

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twenty-Six

Ezekiel

A Heart of Flesh, A Holy Temple, A Healing River

(John 5:39; Ezekiel 36:24-27)

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:24-27).

Introduction

The news can be so disturbing that we may opt out of current events. Drug cartels shooting entire families, political unrest reaching levels of smear where one side cannot help but accuse the other of Stalinism, Nazism or some other form of fascism. Christians throughout the world being persecuted, tortured and killed for merely name the name of Christ. And none of this speaking to the so-called natural disasters of disease, earthquakes, hurricanes and famines.

Of course, reading history books will bring no brighter message. One hardly walks away from reading of the Holocaust, the Conquests of Genghis Khan (where he killed approximately 10 percent of the world's population), The Black Death (14th century) where 70 percent of Europe's population was wiped out, the Armenian Genocide, the Soviet and Chinese Communist Crimes of the 20th century responsible for over 100 million deaths, and more.

Of course, this is all so macro. Generally speaking, at least here in the west at the micro level, life is good. At least it is good until...It is good until it isn't. Until we get sick or a loved one gets sick. It is good until we lose our jobs or someone we love does something foolish and horrible. And both the micro and the macro difficulties pale in light of that which is eternal. Eternal life and eternal death will make the pleasures, pains and passions of this life appear insignificant by comparison.

In terms of pain, Paul wrote:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

Conversely, Jesus gives the other side of the eternal equation:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

In light of all of this, we sure can use a bit of good news. We need healing. From whence does this healing come? And if this healing is presented as the answer to the plight of man (since this plight is generally the consequence of the sinful human heart), how confident can we be that we, or anyone else, would receive or embrace it?

Ezekiel chronicles a time in Israel's history where their rebellion had so controlled them that they, as a nation, were being judged into captivity. The world was a dark, dark place. Israel had become like the severely evil nations by which they were surrounded. They shed the blood of those who were not guilty, sacrificed their own children, treated their parents with contempt, extorted the sojourner, engaged in lewd and incestuous actions, took bribes and much more.

And all of this flowed from their idolatry. As much as the natural man repudiates religion, all people are religious at heart. Our guiding principles, urges, motivations, impulses are our gods. And when that god is not God, the fruit is licentiousness—a disregard for that which is good, right and true.

A popular suggestion among today's neo-atheists is that one needn't believe in God in order to do good. They, perhaps with some credibility, will highlight the scandals within Christianity, both now and in history. But I would argue that what marks Christianity as distinct and necessary is not the superior ethical behavior of Christians (even though it should be, and many times, has been established), but that apart from acknowledging an eternal, self-existent, transcendent, omni-benevolent being, i.e. God, who has revealed Himself to creation, we can't even know right from wrong. Are we not engaged in this very discussion with our friends, neighbors, co-workers and classmates on a daily basis? This difficulty isn't merely doing right. It is knowing what is right.

What we read of in this book of Ezekiel, written some six-hundred years before the birth of Christ, is God's answer to the human dilemma. In a reverse order, the book will climax with a beautiful picture of living waters at the healer of the nations. It will specify from when those waters flow. And we learn how God ensures that we will respond and not be forever trapped in our own blindness-*A Heart of Flesh, A Holy Temple, A Healing River*.

Survey of Ezekiel

As we survey Ezekiel, note the backdrop for this Good News. The backdrop for the Good News is the bad news. Ezekiel himself is one of those taken captive into Babylon where he prophesies against the lying prophets who are claiming that things are just fine, **"saying 'peace' when there is no peace"** (Jeremiah 13:10, 16). Like someone who knows they're sick and should see a doctor but rather listens to their untrained and uneducated friends telling them they'll be just fine.

It was the commission of Ezekiel to inform them that things were not fine. It is a great act of love to care for another person's soul. It is also our responsibility before God to, as it were, sound **"the trumpet"** of warning. So deep is this call that to fail, at some level, places their blood on our hands (Ezekiel 33:6).

The first three chapters of Ezekiel he sees visions of judgment while being ordained for his task. How ominous and certain the judgment. Ezekiel sees winged creatures with the four faces and four wings. The faces were of a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle. It is said these convey

strength, service, intelligence and spirituality. The wings had hands, symbolizing the full capacity for service.

Their wings touched each other leaving no gap for escape and they **“turned not” (Ezekiel 1:12)**, demonstrating their undeviating prosecution of their task. We also see wheels within wheels which turn not. And they are full of eyes. In all of this we are given a picture of the wheels of providence and God’s omniscience (all-knowing). Yet in all of this foreboding judgment, he also sees **“the appearance of a man” (Ezekiel 1:26)**. It is God who appears “in the likeness of enthroned humanity”¹ Accompanied by **“the appearance of a rainbow”** indicating His Divine faithfulness. We take comfort in the promise given through Noah that God’s judgment (at least in the negative sense) would not be universal.

Even within Israel there would be those God would mark for safety and redemption. And what picture would be given to signify this?

...and the Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it” (Ezekiel 9:4).

