

## Bible Survey – O T – Prophetic Writings 23.1 - Ezekiel

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### A) AUTHOR, TIME, AND PLACE:

- a) Ezekiel's introduction is described in stunning details in three short verses, through which the prophet and his ministry are fairly well described:
- i) **Verse 1** – In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Chebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
    - (1) The “thirtieth year” is interpreted by Biblical Scholars as Ezekiel's age at the time his ministry began, as opposed to reference to a particular reign of a king. This would place his birth around 623 BC, and the time of his writing this prophecy around 593 BC.
    - (2) The Chebar [AKA Kebar] river was actually an irrigation canal dug off of the Euphrates River, near the city of Nippur south of Babylon. This is where he had his vision, but he actually ministered primarily in the city of Tel Abib.
    - (3) “Spiritual vision” was one way God has communicated to His people throughout the ages. Isaiah had a vision of heaven at the start of his ministry – Is 6:1-5. Samuel heard God speak to him when he was called to serve as God's messenger – 1 Sam 3:1-4. God has always provided the means of declaring His word and will to His people.
  - ii) **Verse 2** – On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin...
    - (1) The year of this spiritual event is extrapolated as being 593 BC.
    - (2) Ezekiel's ministry occurred between 593 and 571 BC.
    - (3) Ezekiel was one of thousands of Jews taken at the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity in Babylon.
  - iii) **Verse 3** – ...the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Chebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.
    - (1) Ezekiel is identified as a Levite from the priestly family of Buzi. Priestly ministry was hereditary but didn't formally begin until the age of 30. This would indicate that Ezekiel was well educated as a Jewish scholar.
    - (2) Matthew 12:18 and 22:14 refer to two different categories of servant... “Called” meaning “invited”, and “Chosen” meaning “appointed”. Many are invited to serve, but few are appointed according to God's Sovereign Will.
    - (3) The “Hand of the Lord” being upon Ezekiel testified to the authority he had because of God's evident Spiritual power bestowed upon him. To have God's Presence powerfully displayed to a person is an unforgettable “threshold” experience... from which a person is changed for life.
    - (4) Jesus invited His disciples, while Paul was appointed to ministry.
- b) “Ezekiel” means “May God strengthen him,” certainly a prophetic name indicating his prophetic mission. Ezekiel was appointed to be a “Watchman”... one who stands alertly at the wall to warn and inform the house of Israel – 3:17.

### B) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

- a) Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Samaria in 722 BC. The Southern kingdom of Judah

had become a vassal state paying tribute to Assyria since the rule of king Ahaz (735-715 BC).

- b) Assyria's dominance over the region began to wane and they were finally conquered by the Babylonians in 612 BC.
- c) Ezekiel entered redemptive history at a propitious time. He was born in the aftermath of the "good king" Josiah's discovery of the book of Deuteronomy in the Temple. Josiah ruled Judah from 640-609 BC. During his rule Josiah initiated many reforms in an attempt to purge Israel of its Pagan forms of worship and its syncretism... the blending of Pagan and Jewish worship. The impurity of Pagan and syncretism greatly offended God. But while Pagan worship sites were being destroyed by Josiah, the hearts of the people and leadership had grown cold and far from God. The confusion of syncretism had worked thoroughly through the culture. Josiah died in 609 BC, and Egypt soon gained control over Judah who installed Jehoiachin as their vassal king.
- d) Jeremiah was in conflict with king Jehoiachin in 605 BC, and Ezekiel would have been about 17 years old at the time when the Babylonians defeated king Neco of Egypt at Carchemish in 601 BC.
- e) The first wave of exiles from Judah began after Nebuchadnezzar moved against Jerusalem in 605 BC. Zedekiah was installed as king and he ultimately rebelled against the Babylonians and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.

### C) PROPHETIC BACKGROUND of THE TEXT:

- a) The United Kingdom of Israel is represented in the writings of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles... between 1,000 BC and 930 BC.
- b) The divided Kingdom of Samaria [northern kingdom] and Judah [southern kingdom] resulted after the death of Solomon and is represented in the writings of 1 & 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles.
- c) Jonah, Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah prophesied from 791 to 698 BC.
- d) Nahum, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Zechariah, and Haggai prophesied from 658 to 520 BC.
- e) Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are represented in writings dated from 478 to 430 BC.
- f) Malachi and Joel prophesied from 465 to 450 BC.

