

THE REVEALED MYSTERIES OF EZEKIEL

God set Ezekiel apart for service from birth. This prophet/evangelist was chosen to be a Watchman for the house of Israel. He was to hear a Word from God's mouth and give rebellious Israel a warning from Him (3:16-27). And yet he was trained to be a priest (1:3). But where in Babylon could he carry out his priestly duties now that the temple was in ruins? Surely, it would be as one who interceded for his people, who formed that bridge between God and His people and who would explain the mysteries of who God was and what God thought, to a people who had become unfaithful, deceitful and rebellious.

GOD WANTED ISRAEL TO KNOW HIM

Ps 107:1-9 stirred Israel to be reminded of what God had done for them and to give thanks for being redeemed from slavery. He promised He would satisfy not the curious who were seeking answers to academic questions but the longing soul and would fill those who truly hungered after Him with Good things. He wanted their fellowship! Today, it is God's heart for all believers in Jesus – the Messiah not just to know about Him but to truly know Him. Phil 3:10 puts it this way, "That I might know Him and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." And yet as Ezekiel discovered, God dwells in a place and in a form that almost defies explanation.

But just how do you describe God to those who have no knowledge of Him? One thing we can

do is to ask questions – just as Jesus did. He put this question to those who flocked to hear John the Baptist – recorded in Matt 11:7-10 What did you go out to see? A reed shaken by the wind? A Prophet – yes indeed but the Scribes and Pharisees who sought him out were not thirsty for knowledge. Rather, they wanted to trick John, just as they would also do to Jesus. The strange thing is that Jesus was prepared to lose these kinds of people whose motivation was wrong. Remember the Rich Young Ruler who only sought to justify himself.

HOW CAN GOD BE EXPLAINED?

Ezekiel's vision in Chapter 1-3 is awesome and complex. He struggles to describe God in terrible detail. He is struck with fear like so many who receive such a revelation and falls forward on his face; prostrate before the Lord. But here's an interesting thing. Before any further conversation, The Voice tells him to stand on his feet. I think it is worth noting which is contrary to popular experience. Nowhere in scripture do people fall backwards (except for the guards who arrested Jesus) and conversations with God are always when we are on our feet and in our right mind.

But what kind of writer was Ezekiel? Some parts of his prophecy are quite clear but many parts are hard to take in. Consequently as David Pawson says, "It's the most neglected book. It's the least favourite. Why? Because it's seems gloomy. It shows a side of God's character, few find appealing. And because it's about judgment and thereby presents a challenge to us when we would like God to be only depicted as a God of Love.

HOW AND WHY WE READ THE BIBLE?

(a) For ourselves, as a devotional guide "What is God saying to me?" (b) For others,

using favourite chapters “What is God saying to them?” Hopefully, that we might stir them to turn to the Lord by using Chs like 18 – Personal responsibility for sin; Ch 33 – The need to be watchmen; Ch 34 – Good and Bad Shepherds; Ch 36-37 – The restoration of Israel from a Valley of Dry Bones; Ch 47 – The future and the River of God (c) Read the prophecy as a whole rather than dissecting it into pieces. But that requires reading through the so-called ‘gloomy’ passages.

EZEKIEL’S PREACHING

Scholars call it Apocalyptic, which means unveiling something hidden and other worldly which we need to hear because it is relevant and directly practical. The challenge for him as for us is how do you explain urgent spiritual realities to a people who needed to hear but were too preoccupied with their own affairs? Ch 3:5-6 He recognised his own role as a Watchmen to a reluctant Israel and today our witness is as foreign to those around us – sadly, even in the Churches.

But in every generation, there seems to be a similar challenge. For Noah, he preached for 120 years and saw no-one saved except his own family. His world was far too busy with their own affairs, eating drinking, getting married etc to listen to his depressing message. Moses had a very difficult task trying to stir the Hebrews up to desire deliverance. It was only as the pressure rose, did they cry out “Save us!” Paul was rewarded with the insult of being declared ‘mad’ and a propagator of ‘strange teachings.’ (Acts 17:18; 26:24)

Then there are the contemporaries of Ezekiel. Jeremiah was accused of always speaking bad things. (Jer 20:7-11) Why couldn’t he lighten up and be a little more tolerant and balanced and stop talking about judgment all the time!

THE CHALLENGE FOR US

What do we do with parts of the Bible we find difficult? Do we resort to – “Maybe the translation is inaccurate.” “Perhaps this only applies to Israel and not to us.” “The Jews deserve all the curses but we are to inherit all the blessings.” “Maybe God has changed over the years. God worked differently in the OT than in the NT?” Then there are passages of the Bible that ‘scholars’ reject as irrational and plain silly. “These are imaginations of highly strung individuals and today because we are more cultured and sophisticated we wouldn’t speak and behave like them.”

But if only we were honest and admitted the fact that we just don’t like what we are reading. **We disagree – and we are right!** And even if we believe it, we can so easily leave aside the challenge convincing ourselves that God doesn’t demand this of us in these days because we are living in different times.

EZEKIEL’S PURPOSE FOR WRITING

His purpose is to show that God has had to do hard things. Judgment is not God’s normal kind of work. But He does these awful things for a reason. “Then you shall know that I am the Lord” – 74 times in this book. First its ‘you’ shall know. Then it is the neighbours of Israel shall know. Lastly ‘the nations’ shall know. Ezekiel is moved to live out what he speaks in a series of enacted prophecies that challenge all who read to consider that how we live our lives often speaks louder than what we say.

HIS VISION

Ezekiel’s name means “God strengthens” but is referred to 83 times as ‘Son of Man’ showing that in some ways his ministry paralleled that of Jesus. He attempts to

describe the indescribable and in many ways he writes much like Daniel and John, the author of Revelation. The Vision is full of mobility showing that God is not static and fixed in Jerusalem but constantly in motion, whose presence is universal.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS

First, they will fall upon Israel. Chs 4-24. But exile is not just God's retribution but His way to bring reform and cause them to turn back to Him. One cannot deny that Babylon cured Israel of Idolatry. Second, judgments pour upon the nations surrounding Israel because of their sheer delight to see Israel judged and they so enjoyed being used to bring this about. Chs 25-32 show how they relished their opportunity. But God would hold them to account for what they did.

EZEKIEL ENDS WITH HOPE

His message shifts from pessimism to optimism through Chs 33-39. He looks forward to the return from exile Ch 36:24-38. In chapter 37 the dry bones miraculously come together, each bone joining with the next appropriate bone. They become one nation under God with divisions healed.

After the final 'end time' battles against the Lord and His anointed in Ch 38, God's glory can be seen to spread through all nations of the earth Ch 39:21. It continues with the restoration of – not the Church – but Israel to her former glory and better. Nevertheless, the church is grafted in and gentile believers will also rule and reign with Him as full citizens with all the saints as Zechariah so wonderfully describes in his prophecy. Chapter 14 wonderfully shows that all the nations will ultimately focus their attentions and affections upon the Eternal City of the Great King – Jerusalem.