The Weird Yet Wonderful Prophet

Ezekiel 1:1-3

Ezekiel is the strangest of all the Old Testament prophets; we will call him the weird yet wonderful prophet.

*The personhood of Ezekiel (1:1)*... His name is mentioned twice (1:3; 24:24); mentioned nowhere else in Scripture; his name means “strengthened by God.”

He was 25 when taken captive and 30 when called to be a prophet; he was also a priest (1:3; Numbers 4:3); his ministry began in 593 BC and extended for 22 years until 571 BC.

He and his wife (24:15-27) were among 10,000 Jews taken captive to Babylon in 597 BC; they lived in Tel Abib, Babylon; he writes of his wife’s death (24:18), but there is no mention of his own death; rabbinical tradition says he died at the hands of an Israelite prince whose idolatry he rebuked around 560 BC.

He was a contemporary of Jeremiah who was 20 years his senior and Daniel who was near his age and was taken into captivity 8 years prior to Ezekiel; Jeremiah preached to the Jews in Judah; Ezekiel to the exiles.

*The periods of Judah’s three deportations*... 605 BC in the third year of King Jehoiakim when Judah’s prime youth were taken which included Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:1-4; 2 Kings 24:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:5-7); 598 BC at the accession of King Jehoiachin when the most useful and upper class were taken, this included Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:8-16); in 586 BC when King Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar; Jerusalem was leveled in an 18 month siege and Judah was taken captive (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36).
The purpose of the prophecy... To inform the Jews in exile of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the future glory of Israel.

The point of the prophecy... “That you will know that I am the LORD” (6:7); that phrase occurs 70 times; 29 times it is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem; 24 times with God judgment on Gentile nations; 17 times with God’s future restoration and glory of Israel.

The power of the prophecy... “The word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest... and the hand of the LORD was upon him” (1:3).

The partitioning of his prophecy... The book opens with the vision and call of Ezekiel (1-3); it can be divided into three sections: 1. The fall of Jerusalem (4-24): the designing of imminent doom (4-7); the departing of God’s glory (8-9); the describing of future judgments (12-24); 2. The future of nations (25-39): the reckoning of God on the Gentiles (25-32); the resurrection of Israel (33-39); the Russians and her allies invade Israel in the latter days (38-39); 3. The featuring of the Millennial Temple (40-48): the rebuilt temple (40-43:12); the renewed worship (43:13-47:12); the redivided land (47:13-48:1-35).

We will divide the book into two sections: “When the Glory of God Departs” (1-24) and “When the Glory of God Descends” (25-48)

The Man Ezekiel

He was a priest (1:3)... Ezekiel came from the tribe of Levi and when he was 30 he became a priest in the land of Babylon; he was to be a spiritual teacher to the captives.

He was born a few years before Moses’s book of the law was discovered in the temple as part of King Josiah’s reform (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34-35).

Can you image the Word of God lost in the house of God? It is good to have the Word, it is better to hear the Word; but it is best to heed the Word (James
1:19-25); tragically the Word of God is lost in many Church pulpits as it is totally ignored; the Word of God is not to be a “jump off place” to tickle ears, but to be carefully studied and applied.

God’s Word has been given for regenerating the soul (James 1:18; 1Peter 1:23), for reviving life (Psalm 119:50,93), for understanding God’s truths (Psalm 119:130), for converting the soul (Psalm 19:7), for making wise the simple (Psalm 19:7), for sanctifying the believer (John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26), for producing faith (Romans 10:17), for producing hope (Romans 15:4), for producing obedience (Deuteronomy 17:19,20), for cleansing the heart (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26), for cleansing the ways (Psalm 19:9), for keeping one from destructive paths (Psalm 17:4), for supporting life (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4), for promoting growth in grace (1 Peter 2:2), for building one up in the faith (Acts 20:32), for admonishing the sinner (Psalm 19:11; 1 Corinthians 10:11), for comforting the brokenhearted (Psalm 119:82; Romans 15:4), and for rejoicing the heart (Psalm 19:8;119:111).

It was the Word of God that affected Ezekiel as a young boy under the spiritual reform of King Josiah; Ezekiel was a teen ager when Josiah was killed in a battle with Pharaoh Necho of Egypt when Judah once again came under the subjugation of Egypt (2 Chronicles 35:20-27); godly leadership has a godly affect on others; reform begins at the top down; with the head of government to its citizens, with the pastor to his congregation.

*He was a prisoner (1:1; 3:24-25)*... He and his wife were part of the second deportation as his family was from the upper-class Levites of Jerusalem; the exiles all lived in Tel Abib, meaning, “hills of corn ears” where he owned a house; he lived on a farm that grew corn.

Ezekiel for a time was a prisoner in his own house and if he were to go outside there were those who would tie him up so he could not go outside (3:24-25).

