**Ezekiel: Prophet in Exile**

Park Street Church

27 September – Session One

Fall Overview [in very broad brush strokes!]

* Historical and Geographical Backdrop
* Literary Matters:
  + Structure of Book
  + Prophetic Media
  + Apocalyptic Genre
* Theological Emphases Intertwined: the glory of God; idolatry of God’s rebellious people; exile and return
* Chapters 1-3

Our Starting Point . . .

“In the 30th year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, I was with the **exiles** by the Kebar River. The **heavens were opened and I saw visions of God**.” [This was the fifth year of the **exile** of king Jehoiachin. Ezekiel was a member of the priestly family.] (1:1-3)

* **What questions do we need to ask?**
* Locations: Babylon, River Kebar**; Land** [Jerusalem and the Temple] – and the “open heavens”
* Times: long chain of events leading to exile
* Persons: Ezekiel, called “son of man” and “watchman,” was a priest in exile; Jehoiachin was king in the line of David until he was exiled to Babylon; God of Israel

The Land Between was the Testing Ground of Faith

* This location, **between** major (often competing) powers, was geopolitically vulnerable
* It was **between** sea and desert, and was dependent on rainfall for agricultural productivity
* Abram was called to journey in faith to that land promised to his descendants
* Abraham’s descendants were redeemed from Egypt and brought in covenant union to Sinai
* Relationship – “love the Lord; no other gods . . .”

Exploring this Further [central to the covenant at Sinai]

* Exod 19:5-6; Deut 7:6 – God’s “treasured possession,” a people “holy to the Lord” – chosen and beloved
* Deut 7:3-4 – don’t get trapped in Canaanite idolatry
* Obedience meant blessings of rain and security
* Disobedience would mean disease, drought, famine, destruction, exile

Broken Covenant – Repeatedly

* Golden calf (Exod 32-34)
* Judges – apostasy of people
* Solomon (1 Kgs 11)
* Northern kings – summary indictment (2 Kgs 17)
* Kings of the south – Ahaz and Manasseh as notable offenders (2 Kgs 16; 21)
* Cumulative record (1 and 2 Kings) – idolatry with occasional short-lived reforms

Sharpening the Focus on the Final Years of the Southern Kingdom

* Josiah’s reforms were apparently short-lived
* Josiah was killed in 609 as he tried to intercept Pharaoh Neco (Egypt) who was heading north to assist Assyria against the rapidly rising Babylon [Egyptian/Assyrian coalition defeated by Babylonia/Media at Carchemish]
* Jehoahaz [3 months] and Jehoiakim [11 years]
* In Jehoiakim’s fourth year (605), Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco at Carchemish and invaded Judah, taking a small set of royalty and nobility into exile (Jer 46:2; Dan 1:1). Jeremiah 25 is dated to “the fourth year of Jehoiakim”; it was an ominous message about the destruction that Nebuchadnezzar would bring about.

Nebuchadnezzar’s 597 Attack on Jerusalem [2 Kgs 24:8-17; *Babylonian Chronicles*]

* Captured city; took Temple vessels; royalty and leaders; ca. 10,000 captives
* Jehoiachin (and Ezekiel) to Babylon **[Ezekiel dates events in relation to this personal and national catastrophe]**
* Zedekiah installed as puppet king [for 11 years]

Ezekiel in Babylon

* **Jewish settlements in Babylon - Kebar Canal**
* Ezekiel called in his 30th year, **5th year of Jehoiachin’s exile [and his own]**
* His career in Jerusalem Temple was terminated; but in visions he saw the threshold of the heavenly Temple as well as the disastrous pollution of the Jerusalem Temple
* Zedekiah visited Babylon in his fourth year (Jer 51:59); i.e., 593 – the year of Ezekiel’s prophetic call

Nebuchadnezzar’s Final Assault on Judah [587/586; see Ezek 24:1-2; 2 Kgs 25:1-21; Jer 34:1-7]

* Zedekiah tried to rebel.
* Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for two years . . .
* fending off an attack from Egypt and then approaching Jerusalem from southwest (Lachish).
* Zedekiah was captured; Temple burned

Judah’s Defensive Lines Give Way [Documentation]

* “This letter certifies to the commanding officer that I remain on duty to carry out your orders.  Judah's signal fire at Lachish still burns, even after the only other remaining signal fire at Azekah has gone out” (Lachish Letter #4).
* “The army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out--Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah” (Jeremiah 34:7)

Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

* Area G: house with charred layer; contained bullae; arrowheads
* House of the Bullae [over 50 clay sealings of documents]
* A lump of clay (a *bulla*) was attached to a string binding a document and stamped with a seal. A conflagration destroyed the house; the floor was covered by a thick charred destruction layer.
* The fire burned the documents, and fired the clay of the *bullae*, preserving them in good condition. They have dozens of Hebrew personal names, two of them belonging to persons known from the Bible, just prior to the destruction by the Babylonians.
* Here’s one . . .

Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemaryahu the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court at the entrance of the new Gate of the Lord's House in the hearing of all the people ([Jer 36:10](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yirmeyahu-jeremiah-chapter-36); see also 11-12, 25).



The Lord Speaking Through Ezekiel to the Community Already in Exile

* [*About Jerusalem*] *“*Bring a mob against them and give them over to terror and plunder. The mob will stone them and cut them down with their swords; they will kill their sons and daughters and burn their houses with fire” (Ezek 23:46-47).
* Ezekiel’s wife died, but he was not to mourn (24:15-18).
* “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary – the stronghold in which you take pride, the **delight of your eyes, the object of your affection.** The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword” (24:20-21).

Pause for Lessons to Take Home

General Structure of the Book

* Chapters 1-24 – doom approaching for Jerusalem because of sin
* Chapters 25-32 – prophecies against foreign nations – note especially Tyre and the prince of Tyre (chs 26-28) and Edom (chs 25 and 35)
* Chapters 33-39 revival and restoration amidst danger
* Chapters 40-48 – symbolism of Temple/ return of God’s Presence