

GOD WITH US
Part 7: Kings & Prophets to Exile and Return
Judah's Fall and God's Faithfulness

Message 11 – The Sovereign Lord Will Return
Ezekiel 25-48

Introduction

The first half of Ezekiel's book focused on God's relationship with Israel. The "*Sovereign LORD*" told His erring and rebellious people why He must depart from them for a time (i.e., why He would allow Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to capture and destroy Jerusalem and the Temple of Yahweh, prepared by King David and built by King Solomon).

Now, in the second half of the book, God spoke to the surrounding nations to let them know that He was in fact the *Sovereign LORD* over them as well. "***Then they will know that I am the LORD***" is a repeated phrase (64x). This was God's ultimate goal – to make Himself clearly and accurately known to all nations. He called these other nations to account for how they treated His people, Israel. But the bigger issue was how these nations had responded to Him, as Sovereign Lord of all. Their treatment of Israel was a sign and symptom of their deeper attitude of unbelief and disrespect toward Yahweh, *Lord of all*.

Then, Ezekiel's eyes turned toward the future of Israel. He was the only prophet through whom God revealed the future of a glorious new city and temple. He sees grand visions of a distant time (the last days) when God will reestablish His presence with His people in a new temple, in the new Jerusalem. The people will have new hearts that are beating in tune with God's heart, and Israel will be glorious among the nations of the world. God will delight in a true relationship with all nations who will know Him and delight in worshipping Him. Israel will be a 'true priest' as was God's calling for them in the first place (Exodus 19:5,6).

Prophecies against foreign nations: Chs.25-35

Most of the O.T. prophets contain sections where God gave messages to the surrounding nations. This shows that God was always interested in *all nations*, not just the nation of Israel. In Ezekiel's oracles (messages), God repeatedly declares His ultimate

purpose in judging these nations: ***“They will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.”*** In every case, the surrounding nations were judged based on their treatment of Israel during the years when Babylon came to overtake Israel. Since the Babylonian invasion was really the hand of God disciplining His erring people, it was important to God that the surrounding nations respond to Israel’s trouble with humility and respect, not with pride and vengeance. Yet, most of the nearby nations *did act against Israel* with arrogance and a spirit of revenge. They “piled on” to Israel’s disaster, thus incurring the justice of the Sovereign LORD.

Every nation has people who have found the true God and have begun to worship Him, even though their whole nation worships other forms of deity and religious systems. God is still looking for people who are truly seeking Him. He sovereignly sends a confirmation of some form to those individuals to let them know that their desire to know the true God has been seen. He uses willing people like you who will follow His promptings to go and speak about Him to those who are open and seeking. What is He prompting you to say or do that would be used by Him to be the answer of a seeking heart?

Ch.25 Warning against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia.

These 4 close neighbors took advantage of Israel during her fall to the Babylonians. They made Israel’s troubles worse by *“acting with vengeance and ancient hostility.”* They would cut down fleeing fugitives instead of giving them help and shelter in their times of distress.

Ch.26-28 Warning against Tyre.

Ezekiel gave an extended message to Tyre. This city-state was known for its sea-trade, being a center for commercial activity in the ancient world. Tyre was rich and glorious, and proud of it! Yet, Tyre, like other neighbors, made the mistake of gloating over Israel’s misfortune. God sent judgment against Tyre in the form of a 13-year long siege by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon! Although Tyre did not fall to Babylon, her strength was greatly reduced. It was Alexander the Great who later conquered Tyre and destroyed it. A short message against Sidon is placed here, since Tyre and Sidon were close neighbors and allies (28:20-24). The warning ends with a prediction of Israel’s future restoration (28:25-26), a testimony to God’s faithfulness to His people, even though the surrounding nations hoped for Israel’s complete extinction.

*The last section of the warning against Tyre is unusual (28:12-19). The lofty language has caused many scholars to interpret this as a case where the prophet was *seeing beyond* the human ruler of Tyre to Satan (as with Isaiah 14:12-15).

“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you . . . You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones . . .” (Ezekiel 28:12-14).

This passage, combined with Isaiah 14:12-15, tells us several things about Satan: 1) He was originally one of the highest and most important angels, assigned to guard the glory of God. 2) He was perfect and beautiful until pride entered his heart and he decided HE wanted to be God. 3) He was cast down to the earth as a judgment for his rebellion against God. 4) He was in the Garden of Eden.