### D) EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY FOCUS [OCCASION FOR WRITING]:

- a) The Jews were sure that God would never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed because that was where the temple... God's footstool on earth was located.
  - i) It was inconceivable to the Jews of this era that God would use a nation less righteous than Samaria [Assyrians] and Judah [Babylonians] to exercise His judgment against His people.
  - ii) Not unlike the Jews of Jesus' era, the Jews were secure because of their heritage as descendants of Abraham, not because of their love for and relationship with God. Cross reference Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6.
- b) The Babylonians took the best and the brightest [the younger nobles and educated] into exile. The Levites and the poorest were killed or left behind to work the land.

- i) Those left behind presumed that those taken away were receiving the greater punishment.
  - ii) Those exiled presumed that they got the worst of the judgment.
  - iii) Ezekiel's message to those left – you may yet suffer even greater punishment, as only the truly repentant will be spared.
  - iv) Ezekiel's message to those exiled – God intended them to be the remnant and hope for Israel's future.
  - v) Two questions both groups asked in light of what had occurred:
    - (1) How should we understand the past?
    - (2) How should we look toward the future?
  - vi) Ezekiel's answer to both – my prophecies of judgment have come to pass... therefore it makes sense that my prophecies of restoration will take place as well. Ezekiel's message was to be steadfast and have faith, trust God and hope for a new future.
- c) Ezekiel's 1<sup>st</sup> 7 years of prophecy (593-586) related the coming of God's harsh judgment that Jerusalem would fall and the nation would be destroyed – chapters 1-24.
- i) Judah cannot expect to avoid God's judgment merely because they are God's covenant people or because God would never allow Jerusalem & the Temple to be destroyed – see Jeremiah 29-30.
  - ii) The only hope Ezekiel provided was that the people needed to live in peace with themselves and with God in enduring the exile.
- d) The surrounding nations of Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt would also soon experience God's wrath – chapters 25-32. Perhaps small consolation, but proof that God would not allow these troublesome peoples to gloat over Israel's demise.
- e) The Hope to sustain them – a day would come when the Jewish nation would be restored, and they would experience revival and a glorious future as the perfected kingdom of God – chapters 33-48.
- E) **LITERARY STRUCTURE** – Notice how intricate and complex the structure of the book really is. The art of Biblical literature is pretty compelling and has many non-Jewish and non-Christian scholars intrigued. So it should be so much more so for believers!
- a) Book Structure is divided into Three Segments:
    - i) Four Visions:
      - (1) Chapters 1-3
      - (2) Chapters 8-11
      - (3) 37:1-14
      - (4) Chapters 40-48
    - ii) Twelve Symbolic Acts:
      - (1) 3:22-26
      - (2) 4:1-3
      - (3) 4:4-8
      - (4) 4:9-11

(5) 4:12-14

(6) 5:1-3

(7) 12:1-16

(8) 12:17-20

(9) 21:6-7

(10) 21:18-24

(11) 24:15-24

(12) 37:15-38

iii) Five Messages in Parables:

(1) Chapter 15

(2) Chapter 16

(3) Chapter 17

(4) Chapter 19

(5) Chapter 23

b) Literary Structure:

i) Literary Vehicle is Poetry which is unique and organically held together within the structural format.

ii) Poetry encourages the reader in helping them visualize what life in exile was all about in terms of God's righteous judgment on Jerusalem and the nation, amid their hope of restoration in a near future.

iii) The poetry Ezekiel employs paints these pictures with words.

c) Chiastic Structure – is similar to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah. Note the complexity of the three patterns and Chiastic sections:

i) Three Patterns:

(1) Pattern 1 – Oracles against Israel:

(a) Ezekiel called by God as watchman for judgment – 1:1-3:27

(b) Exiles warned of Jerusalem's doom – 4:1-7:27

(c) Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Jerusalem – 8:1-11:25

(d) Jerusalem's destruction depicted – 12:1-15:8

(e) Allegory and lament – 16:1-19:13

(f) Last days of Jerusalem – 20:1-24:27

(2) Pattern 2 – Oracles against the nations:

(a) Ammon – 25:1-7

(b) Moab – 25:8-11

(c) Edom – 25:12-14

(d) Philistia – 25:15-17

(e) Oracle Chiasm:

(i) Tyre – 26:28-19

- a. judgment against Tyre – 26:1-21
- b. lament for Tyre – 27:1-36
- a' judgment against the king of Tyre – 28:1-10
- b' lament of the king of Tyre – 28:11-19
- (ii) Sidon – 28:20-26
- (iii) Egypt – 29:1-32:32
  - a. judgment against Egypt & Pharaoh – 29:1-31:18
  - b' lament for Pharaoh – 32:1-32

