

God's Message to Us in Ezekiel 1-24 (Part 1)

Halifax, NS

2 September 2018, 2:00 PM

Introduction

In our sermon series on God's Message to Us in Every Book of the Bible,

- we have come to the last of the three books of the major prophets—Ezekiel.
- The other two are Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Let me explain how these three prophets stand in relation to each other.

- Isaiah is the earliest of them.

- He ministered from 740 BC at the end of King Uzziah's reign until 681 BC when Hezekiah was king.
 - I want to correct the record that this was a 59 year ministry (I erroneously said 79 years in the sermon on Isaiah).
- Isaiah pled with the people of his day to repent of their sins, warning that judgment would come if they did not, but mercy was waiting if they would.
 - He told them that all Israel (the northern kingdom) would be destroyed by Assyria and that all of Judah except Jerusalem would be destroyed.
 - He told them that God would marvellously stop the Assyrian army when they came up to Jerusalem.
 - Godly Hezekiah was on the throne at that time, and he led Israel to trust in the promise and not surrender to Assyria even though it looked hopeless.
 - God wanted to show His people that He loved Jerusalem where He had put His name and that He was well able to defend the city that He had appointed in those days as the place where He showed how He was reconciled to His people by the blood of the covenant.
 - But He also revealed to Isaiah that Babylon would arise as the next world power and that they would destroy Jerusalem because of the wickedness of His people.
 - Interestingly, however, Isaiah was also given a ministry of consolation in which he promised that God's Son and God's kingdom would still come and that through Him, all the nations of the world would be blessed.
 - In Isaiah we have some of the clearest and most powerful promises of Christ in the entire Bible... remarkable prophecies!

- Jeremiah is next in line.

- He did not come until 626 BC, 55 years after Isaiah had finished his ministry.
- His ministry was primarily focused on preparing the people for the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon.
 - Even though Isaiah had foretold this, and even though Jeremiah had shown himself to be a true prophet by short term prophecies that were fulfilled,
 - the people and their leaders did not want to believe that Jerusalem would ever fall.
 - They took false comfort in how God had stopped Assyria and they accused Jeremiah of destroying the people's faith.

- He was persecuted and his message was rejected, and he found that very hard indeed.
- But Jeremiah also gave us some very excellent promises from God that the exile would only last for 70 years and that after that, God would bring His people back and eventually would bring His promised Son and make a new covenant with them—a covenant that they would not break.
- In 586 BC, Jeremiah’s (and Isaiah’s) prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem was fulfilled... it was utterly destroyed by Babylon under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar... the city and the temple were burned.
 - Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, found this very troubling.
 - He wrote Lamentations, which we looked at last time, a book that shows us how to mourn and lament when God sends judgment on His church...
 - as He has in our day.
 - We saw that although we ought to mourn, we also ought to cling to God’s promises and hope in His unfailing mercies that are new every day.
 - Jeremiah’s ministry was pretty much wrapped up a year or so after the fall of Jerusalem (585 BC).
- **So what about Ezekiel? How does he fit into to all of this?**
 - Ezekiel actually overlaps with Jeremiah.
 - He gives us the exact date of his call to ministry—on our calendar, it is July 31, 593 BC—that is seven years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
 - But Ezekiel did not conduct his ministry in Jerusalem like Jeremiah did.
 - He was actually in Babylon, in exile, with 10,000 other Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried off when he subdued Jerusalem in 597 BC—eleven years before he utterly destroyed it.
 - This was actually the second deportation; the first had been in 605 BC when Daniel was taken away.
 - So when Ezekiel begins his ministry, he is essentially doing among the exiles in Babylon the same thing that Jeremiah was doing in Jerusalem...
 - Insisting that this deportation was just the beginning of sorrows—that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed.
 - Ezekiel actually had it much better than Jeremiah. Even though, like Jeremiah, he was not believed, he was treated relatively well by his fellow exiles.
 - Ezekiel’s ministry continued for at least 16 years after the destruction of Jerusalem—he dates many of his visions, and the latest date he gives us 571 BC.
 - It is recorded in Ezek 29:17—the book is not in chronological order.

But let’s get on to the message of Ezekiel for us in our day. What does this book teach us?

- **Ezekiel teaches us that our sovereign LORD orders history to display His own glory with reference to His people.**
 - That is a mouth full so let me repeat it again...
 - Ezekiel teaches us that our sovereign LORD orders history to display His own glory with reference to His people.

- If you read this book, you will run into the statement that God has done this or that **“in order that all might know that He is LORD”** again and again.
 - Something like 65 times it says that!
 - He acts so as to display His glory!
- We should be extremely happy about that.
 - The source of all our troubles, all our unhappiness, all of our emptiness, is that we do not see the majesty and glory and beauty and goodness and justice of our God.
 - Sin has blinded us to the only thing that can ever make us truly happy.
 - But blessed be the triune God—the Father is always looking to glorify the Son and the Spirit, and the Son wants to glorify the Father and the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit wants to glorify the Father and the Son.
 - There is a continual delight and outgiving of one member of the Trinity to another.
 - And now that God has made us in His own image, the triune God is also committed to displaying His glory in both judging and redeeming us sinners.
 - As we go along, I will show you how the manifestation of God’s glory is centred around His redeemed people—the church—Israel in the Old Testament and those professing Christ in the New Testament.