Chs.29-32 Warning against Egypt. Ezekiel has a long section on Egypt. This was due to the prominent role Egypt played throughout Israel’s history. Israel was captive in Egypt for 400 years from the time of Jacob to Moses, yet Egypt was used by God to be ‘a womb’ where Israel could grow from a mere 70-member family of Jacob, to approximately 2,000,000. After Israel miraculously escaped from slavery out of Egypt, Israel had to constantly live with the threat of Egyptian power looming close by. Egypt was Israel’s nearest and biggest threat for centuries. Further, when Israel was threatened by other mighty nations from further off (Assyria, Babylon), she often ran to Egypt for help – a sin that God constantly rebuked His people for, since they would not turn to Him for help and protection. Thus, in Ezekiel’s extended prophecy, Egypt is depicted as falling to Babylon. Her close allies, Cush (Ethiopia), Libya, Lydia and Arabia, would also fall. Egypt would go into a 40-year period of captivity and dispersion of her own, but afterwards, her people would return to their smaller amount of land and become “*a lowly nation*” that would never be a super-power again. Indeed, Egypt did fall to Babylon, and never rose again to recapture her previous dominance in the world. It is interesting to note that God still used Egypt as a safe-haven for His Son Jesus during the account of Christ’s infancy narrative, to be protected from Herod the Great (Matthew 2:13-23).

Ch.33:1-20 The duty of the watchman. Ezekiel had already been charged by God to be a faithful “watchman” over the people of

Israel (see ch.3:16-21). Now this charge is repeated (33:1-9). The watchman *must* tell the people when trouble is near, otherwise he will be held accountable for the lives of those he failed to warn. Yet, if the watchman *is faithful* to warn people, and they still fail to heed his warnings, then their guilt will fall upon their own heads and the watchman will not have their blood on his own hands (33:10-20).

Today, God essentially is calling us, His Church, His 'watchman'. We are called 'His witnesses' (Matthew 28:18-20). We who have experienced the life-changing message of Jesus Christ's death for our sin, have been called to share 'the good news' (the gospel), with people in our lives. As we learn the truths of forgiveness and restoration with God, and see how our lives are being transformed by His new life within us, He commands us to be His witness to others. This is essentially, the same idea as being 'His watchman'.

Ch.33:21-33 Word comes of the fall of Jerusalem. A messenger escaped from Jerusalem, traveling for 5 months to announce that the city had fallen to the Babylonians. God once again recounts briefly the reasons for her fall –she had failed to keep the Lord's ordinances as given through Moses. On this same day, Ezekiel's tongue was loosed (his muteness removed) so that he could speak freely at any time, rather than only being able to speak when the LORD gave him a message for the people. Yet, Ezekiel was confronted with a difficult reality. God told him that the exiles who were coming to listen to him speak *were not at all interested in heeding and obeying his words!* They were only interested in listening to him as entertainment, much like they would listen to a musician with a sweet-sounding voice. Yes, Ezekiel could now *speak*; but no-one was really *listening* . . .

Ch.34 The shepherds of Israel are condemned. God declared His intentions to rid Israel of selfish and unworthy shepherds who cared very little about the actual lives that they led. He promised in this very tender chapter to be the One who will one day place the "True Shepherd" in the flock- the Son of David, to faithfully shepherd His people. But first, the leaders of Israel were condemned for abusing the sheep to meet their own needs, instead of faithfully caring for God's 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. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them” (34:4-6).

God foretold that He would remove those worthless shepherds and shepherd His own flock. At some future time, He will set “His servant David” (the Messiah) over the flock. **“I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them” (34:11); “I will place over them one shepherd, My servant David, and He will tend them and be their Shepherd (34:23).** He will restore His scattered flock to their land and finally fulfill His promises to shepherd and care for His people Israel.

In the New Testament, John 10:14-16, Jesus declared, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know My sheep and My sheep know Me- I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them in also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd”. Jesus was referring to the time that the Gentiles (non-Jews after His ascension to heaven), would believe in Him just as the Jews would. He was not exclusive, but rather inclusive. “Every tribe and nation and tongue” (Revelation 7:9) will someday have people who believe and worship Jesus the Son of God, the ‘Son of David’ and ‘Lamb Who was slain’. Pray for God to use YOU to be a ‘witness’ (watchman) to those of a different ‘tongue’. Build a friendship, pray, and be willing to ‘give a respectful account for the hope that you have’ concerning your relationship with the glorious Christ when the opportunity presents itself (1Peter 3:15).

