



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 5: The Message of the Prophets

Lesson 2: God's Warning For Israel—Ezekiel 1-3

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

Ezekiel lived around the same time as the prophets Jeremiah and Daniel, during the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (between 593 BC and 565 BC). He initially trained to serve as a priest in the temple, but received a radical vision from God that deepened his relationship with the Lord and his calling in life. Out of that encounter, he began to reach out to the Israelites with a message that would turn their hearts back to the Lord after a long pattern of rebelling. The message was to be so specific and clear that whether they listened or ignored it they couldn't deny that "a prophet has been among them" (Ezekiel 2:5).

The purpose for such a stern warning for Israel is that their rebellion had compounded and brought them to the brink of their destruction and exile. Like other prophets, Ezekiel endured these trying times while trying to speak into the actions of his fellow Jews. The signs he performed on behalf of God to reach such hard people were met with such wickedness that he may very well be one of the most faithful prophets ever to walk the earth.

Certainly this is why the Lord told him "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you" (Ezekiel 3:10). Without a true belief and understanding in what God was asking, there is no way he could have bore the hardships presented to him. Consider this list of Ezekiel's activities in reaching the rebellious community around him:

- Was made mute until God gave him something worth saying.
- Inscribed "Jerusalem" on a brick and pretended to lay siege to it with an iron plate to symbolize the coming violence.
- Laid on his left side in public for 390 days, the number of years of Israel's sin.
- Laid on his right side in public for 40 days, the number of years of Judah's sin.
- Was asked to cook his bread with human excrement, which was changed to cattle's at Ezekiel's pleading, all to show the depth of Israel and Judah's famine to come from the siege on the city.
- Cut off his hair and beard, dividing it into three parts, the way the Israelites would be destroyed by famine/disease, slaughtered outside the city and by being chased away.
- Said difficult things to important people, like how King Zedekiah would have a hole dug in the wall for him to go through, cover his face so he could not see the land, and be caught in a snare (Ezekiel 12:12-13). No doubt this important individual would not like this and would create backlash, but invariably his eyes were put out and the prophesy was fulfilled.

- Was not allowed to mourn for his wife's death the way God would not be able to mourn for the people He loves when they receive the punishment they brought upon themselves.

All in all, Ezekiel was trying to cope with a world gone astray who wouldn't listen to anything to the contrary. He brought this message to everyone, including the leaders of Israel who had become poor shepherds over the people. Again, this wasn't just to criticize but to seek and save that which was lost. The setting Ezekiel lived in required desperate action since a very real invasion was on its way.

OUR STORY

Ezekiel was in what seemed like an impossible situation among those in his generation. It is comparably difficult for us to grasp how dire things became for him, especially when our lives have the illusion of stability.

Once we get a better view of what's really going on, we have to maintain perspective after such revelation. Often Christians get tired in doing good because they feel as if they've "done enough." As we let down our guard, our passion drops as well and we become increasingly open to attacks from Satan. There is a reason the apostle Peter calls us to "be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

We must become hill-takers or we will lose ground. Ezekiel's example challenges us to experience a life-changing vision of God and be shaken to our core because of Him. Sometimes our struggle isn't so much that evil will completely overtake our heart but that we'll settle for something less than a powerful relationship with the Lord.

A one-on-one encounter with God may be precisely what you need. He can give you a new vision and give you momentum in the right direction. At times this will be a new task in your life, such as giving you a message to share with others. He could give you specific steps forward so you can eventually understand the culture shock you're currently experiencing. The Lord may even set you right back into the context you're in, but the difference will be that you experienced a vision of His glory that will sustain you into any prophetic ministry He asks of you.

OTHERS' STORY

The New Testament version of Ezekiel may very well be the book of Revelation. God inspired John the disciple of Jesus to write it, and many of the visions he shared remind us that we're a part of something active and large. Christ asked His followers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

According to Ezekiel, we're responsible for the eternities of other people we ignore:

"When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself" (Ezekiel 3:18-19).

This is the call we share with others around the globe and from every era of Christendom. We need to reach everyone for the Lord, not by our skills or abilities but out of our relationship with the Lord. As Christ said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

THE WORLD'S STORY

God loves the nations. When the Holy Spirit first came upon the disciples, He enabled the believers to speak in languages familiar to hundreds of foreigners visiting Jerusalem at the time. Even since the beginning of God's chosen people, when Abraham was chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation, an appointment was placed upon him by God to speak salvation into the world:

“Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3).

God's people are blessed to be a blessing to all people. As we find His love ultimately realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we must see that we have a message that can save the world. Before the cross, the laws, rules, and regulations found in the Old Testament were only half understood. After the cross, everything made sense.

God pours out His Holy Spirit upon those who receive Him. They are imbued with special gifts and are marked with a purpose to let His kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Bible further says that we are God's workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). With a message so imminent and so glorious, how can we not accept all trials as Ezekiel did, and possibly even more, for the sake of the world?