

Lecture Five. Ezekiel.

The son of Buzi, Ezekiel was a priest who was among the thousands of people from Judah exiled along with King Jehoiachin after the attack on Jerusalem in March 597. They settled in Tel Abib (south of Babylon). His wife died there just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Following a largely chronological order, the book uses an autobiographical form that is written in the first person but still leaves the picture of the author deeply mysterious (especially the unusual nature of his symbolic actions, which seem designed to break down the stiffness of a culture whose conventions leave no room for divine revelation).

His main concern seems to be the point beyond himself to God's glory and what He wants to reveal. The book consists mostly of his interactions with God; references to the behavior of other people generally come about only in things that the LORD says to Ezekiel (e.g., 12: 21-28, 33:10-33). The first half announces God's judgment, the second half His promises. The prophecies of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem took place between 593 and 588. Once the attack upon Jerusalem has commenced, Ezekiel proclaims God's judgments against the nations (especially Egypt, with whom Zedekiah had tried to form an alliance. His last visions (concerning the restoration of the Temple, the people, and the land) come about some fourteen years after the destruction of Jerusalem, c. 571.

I. Prophecies of judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah – 1:1–24:27

- 1:1–3:27 – Vision of God's glory and holiness in a foreign and unclean land: a chariot, wheels winged creatures, coals of fire – a sign of hope, for the LORD can and does reveal Himself even during exile. Ezekiel's call (1:1-28) to be a watchman for his defiant people in July 593 (four years after his deportation), including the scene in which he devours a scroll with the decrees of God. The power of God changes his location suddenly (3:12, 24; 8:3; 37:1; 40:1). It also causes him stupor (3:15), muteness (3:25-27; 24:27), paralysis (4:8), trembling (12:17-18), groans (21:11).
- 4:1–7:27 – Jerusalem under siege, symbolic gestures, comments on Jerusalem, Israel's mountains, land
 - 4:1-13 – using a brick to portray a battle in miniature to announce the coming siege of Jerusalem.
 - 4:4-8 – lying on the side for months at a time
 - 4:9-17 – eating only bread and water
 - 5:1-4 – shaving his head and beard, chopping his hair with a sword, burning it, casting it to the wind.
 - 7:9-27 – prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of the wicked
- 8:1–11:25 – Departure of the Glory of God from the Temple (a sign of judgment and of the LORD's intention to transform His people. Note the references to ritual purity in the tradition of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17:1–26:46) and Temple issues, suggesting that he had a school of priestly disciples at 8:1, 14:1, 20:1.
- 12:1–14:23 – The exile, the end of the false prophets and diviners
 - 12:1-20 – symbolic action of packing a bag, digging a hole in the wall, walking through it.
- 15:1–19:14 Historical allegories and judgment sermons
 - 15:1-8 – the metaphor of a vine burnt and useless to describe Judah
 - 16:1-63 – the metaphor of the unfaithful wife to describe Israel's infidelities; the Covenant: 16:63
 - 17:1-24 – the metaphor of an eagle to describe Nebuchadnezzar
 - 18:1-32 – individual responsibility: every is free to respond rightly to God (see also 14:12-23)
 - 18:2 – countering the error of saying that the faults of the parents hold children in bondage.
 - 18:23 – the LORD delights not in the death of His people but in its life. Commandments 18:5-9
 - 19:1-14 – lament over Judah and her last kings; the cubs of a lioness to describe young kings
- 20:1–24:27 – the crimes of Israel and their punishment
 - 20:1-44 – Israel's infidelities; the Covenant (20:44)
 - 21:1-37 – the sword of execution
 - 21:23-32 – symbolic action of tracing a map of the Babylonian king's route to Jerusalem

- 22:1-31 – the offenses of Jerusalem
- 23:1-49 – Jerusalem and Samaria; each generation has a chance to break with its sinful past.
- 24:1-27 – the siege of Jerusalem
 - 24:4-8 – symbolic action: boiling fine meat and bones in a rusty pot
 - 24:19-24 – the only dialogue in the book not involving God and Ezekiel; being asked why he does not grieve his wife's death and carry out the traditional rites of mourning – a symbolic action to signal God's decision to allow Jerusalem to be destroyed.

II. Oracles against foreign nations – 25:1–32:31

- 25:1–32:31 – against the immediate neighbors of Israel
- 26:1-28:26 – against Tyre and Sidon; the island-fortress of Tyre as a sea-going boat
- 29:1–32:31 – against Egypt, the metaphor of a crocodile to describe the pharaoh

III. Prophecy of restoration for Judah – 33:1–39:29 – a theology of Covenant (36:29; 34:30-31, 37:26)

- 33:1-33 – the renewal of the calling of Ezekiel, the gifted teacher of the Law who is well informed about current events. Again, the image of the watchman. Repentance opens one's life to a future in which God will form a new heart and a new spirit, bringing freedom from the influence of past decisions.
- 34:1-31 – the divine shepherd and his flock (cf. Ps 23) – an elaboration of Jeremiah's prophecy of a new branch of the Davidic line (Jer 23:1-6) through a judgment vs. recent kings (34:1-10), as a reminder of God's love for His people (34:11-22), and a promise of a new covenant of peace (34:23-31).
[Jesus will often employ this image to show how He draws back those who have strayed and directs His Church to do the same – see John 10:7-15. Further, Jesus is the true David who establishes the eternal covenant of peace between God and His people (Jew and Gentile) – see John 10:16-18]
- 35:1-15 – the mountains of Edom
- 36:1-38 – the mountains of Israel, God's spirit [important for John's theology of baptism; John 4:23-24]
 - 36:16-38 – the new mind and heart that God will place within His people in a perduring way
- 37:1-28 – the valley of the dead – dry bones that He brings to life by the breath of His command (recalling creation); the rising of the dead as a symbol of the restoration of the exiles to the land [a foreshadowing of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection].
- 38:1–39:29 – the final battle: Gog and Magog

IV. The new community and the new Temple – 40:1–48:35

- 40:1–43:12 – return of God's Glory to the land and the promise of a new Temple; the LORD's presence.
- 43:13–46:24 – the new order of service to be observed
- 47:1-12 – the waters flowing from the Temple: the life-giving powers of God's glory will extend to all creation; creation will seem to return to its original state in Eden (Gen 2:10-14). [A foreshadowing of the heavenly Jerusalem – see Revelation 21:1–22:5]
- 47:13–48:35 – the division of the Land.