(3) Pattern 3 – Oracles of Consolation and Restoration for Israel... and by extension for the nations always intended to be blessed through them:

- (a) Ezekiel called by God as watchman for renewal – 33:
- (b) God as Shepherd King – 34:1-31
- (c) Land renewal – 35:1-36:15
- (d) God's Honor – 36:16-38
- (e) God's people – 37:1-14
- (f) God's covenant – 37:15-28
- (g) God's supremacy – 38:1-39:29
- (h) God's Presence among His people – 40:1-46:24
- (i) God's Presence in the Land – 47:1-48:35

ii) Chiastic Structure:

- A – The vision of the Glory of God – chap 1-2 and desecration of the Temple – chapters 8-11
- B – The commission of Ezekiel as watchman of divine judgment – chapter 3
- C – Ezekiel addresses the “Mountains of Israel” in Judgment – chapter 6
- C' – Ezekiel addresses the “Mountains of Israel” with words of hope and Restoration – chapter 36
- B' – The commission of Ezekiel as watchman of a new age – chapter 33
- A' – The vision of the Glory of God returning to His Temple – chapters 40-48

F) **BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS** – Thematic Development seems rather choppy, which belies the intricate structure and cohesion of Ezekiel's writing... he is an amazing writer incorporating many different structural elements to enhance his message.

a) A Prophet in motion:

- Chariot to Jerusalem – 8:1-11:21
  - a. Idolatry in the Temple... corrupted by syncretism – 8:5-18
  - b. Executioners prepared... only the repentant will be spared – 9:1-11
  - a' God's glory departs Temple... God has left eastward – 10:1-22
  - Note that Jesus returns taking same route in reverse
  - b' Jerusalem's evil leaders destroyed – 11:1-21

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**Note that God's people will return as His favored ones**

**Chariot to Babylon – 11:22-25**

**b) A Prophet in action:**

**Pictures of Woe – 1:1-5:4**

- a. clay tablet – 4:1-3 => the siege
- b. lying on his side – 4:4-8 => punishment
- c. rationed food prepared with excrement => famine and defiled food
- d. burning hair – 5:1-4 => death

**Pictures of Exile – 12:1-28**

- a. packed belongings – 12:1-16 => prepared for certain exile
- b. eating and drinking – 12:17-20 => anticipation of fear
- c. false prophecies – 12:21-28 => have ushered in doom

**c) A Prophet as Watchman – 3:17; 33:2, 6-7**

**“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me” – 3:17. The picture here is of a servant or steward responsible for delivering the King's message, but who is not responsible for their response.**

- i) **The role of “Watchman” is a sentry stationed on a wall as a lookout to warn or advise the leaders of activity they should know about and address. Once the watchman has delivered the message, it is up to the leadership to properly respond.**
- ii) **That Ezekiel as watchman to properly hear and convey the “Word of the Lord” is his responsibility on pain of death – 3:18-21.**

**d) The Glory of the Lord leaves the Temple – 8:1-11:25**

- i) **This is a powerful and continuing vision. We read it casually and miss the impact it must have had on Ezekiel. Imagine then as he is faced with the prospect of delivering this message to the leaders and people who just didn't want to hear it. This was obviously a huge and brave undertaking, the power of Ezekiel's vision gave him the strength and courage to stand and deliver.**
- ii) **Note God's instruction in 8:12-13 – “He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, ‘The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.’ ” Again, he said, “You will see them doing things that are even more detestable.” Most leaders don't want to be confronted with their shortcomings, but all good leaders know they must accept it, and act wisely on it as did King David when Nathan confronted him with David's own moral & ethical failure [EG. Cross reference to 2 Samuel 12:7-15].**
  - (1) **The image of worshipping in the dark is the opposite of what God had asked His people for, namely worshipping in the light. This is proof they were deeply into idolatry and syncretism.**
  - (2) **God makes His case clear in 9:9-10 – “He answered me, “The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice [this**

mirrors Micah's prophecy especially in Micah 6]. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done."

- iii) To strengthen the young prophet, God invites him into the Heavenly realm where he observes the wonder of God – 10:1-5

I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the Cherubim. The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the wheels beneath the Cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the Cherubim and scatter them over the city." And as I watched, he went in. Now the Cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the Cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. The sound of the wings of the Cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

- (1) We need to realize that in all of recorded redemptive history, God has granted very few individuals access to observe the heavenly realm... here are a couple of examples:

- (a) Elisha in 2 Kings 6:15-17

Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

- (b) Isaiah 6:1-5

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

- (c) Daniel had a series of "Night Visions" beginning in 7:1

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spoke and said, "I saw in my vision by night..." which then continues with an amazing and lengthy spiritual experience.

