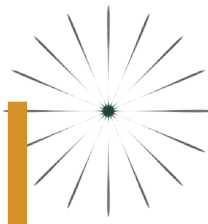


EZEKIEL



INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

PART 1

A Story of Downfall and Restoration

SCRIPTURE: READ EZEKIEL 36:24-27

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezekiel is an Old Testament book that deals mostly with the nations of Judah and Israel. The book was written by Ezekiel while Israel was in Babylonian captivity. Yehezkel (Hebrew for “Ezekiel”) means “God strengthens” or “Strengthened by God”. We see that he is given strength by God to minister to the people throughout the entire book. (3:8, 9)

With Israel in captivity and Judah under the yoke of the Babylonian empire, Ezekiel was a prophet of God during a time that was politically strained for God’s people. God had warned Israel that if they did not give up their worship of false idols and turn back to Him there would be consequences and the children of Israel and Judah were experiencing those consequences. Many people thought that God was not as powerful as Marduk (the god of the Babylonians) since they lost the battles against the Babylonians. There are times in our own lives that we start to doubt whether God is there and if He cares for us or not. In His silence we must be reminded, as Ezekiel would be, that God has a remnant available and will never leave us alone. (Matt. 28:20)

There is always hope on the horizon when we follow God. Israel was going to return to God and He was going to restore them. He is a God of mercy and grace and that hasn’t changed. In chapter 36 we see that God had a wondrous plan for His children. He was going to give them a new heart (v. 26) He would cleanse them and restore them to His purposes. God has provided us with a new heart when we choose to follow Christ and not our own desires. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He has made us into a new creation. His Spirit has been given to us so that we are able to walk in His statutes and His judgements. (v. 27)



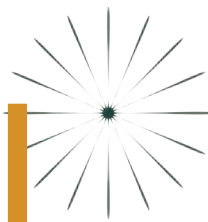
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does it feel when God tells you to do something that you do not feel ready to do? What is your natural reaction? How might Ezekiel's reaction encourage you the next time God asks you to do something hard?
2. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Knowing this, why do you think Israel was so susceptible to turning away from God's statutes and worshipping idols? What are some of the idols that we choose over God today? Why do we choose them? How can we be better prepared for the temptation and how can we choose God in that situation?
3. Was Marduk more powerful than God? Why did God allow His chosen people to fall to the Babylonians? Were the children of Israel justified in their anger towards God? (Read Hebrews 10:5-6) Have you always allowed God's chastisement to lead you closer to Him? Why or why not?
4. Given the context of these verses (v. 24-27), why do you think people believe that God has changed from the Old Testament? Do you think of God as having a different attitude towards people between the Old and New Testaments? How can we fear God and, at the same time, have a healthy and personal relationship with Him?
5. What does it mean to be a new creation? How do we show the world that we are made new?

WRAP UP

Ezekiel was called when the nation was in great turmoil and there was nothing that anyone could do about it. His call was to be faithful and to speak the words from God. Times were bleak but God was going to do some incredible things very soon. How much does that mirror where we are today?

EZEKIEL



CALL AND COMMISSION

PART 2

Responsibility to the Call

READ EZEKIEL 2:6-8

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel was being called by God to a life of sacrifice for His purpose. Even though his life was to be separated for God, Ezekiel did not complain about what God was calling him into. At the beginning of chapter two we see that the call for Ezekiel was to go to the nation of Israel. (vv. 3-4) He could have groaned and complained about the fact he was to go to a rebellious and stubborn people. Most people do not look forward to public speaking as it is, let alone having to do it to a people that are unreceptive. God encourages him through this though, by saying that regardless of how the people react to him, he is the prophet sent from God. (v. 5) There is no guarantee of success when we follow God, but we are to be faithful to the calling that He gives to us.

There are many things that can distract us from speaking the truths of God to our friends, family, or co-workers. God reassures Ezekiel that he should not care or be afraid of what the people say or do. There is nothing that a man can do that supersedes the Word of God. (Matthew 10:28) Paul spoke with boldness about the Gospel that saved him. (Romans 1:16) This does not mean that it is not difficult at times but that God has called us to be bold for Him and He will take care of the rest.

