

Ezekiel

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel was one of the most significant prophets in Israel's history. God called him to prophesy as the people of God languished in defeat and apathy in Babylon. As the exiles struggled with the question of whether or not God had abandoned them, Ezekiel proclaimed a message of restoration. Their dry bones would live again and they would have a new life, a new breath, and a new response to his Word. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the uniqueness and power of the prophet Ezekiel.

SCRIPTURE READING

Ezekiel

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To summarize the life and call of the prophet Ezekiel.
2. To describe Ezekiel's mission as a watchman to God's people.
3. To identify the significance of Ezekiel's message in the valley of dry bones.

QUOTATIONS

[Ezekiel's] prophetic experiences, symbolic actions, and oracular pronouncements derive from encounters with God that have affected his entire being but were all directly related to his ministry. What other prophets spoke of, Ezekiel suffers. He is a man totally possessed by the Spirit of Yahweh, called, equipped, and gripped by the hand of God. Ezekiel is a "sign, portent" (12:6, 11; 24:24, 27), carrying in his body the oracles he proclaims and redefining the adage, "The medium is the message." Furthermore, he is a

profound theologian, exposing the delusions of his audience and reintroducing them to the God of Israel.

—Daniel Block

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The question asked by the Judean exiles was, “How does one sing the praises of their God in a foreign land?”
 - 1. Ezekiel and Daniel were prophets to the people in exile.
 - 2. The exiles struggled with the question of whether or not God had abandoned them.
- B. The book of Ezekiel functions as a theodicy.
 - 1. A *theodicy* attempts to explain why God allows evil and problems in this world.
 - 2. Ezekiel was attempting to give a justification of the justice of God.
- C. Ezekiel carried the dual identity of prophet and priest.
 - 1. The priest encouraged the people in their worship services.
 - 2. The prophet rebuked the people for unrighteousness.
 - 3. Ezekiel was born into a priestly family, but at the age of thirty God consecrated him as a prophet.
- D. The opening vision of the book is a glorious description of the chariot-throne of God.
 - 1. The elements of the tabernacle represented heavenly realities.
 - 2. The chariot-throne vision is the outward manifestation of the throne of God.
 - 3. God addresses Ezekiel from the judgment throne and gives him a message of judgment.
- E. “‘But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.’ And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezek. 2:8–10).
 - 1. This vision is characteristic of apocalyptic literature, which employs signs, symbols, and numbers to convey a divine message.

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2. Ezekiel is commanded to eat the scroll which is covered with a message of lamentation, mourning, and woe.
- F. “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey” (Ezek. 3:1-3)
1. The irony of the scroll was that it was a message of judgment, but it tasted as sweet as honey.
 2. The Word of God, even its words of judgment, is sweet and excellent to the human soul.
- G. Ezekiel labors as a watchman for his people among the exiles as Jeremiah labors as a prophet in Jerusalem.
1. The purpose of Ezekiel’s mission was so that the Israelites would know that Yahweh was Lord.
 2. “That they may know that I am the LORD” occurs sixty times in the book of Ezekiel.
 3. This phrase is similar to the Psalmist’s call to “be still and know that I am God.”
 4. Both of these statements are a strong call to be silent and listen to the Word of God.
- H. In chapter 37, Ezekiel also offers his people hope of the restoration.
1. Ezekiel is transported to a valley full of dry bones.
 2. God asks his prophet if the bones can live and Ezekiel responds, “O Lord God, you know.”
 3. God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones and gradually the bones come together, muscle covers the skeletons, and they are given skin.
 4. Ezekiel preaches to the wind and the wind gives the lifeless bodies breath.
 5. The valley of dry bones is now filled with living, breathing bodies and form a great army.
 6. The Lord declares the army to be the whole house of Israel.

- I. God is not going to leave His people in exile.
 1. They will have new life, new breath, and a new response to his Word.
 2. There will be an end to captivity and a regeneration of his people.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read the following verses in Ezekiel: 6:14; 25:11, 17; 26:6; 28:23, 24, 26; 29:9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 35:15; 36:38; 38:23. What is the common refrain in these verses? What does this indicate about Ezekiel's purposes in the writing of his book?
2. Chapters 8–10 of Ezekiel deal with abominations occurring in the Jerusalem temple in the years preceding the exile. What kind of abominable practices are occurring according to Ezekiel 8? How will God respond according to Ezekiel 9? What significant event does Ezekiel see in chapter 10?
3. Read Ezekiel's oracles of judgment against Judah and Israel in Ezekiel 16 and 23. What kind of imagery does Ezekiel use to describe the sins of the nation? What is the purpose of the graphic and shocking language he uses?
4. In Ezekiel's oracle of judgment against Tyre (26:1–28:19), there is a section (28:11–19) that some have seen as a veiled reference to the fall of Satan. What language in this oracle might give rise to such an interpretation? Could it be rather that the fall of the king of Tyre echoes the story of man's primeval fall in Eden? Why or why not?
5. In Ezekiel 40–48, the prophet sees a vision of a restored temple. There are some who believe that this is a prophecy of a literal temple that will be rebuilt at some point just before the Second Coming of Christ. Read Ezekiel 45:15, 17, and 20. What kind of sacrifices does Ezekiel describe in these verses as being part of the restored temple ritual? Can such sacrifices be instituted now, in light of what is taught in Hebrews 10:1–18?

DISCUSSION

1. How do the four symbolic actions described in Ezekiel 4:1–5:17 illustrate the seriousness of sin?
2. The language of Ezekiel in chapters 16 and 23 is notoriously graphic. When, if ever, is such language appropriate in preaching today?
3. There are five main interpretations of the temple vision in Ezekiel 40–48.
 - The vision describes the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

- The vision describes a literal temple in God's future kingdom.
- The vision is a prophetic reference to the church.
- The vision describes a restoration that was partially fulfilled immediately after the exile, but completely fulfilled in the church age or in a future millennium.
- The vision is apocalyptic literature describing general spiritual truths in highly symbolic language.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Block, Daniel. *The Book of Ezekiel* (2 vols.)