**Ezekiel: Prophet in Exile**

Park Street Church

4 October – Session Two

**Reading Ezekiel: Where We Are Going Today**

Review: Structure of the Book; Historical Contexts

The Prophetic Calling

Getting Through to the Audience

Using the Media: Apocalyptic Visions, Symbolic Actions, Telling Stories

**Review: General Outline of the Book**

* Chapters 1-24 – doom approaching for Jerusalem because of sin
* Chapters 25-32 – prophecies against foreign nations
* Chapters 33-39 revival and restoration amidst danger
* Chapters 40-48 – symbolism of Temple/ return of God’s Presence

**A Review of History**

* Because of Israel’s persistent disobedience, first the northern kingdom was exiled (722 BC); then the south (Judah).
* Nebuchadnezzar took multiple waves of exiles to Babylon, starting in 605 BC and continuing beyond the destruction of the Temple in 587/586 BC
* Ezekiel was prophesying in Babylon to the upper class types who had been brought there with him in 597 BC
* Far away from Jerusalem, his profession as a Temple priest was seemingly over, but in fact, he would see multiple Temple scenes. That is the “stuff” of apocalyptic.
* As a priest/prophet outside the Land and with Judah on the cusp of the worst imaginable disaster, Ezekiel’s task was extraordinarily grim.

**Every Prophet’s Unenviable Task**

* The role of God’s prophet was to summon God’s wayward and idolatrous people back to covenant obedience, accompanied by very strong warnings of impending judgment.
* Lev 26:14-45; cf 2 Chr 7:14

**Promised Restoration as Articulated by Ezekiel**

“I will make a covenant of peace with them . . . I will bless them and send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them” (34:25-27). But in the meantime . .

**Calling Prophets**

* Getting the prophet on board involved God’s personal intervention and communication. See also Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea
* In Ezekiel’s case, God’s glory appeared to him [outside the land] in a vision of the ineffable realms of heaven.
* A reluctant prophet? We might be able to understand why.

**“Invitation” to Prophesy: What a Receptive Congregation!**

* “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them . . . though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them” (2:6).
* Ezekiel emerged from the initial encounter bitter and raging in his spirit “with the strong hand of the Lord on him” [3:14].
* Most prophets were warned of and experienced rough receptions due to the unpopularity of their message.
* Facing increasingly deaf ears and blind eyes, the prophets were often commanded to engage in rather striking uses of “media.” [More on that shortly.]
* **A Reminder: *The prophets’ lives are models for faithful believers – and for faithful preachers – in difficult times.***

**A Literary Genre: Apocalyptic**

* Revelation of activities in the celestial realms along with visions of future events
* Characteristics:
  + Anticipating a time when good would triumph; current circumstances were grim
  + Messages conveyed through dreams and visions
  + Symbolic imagery engaged the realm of fantasy
  + Divisions of time and symbolic use of numbers
  + Intertestamental period examples were pseudonymous
* Interpretative strategies: read within the framework of God’s redemptive plan; expect a wide temporal sweep; look for patterns and inner-biblical connections

**Multiple Media for Ezekiel’s Messages**

* The prophet experienced apocalyptic visions of both transcendent realms and geographically distant places; he recorded them along with the interpretations.
* God commanded Ezekiel to engage in symbolic actions that were intended to elicit the question “What are you doing?” (12:9).
* The prophet narrated attention-grabbing allegories.

**Visions of the Glory of God (chs 1, 8-11)**

* Implications?
* Glory; holiness; power; mobility (this is the key to understanding the tragedy; the Glory departed from God’s dwelling)

**Ezekiel’s “Mobility”: Journeying to Jerusalem (8:1-18) “in the sixth year. . .”**

* “[A figure] stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem . . .there before me was the Glory of the God of Israel.”
* But Ezekiel also saw the depths of depravity:
  + The “idol that provokes to jealousy”
  + Detestable crawling creatures portrayed on the interior walls
  + Elders of Israel bowing in the darkness before idols
  + Men bowing to worship the sun
* The Glory departed [chs 9-11]

**Visions of Restoration**

* Dry bones and resurrection (ch 37)
* Follow-up: Gog from the land of Magog (chs 38-39; cf. Rev 19-20)
* The Glory returns to a new Temple (chs 40-46; esp 43:4)
  + [echoes of Eden]
  + Revelation 21:22
* The river flowing from the Temple (47:1-12; Rev 22)

**Re-Visioning Symbolic Actions: What Was Ezekiel Doing (12:9) and Why?**

Chapter 4 – model of the siege of Jerusalem

* What details need to be added from the literary description?
* What did they mean?

Chapter 5 – Ezekiel shaved his head and beard (a shaming action), weighed the hair, and divided it into three parts which were slashed, burned, and blown away

* What key [**small**] feature is missing entirely?
* **There was a remnant!**

Chapter 12 – the End for Jerusalem

* Pack your belongings for exile, but don’t go out through the city gate.
* Instead dig a hole through the wall; the “prince” will exit the city that way (chapter 12).

**Allegories of Judgment**

* Chapter 16 – The Lord found Jerusalem as an abandoned child and rescued her, but she turned to the worst kind of prostitution.
* Chapter 17 – The two superpowers of the day (Babylon and Egypt) are represented as eagles; the first plucked off the best foliage from [Jerusalem] and flew away with it; in its place a vine was planted which, unfortunately for it, was more attracted to Egypt; that turned out to be disastrous.
* Chapter 23 – Two “sisters,” Israel and Judah, are in competition as to which could engage in the most salacious prostitution.
* Chapter 28 – the Prince of Tyre, a figure in the garden of Eden, was cast down [compare with Isaiah 14:4-15 in regard to the king of Babylon]

Pause for Questions and Reflection