The words that Ezekiel was to speak to the people were the words of God Himself. This is a serious charge because it is important not to mishandle the Word of God. Ezekiel was told to be courageous and bold when speaking to the people and to not be rebellious as they were. (vv. 7-8) He was called to eat what God gave him and to follow God above all others. We are called to the same thing. We have been made new and whole through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our bodies are no longer ours. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) We must listen to the call of God and be bold in sharing His Gospel.



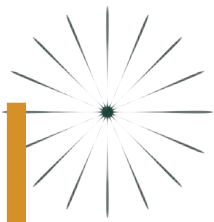
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read John 10:27. When God calls us, how can we be sure it is Him? How is God calling you into a place of vulnerability? Will you listen?
2. Have you ever been asked to do something that you knew would be hard and you really didn't want to do? What was the end result? Is it hard for you to do the will of God without groaning? How can a person work on their attitude when doing something that they don't particularly want to do?
3. What are some of the main distractions that come up on a daily basis in life? Do you think that Ezekiel had distractions like us? What is the best way to fight all of the distractions that are swirling around us every day and how do we focus our attention on the things of God above all others?
4. Read Romans 1:16-17. What was it that caused Paul to speak so boldly about the Gospel? What does it mean when it says "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith"? How is it possible to live a life by faith in the current world and culture that we are surrounded by?
5. In John 14:15 Jesus says that "if you love Me, then you will keep my commandments". In light of that, how should we listen and submit to the Lord and His call? Ezekiel was told that God would give him everything he needed even down to what he ate. Do we rely on God for everything or just some things? What does it mean to be wholly reliant on God? How can we do that?

WRAP UP

Ezekiel was given a task that may have seemed daunting. He took it and listened to God and was used by God to speak to the people. They were stubborn and stiff necked but Ezekiel was not worried about them as much as he wanted to follow the will of the Father. We see this same example in Jesus Christ and His submission to God the Father in being willing to die on a cross for the sins of the world. How, then, can we submit to and follow the Word and the calling of our heavenly Father?

EZEKIEL



SYMBOLS, SERMONS AND VISIONS

PART 3

Judgement on Judah

READ EZEKIEL 18:19-32

INTRODUCTION

This chapter in Ezekiel deals with God speaking to the Israelites about their individual sin and the consequences of that sin. People often think that their sin, as long as it isn't hurting anyone else, is no big deal. There are two problems with this line of thinking that must be addressed in our own daily lives.

First, is the notion that, as long as I am not hurting anyone, then my sin is fine. This line of thinking insinuates that sin only affects the one performing that sin. This is, at best, a half truth and at worst a full-blown lie to appease the guilty conscience. There may be sins that are done in the secret places that seem to not affect anyone else but that is never the case. A man that commits the sin of lust may think that he is doing so in private but has no idea what kind of damage he may be doing to his future relationships with women. The bank robber who "only steals from the government" doesn't realize that he is causing others harm in their work environment. All sin has ripple effects that emanate from the source. There is also someone else that gets hurt anytime a person sins. God. He is with us all and is hurt by our actions against His Word. There is no getting around it that even if we feel like our sin is not hurting anyone else in this world, it hurts God.

Secondly, we may live in a culture that thinks "if it feels right, do it" but no matter what we have heard or what others try to tell us, our sin is a big deal and even the smallest of infractions will have eternal consequences. (Romans 6:23, Isaiah 59:2, 1 John 3:4) We cannot look so lightly upon an action in our life that has such resounding eternal consequences. There is no room for error when we are dealing with a perfect God. There may be some that don't like this and think it is too narrow of a path and they are correct, that path is narrow. (Matthew 7:13-14) God doesn't require a "good person", He requires perfection and none of us can reach that level of perfection. (Romans 3:23) Thankfully, there is hope in Jesus Christ who died to forgive us of those sins and to save us from the consequences of them.

EZEKIEL



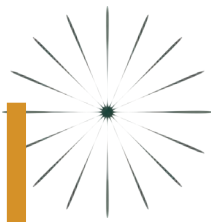
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had someone else's sin affect you or your life? How did that impact your outlook on that person? Knowing how you felt, do you ever justify your sin by saying it won't affect anyone else?
2. How do you think God feels when we sin against Him? Why?
3. When has there been a time in your life that you have treated your sin as less than what it really was? What made you try to make less of your sin? Do you think it is a good idea to belittle our sin?
4. Do you treat your sin as something that breaks God's heart? How can you better understand the effect of your sin on others as well as on God?
5. Have you ever sinned and, when consequences came, asked God "why me?" Why do you think God doesn't like that? How can we be better?