I. In chapters 1-24, Ezekiel shows us what happens when God withdraws from Jerusalem—when His glory departs from them.

- A. The thing that made Jerusalem great—the only thing that makes any people great, is that God is with them.
1. When He commanded His people to build a tabernacle for Him, it was to be built to show that He was with them.
 - They were in tents in the wilderness, and God was symbolically in His tent right in the midst of them.
 - When He arose to move forward, they were to go with Him and when He rested, they were to camp around His tent.
 - Later on when He settled in the land of Canaan and they lived in houses instead of tents, He ordered them to build Him a house—a temple—at Jerusalem.
 - As His people, He ordered them to live holy lives in accordance with His commandments...
 - And at His tent (and later His temple), He ordered that sacrifices be offered to atone for their sins and that many ceremonies of purification be carried out to make it clear that He does not tolerate sin and that sin must be pardoned.
 - His justice is part of His glory.
 - With Him in their midst, they were safe and secure from all enemies, except when they ceased to follow Him...
 - He would protect them so long as they continued to have Him as their God, but when they turned to other gods, He would leave them to their enemies.

- But even that was a part of their greatness that God was with them to chasten them.
2. For us under the New Testament, the thing that makes us great is that God is with us—more than ever!
 - Now the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, has come as the prophets foretold to dwell among us.
 - He came as Emmanuel, God with us, taking human flesh, being born in the womb of the virgin Mary.
 - That means that now, God is with us more than ever—there is not a temple made with man’s hands with priests officiating and sacrifices of bulls and goats.
 - Now the Son of God Himself has actually become one of us, and it is He who has reconciled us to God in truth—not in symbol—by paying for our sins on the cross and by representing us as our righteous king.
 - All of our hopes are in that we are in Him—baptised into Him by the Holy Spirit so that we hold to Him by faith and He holds to us by grace.
 - Our greatness is all because God is with us as our God.
- B. But in the first 24 chapters of Ezekiel, we are shown what happens when God withdraws from Jerusalem—or from His church or any branch of it!
1. When the book opens, it is July 31, 593 BC, and Ezekiel has a vision of God’s chariot, and it is not at Jerusalem. This is significant.
 - a. Look at what it says in the opening verses:
 - Ezek 1:1... **Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month [that would be July 31, 593 BC], as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, [he is not at Jerusalem you see] that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. ² On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity, ³ the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. ⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁵ Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. ⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings... and so on.**
 - b. Ezekiel goes into a detailed description, and then in verse 26-28, he tells us of one who is on a throne which they bear, one who has the appearance of a man, but also of the likeness of the glory of God...
 - Who do you suppose *that* is?
 - Listen to the description from chapter 1 verse 26: **And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. ²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of**

the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

- Here is the Son of God—Ezekiel worships Him.
- c. He commands Ezekiel (in chapters 2 & 3) to go and speak to a stubborn and rebellious people with His message, a message from God.
 - Much is said about this and he is commanded to be faithful in preaching to them even though they reject him...
 - One of the most precious things here is the way that seven days later, the LORD comes again and orders Ezekiel to preach the offer of free grace.
 - He is to warn them that if they turn away from Him, they will die, but that even if they have been wicked and they turn back to Him, they will deliver their soul from death!
 - There is always mercy for anyone who will turn to the LORD, there is always ruin for any that reject Him.
 - The LORD insists that Ezekiel faithfully preach this message—if he does not, he will be responsible for those who die in their sin.
- 2. But notice, Ezekiel is not at Jerusalem and neither is the LORD... yet Jerusalem was the place He had chosen to reveal Himself.
 - a. This might not be so significant if it were not for what follows in Ezekiel...
 - After all, the LORD can certainly be in more than one place at a time.
 - But it is in fact very significant in Ezekiel.
 - b. In chapter 8, a little over a year later, Ezekiel is taken by a fiery man to the temple at Jerusalem.
 - And he is shown visions of priests and princes and a group of women—people that were known to him as leaders who were living at Jerusalem—worshipping false gods and doing wicked things at the temple.
 - For example, in 8:15-16, it says: **So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’S house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east. ¹⁷ And He said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger.”**
 - In chapter 9, the LORD says that Jerusalem will be destroyed because of these things...
 - c. But in chapter 10, Ezekiel sees the vision of the chariot of God again...
 - And God is departing from Jerusalem because of all of their sins!
 - Look at 10:18: **Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.**
- 3. Ezekiel’s message is that God has departed from Jerusalem.
 - He will no longer protect Jerusalem or His temple because He is not there.