- (d) The Disciples at the Transfiguration – Matthew 17:1-6

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

- (e) Stephen in Acts 7:51-59 rightfully accused the Jewish leaders of their “uncircumcised hearts” and was soon after put to death. In this encounter he had an experience that changed him and prepared him for entering eternity –

You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul [the future Apostle Paul... no coincidence]. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”

- (i) Stephen “gazed intently into heaven” is an incredible statement as the Kingdom of God was opening to receive him.
- (ii) Even more incredible, Jesus said He would be “seated at the right hand” of the Father (Luke 22:69; Colossians 3:1), and yet here in this vision He is standing. The only plausible reason Jesus is standing is to receive Stephen... what a gracious Lord we serve!

- (f) The Apostle John in Revelation 1:9-19

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum

and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands *I saw* one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things’.

- (2) Such visions are “Threshold Experiences” – they are doors into the supernatural, and those who have experienced them are forever changed. Seeing such a vision they realize they are caught up into something far greater than the temporal “here and now” and such experiences give them the strength and fortitude to stand against any adversary knowing God is all powerful and Sovereign.
- iv) Ezekiel’s vision in 10:18 describes as he watches in horrid fascination as God’s Glory departs the Temple... a sure sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem – “Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.” This had to have been a heart wrenching experience for Ezekiel.
- (1) Although things obviously look bleak for the nation, Ezekiel seems secure in his confidence that God will not remain angry forever, that His righteous anger will be replaced by mercy and grace, that God’s faithfulness... His *Hessed* [loyal love] will not allow Him to abandon His people.
- (2) The notion of a “Righteous Remnant” that will be preserved and will be redeemed is clear throughout Scripture. The idea of a remnant is employed 64 times in Scripture beginning with Genesis 45:7 – “But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”
- (3) The notion of “False Leadership” abusing their authority is also abundantly clear... and something that God will ultimately deal with Himself. Cross reference Jesus’ condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees in the “8 woes of Matthew” – Matthew 23:13-36.
- (4) Grace and mercy plays out as an option for all... as Christians we understand that sin still has a hold on our fallen flesh because we are still a part of a broken and unredeemed physical universe that longs for restoration. Paul wrote in Romans of the struggle all believers face in dealing with the pull of sin and wrong living, but concludes that the Grace of Jesus redeems us – Romans 7:7-8:2.

- e) **ISRAEL'S CALLING** – intended as a “Light to the Nations” but instead she has become a Prostitute... serving any god, power or authority that pays for services rendered – 16:1-59. Not a pretty picture:
- i) Hosea and Ezekiel both aptly employ the Prostitute or “Harlot” imagery in regard to Israel... especially in relation to her “Lustful Neighbors” Egypt and Assyria – 16:25-26; 28-29. Instead of remaining faithful to God who is Israel’s rightful husband, she trolls around in the mud with whoever promises her the wrongful things she desires, things that won’t last or bring long term satisfaction and joy.
  - ii) Christopher Wright in his book The Message of Ezekiel sees this portion of the text as a cartoon video of “garish scenes, offensive vocabulary, and sickening violence.”
    - (1) 16:13 – Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt and rendered by God during His deliverance as “exceedingly beautiful and adorned in royalty.”
    - (2) 16:15-37 – This was clearly a gift from God which Israel gratefully accepted. Instead of being satisfied with what she’s been given, like an addicted prostitute she remembers things she had and then desires more and more depraved and egregious things.
    - (3) 16:51 – The gifts God provided became the objects of lust that were used to replace Him. This is a clear picture of addition... at first the addictive behavior is enjoyable, but then you require more and more just to feel “normal.” Israel was intended to be of a nation of priests who love and worship God, bringing the nations to Him because of her beauty and devotion to Him. Instead she makes herself and God a mockery. The sins of Judah eclipse those of Samaria and even Sodom.
    - (4) There is a New Testament application of this Old Testament failure:
      - (a) Ephesians 2:7 – “we have been given every good thing in Christ Jesus that we [the Church] may display the “surpassing riches of His Grace and Kindness.”
      - (b) Luke 6:26 – when we take personal pride for what we’ve been given, rather than using it to demonstrate God’s love and glory... seeking the praise of others rather than the approval of God – “woe to you when everyone speaks well of you” instead of the God you say you serve.
    - (5) 16:60-63 – God’s desire is that humanity will know He is God and seek Him, and He will yet extend grace and goodness and forgiveness.
- f) **THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL’S WIFE – 24:15-27**
- i) 24:15-18 – in this passage it is obvious that Ezekiel loves his wife... the text says she is “the delight of your eyes.”
    - (1) Yet Ezekiel stands in obedience as an example of the pain and suffering God endures because His unfaithful bride is about to suffer death and desolation:

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your

sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners.”