WRAP UP

The children of Israel were being punished by God but He tells them that He will give them a new heart. He says in verse 32 that He takes no pleasure in the death of the one who dies. He is a caring God that truly wants a close relationship to His people. This is important to understand because God does care for us and doesn't want to see us living a sinful life. Not because He doesn't want us to have "fun" but because He doesn't want to see us die. We choose sin often but we must change and learn to choose Jesus instead.

EZEKIEL



JUDGEMENT ON FOREIGN NATIONS

PART 4

Pride and Judgement

READ EZEKIEL 28:13-19

INTRODUCTION

God does not appreciate pride. We see that throughout all of Scripture. In fact, pride is the thing that God hates the most. (Proverbs 8:13, 6:16-19, 16:15, James 4:6) Pridefulness can be linked to every sin that man commits and even is the cause of the original sin of Adam. In his desire to be on a level playing field with God, Adam was prideful in trying to be like God. He wanted to be just as knowledgeable and wise as the Creator of the universe and so he ate the fruit in pride. (see Genesis 3) In this section of Ezekiel we see the different nations that showed a proud spirit against the Lord and His law and the consequences of that pride.

Verse 17 begins the downfall. The word here for their heart being “lifted up” is better translated as their hearts became “proud”. Pride is the beginning of destruction. (Proverbs 16:18) For the nation of Tyre this meant that God was going to be punishing them for becoming a proud nation. God is a jealous God. (Exodus 20:5-6) This does not imply that He is envious of us but that He desires (and deserves) our complete and utter worship and obedience. He is jealous for our worship of Him and Him alone. There are many Old Testament references to the children of Israel acting like a harlot because of their desire to worship other gods. They were in a covenant relationship with God the Father and kept turning to other gods to fulfil the lusts of their hearts.

Turning to something else other than God is another form of pride. When we look to other forms of fulfilment in life, we are saying that God is not big enough to handle our issue in that particular area. Or, we are suggesting that the answer God has given us in response to a request or “need” is not sufficient or a good enough answer and we must look somewhere else to get the answer that we want. Our pride takes us away from God and worshipping Him into a place of worshipping something or someone else to elevate our own hearts, just like the people in Tyre.

EZEKIEL



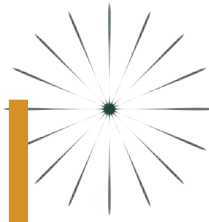
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is pride such an “abomination” to God? Do you find yourself making excuses to be prideful even in your walk with Christ? Given what the Bible says about God’s attitude towards pride, is there any place for pridefulness in our daily life? Why or why not?
2. When we see Adam as being prideful in his desire to be like God, what are the similarities and differences to our pride in today’s world? How have you desired to be like God in your own life and how do you think God feels about that?
3. Is God’s punishment of Tyre fair and just? Why or why not? Read through Proverbs 16:18 and think about the implications of our pride.
4. What does it mean to you that God is a jealous God? In what ways can you better give Him the worship that He desires from you? How can you better make time for God in your daily life? Do you think that it will be worth it?
5. What are some of you “go-to’s” when you turn from God to worship something or someone else? How do those things measure up to God and His love for you? Do you think idol worship is a good way to describe this? What can you do practically to not turn to idols and instead turn to God?

WRAP UP

Pride is not a small thing to God. Pride is something that He must deal with because only He is good and only He is worthy of any kind of worship. It may seem harsh when we read about all of the nations that went against God and His punishment of them. The truth is that when we understand better who God is, then we can understand why he hates pride so much. He is worthy and He is to be honored in our lives above anything and everything else.

