

What's the Point...of Ezekiel?

Mark Garner

Ezekiel has been taken captive by the Babylonians when God begins speaking to him. In the book of Ezekiel, God opens the heavens to give us a deeper look at his nature and the purposes of his heart, and to help us understand our walk with him. Ezekiel's visions are at times complex, obscure, graphic, or even confusing. Yet in each of them we see God's holiness and his understanding.

The Heavens Were Opened (Overview Of Ezekiel)

The book of Ezekiel is full of vivid images that call us to look beyond the surface, and let God teach us his ways and his thoughts. We frequently see the phrase that "they will know that I am the Lord," when we realize our need for our Heavenly Father, and when we realize the depths of his care for us. Ezekiel opens with visions and images of God's glory, holiness, & righteousness (Ezekiel 1-9). His first vision is complicated to the point of being almost incomprehensible; these sights are meant to be pondered, not analyzed, and they are to help us think about God's nature.

As Ezekiel describes one image as "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord", these visions are shadows of God's full glory, of the life he provides, of the depths of his understanding. As God explains that the path ahead for Ezekiel will be full of 'thorns' and 'scorpions', he gives the prophet a scroll to eat, and the words of God taste sweet to the spirits those who seek him in truth. God's reassurance to Ezekiel is that his calling is simply to speak the truths God gives him, knowing that some will listen, while many will reject them.

After describing the idolatry and spiritual emptiness in Judah, the book turns to the exile and the return that would later follow (Ezekiel 10-18). Even as God uses vivid images to explain his sorrow over their wandering, he expresses his eagerness to re-establish his covenant with them, so that they will know that he is the Lord, a gracious God.

The next section is a series of divine laments (Ezekiel 19-32) over the Israelites and the things they trusted in, and images of the need for God we all have. When we realize that God alone can satisfy the needs of our spirits, we will know that he is the Lord. As Ezekiel next describes the Judeans' future return from exile, we also see images of our heavenly Shepherd Jesus.

We then see God's desire to give us new life (Ezekiel 33-39). Without God, we are sheep without a shepherd, yet God himself is our faithful Shepherd who looks for us and brings us back to his heavenly pasture when we hear his call. Our Heavenly Father also renews us inwardly, and gives us a new heart and a new spirit. This particularly foreshadows Jesus' ministry, as do similar themes when he brings life to the dry bones. Without God, our lives are empty and our spirits are dry; yet when we open our hearts, he can breathe life into us, and we will know that he is the Lord.

The final section (Ezekiel 40-48) figuratively describes a new city and a new temple (see 40:2-4 and Revelation 21:10-11). God's glory returns and fills the temple, as God and Jesus make their home with us. The river flowing from God is another image that we see also in Revelation (47:2-9 and 47:12, see Revelation 22:1-2). As the river starts with a trickle yet continues to increase, the more that we let God open our eyes, the more we can see the depth of God's grace and compassion for us. Ezekiel closes by telling us that this new city will be called, The Lord Is There.

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What's the Point...of Ezekiel? Caleb Dillinger

Ezekiel is another major prophet of the Old Testament, not “major” in the sense that he is more important, but that his book is rather lengthy (48 chapters). Ezekiel is actually introduced as a priest, which is not exactly common among the Old Testament prophets. He also is receiving visions, rather than teachings, again not always present among the other prophets. And finally, he is receiving these visions (at least at the beginning) while in exile after the Israelites had been overrun by the Chaldeans.

This series asks the question, “What’s the point of each book of the Bible?” This question is especially nuanced with an understanding of relevance for 21st century American Christianity. What makes Ezekiel so relevant?

First, it deals with the Lord’s Spirit more than every Old Testament book except Isaiah. As Christians who have the Lord’s Spirit, we should be especially attentive to how the Lord’s Spirit is used throughout the Bible. Second, the phrase “Son of Man” occurs over 90 times in this book, and Jesus will inherit that title at his coming. Any connection to the Lord Jesus is well worth attention. Third, it juxtaposes the evil of idolatry with the glory of God, a particularly relevant topic for modern day struggles with modern idols. And finally, a key theme of the book of Ezekiel is the new heart given to God’s people by God himself.

Without God, all people are lost – God’s people and people of the world! Doing some right things is not enough. Having some right knowledge is not enough. In order to be in right standing with God, Christians need God, and this requires a spiritual change of heart. It’s become rather popular in contemporary Christian circles to talk about a relationship with God as “being about the heart.” It’s not how many righteous deeds you can do, or how many sins are attributed to your name. It’s about the heart. Some of that concept, rightfully so, comes from Ezekiel. Three separate chapters in Ezekiel bring up this new heart (11, 18, 36), with the final reference being a more well-known verse in Ezekiel: And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (36:26). It is God who grants us this new heart, and as his people who constantly battle sin, we need it!

Why read Ezekiel today? Look no further than the call against sin and the call to God to breathe new life into our sinfully dead bodies. Ezekiel proves God alone can do just that.