(2) In the midst of his pain, we see a faithful servant:

So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded – 24:16.

(3) “The delight of your Eyes” is a term of close, personal, relational commitment. A commitment that the people who knew Ezekiel understood. Ezekiel’s fortitude in the obvious pain of loss begs a question from the people observing him... who personally know how much he loved his wife. Ezekiel and his wife is a picture of God and His wife [Israel].

ii) 24:19-22 – The people know and understand the loss Ezekiel has just suffered, but they still don’t understand his response to it...

Then the people asked me, “Won’t you tell us what these things have to do with us?” So I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me: Say to the house of Israel, ‘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. And you will do as I have done.

(1) Often the servants of God suffer publically the pain and suffering God feels for the sin and betrayal of His people.

(2) The notion of a “Prosperity Gospel” that God blesses His servants with wealth in the Land, is a false notion. Jesus warns we will suffer as He did (John 21:18), and that pain and suffering has its place in the life of a disciple (James 1:2-4). Jesus is not saying we should seek trouble, but if/when it comes we should understand it in terms of God’s eternal purpose... easier said than done for sure.

(3) Through Ezekiel God delivered a message that could be delivered in no other way... one can only surmise that the onlookers Ezekiel addressed were beginning to see what lay ahead.

g) **CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE-MISGUIDED SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL – 34:1-31**

i) The accusation against the false shepherds – 34:1-6:

(1) The metaphor of shepherd used for the kings and leaders of Israel was commonly used throughout the Ancient Near East. These cultures were typically supported by pastoral and agricultural forms of subsistence, which provided a universal understanding of the concept.

(2) Israel was to have been God’s example of the ideal society on earth... providing a standard of a “Theocratic Monarchy” serving as an extension of the Kingdom of God on earth. Instead, Jewish leadership had a long history of being more interested in the trappings of success and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of their subjects they were conscripted by God to serve, protect, and nurture.

(a) Ezekiel 34:2-5 is where God serves notice against these wicked leaders – “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the

**Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.”**

- (b) God’s expectations are clear... but unlike King David, these leaders do not repent. God’s warnings and condemnations always are offered to alert or shock the recipients... first to convict them of their error, and second to initiate the response of remorse, repentance, restoration, and then God would bring about reconciliation. This is what I call the “Forgiveness Cycle” or C-R4... see “Forgiveness Study” linked below to Authentic Discipleship website <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Disciplines/SF%201.11%20Prayer%20Practicum%209%20-%20Forgiveness%20Study.pdf>**
  - (c) God’s prophetic warnings are always offered in the hope that His leaders and His people will respond and be healed. Only when they repeatedly pursue their own interests and ignore God, does He finally act. God’s patience and kindness to us is really amazing! And He loves us too much to allow us to remain unrepentant in our sin.**
- ii) God’s verdict against the false shepherds – 34:7-31**
- (1) 34:11-16 – God had entrusted the care of His people to chosen shepherds who were stewards and hirelings... God was the owner and employer. These leaders failed miserably: “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”**
  - (a) These passages are poetic imagery rather than literal narrative. God is painting a picture through the words of the prophet.**
  - (b) The picture being painted demonstrates God’s expectations of the reciprocal relationship of leaders and the people... as the people prosper as the result of effective leadership, so with the leaders. If the leaders prosper while the people suffer, God will hold the leaders**

responsible. In all of this, God is glorified when His leaders care for His people.

(2) 34:23-24 – God points toward a Messianic figure who in the tradition and lineage of David will be a true shepherd for God’s people.

“I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”

(a) Though king David is long gone by this time, he remains the gold-standard for servant leadership for the monarchy. The leaders and the people would remember the glory days of David – how an imperfect warrior-poet emerged as king and steward and most especially as ‘a man after God’s own heart’ – high praise from God.