EZEKIEL



ISRAEL RESTORED

PART 5

The Good Shepherd

READ EZEKIEL 34:11-31

INTRODUCTION

In this section of chapter 34, we see that God will lead His children back to Him in the same way that a shepherd goes to collect his sheep. In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were taken into captivity and scattered throughout the nations. Other nations, in an effort to end the nation, would send in their people to intermarry with the Israelites so that they would lose their tradition and their identity. We see here that God would not let that happen and that He would gather them back to Him and that He would take care of them, protecting them from all dangers. We have seen this happen twice already with the freedom from captivity of the Babylonians and also in the establishment of Israel on May 14th 1948. There is yet one more “gathering of the sheep” that will take place after the tribulation when the children of Israel will enjoy an eternal rest and protection from their enemies with the Father.

Even if we understand the imagery that comes with a “good shepherd” there is still the question of who that shepherd is. Well, God answered that through His Son, Jesus Christ. In Matthew 25:31-46 we see Jesus sitting on His throne at the end of days, judging the nations. Every human being will come before Christ and be judged. There will be two options: the Bema seat and the Great White Throne. The Bema seat refers to ancient olympics when athletes would stand on the podium and the judges would sit on the Bema and “judge” them. A better word for it is reward. This was not a punitive judgement but a rewarding one. This is where everyone who is saved will stand before Christ and He will hand out their rewards according to their confession and their deeds here on earth.

The Second judgement is the Great White Throne judgement. This will be where those who have rejected Christ and God will be judged according to their confessions and deeds as well but they will not have the blood of Christ covering their sins and they will have to give an account. This judgement is one of consequence and punishment. This is where Christ will say to the goats, “depart from me, I never knew you” and they will turn away into everlasting fire. Hebrews 9:27 talks about this judgement and how humans only have one opportunity. The Great White Throne judgement will be one that sees many people being forced to their knees and proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, but for them it will be too late to be saved from the consequences of their sin.



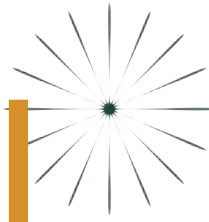
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How many times do you think God takes Israel back in the Old Testament? Do you think that they deserve it? Why or why not? How many times has God taken you back? Do you think you deserve it?
2. How is God like a Shepherd? Read Psalm 23 and discuss.
3. Do you often think of the coming day when you will stand before Jesus and give an account? Do you think that on that day you will be in right standing before the Lord? Why? How can you remind yourself to follow Him more closely throughout the day to day?
4. Is it fair that Jesus judges all of humanity? What gives Him the ability and the right to do so?
5. Given what Hebrews says about man having one chance at life and then judgement, how do you think you are doing with serving Jesus first? Have you been seeking His will first above all others? What can you change to see a deeper relationship come to life with Him?

WRAP UP

This life is short. God is patient and He is able to bring us back and restore us to Him. We have to be willing to follow Him and to make sacrifices of comfort and desire to do so. We only get one shot at this life and so it is important that we spend our days honoring and glorifying Him so that, not only we can be saved, but that others might come to know Him better as well.

EZEKIEL



VALLEY OF DRY BONES

PART 6

Bringing Back the Children

READ EZEKIEL 37:16-28

INTRODUCTION

Here in Ezekiel we see another task that God puts before the prophet to symbolize the restoration of the people to the family of God. We have seen that the people of Israel have returned to their land and that this prophecy has been somewhat fulfilled. The final, main, point of the prophecy will not take place however until the Tribulation period when, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people". This is a yet future occurrence that will bring His children (the nation of Israel) back to Him once and for all time.

Many people misread the Old Testament and claim that God is now finished with the Children of Israel. They believe that any reference to Israel in the New Testament is referring to the Church. This is a fallacy and false doctrine. God is never "finished" with His chosen people. (Romans 11) We, as Gentile believers, have been chosen as a people to be "grafted into" the family of God. (vv. 11) This means that we now enjoy the benefits of being God's children. Make no mistake that God's chosen people, the Israelites, are still His chosen people and we, the Gentiles, do not remove that title from them to put it on us.

God restores His people to Him through the work of Jesus Christ. Most of the children of Israel will realize this only after it is too late or, during the Tribulation written about in the book of Revelation. Jesus Christ came to establish a new covenant with the nation of Israel and they rejected Him at first. This rejection will last a while longer as we wait for the glory of Christ to be revealed and His perfect judgement on the world to take place. Then, on that final day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation.