- His glory has departed.
 - Ezekiel is to declare the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.
 - He is given many interesting parables, oracles, symbolic actions and prompts to portray this message to God’s stubborn people.
 - For example, he is told to make a model of Jerusalem on a clay tablet, and then to lay against it and build a siege wall against it... he is to lay on his side for 390 days to bear their iniquity.
 - We don’t have time to go into all the things like that that he was to do, but the essential message is that God has left Jerusalem because of their great wickedness and their refusal to turn from it, and that destruction is coming.
 - Ezekiel was telling these fellow exiles that Jerusalem would fall.
 - They did not want to believe it, so God kept giving them more signs and oracles—very memorable ones.
 - He wanted everyone to know that He was the LORD who was sending Babylon—it was not just that Babylon gained power and took Jerusalem—it was God using Babylon to judge them for their sin.
 - They wanted to minimise their sin and say that God would not take such drastic measures as all of that.
- C. As God’s people today, we do the same thing...
- we always minimise sin and its punishments.
1. Despite all of Ezekiel’s signs and oracles, the people refused to accept that the LORD would ever let Jerusalem be utterly destroyed.
 - a. In chapter 24, the LORD gave the sign to them of taking away the life of Ezekiel’s wife, who is called the desire of his eyes.
 - Ezekiel was instructed not to mourn for her in public and to give this as the reason for his action when the exiles asked him:
 - **Ezekiel 24:21-24: “Speak to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. ²² And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips nor eat man’s bread of sorrow. ²³ Your turbans shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; you shall neither mourn nor weep, but you shall pine away in your iniquities and mourn with one another. ²⁴ Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.” ’ ”**
 - b. Notice the goal...that they would know that God is the Lord GOD.
 - That is what they did not know—they had forgotten that the God is the Lord GOD (Adonai Yahweh).
 - He had to depart from Jerusalem and destroy it in order to wake them up to this reality.
 - Their destiny is not in their own hands—it is in the Lord’s hands who has told them repeatedly that if they will simply turn to Him in faith, He will bless them.
 - He is the LORD, and His promises—as well as His threats—are sure.

- It is very foolish to write Him off as irrelevant the way even His people so often have done.
2. We have even greater revelation from God about the consequences of sin.
- Not only did God profane His own sanctuary at Jerusalem—
 - He did much more than that!
 - He brought His eternal Son under the curse to atone for it.
 - When we read in Ezekiel about God showing that He was LORD by destroying Jerusalem and His own house there, the city and the house that He had appointed for Himself...
 - We need to think about how He departed from Christ when He was on the cross—how Jesus cried out as one who was forsaken!
 - What drastic measures are these—all because of our sin.
 - The history of the cross is an every greater revelation of His wrath and righteous abhorrence against sin—of how heinous our sin truly is.
 - The fall of Jerusalem shows us that He is the LORD who hates sin—the cross of Christ shows us this all the more!
 - That the glory should depart from Him because of our sin is beyond belief.
 - Yet, that is what God has revealed to us.
 - Be humbled by this my brothers and sisters.
 - See what your sin and mine did to the Son of God.

TRANS> That is the first lesson from Ezekiel.

- I'm going to go ahead and not go into even the second lesson today. I think we have plenty there to think about.
 - I want to add something to it, though, by way of conclusion.
 - Do you know how this book ends? Turn to chapter 48.
 - Ezekiel has a vision of a new temple, similar to the one we saw in Revelation.
 - At the very end of Ezekiel, chapter 48, verse 35, it says, **“The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, THE LORD IS THERE.”**
 - What do we see with Jerusalem, and even with Jesus on the cross?
 - The glory departed! Jesus was brought to shame!
 - He didn't belong there at all!
 - He was profaned because we are profane!
 - The temple was profaned, not because it's not a holy place, but because the people were profane.
 - What's happening at the end?
 - God returns to His temple!
 - THE LORD IS THERE is the name of the city.
 - We will be blessed when Jesus comes back—we *are* blessed, even now—because He was profaned and suffered for us, but then was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand!
 - Remember what we saw in Thessalonians?

- When we depart to be with the Lord, when He comes in His glory, we will go and we will be with Him.
 - Forever!
 - The Lord will be with His city, and He will never depart!
- What does that mean?
 - That we'll see His glory for all eternity if we are in Him!
 - If we are not in Him we will see the glory of His judgment.
- We need to learn the lesson that we saw in Ezekiel today: When God says things, He's not making them up.
 - He wasn't making it up about Jerusalem being destroyed, even though His people didn't believe it.
 - Neither has He made up the reality of heaven and hell.
 - We need to be sure that we're in Christ, because if we're not, we're going to be judged for all of our sin.
 - We'll have no covering, no atonement.
 - In Christ, we have the one who is profaned for our sake in order that we might be saved.