Ch.35 Warning against Edom. A second prophecy against Edom stands alone at the end of this section of Ezekiel. Why is it separated by several chapters from the warnings against other nations, and why is it placed at the end of this part of the book? **Edom was the nation that descended from Esau**, the original twin brother (and constant rival) of **Jacob**. Jacob’s name was changed by God to **Israel** – who was the father of the **nation Israel** (whose 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel). The animosity that existed between the twins Jacob and Esau from birth until death (Genesis 25:19-34; Ch’s 27,33), continued to exist down through the centuries through their descendants. In the prophets, Edom was regularly called out for failing to act like a true “brother” to Israel, choosing instead to pile on disdain and

additional hardships in times of Israel's trouble, and to even attempt to bring about Israel's extinction. Edom (also referred to as 'Mount Seir') deserved a special message of judgment because her role in Israel's hardships was uniquely personal. God literally accused Edom of mocking HIM when they were mocking Israel. He took Edom's hatred of Israel very seriously and predicted that He would ultimately judge them for their hatred (35:11-13; and note also God's comment about Edom at 36:5).

Prophecies of Israel's future restoration: Chs.36-48

The prophets always wove visions of future hope into their collections. The hope was based on God's covenant loyalty to Israel, regardless of how unfaithful Israel was toward God. Ezekiel's vision of the future was incredibly grand and unique.

The restoration of Israel foretold for the SAKE OF GOD'S NAME: Chs.36-37. God will eventually act out of jealous love for His people and, more importantly, *to vindicate the honor of His own Name among the nations.*

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight'" (36:22-23).

He will gather Israel from the nations where they have been scattered and bring them back to their land. He will then sprinkle clean water on them and cleanse them from the filth of their idolatries and unfaithfulness. He will put a new heart in them, and put His Spirit in them so that they will be careful to walk in His ways. They will be His people, and He will be their God. The surrounding nations will look on with amazement as they see God's faithfulness to Israel. They will say: ***"The desolate land has become the Garden of Eden!"*** (36:35). The vision of ***the valley of dry bones*** coming back to life depicts the "resurrection" of Israel (both north and south) from the "death" of captivity (ch.37). God will bring them back to life, restore them to their land and appoint David as king over them.

The future protection of Israel: Chs.38-39. These chapters

depict a future invasion of Israel by a northern confederacy of nations (Gog, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal). This invasion will occur many days after Israel has been restored to her land. Based on evidence from the Book of Revelation, it seems likely that this great war will occur either at the end of the Great Tribulation, or at the end of the Millennium. The main point here is that *God will supernaturally protect His chosen people* from the destructive schemes of hostile human and spiritual forces. When it seems hopeless and that Israel has no ability to be victorious against her adversaries, God the Son will come against them to fight for Israel. Why will God provide such protection for His people? Because He wants to vindicate the honor of HIS OWN NAME, and show the nations who He really is. ***“I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD” (38:23).***

***A major theme in Ezekiel is the vindication of the honor of God’s NAME (reputation) among the nations. He IS the Sovereign Lord of all. Yet, God’s name was being profaned among the nations due to Israel’s fall and captivity in Babylon. Perhaps the “word around the region” concerning Yahweh went something like this: Yahweh must not be worth worshipping, since the people of Israel turned to other gods (idols) when they were in their land. They gave Baal and Molech and other Canaanite gods more devotion than they did Yahweh. They even filled Yahweh’s temple with their idols! Furthermore, Yahweh did not protect Israel from our armies, who are protected and empowered by our gods! So, Yahweh must not be a very significant god. He is unworthy of devotion, and He is powerless to protect his territory and his people. Or maybe Yahweh is just an unfaithful God who abandoned his people? At best, Yahweh is some low-level local Canaanite deity that the people of Israel decided to toss aside . . . and we should do the same with him.*

One thing God makes CLEAR through Ezekiel is that HIS NAME has been profaned among the nations because of Israel . . . and GOD WILL ACT TO VINDICATE HIS NAME and SHOW HIS TRUE CHARACTER to the nations. God is jealous for the honor of His own name (reputation). And He is angry when His name (His character-who He really is) is misrepresented to the world. The future restoration of Israel (which God will bring about through His own great power and faithfulness) will demonstrate to *the world* who He really is – the *Sovereign Lord* of all humanity!

