**Ezekiel: Son of Man and Watchman**

**Chapters Two and Three**

Review

* Waves of exiles to Babylon: Ezekiel (a priest), young king Jehoiachin and other nobility were taken into exile in 597; he was prophesying initially from one of the exiled Jewish communities near the Kebar Canal
* This seemed to be the end of his Temple “career” but in visions he would see both God’s heavenly temple and the Jerusalem Temple—the latter defiled to the point where God’s Presence left
* The children of Israel were in Babylon because of persistent disobedience and flouting of God’s covenant; the adjective “rebellious” recurs
* A connection: Ezekiel was born just about when Josiah’s short-lived reform occurred (620’s BC); he would likely have known Jeremiah (also a priest) who stayed in Jerusalem until the bitter end; their messages share similarities
* “The heavens opened” and Ezekiel was given a vision of God’s glory (in exile) with an emphasis on God’s Spirit—ever-moving, ever-guarding the radiant Presence of God on God’s throne; sovereign King
* Some components of the vision of God’s glory are found among artifacts from the wider cultural context, but the powerful mobility and radiance of what Ezekiel saw and described far transcend those.

Preview

* Identity Clashes: God and God’s Spirit; rebellious Israel in exile; Ezekiel, Son of Man, called as Watchman
* Sequence of Events: summoned to speak to rebels (warned of their hardness and admonished not to fear); fed the scroll; warned again and hardened in measure; transported by the Spirit to visit one community of exiles; appointed and charged as watchman; revisited and transported again to see the Glory; self-isolated, bound, and made mute except when God opened his mouth
* Implications: it is God alone who calls and it is *God’s* message; God’s servant must have a deep sense of God’s presence and the Spirit’s indwelling; God knows the challenges and prepares us accordingly; responsibility to and accountability within the community of God’s people are paramount; negligence in ministry is serious business; we are called to faithfulness, not success

Identity Clashes

* God [“the Holy One of Israel,” as Isaiah put it], God’s glory, and God’s Spirit – cherubim, wings, wheels [possible echoes of cosmic warfare—chariot]; spoke as Sovereign Lord
* Rebellious Israel in Exile – called “house of rebellion” instead of “house of Israel”; called “nations” (pejorative—implying they were like everyone around them); some form of “rebellious” appears six times
* Ezekiel as “son of man” (“son of ʾ*adam*”)
  + the expression is used more than 90 times in Ezekiel. It refers to his being fully human (“son of Adam”) and fully dependent on God and given over to God’s service
  + Contrast with Daniel 7:13-14. In the vision of the Ancient of Days on His throne (7:9-14), Daniel saw one “like the Son of Man,” coming on the clouds of heaven and being given all the attributes of deity (authority, glory, sovereign power, everlasting dominion)
  + Jesus intentionally chose that Name for Himself: fully human and fully God [Matt 26:57-66]
* Ezekiel as appointed watchman (a military term) to issue warnings of approaching danger