There appears to be a great deal of interest in the Mark of the Beast. Not so much in the Mark of God. Suffice it to say, that the primary message is not that of a tattoo. The forehead and the hand signify the way one thinks and the subsequent work. One can liken this to faith and practice. We believe (forehead) we follow (hand).

For the next twenty chapters (4-24) we read of God’s judgment upon His own covenant people. This is followed by fifteen more chapters (25-39) where God addresses the destinies of the surrounding gentile nations. We’ve gone into this in previous books, so I won’t labor the issue here except to observe a few significant items.

If the “chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” it would appear that the chief end of God is to glorify Himself that we might enjoy Him forever. Over seventy times in these chapters we read the

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 569). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

words “They shall know that I am Jehovah.” Truly, if God were not God, such a motive would be the ravings of a madman.

But there is no higher attainment for humanity than to know God. In his wonderful, must-read, work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer opens the book with a staggering quote from a Charles Spurgeon sermon which had been given in 1855 (at the age of 20!). The entire quote would be well worth the read, but I will just give the conclusion:

Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.²

We complete our survey of Ezekiel with chapters 40-48 and the building of the final temple. This building of this temple becomes a matter of much debate which we haven’t time to enter into here. A couple of notable things as we seek out where Christ is to be found in Ezekiel.

Christ in Ezekiel

As you may know, the rebuilding of the temple is a matter of great popularity and sensationalism in the modern eschatological (end-time) culture. Suffice it to say (and this may be shocking to hear) that the New Testament mentions the rebuilding of the temple only once.

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”²⁰ Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it

² Packer, J. I. (1973). [*Knowing God*](#) (electronic ed.). Downers Grove: InterVarsity.

up in three days?"²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:19-21).

It is also worth observing that the outer dimensions of the temple (Ezekiel 42:15-20) in Ezekiel equal a square mile which covers a space as large as the whole city (requiring it to traverse bodies of water). It also requires one explain the source of water which becomes an impassable river. Add to this, that if this temple is yet future and a structure of worship (in which the glorified Christ sits), the animal sacrifices will be reinstated. One must not grapple with the Christology (study of Christ) of a system of worship where lambs are sacrificed before the Lamb of God.

All this to say that Jesus was, no doubt, aware of this temple in Ezekiel when He spoke of the temple of His body. He was, no doubt, aware of the river of flowing waters of that temple when He told the Samaritan woman that **"whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never be thirsty again"** (John 4:14).

On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37, 38).

It is so like a kingdom parable that the water flowing from the temple begins at the ankles, then to the knees, then a river that could not be crossed (Ezekiel 47: 3-5).

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter (Zechariah 14:8).

So that river of life, that Healing River is Christ. He is the healer of the nations. But as the risen Savior, what is the means by which He brings His healing? If we appeal to the image given in Ezekiel, the river flows from the temple. The temple is the body of Christ. But how does the ascended body of Christ continue this healing?

Numerous times throughout the New Testament the church is referred to as the **"body of Christ"** (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 10:17;

12:27; Ephesians 4:12; 5:23; Colossians 1:24; Hebrews 13:3). But the church is only the body of Christ, the temple (2 Peter 2:4) to the extent that it presents Christ and Him crucified, resurrected and ascended, i.e. the gospel. As Paul wrote:

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

And we, as Christians, function appropriately in that temple when we, as a royal priesthood, present ourselves as living sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1). It is when the church is marked by the true message, followed by loving, sacrificial obedience, that she operates as that Holy Temple, presenting the living waters of Christ.

Yet there is one last operation of grace of which we read in Ezekiel, lest we find ourselves drowning in the waters rather than redeemed by the waters—lest the message conveyed smell of the aroma of death rather than the aroma of life (2 Corinthians 2:16). Because we would naturally resist such a healing medicine, God graciously and effectually brings us to those waters.

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:24-27).

So much can be said of the cleansing waters. On the day of judgment, to be declared clean will be glorious indeed. And the true fruit of those who have sincerely called upon the name of Christ will demonstrate the presence of the Spirit of God in their lives by seeking to walk in God's statutes and keep His judgment.

But, that we may know that our redemption is all of grace, we are told that even our embracing of this restoration and reconciliation is by the

power and love of God over the will of man. In our natural estate, we are dead to this life-giving message until our hearts of stone are replaced with a heart of flesh. So that from beginning to end, the healing of the nations is the accomplishment of the living Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss the highs and lows of this life. How do they compare to that which awaits us in eternity (pages 2, 3)?
2. What was the condition of Israel when Ezekiel was written (page 3)?
3. During being commissioned, what was Ezekiel initially taught via visions? What encouragement was among these visions (pages 4, 5)?
4. What does the “mark” put on the foreheads mean in the Bible (page 5)?
5. What phrase is mentioned over seventy times in Ezekiel? Why is this a good thing (pages 5, 6)?
6. Why is the temple at the end of Ezekiel a controversial topic? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various ways of looking at that temple (pages 6, 7)?
7. What flows from the temple and what does it signify (pages 6-8)?
8. How do we understand the temple in light of the New Testament/Covenant (pages 7, 8)?
9. How does God effectually redeem us (page 8)?