(b) Jesus reveals Himself as the “Good Shepherd” in line with these Messianic prophecies on the One who would come with the interests of the people first and foremost... setting aside His own interests in preference for God’s will – John 10:10-15

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

h) RENEW ME AND MAKE ME CLEAN – 36:22-32

i) There is an appropriate response to God’s rebuke – we are condemned when we refuse to hear and obey God’s invitation for forgiveness and life. King David demonstrated the correct response when God accused him through the prophet Nathan after his sin with Bathsheba and his even worse sin of having Uriah killed to obscure his own crime. David knew he could not fix the brokenness within him, he knew God was right in His accusation, and made no pretense of an excuse... he knew he was guilty as convicted and immediately expressed remorse and he confessed (2 Sam 11:1-12:25). Listen to David’s heart in Ps 51:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones

which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

- ii) God restates His condemnation of the faithless leaders and Israel in general in 36:17-23 – but then states His intention to cleanse and heal His people in 36:24-28 –

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

- (1) ‘Heart of Stone’ – a stone is dead, insensitive, unyielding, and unresponsive – all the things Fallen humanity had become, and Israel was no better though they should have known and responded differently... they should have responded as David had done.

- (2) Note the picture of a “New Creation” in the Chiastic outline of 36:24-28:

A. Gather from all the lands... bring to your land	Promise of Restoration
B. Sprinkle clean water on you... you will be clean	} Old Covenant
C. Cleanse you from your impurities [filthiness] of idols	
B’ New heart and new Spirit... remove the heart of stone	} New Covenant
C’ Put my Spirit within you... cause you to walk	
A’ Then you will ‘Live in the Land’	Promise of life and blessing

#### G) THE SPIRIT AND RENEWAL/RESTORATION – 37:1-28

- a) Most likely as a result of the intense experience Ezekiel had in his visions of heaven and of God, he is seen through his writings as one of the greatest OT prophets of the Spirit. The words Ezekiel used which relate to the Spirit are – Spirit, wind, and breath.
- i) Ezekiel is conveyed into heaven by the Spirit – 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:24; 37:1; 43:5.
- ii) “The Hand of the Lord” Ezekiel described as being “upon me” – this is what drives and moves the prophet – 8:1; 37:1; 30:1.
- iii) The Spirit is the power that animates the “Living Creatures” in the Throne Room experience – 1:19, 21; 1:28-2:2; 3:23-24; 10:17.
- iv) The Spirit is the animating Hope for deceased Israel – 36:26-27; 37:1-14; CR Jesus dialogue with

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Nicodemus in John 3:1-8.

v) The Spirit is the source of prophetic inspiration – 2:2; 3:24; 11:24; chap 13; CR 2 Peter 1:21.

vi) The Presence of the Spirit is a marker of Divine ownership – 39:29; CR Joel 2: 28-29; Acts 2:17-18; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13.

b) The Spirit reanimates the Dry Bones – what is obviously dead beyond any reasonable human expectation for resuscitation, God through the Spirit can bring to life... God alone can renew and restore:

i) Note the contrast of Ezekiel's dead wife with the living bones.

ii) The bones are rejoined, sinew and muscle are reattached, and then the body is covered with skin.

iii) But there is no "breath of life" within them until Ezekiel prophesied, and then the dead are made alive – 37:9.

iv) If God can renew and restore dead bones, He can renew and restore the nation of Israel.

v) This is a pre-exilic picture of the Resurrection promised in the Gospels, the epistles, and in Revelation.

c) Two Sticks become One Stick – 37:15-28

i) Judah is one stick, and Israel is one stick – bound together and the nation will be re-unified under a Messianic Davidic king in a covenant of peace.

ii) If life can come out from death, then separate branches can be joined together. Cross reference Paul's teaching of branches grafted into the tree – Romans 11:17-24.

H) THE GLORY OF THE LORD RETURNS TO THE TEMPLE – 40:1-48:35

a) It is important to note that Ezekiel devotes a major portion of his book to God returning to the Temple.

b) Chiastic Structure of this portion:

A Ezekiel is restored to Jerusalem – 40:1-4

B The Temple Structure is restored – 40:5-42:20

X The Return of God's Presence – 43:1-27

B' The Temple Staff are restored – 44:1-46:27

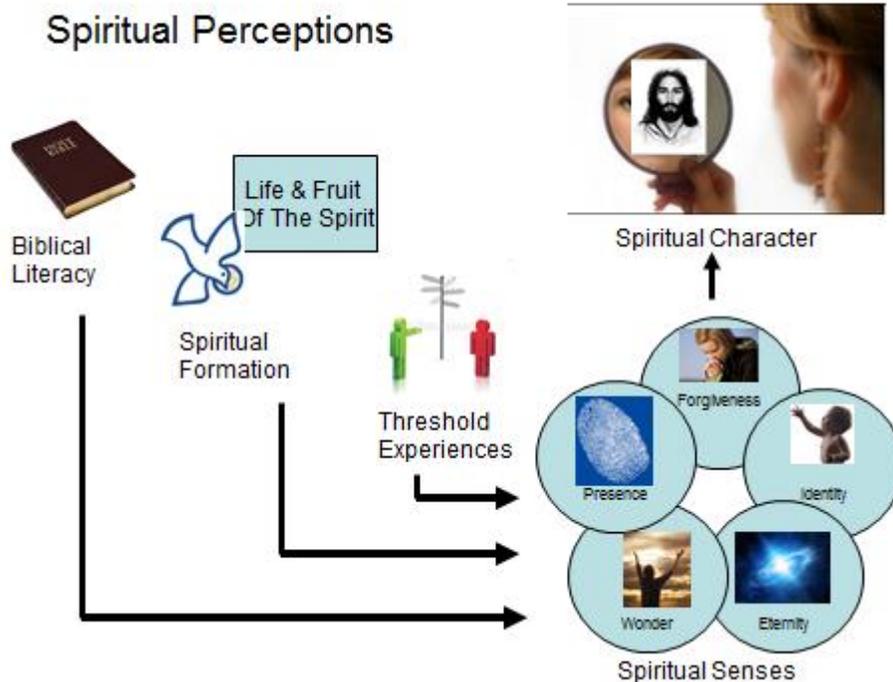
A' The Land is restored – 47:1-48:35

c) Note the reversal of fortunes – in 10:18ff Ezekiel watches God depart the Temple, now he watches God return... in essence, the King Returns! Ezekiel could not enter the Holy place, but Messiah Jesus opens the door for all to enter. Note Heb 12:22.

I) REFLECTIONS ON EZEKIEL – Though Ezekiel lived some 2,600 years ago much of what he wrote against the misguided or in many cases perverted leadership has application today. I imagine that if Ezekiel were alive today based upon the message he was compelled to write, what would he say to us today? How would his message speak to us today about the Church age?

- a) **Application of Scripture Past, Present and Future – the proper way of interpreting Scripture Hermeneutically is to understand what the original hearers of the message would have understood in terms of the author’s intended message, and then to move from the Macro [big picture thoughts] of thematic meaning of the text in terms of the unfolding Word of God throughout redemptive history to more specific thoughts and a modern application. We know and understand that God is the same – past, present and future. Therefore, it stands to reason that God’s Word... Scripture has the same qualities; it speaks in and to past, present, and future. We just need to dig into the text on its terms to find it and interpret it. For more on Biblical Hermeneutics please refer to the article below and read all three articles - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Interpreting%20Scripture%20-%20Part%201.pdf>**
- b) **One thing that really hits me in the face is the section of chapter 34... re-read the section above on the “Condemnation of Israel’s false leaders.” As pastors and lay leaders of Jesus’ Church, we should all sit up and take notice of Ezekiel’s prophetic arguments against misguided leadership. We should also realize that Jesus’ most vehement condemnation was against the misguided leaders of His day. Several points come to mind in no particular order:**
- i) **It is God’s Kingdom and Jesus’ Church – As leaders we are commissioned [Matt 28:18-20] to advance Jesus’ Mission... namely advancing the Kingdom of God. It is not about me or the “culture of me” that society has unfortunately descended into, and furthering the problem instead of being servant leaders and salt and light in a counter-cultural entity... the Church has followed the culture down that same trail. We are called to be humble servant leaders of Jesus’ Mission, and we are not free to advance our own interests and objectives or to redefine what the advancement of the Kingdom of God means. We follow and obey as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Read anew 1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 3:5ff.**
  - ii) **The Church as One Universal Body of Believers – the Church is the organic Body of Christ-followers indwelt by the Spirit. Though we may participate in a local congregation of believers, and hopefully we have smaller and more intimate faith communities we engage in [small groups, home fellowships, life groups] we are part of a much larger Body of Christ. Therefore, we must think local, regional, and worldwide in our ministry. We should not become so insular and segregationist in our thinking or community life that we fail to connect to the larger reality. Imagine what life in Heaven will be like – cultural barriers will be gone, denominational barriers will be gone, historical time barriers will be gone.**
  - iii) **Character Matters to God – The values we hold on to and the mission we seek to advance are defined by God, not by us. How we act, how we relate, how we live out our faith are more important to God than the things we actually say or even do in His name. Character matters – see the article below for more on this important topic – Coaching for Character Development <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%204.4%20-%20Coaching%20for%20Character%20Development.pdf>**
  - iv) **What does it Really Mean to be a “Christian” – the word Christian literally means to be a “Little**

Christ.” This was originally intended to be a derogatory term in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, but the name stuck and we need to recapture its true meaning. To be a “Little Christ” is to be a living individual reflection of Jesus’ nature and character. To be a disciple of Jesus is to have His Mind, Heart and Mission being formed in our inner being. It doesn’t mean we’re perfect, and we won’t be perfected this side of eternity. None the less, the Spirit’s goal is to form within each disciple Jesus’ nature, character and values... with our own distinct face and personality.