Otherwise, living conditions in exile were not bad as they had no shortage of needs (Jeremiah 29); it was the best of times for they had their needs met and it was the worst of times for they were separated from God; Ezekiel’s neighbors were those who mocked Jeremiah and stoned the prophets; they were the people to whom God was calling Ezekiel to preach and prophecy.
He was a prophet (2:3-4)... The favorite term God uses to refer to Ezekiel is “son of man;” it appears 87 times; he is called to preach to a stubborn and rebellious people and declare unto them: “Thus says the Lord GOD.”

At first Ezekiel was very entertaining with his silent, pantomime style of delivering a message; he was silently communicating that Jerusalem would fall like a pile of rubbish and the people would either die by the sword, taken captive, but a few would escape; while they denied his message the day would come when they would know he had told them the truth (Ezekiel 33:33).

Many people in our nation see us as a Christian nation, blessed of God and there is no chance that we too will fall; but that has been the cry of every empire and nation from the Egyptians to the British Empire; while Ezekiel’s message is to the people of Judah, it is pertinent for us today; when you continue to sin and ignore God’s prophets judgment will ultimately come.

The Means of Ezekiel’s Prophesying

By drama... Ezekiel has been labeled as neurotic, paranoid or schizophrenic because of his unusual behavior; he prophesied by using pantomime; he acted out his messages to the people of Tel Abib (see 3:1-2; 4:1-3; 4:4-8; 4:9-17; 5:1-17; 6:1-10; 6:11-14).

By dumbness... God made Ezekiel mute except when he had a word from the Lord to declare (3:26-27); This divine controlled silence lasted until Jerusalem’s destruction confirmed his prophetic message.

By dreams... Ezekiel was given three visions: 1. A vision of God ruling over the governments of mankind (1-3); 2. A vision of being transported to Jerusalem when the hand of the Lord took him by a lock of his hair and lifted him between heaven and earth (8-11); 3. A vision of the Millennial Temple and the future glory of Israel (40-48).
The Message of Ezekiel

*Seen in the departure of God’s glory...* In 1 Samuel 4:21 we learn about the birth of Ichabod (without glory); he was the new born son of Eli’s daughter-in-law who was so named when the Philistines stole the Ark of the Covenant from the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle and the glory of God departed from the Tabernacle; Phinehas, Eli’s son and father to the child died in battle.

The departing of God’s glory from the Temple in Jerusalem is a theme that begins in Ezekiel 4 and runs through 24; His glory departs in stages-- from the Holy of Holies to over the threshold of the temple, to over the four living creatures, to over the Eastern Gate of the city, to over the Mount of Olives from where it disappears (Ezekiel 9-11); the remainder of the book is a message of hope that eventually the glory of God will return when the Messiah builds the Millennial Temple (Zechariah 6:12).

*Seen in the deception of false prophets...* It was over a ten year period that Ezekiel prophesied the departure of God’s glory from the temple in Jerusalem; there were false prophets who contradicted his message; Ezekiel kept telling the people: “The glory has departed and His glory will not return until the people repent.”

There was another kind of false prophet in the land; they were more deadly with their message; they agreed with Ezekiel that Jerusalem would fall, but that will be proof that the God of Israel is impotent; that Merodach is stronger and mightier than Yahweh.

False prophets have been around from the very beginning; they are Satan’s tool to pull people away from God; that is why it is important that we know the Word of God.

*Seen in the distain for man’s sinfulness...* Ezekiel responds to these false prophets by reminding the people of their sinfulness before God; he accuses them of being spiritual prostitutes and worse than Sodom and Gomorrah (16:44b-48); Israel was God’s covenant people; they were to be a holy nation separate from the pagan nations; they were to be God’s light to a dark world, instead they got in bed with the pagan nations.
Seen in the devastation of divine judgment... Ezekiel makes it clear to those who believe that God will spare Jerusalem and that those in captivity would soon return home: that is not going to happen; they were going to be judged for their sins; they had been pre-warned; in chapter 24 he tells the captives that God was going to make them meat for the cooking pot that was full of scum and He is going to cook the meat well until it is burned up; then He will set the empty pot on the coals until it is melted and there is nothing left but the scum to eat; He refers to the sins of the people as “scum” to be consumed (24:9-14).

Seen in the discovery of future hope (36-48)... Ezekiel ends on a positive note with the future restoration of Israel when the Messiah returns and reigns; He builds the Millennial Temple in Jerusalem from which He rules (Zechariah 6:13).

Ezekiel’s message to us: as believers our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); as the collective body, the Church, it was Paul’s prayer that Jesus be glorified in the Church to all generations (Ephesians 3:21); individually and collectively we are the recipients of God’s glory and we are to manifest that glory to all generations by living a faithful and obedient life; may none of us ever wear the name Ichabod! Amen!