

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 46 – April 17-23

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 132-134

Luke 17-20

Readings in Class:

Ezekiel 23-36

Introduction to Ezekiel

Does God have a plan for his people in Exile? What has happened to all of God's promises that he stated would never fail? What does God have planned for the future of his scattered and shattered people?

Those are the themes and raw emotions that the Prophet Ezekiel addresses, and which God will bring resolution through to. The Prophet Ezekiel is among the exiles living in Babylon. He lives with a cohort of the people of Judah and throughout the span of several years, God relates to his people through Ezekiel what he is up to and why this calamity has struck. His first message begins in the year 597, 10 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and continue for some time afterwards. Noteworthy is the fact that Ezekiel gets his first message on his 30th birthday, the date that would have marked his entrance into the priesthood since he is a priest.

The Prophet Ezekiel has one foot in the past as he is among the exiles before the fall of Jerusalem and one foot into the future as he addresses the future following the exile. His messages leading up to the fall of the city are messages of harsh and honest law and destruction. In fact, God becomes more distant in the first half of the book. But after the fall, God then speaks his Gospel and consolation through him. And God draws near again with the final words of the book summarizing it all by saying, "The Lord is There."

Ezekiel is among one of the hardest books to read in the Old Testament for the imagery that Ezekiel uses and the themes which are often hard to track. But the main theme of the book that carries through from the beginning to the end is that God is making an end to how things are, but after he destroys, he will rebuild and begin anew.

A brief summary of Ezekiel

1. Oracles of Judgement on Israel 1-24
 - a. Ezekiel called and equipped for Office of Prophet 1-3
 - b. Action Prophecy 4-5
 - c. Condemnation of Temple and Abandonment by God 6-11
 - d. Action Prophecies and Allegories of Israel's unfaithfulness 12-24
2. Oracles of Judgment on all Nations 25-32

- a. Ammonites, Moab, Edom, Philistines 25
 - b. Tyre 26-28
 - c. Egypt 29-32
- 3. Oracles of Restoration for God's People 33-48
 - a. Promise for God to lead, care and make new his people 33-39
 - b. A New Temple. God returns to be with His People 40-48

WHAT IS GOING ON?!

Ezekiel contains some of the strangest and hardest to imagine scenes in the Bible. Right off the bat, Ezekiel describes God's mobile throne and temple, and the long descriptions are foreign and odd to our senses. Spinning wheels and turning four sided creatures make the book hard to read. Many of the images that Ezekiel uses are actually later used by St. John in the book of Revelation.

On top of that, Ezekiel's strange stunts, called action prophecies, and allegories and parables take some time to decode. Because of this, the overall message can be lost in the midst of trying to figure out individual parts.

Yet, Ezekiel contains some of the most clear passages of hope and restoration as well. Images of God shepherding his people, of calling a new David to care for his people, of sprinkling and marking his people with clean water.

You doing okay there Ezekiel?

Of all the Prophets, what marks Ezekiel as unique is the action prophecies that God tells him to perform. Here are just a few to list:

1. Ezekiel makes a toy model of Jerusalem and destroys it.
2. Ezekiel to make food cooked from dung just as exiles will.
3. God makes Ezekiel mute for years. Only speaks when God tells him to.
4. God takes Ezekiel's wife away in death, told not to mourn publicly.

These actions are to elicit responses for the people around him when he does them. Ezekiel's strange behavior is to get the otherwise hardened and apathetical people to ask: What does this mean?

God Leaves and Returns

In chapter 1, Ezekiel is shocked to have God visit him in exile. God is meant to be in the temple in Jerusalem but shows up on a mobile throne and temple to Ezekiel in exile. In chapters 6-11, God takes Ezekiel on a tour of the temple in Jerusalem and shows him why he left. God shows Ezekiel every lewd and wicked practice that the people are doing in God's house and after he shows him, slowly moves out from his temple and abandons it and leaves the city open to attack now that God no longer defends it. This crisis forms the backbone of the book. How will God dwell with his people if he has left and abandoned them? This crisis is resolved by the end of the book as God rebuilds a new temple in chapters 40-48 and ends with the promise: "The Lord is there."