

“The Book of Ezekiel”

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Opening Prayer

Good morning, and welcome to our combined service out here at Pleasant Corners. Many prayers for all of you that you are staying healthy and sane during all of this. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is always a joy to be worshiping with you. This week we are going to be starting a new sermon series that will likely take us to the end of summer. We are going to be looking at the book of Ezekiel right up until either the month of September or until my daughter is born, whichever comes first. A quick note, by the way, about how to read the book of Ezekiel, because as always you will gain more from these sermons if you are reading the scripture throughout the week. This book is a difficult read for many reasons, but if you are going to get the most out of this sermon series I want you to focus on the big pictures and not on the specifics. This book isn't written like Proverbs or Psalms or an Epistle of Paul. It is more narratively written, meaning you have to look at it as a whole. Long story short, if you get confused about something as we go through this book, or if you find a prophecy difficult to interpret, or if you get lost part way through, just keep going. The point in this sermon series isn't to get super in depth into a book you probably have never read, but rather to understand the big picture of it and the themes conveyed because they do speak to us today. But before we really get into the book, we first need some background knowledge about it, including those big picture themes.

The book of Ezekiel is written by the prophet Ezekiel between 593 and 571B.C. We know the time period in which it is written based on the opening verses that we read today, as they correlate with historical

dates. Ezekiel states that he is on the bank of the river Chebar (a river in Babylon, probably just a large watering canal) during the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile in Babylon. If you were able to watch either of the Bible studies I did the last two weeks you may remember that the exile is the most difficult time in the history of the Jewish people other than the holocaust, and the timeframe Ezekiel gives us places his book near the beginning of that tumultuous time. The exile was exactly what it sounds like: the people of Judah were exiled for seventy years, one full generation, in Babylon. (Modern day Iraq area.)

While we often will talk about the exile as one big solid chunk of time, in fact it happened over a spectrum. First the people of Judah were made vassals (subjects who pay tribute to another nation) of Babylon, then many of their best were taken into exile first, and finally the whole of the people were displaced in Babylon. From a secular standpoint the reason the Jews were exiled by the Babylonians is simple. If you take a group of people away from their homeland, make them speak a different language, teach their children what you want them to learn, then they will move from being a distinct people to being a part of your people. A perfect modern example, albeit an infinitely nicer one, would be us. Most of you have roots from a country other than the United States, but you are Americans in definition and in practice. You may hold some old world customs, especially if your family came here within the last few generations, but in reality you are probably now more American than you are anything else. That is what the Babylonians would forcibly do to the people they conquered; and of course this includes the Jews. When Ezekiel begins this letter the Jews are already part way into the exile. 2nd Kings chapters 23-25 give us a clue into the lead up to the full exile that the prophet Ezekiel foretells at the Lord's call.

If you were to go and read through 2nd Kings chapters 23-25 you would see that Judah loses its independence slowly. It starts with Egypt controlling the king of Judah following a battle, then with Babylon making the king of Judah to pay tribute, then it ends when Judah rebels against Babylon and Babylon completely destroys all of Jerusalem. The prophecies of Ezekiel start in that middle section, just before the great deportation and destruction. With all of that history in the back of your mind giving context, Ezekiel's words of warning should make a little more sense.

The first ten verses that we read had dual purpose for us. As mentioned it places the book into context, and second it gives us a good idea about how crazy this book can get. Verses 8-10 read "Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle." What Ezekiel is describing at the beginning of the book is the throne of God, along with the angels that stand at attention in front of Him. It is here that Ezekiel receives his calling from the Lord. Ezekiel himself was a part of the priestly class, and when he is first taken into exile he is not yet thirty, meaning he can't take up the mantle of a priest. When he turns thirty on the edge of that irrigation canal, that is when the Lord gives him this calling not to become a priest... but rather a prophet. That calling itself comes from God's throne. Verses 26-28 even give us an idea about how the Lord looks upon His throne. "Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in

appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like the glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.” That is an awe-inspiring thought... to be seated at the foot of the Lord and to see, at least in partiality, His glory. Bringing these scriptures into our world, we again need to think big picture. The big picture here, because we are focusing on the big pictures here in Ezekiel, is that the call for Ezekiel to preach is one that comes directly from the Lord Himself. This is a serious and solemn message that Ezekiel is going to be proclaiming throughout this book. It isn't to be taken lightly, the Lord's words here are going to be powerful, and the imagery is meant to inspire awe. The messages that Ezekiel is going to be proclaiming? That Israel is going to be punished if it does not repent, that destruction comes for those who trust in gods other than the Lord, that the Lord is over everything, and that while Israel has evil leaders now God still has plans for redemption.

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ As for them, whether they listen or not... for they are a rebellious house... they will know that a prophet has been among them.’” The message from the Lord in this book is a common one throughout scripture, it is a call to repentance

before destruction ensues. At the point Ezekiel preaches the people have already seen the Lord's glory begin to fade from Judah. They have seen some of their best deported to Babylon (including Ezekiel), yet they have not turned from their idolatry and sin. The result of sinful unrepentant behavior is very clear: it results in destruction. In our modern day this is still true. Why should God honor something in our lives when we do not honor Him? When we sin without repentance, the resulting pain we endure is well deserved. We cannot say either, by the way, that we receive punishment without cause. Throughout scripture, and especially within this book, punishment by the Lord is given so that the people might return to Him and avoid damnation. In our own lives those difficulties that we are allowed to experience are reminders that we are not in control. Many of you probably can vouch that it was only when you hit rock bottom that then you were able to see that the Lord was in control and not you. If there is not any punishment, if the Lord allowed us to continue on unrepentant infinitely until we entered eternal damnation, He would not be a loving God. One of the points emphasized here in Ezekiel is that no matter what the people choose, they will know that the Lord reigns.

Ezekiel's presence in this book as a prophet is a loving reminder that the Lord exists and that He is willing to forgive sins if we repent... but when Israel does not repent and return to Him then they reap the exile. We should take heed from their example. The final pieces of scripture we looked at show one last important part of this puzzle, they show one last important point that should be remembered as we study this book and apply it to our lives. Ezekiel is given the Lord's Spirit and is commanded to preach these messages to the Jews. If he does so and the people do not repent, then it is upon the people. If he does not share and the people do not repent, then it is upon him.

“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.” (Ezekiel 3:17-18) That is a big calling given to Ezekiel, and one that we should hold in mind in our own lives. As we go throughout this book, we should know that the callings Ezekiel gives are for the good of people... and that as God’s prophet he must proclaim the truth or he is complicit in their downfall. In 2020 we must remember that we too are called to preach and to pray... or else we also are complicit. This isn’t a political call by the way, this is a call to proclaim Christ crucified and resurrected, period.

Beloved, long story short, the book of Ezekiel is a warning to the Israelites that destruction is coming if they do not repent. As a whole, the Jews do not repent and are then thrust into exile. Many are spared by their own righteousness (we will see that later), but most suffer horribly. To put this in our time, to connect the underpinnings of this whole book to us, we have to remember that everyone who does not hold to Jesus is under the weight of their own sin. If someone does not call upon Christ as their Savior, the destruction that is coming for them is infinitely greater even than that that came to the Jews. Eternal damnation is the reality for all who do not follow Jesus. As Christians it is our calling to go and proclaim the truth to others, lest they perish under the weight of their own sins. If you take away anything from the book of Ezekiel this morning, if you take away any part of the opening of this book and its overview, remember that you are given a calling and a commission that is as great as the one given to Ezekiel. You are

called to proclaim the truth to all men, so that they might turn from their sins, give them to Christ, and find their salvation. If we do not uphold this calling, if we do not proclaim the truth, then we are complicit in letting them die in their iniquity.

Closing Prayer