



Ezekiel 1-33

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:47

The book of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest who had been living in Jerusalem during the first Babylonian attack on the city. And they spared the city, but they took a first wave of Israelite prisoners and hauled them off into exile, and Ezekiel was among them.

So the book begins five years after all that, and Ezekiel is sitting on the bank of an irrigation canal near his Israelite refugee camp, and it's his 30th birthday no less, the year that he would've been installed as a priest in Jerusalem. And then all of a sudden, Ezekiel has this vision. He sees a storm cloud approaching, and then inside the cloud are four strange creatures that have wings outstretched and touching each other. And these creatures each had four faces. And then he saw four wheels, one by each creature, and then he saw that the wings of the creatures were supporting this dazzling platform. And then on that platform is a throne, and then sitting on that throne is this human-like creature glowing and shrouded in fire. And then all of a sudden, Ezekiel realizes what he's seeing! He calls it "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." It's God riding his royal throne chariot.

Now, the word "glory." In Hebrew, it's *kavod*. It means heavy or significant. The biblical authors use this word to describe the physical appearance and manifestation of God's significance when he shows up in person. These images in the vision, they're very similar to what happened when God appeared on Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus. And it's also very similar to the depictions of God's presence over the ark of the covenant. And that's actually the most shocking thing about Ezekiel's vision: What is God's glory doing in Babylon? It's supposed to be above the ark of the covenant in the temple in Jerusalem.

Chapters 1-11

01:47-05:17

And so the first section of the book opens to explore that question as Ezekiel begins to accuse Israel of rebellion. So God first speaks to Ezekiel from the throne chariot, and he commissions him as a prophet. Ezekiel is to accuse Israel of breaking their covenant agreement with God in a couple of ways. Israel has given their allegiance to other gods and has been worshipping idols, and this has all led to rampant social injustice and violence. And so as a result, God appoints Ezekiel to warn the people. The first Babylonian attack that took Ezekiel into exile is going to be matched by another, and Jerusalem, its temple, all face imminent destruction.

So Ezekiel uses words and more to get his message across. He also performs sign acts. These were a form of street theater. Ezekiel would go out in public and start behaving in these really bizarre ways that were like parables of his prophetic message. So he was supposed to build a tiny model of Jerusalem and then stage an attack on it, or he was to shave off all of his hair and then chop it up with a sword. Or, the most extreme, he was to play the role of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. And he would lay on his side for over a year, eating food cooked over poop, as a sign of the nasty food that people will have to eat during the siege of Jerusalem. And perhaps the most disheartening thing of all is the bad news God gave Ezekiel: that no one was going to listen to him. Israel would reject him because of their rebellious and hard heart, and this recalls Moses' description of the people after the wilderness rebellions, when he predicted that exile would one day happen. And Ezekiel had the unfortunate privilege of seeing it all come to pass.

And so a dismayed Ezekiel, he begins to perform his task, and after about a year, he has another vision. This one is about the temple. He goes on this virtual tour of the temple, and he sees what is happening there in his absence, and it is not good. In the outer courtyard, in front of the temple, he sees this large idol statue, and then he sees the elders of Israel worshipping other gods, both outside and inside the temple. And then he sees the women of Israel, they're worshipping a Babylonian god named Tammuz. And the vision ends with God's glorious throne chariot moving up and away from the temple. It's leaving, going east, headed towards Babylon.

And so in chapter 11, we come to see why and how God's glory appeared to Ezekiel there in Babylon. Israel's idolatry and their covenant violations, it's become so blatant and offensive that God has left his temple. They've driven him away, and he consigns it to destruction. But God hasn't abandoned his people; rather, he goes into exile with them. And so at the end of this vision in chapter 11, God promises that he will return a remnant of Israel back to the land. And he'll transform them by removing their heart of stone and giving them a new soft heart of flesh, so that they can love and truly follow their God after all. This is a small glimmer of hope, and it's

quickly submerged under the reality of the imminent destruction. But chapter 11 is the key transition, and it helps us understand how the rest of the book has been designed.

So the next three sections are all announcements of God's judgment, first on Israel, then on the nations around Israel, and then on Jerusalem itself. But then after that, the hopeful conclusion of chapter 11 gets developed in the final three sections of the book: first hope for Israel, then for the nations, and then for all creation.

Chapters 12-24

05:18-06:18

Chapters 12-24 focus on God's judgment coming to Israel, and this is a diverse collection of poems and essays. And here Ezekiel shows his fondness for parable and allegory. So he depicts Israel as a burnt, useless stick, or as a rebellious wife, or as a dangerous, raging lion that gets captured, or as two promiscuous sisters. These are all depictions of Israel's senseless rebellion and idolatry that result in their ruin.

In this section, Ezekiel also acts like a lawyer. He begins arguing the case that, first of all, Jerusalem's destruction is truly deserved after centuries of covenant violation, and that even if the most righteous people in the world—like Noah or Daniel or Job—were alive and praying for God to spare Israel, God would not accept their prayers; it's far too late. And so God's goodness actually demands that he bring justice on this generation of Israel. The exile has become inevitable. They've reached the point of no return.

Chapters 25-32

06:18-06:50

Following this, Ezekiel focuses first on the nations immediately around Israel and then on the two most powerful states in the region, Egypt and then Tyre. Israel has allied with these nations and adopted their gods and their idols, and so God accuses the kings of Tyre and Egypt for arrogantly viewing themselves as gods who get to define right and wrong on their own terms. And God holds these kings accountable for their pride, and he announces that he will use Babylon to bring them down. They will face God's justice along with everybody else.

Chapter 33

06:51-07:09

Following these really intense sections is a short story in chapter 33. Ezekiel is met by a refugee who has just arrived from Jerusalem, and he gives them the report that Babylon has attacked the city of Jerusalem, that the city has fallen and the temple is destroyed. Ezekiel's grim warnings have become a reality.

Conclusion

07:10-07:22

But remember the end of chapter 11. That's not the end of the story. And so in the next video, we'll explore Ezekiel's profound vision of hope. But for now, that's the first half of the book of Ezekiel.

