

What's the Message – Lesson 79

Today we conclude our study of Ezekiel, with a look into some of his visions.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray: O God, You have called us to be your fruitful people. Therefore, by the working of Your Spirit in our hearts, grant that by faith we might always abide in our Lord Jesus and He in us, for apart from Him we can do nothing. Amen.

The book of Ezekiel is filled with some bizarre visions, but their overall message can be clearly drawn without going into an attempt to explain each detail. One clear theme can be seen in chapter 33, verse 11, where we read: *As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?*

And Ezekiel echoes the warning of Isaiah, chapter 29, verse 13 – a verse that Jesus quotes in Matthew 15:8 – *And they come to you as people come; and they sit before you as My people, and they hear what you say, but will not do it; for with their lips they show much love, but their heart is set on their gain.* Or, as Jesus expressed it, “their heart is far from Me.”

Then, in imagery foreign to us city-dwellers of the internet age, in chapter 34 God calls the Children of Israel His sheep, the sheep of His fold, and warns the appointed shepherds that they have misled His flock, and will be judged accordingly. The conclusion of this illustration is found in the words of verses 30 and 31: *And they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel are My people . . . you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord.*

After this comes chapter 37, one of the more familiar chapters of Ezekiel, a chapter that is often the object of disrespectful humor – the chapter about the valley of dried bones coming together and walking around. Then this image

is followed by a lengthy, detailed vision in chapters 40 through 48, about Ezekiel being transported back to Jerusalem and seeing it restored.

That, Teacher, is a highly condensed introduction into the last chapters of Ezekiel. This is a book so full of strange imagery that it is hard to see the meaning for us today. So, once again I must ask, what's the message we should draw from all of this?

First, remember the audience to whom Ezekiel preached and wrote. All outside appearances showed a destroyed nation. They were a disconsolate, dejected people. What kind of a message did they need from a prophet of God? Was it not a word of comforting reassurance that Yahweh was still in control, and that He would bring this time of punishment and trial to an end that showed His power and glory?

Consider these words from chapter 36, beginning with verse 22:
Therefore say to the house of Israel . . . Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake that I am about to act, but for the sake of My name which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name . . . and the nations will know that I am the Lord. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And what is the significance and meaning of the vision of the dried bones? Look at verse 12, where we read: *Thus says the Lord God: Behold I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O My people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. . . . And I will put My spirit within you, and you shall live*

Are those words not comforting to a people that have been depressed and distressed? But Ezekiel does not stop with just a comforting promise. He goes on to describe through a vision how Israel would be restored to its homeland. In this vision he is taken up by the Lord and set down on a high mountain overlooking the site of

Jerusalem. But it was an entirely new Jerusalem, one that was thoroughly and wonderfully planned and built. And it was now the home of the entire family of the children of God. It is a lengthy and detailed vision and Ezekiel gives the complete account of it beginning in chapter 40 and going to the end of the book in chapter 48.

The point of the message of these chapters is in a few verses in chapter 43, where we read: *Afterward He brought me to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of His coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. . . . I heard One speaking to me out of the temple; and He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.*

Certainly these were comforting words to the exiles, but what about their meaning to you? Let's make this a bit personal. Have you ever had a time of trial in your life that tested you and depressed you? Was it a matter out of your control? Did you, like the exiles in Babylon deserve the treatment you were receiving? Where could you turn for comfort and guidance? Are these words of Ezekiel not just as applicable and comforting to you today as they were some 3,000 years ago? As Ezekiel said: "Turn to the Lord, and live."

Next time we shall begin our study of the return from Babylon and the reconstruction of Israel.