Sequence of Events

* Prostrate before God’s throne, Ezekiel was told and then helped by the Spirit to stand; standing up meant being ready to serve (2:1-2); he would need to re-experience this several times
* Commanded to speak to the “rebellious house” (2:3-5): “hard of face” and “strong of heart” (2:4) [latter expression used multiple times of Pharaoh in Exodus]; see also “strong of forehead” and “hard of heart” (3:7); they and their fathers have transgressed (the word intimates deliberate violation of covenant stipulations)
* Admonished not to fear—four times (2:6-8)—why not fear? [the usual “because I am with you . . .” is not included here]; instead, the environment sounds unpleasant!
  + How do we understand “briers” (this Hebrew word used only here) and “thorns” (this Hebrew word only used here and in Ezek 28:24 where it is in parallel with a more common word for “thorns”)?
  + And “scorpions”? [suggestion: this might have alluded to a plant]
  + While the conjunction is usually translated “though [you live with these things],” it could also be “because.” If the latter, it could be a promise of protection (a hedge; cf Job 1:10 – although Job has a different word)
  + Restated admonition to speak and not become like them (2:7-8)
* Fed the scroll (2:8-3:3) – perhaps a test as to whether he was ready to obey the Lord’s command
  + Likely papyrus (not leather) and inscribed on both sides, symbolizing a complete message (possible with papyrus) – lament, mourning, woe
  + *Was this visionary or did he actually ingest papyrus? These two aspects repeatedly merge in Ezekiel; they were his experienced reality.* Somehow it happened; we don’t understand how.
  + “Fill your stomach” - bitter (lament) content but sweet taste
  + **Sweetness: encounter with the divine word; he was filled, nurtured, and empowered by God’s word. He carried in his body the word (cf Col 3:16- let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . .)**
  + See also Deut 8:3 – humans live not by bread but by every word that comes from the mouth of God; Jer 15:16 – “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your Name, O Lord God Almighty.” See also John 6 and the discussion between Jesus and his opponents about bread from heaven (the “Moses brand,” Jesus’s own flesh, the “Living Word” [Jn 6:68])
* Warned again and hardened in measure to their hardness (3:4-11)
  + There would be no language barrier (no excuse for not speaking – or hearing), but heart barriers
  + The Lord would make Ezekiel as hard as they (3:8); the word for forehead (3:7-9) is same word as in the instructions for the priestly attire (Exod 28:38)
  + This was the “family” of Israel, but familiarity breeds contempt, directed to Ezekiel just as it was to God. Compare with Jeremiah who was admonished not to be terrified by the people. “I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you. . .” (1:17-19)
  + The meaning of *Yehezkʾel*: God strengthens / grasps – a segue between this strengthening and the next “grasping” section
* Transported by the Spirit to visit the exiles (3:11-16)
  + Tel Aviv (one of many communities of exiles; cf Ezr 2:59; 8:17,21) – winged creatures, wheels, sound (of earthquake – *ra’ash*) as the Glory of the Lord rose from its place
  + He went bitter and infuriated – because of the nature of the messages and what would be a thankless calling (likely his acquaintance with Jeremiah made him quite aware)
  + He went impelled by divine pressure - “the strong hand of the Lord”
  + He sat for seven days, “stunned” – shock, dismay, exhaustion, sentenced to a life of loneliness and alienation, even though he was among people (cf. Job’s friends)
* Appointed and charged as watchman (3:17-21)
  + Hebrew term means “one looking out” (see 2 Kgs 9:17; Jer 6:16-17) in order to give advance warning of danger so people could muster defenses and find shelter (community sirens)
  + In this case, the “enemy” was God, coming in judgment (“warn him from Me” – vs 17)
  + Ezekiel’s “mission” was a matter of life and death; the “wicked criminal” (term used frequently in Ezek 3, 18, 33) who holds the Lord in contempt will “surely die” (echoes from Gen 2:17)
  + Ezekiel was responsible to speak God’s warning faithfully, even though he may have felt the audience was “hopeless”; God would be responsible for the outcome
  + If Ezekiel failed to issue God’s warning to the “wicked person,” that individual would die, but God would “seek his blood” from Ezekiel’s hand; in other words, there would be measure-for-measure consequences for Ezekiel [life for life]
  + Further challenge [no one among Ezekiel’s audience was off the hook]: Ezekiel was equally responsible to warn folks presuming to rest on their righteous reputations, but tottering into dangerous self-indulgence
  + The all-too-common trajectory: faithfulness, temptation to indulge in self-gratification, stumbling when encountered by God (who was the One placing that object to trip him up), death
  + Repentance is an ongoing position of the Christian; no such thing as stasis in Christian living; daily faithfulness
* Ezekiel was transported again to see the glory on the “plain” (3:22-23) – and then to be turned right back home for one final step in preparation
* Commanded to self-isolate, be bound, and made mute except for when God opened his mouth (3:24-27)
  + How does this fit with what has gone before? How is he to preach under these conditions?
  + Is this simply figurative?
  + Given the next phase of his prophetic ministry, this binding of his body and tongue merged with the symbolic actions
  + He was an embodied message; identification with the exiles who were in bondage [note connections with Egypt/Exodus]
  + He was to speak only when *God* opened his mouth; his words would have *God’s* authority
* Implications of Restrictions
  + His commission was to speak the Word of God faithfully, conveying God’s truth, with no temptation to soften or fabricate a “nice” message; his own voice had to be silenced
  + He would not be in a position to act as an advocate, interceding for the people (3:26; the same term is used in Job 9:33); parallel to Jeremiah’s being told not to pray
  + He would be mute for seven years, from the time of his call (593 BC) to the destruction of the Temple in 587/6 (24:25-27); possible parallel with seven days of his own silent resistance?
* ***Repeat: prophets’ lives are illustrations of faithful living no matter what the circumstances***