God uses people to make Himself known to the world. Today, you are His representative, His “ambassador” (2Corinthians 5:20). To put it differently: The only picture of Jesus that some people will ever have is you. So the question is: **How would people describe JESUS after looking at YOU for a while?** Is your life becoming a faithful witness to the character of Jesus? Or, has the name of Jesus (His reputation) been taking a hit because of you?

The future dwelling of God within Israel: Chs.40-48. The book of Ezekiel closes in a most dramatic and fitting way. Recall that Ezekiel was born into a priestly family, but he was unable to minister in a physical temple since he was an exile in Babylon. Yet, God gave Ezekiel the unique opportunity to “see” two temples. In the earlier chapters he was transported in visions to Jerusalem to see the abominable idolatries taking place in the temple built by King Solomon. Now, in the final chapters, Ezekiel is given a detailed vision/blueprint of 1) a glorious future temple and 2) a restored land. The description of the temple reads like a long verbal blueprint. To date, no Jewish temple has been built according to these specifications. It seems likely that he was seeing a vision of a temple that would be built during the millennial reign of Christ, when Jesus will set up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years with the Jewish nation at the center of human history. Most importantly, Ezekiel saw ***the glory of God coming again to dwell with His people (43:1-5).*** This was the pinnacle vision of Ezekiel, depicting the restoration of Israel in relationship with Yahweh.

God’s Unconditional Promises

Throughout the messages that God proclaimed through Ezekiel, God wanted one main message clear: No matter how things looked at a certain time in human history, He was still the **Sovereign LORD and keeper of His promises.** God keeps His promises when the other person, or nation fails to keep theirs. The prophecies of Israel’s future and of the other nations through Ezekiel, were to declare that **GOD IS THE LORD AND THERE IS NO OTHER.** **Satan** declared to Jesus when he tempted Him in the wilderness, that he (Satan) *‘owned the nations, and they all belonged to him’ (Matthew 4:8).* It has been a spiritual cosmic battle from before earth was created (Ezekiel 28), when Satan claimed his supreme rule over the Sovereign LORD of all. His lie to himself and to all of humanity has been that we are all able to dethrone the ‘Sovereign One’ with no consequences.

Israel learned that is not reality, and each of us must eventually learn that is not reality! YET- God has continually promised to forgive and restore a people for Himself, starting with Israel, who will recognize Him as their God, and believe in His Son as the True Shepherd and Savior.

*No matter what you are going through, it is a huge encouragement to daily remember that God sees you and is a promise-keeping Shepherd and Savior of your soul. Eternity is hard to comprehend. 'Forever' just doesn't seem real. Yet, each of the prophets have faithfully reminded you that God will keep His promise to Israel, and ultimately to anyone who believes in His Son. He will restore and make all things new. In this world you WILL have trials and tribulations. Take courage that Jesus, God's Son has overcome this world (John 14). You will eventually live again and enjoy the magnificent promises of God, prophesied through faithful men and women throughout the ages. This life is **not** all there is!*

Discussion Questions

1. Ezekiel was called by God as a 30 year old to be a “watchman” (or witness) to the people around him, about the true heart and character of God. He served God for 22 years. Certainly NOT an easy assignment that involved losing his wife (Ch.24). How has his life and message inspired you?
2. GOD’S NAME and GOD’S FAME - God’s name was HOLY yet He put His reputation into the hands of humans. Most of the time they ruined His reputation to the other nations, which kept them from believing that HE ALONE was the only and TRUE GOD. How do you think God’s name and fame are being proclaimed through **your life**? If people based their view of God and Jesus His Son on **your life**, what do you think they would figure out about God?
3. Ezekiel had to live most of his life in Babylon. Although he was a God-fearing person, he still paid a price for the rebellious behaviors of his nation - a high cost that both personally caused him to lose his wife, but also through his witness as a watchman. How are **you** experiencing a cost today, because of either personal choices, or the choices of those around you?
4. God has left us with a hopeful message concerning a future 1,000 year period where His Son will reign with justice, and there will be a time of true belief in Him and true worship. How does that give **you** hope?