As our minds are transformed through the Spirit by Scripture, as our hearts are transformed by a vital relationship with and love for God, as the choices we make more conform to the mission Christ gave us... our Spiritual senses and Spiritual fruit develop and we increasingly become more and more a reflection of Jesus. This is what progressive sanctification is all about... initial sanctification occurs when the Spirit indwells our heart, but the ongoing work of the Spirit is to progressively transform our character and nature. This will not be completed this side of eternity... but God will see it through – Phil 1:6.

- c) Application of Ezekiel – The Role of the Prophet was to keep the King, Priests and Nation properly aligned with the Word of God. Word ministry is aptly described in Isaiah 40:3 as... “A voice of one calling ‘In the desert to prepare the way for the LORD; to make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’.” Prophecy in relating the Word of God was [and still is] “serious business.” In reading the Scripture we understand that most of the people prophesied against didn’t want to hear God calling their actions called into accountability and realignment or redirection. We should not be surprised that it is not much different today.
- i) Being a prophet was/is an amazing gift, and also an incredible burden – see Elijah’s forlorn lament – 1 Kings 19:9-14... as a picture of a prophet who has reached the end of his endurance.

- ii) The Old Testament prophets had continually warned the leaders of God's people of their errors and evil ways. The early prophetic era began with the Judges around 1,300 BC and continued until around 800 BC; the major prophetic era began around 790 and continued to 510 BC; the late prophetic era began around 520 and ended around 430 with Nehemiah being the last words from God before Jesus came.
- iii) Jesus as the prophesized Messiah went on to warn and condemn the false and misguided leaders of His era... often with scathing and harsh words calling these leaders 'blind guides' and a 'brood of vipers.' Instead of responding, these leaders thought to remove the irritation by having Him killed... not unlike the threats to Elijah, Jeremiah, etc... except they actually made good their threat.
- iv) New Covenant leaders today would do well to consider how our Lord will respond to us when He returns:
  - (1) We are beneficiaries of the indwelling Spirit that the Old Covenant leaders lacked. One can only presume we will have a much higher level of accountability as well as responsibility before God.
  - (2) From my perspective, the role of the pastors and Church leadership [elders, deacons, and lay leaders] is to 1) find the lost – evangelism; 2) feed the sheep – nurture the young believers; and 3) equip the saints for their mission – training and sending the mature into their mission field. Understanding this, will God be pleased that we spend 80% of our resources on developing the organization or institution of the church, and only about 20% on evangelism, teaching, training, and sending disciples?
  - (3) In a world of hunger and need, is it reasonable for Christian leaders to be lavishly compensated? What should be appropriate compensation as a witness to the world that our focus is on saving and developing people? Should wealth and numbers continue to be the quantitative means of evaluating ministry success? What qualitative values should apply instead?
  - (4) A "Pastor" is a "Shepherd" – meaning a servant leader that walks with and cares for the sheep, not a CEO or CFO. The world's standard of organizational leadership should not define Church ministry. God's Shepherds have the responsibility to apply the same standard God applies in Ez 34:15-16:
    - (a) "I will *'feed My sheep'*" – this is the charge that Jesus gave to Peter – John 21:17.
    - (b) "I will cause them to lie down" – Ps 23:2 carries David's experience with God as his shepherd.
    - (c) I will seek that which was lost and bring back that which has strayed and I will bandage the hurt and the crippled and will strengthen the weak and the sick – this is what Jesus said as recorded in Luke 19:10 – "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."
    - (d) I will destroy the fat and the strong – those who have become hardhearted and perverse.

- (e) I will feed the arrogant wealthy with judgment and punishment – as they failed to feed the sheep, they will be required to feed on their own error.
- v) The needs of our congregations go way beyond correct theology. We need to be equipping the body for their work of ministry... this means Biblical Literacy – forming the mind of Christ, and Spiritual Formation – forming the heart of Christ, so that we can effectively engage in the mission of Christ. All Christians are ambassadors of the Gospel – we are to bring the good news to the world. We need to take the Great Commandment of loving God and others, and the Great Commission of evangelism and discipleship much more seriously.