

EZEKIEL
A Sunday for Discussion
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LET'S START WITH A SCENARIO

One weekend a friend comes for a visit. In the course of catching up on each other's life, you mention that you are attending Sunday school (er, Christian Formation) at Park Street Church and that you are studying the prophet Ezekiel.

"Oh," your friend responds. "Isn't that the book with those weird visions of flying saucers? Are you studying unexplained aerial phenomena in your class? That must be fascinating! I didn't know you were into UFOs. But isn't that sort of, like, off the beaten track for a church Sunday school?"

"No, no!" you reply. "There's a lot more to Ezekiel than his 'other-worldly' visions."

"Like what?"

Your turn to reply....

As you contemplate your reply, consider the following:

What are the major themes in Ezekiel?

Who are the major players?

Where (location-wise) is most of the action?

How does Ezekiel differ from the other prophets you have studied? I.e., how is Ezekiel unique?

In short, how would you summarize the material in Ezekiel to your inquisitive friend who is probably thinking "Who cares?" "So what?" and "What difference does it make?"

CONTINUING WITH "WHO," "SO," AND "WHAT" ...

In our last class on 28 November we discussed the three visions of chapter 22. This is a rich chapter w/ lots of material that provokes many questions. Unfortunately, because of the inconvenience of class discussions via Zoom and of the plethora of material to cover, we did not have opportunity to discuss the questions I had at the end of the outline for the chapter.

As such, we would like to take this class period (and maybe next, depending on how things go this time) to promote class discussion revolving around the material we have covered.

Other questions about Ezekiel are welcome, but let's begin by circling back to the ones I proposed (with modifications) at the end of chapter 22.

To wit:

- A. Ezekiel called Jerusalem a "bloody city."
 - 1. *What activities were taking place in Jerusalem that warranted that appellation?*
 - 2. *Are there cities you would you consider "bloody cities" in our country? In MA? If so, can you give examples?*
- B. Leaders are responsible to the Lord for the execution of their duties, and Ezekiel does not hesitate to expose leaders' personal sins and their abuse of the people under their care.
 - 1. First, note the duties of the king (Dt. 17.14-20).
 - 2. Second, in the NT Paul brings out the duties of the magistrate [civil leader] as well as the duties of the citizenry (Rom 13.3-6). There is a tendency to put down actions carried out by citizens (protests, civil disobedience) who disagree w/ government actions by reminding them of Paul's directives to Christian citizens in Rom 13.

But the flip side is that Paul also describes the duties of governments. Specifically:

- a. Governments:
 - i. are not a cause of fear for good behavior but [a cause of fear] for bad behavior
 - ii. are supposed to praise good behavior on the part of its citizens
 - iii. bring wrath on those practicing evil
- b. *Are our governments (local, state, national) generally acting in concert w/ Paul's directives for the state?*
- c. *In what areas, if any, are governmental agencies acting contrary of Paul's directives?*
- d. *We are to obey the authority of the state, but in the U.S., on what does the state's authority ultimately rest?*
- e. *What do we as Christians and as citizens do if the state abuses its authority as described by Paul?*
- C. We see the following institutions in Ezekiel 22 and elsewhere: *prophet, priest, king (or leaders and their bureaucratic toadies), princes, land owners, hoi polloi.*
 - 1. *What are the current parallels to these institutions in our country today?*
 - 2. *Do you think they are abusing their power? If so, In what way?*

- D. Ezekiel and the other prophets continue to refer to the Mosaic Law (or more specifically, in Ezekiel's case, to the *Holiness Code*) to show how far short of God's standard the people had become.
1. *As Christians, to what standard should we refer to help the church (in general) consider how short we have fallen from the expectations of the Lord? I.e., should we look to the Mosaic Law, to the Holiness Code, or should we look elsewhere? If elsewhere—where?*
 2. *What about the general society: To what standard does one refer to help people realize their (our) shortcomings before God?*
 3. Ezekiel made it clear that God puts up w/ sin only so long. This is true today as it was in the past. (God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.)

From D Block:

A society that thrives on violence not only self-destructs but will also have to contend w/ God.

How can we bring this message of judgement to today's society?

- E. Finally, *how do we—small cogs in an enormous wheel— “stand in the breach?”*