

Gentile nations. They are not operating in a neutral zone. In the last section, Ezekiel describes a glorious Temple and shows how a restored Israel was going to bless the entire world (40-48). In the original Hebrew, the book had seven distinct sections, and each one of them had seven subsections, giving us a total of 49 sections.

The book begins with the vision of God in “the wheels,” a vision which symbolizes God’s departure from the Temple in Jerusalem and indicates His presence with the exiles in Babylon. The presence of God is highly “mobile,” which means God cannot be kept in some temple-box. But the God who can depart because of all the abominations is also a God who can, in His sovereignty, *return*. And thus, the book concludes with a glorious vision of God’s return to His people, with eucatastrophic blessings for all.

EZEKIEL REWRITTEN:

The books of Ezekiel and Revelation should be read in parallel, as Chilton points out. The two books are companion volumes. 1. throne-vision (Rev. 4; Eze. 1); 2. the book (Rev. 5; Eze. 2-3); 3. The four plagues (Rev. 6:1-8; Eze. 5); 4. the slain and the altar (Rev. 6:9-11; Eze. 6); 5. the wrath of God (Rev. 6:12ff; Eze. 7); 6. sealed foreheads (Rev. 7; Eze. 9); 7. coals from the altar (Rev. 8; Eze. 10); 8. no more delay (Rev. 10:1-7; Eze. 12); 9. eat the book (Rev. 10:8-11; Eze. 2); 10. measuring the Temple (Rev. 11:1-2; Eze. 40-43); 11. Jerusalem and Sodom (Rev. 11:8; Eze. 16); 12. cup of wrath (Rev. 14; Eze. 23); 13. vine of the land (Rev. 14:18-20; Eze. 15); 14. the great harlot (Rev. 17-18; Eze. 16, 23); 15. lament over the city (Rev. 18; Eze. 27); 16. the scavenger’s feast (Rev. 19; Eze. 39); 17. the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6; Eze. 37); 18. Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-9; Eze. 38-39); 19. the New Jerusalem Rev. 21; Eze. 40-48); 20. the river of life (Rev. 22; Eze. 47).

VALLEY OF DRY BONES:

The transformation in Israel’s fortunes is described in great detail by the prophet Ezekiel, but his characteristic image is that of *life*. A living heart for a dead one. Living water flowing to the nations. Life coming upon a valley filled with dead Israelite bones (Eze. 37:4). Son of man, can these bones live? Ah, Lord God . . . you know. Preaching the gospel is like holding an evangelistic crusade in a graveyard. If anything is to happen, someone besides the preacher will have to accomplish it. Preaching the gospel is not like going into a hospital ward with the idea of persuading patients to take some medicine. The disease is death, dry bones death, and the solution, the only solution, is resurrection power.

FISHERS OF MEN:

John was among the disciples that Jesus summoned to be fishers of men. At the end of the gospel of John, the resurrected Lord gives His disciples a fishing haul, 153 fish, to be exact. That number is the triangular of 17 (meaning that 17 + 16 + 15, etc. will result in 153) The living water flowed out over the threshold of Ezekiel’s Temple, and was the source of life for all the nations.

“And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many” (Eze. 47:10).

The numerical value of *Gedi* was 17 and *Eglaim* was 153. The prefix *En* simply meant spring. Ezekiel prophesied that healing water would flow to that place where men who were fishers of men would stand, from the *Spring of 17* to the *Spring of 153*. And so here we are.

We are the New Jerusalem. We are the Temple that Ezekiel saw. The water for the life of the nations flows out from us. The trees grow on both sides of the river, and their leaves are for the healing of the nations. Come, then, and welcome.



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