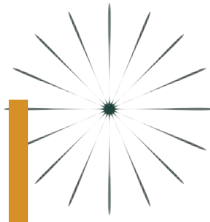
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think God is so patient with His people? Why doesn't He just turn from them and be done with them? Have you ever felt as though God has turned His back on you? What are some truths that we see in Scripture to help you understand that He never will turn away from you?
2. What are some of the ways we see God being faithful to Israel even today? How is He faithful to us as Gentiles? What do you think it will be like to see, on that final day, one family come to worship Jesus?
3. Do you think it is fair that God still cares for and protects Israel? Why or why not? Knowing that God will never turn from His chosen people, do you think it is important to pray for Israel? Why?
4. Read Romans 11:33-36. What is Paul rejoicing over in these verses? How should we react to the judgements and the promises of God? How can we better worship Him knowing that He is so patient with His people?
5. Has your perspective changed regarding Israel? How often have you thought about them and the promises God has made to them? How can we better bless the people of Israel and love them more?

WRAP UP

Paul had an obvious heart for the nation of Israel. He was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). Our desires sometimes are not matched with what God has for us. This doesn't mean that we stop caring for certain things but that God directs our path. Ezekiel was called to prophecy to the nation of Israel and Paul was called to the Gentiles. We all have a different calling but God knows the end game and how His plan works out. He will get His glory with or without us. It is much better to give Him the glory now.

EZEKIEL



MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

PART 7

Calm after the Storm

READ EZEKIEL 43:1-12

INTRODUCTION

After Ezekiel goes through and watches the bronze man measure out the entire Temple (see chapters 40-43) there is a parenthetical part to the vision where God explains His return to the Temple. God explains to Ezekiel what he is looking at and even what it means: God is coming back to rule His people. (v. 7-12) God told Ezekiel that His children would no longer defile His Holy name and that they would be under His rule once again. Again, we note here that God is not finished with His chosen people. He has promised to take His place as their King once again in the Millennial Kingdom into eternity.

Revelation 20 gives us an image of this Kingdom and what it will be for us as believers. Many times in the Old and New Testament we see God and Jesus referring to a time where we will reign alongside Jesus and work for Him in this world before He brings about the world to come. God, in Ezekiel 43, is telling His prophet that there will be a time that the nation of Israel no longer turns to their false gods and idols but only rely on and turn to Jesus. This will be the day that their "house" will be the same "house" of God. (v. 8) God says that He will dwell in their midst forever and that is such an encouragement.

We do not serve a God that is distant and unreachable. He is unknowable but He has made Himself known through Jesus and His Holy Spirit and we have a real relationship with Him because of that. It means that we, as Christians, do not need to wait for this millennial reign to experience God living in our midst but have that opportunity right now. When we allow Christ to "rule" in our lives then He is able to dwell with us. This means that we do not call the shots but allow Him to guide and direct our path. This is uncomfortable for most because we have convinced ourselves that we are in control of our lives and to have Him be "Lord" in our hearts means that we no longer are the captain of our own ships. It requires a love for Him above all other things and a humility to trust that He knows better.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the people that will be around for the Millennial Kingdom? Read through some Scripture and discuss.
2. Where will the Millennial Kingdom be centered? (hint: you can find it in the reading) Why do you think God has chosen this place above all other spots?
3. How can we set up a house for the Spirit to dwell in right now? What does it look like to have a life that He “dwells” in? What can you do to change your life to better allow Him to dwell with you?
4. Do you think that God’s Kingdom is fair? Why or why not? Do you think that our view of His Kingdom may be wrong or influenced in certain directions that aren’t found in Scripture?
5. Have you given thought to the word “Lord”? What does it mean to you that Jesus is Lord of our lives? (or should be) Do you think that you have given Him His proper place in your heart?

WRAP UP

Ezekiel was commanded to give the children of Israel many messages. Most of those messages were not that encouraging. This message can be encouraging if you are a person who makes Jesus Christ the Lord over your life and He dwells with you. It can be just as scary though if Jesus is not Lord in your life but you have just given Him lip service. Following Jesus means that our hearts change towards the things of God. We desire to serve Him more and to see His will be done in our lives. Ultimately, we desire to see His Kingdom and we look forward to the day when He will rule and we will see Him face to face.