

04-10-16 – Light at the End of the Tunnel

Ezekiel 47:1-12

(Some content, quotes, and ideas, taken from *Adventuring Through the Bible*, Ray Stedman, Discovery House Publishers, © 1997 Elaine Stedman, p. 341-349)

We have been following a little book by Dr. David Jeremiah called, Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible. We are now up to the book of Ezekiel.

His key thought is this: *“God has a vision for our future, even when it appears we’ve been exiled in a land of failure.”* Keep that in mind as we look into this book of prophecy.

David Jeremiah’s opening comment on Ezekiel says this, “Do you remember the saying, ‘Disappointments are God’s Appointments?’ That’s true for every child of God, though it’s hard to remember when disappointments land on our doorstep.”

The book of Ezekiel (God strengthens or God is his strength) is a story of an individual as well as the story of a nation, Israel, as well as a story of the human race. It is a story of your life and mine. It is a difficult book to understand due to all the symbolism.

Ezekiel experienced a great disappointment that turned into God’s appointment for his life. He was born into the family line of the temple priesthood. His sights were set on being a priest; his goal in life was to be a priest; he was born into a family line of priests. Just when he reached the age to start his ministry – 30 – like others, including Jesus, the rug was pulled out from under him. Babylon conquered Judah, and Ezekiel was taken captive and exiled to Babylon. This all took place exactly as prophesied by Jeremiah the prophet. **Why Me, Lord? Why Now? Do you know what’s going on here? Do you really know what you’re doing? There must be some mistake. I’m supposed to be a priest!**

Jeremiah prophesied that Israel and Judah would be conquered and led away captive. Now this was happening in Ezekiel’s time and Daniel would come next to bring a prophetic message regarding Israel and the future end times.

This is the situation and condition Ezekiel found himself in at the opening of his book, but he didn’t dwell on it. He had a deeper understanding of God. His faith was greater than disappointment and depression. Because of this, he was given a great vision from God that changed his calling and future direction...

Ez. 1:4-6 – “As I looked, I saw a great storm coming from the north, driving before it a huge cloud that flashed with lightning and shone with brilliant light. There was fire inside the cloud, and in the middle of the fire glowed something like gleaming amber. ⁵ From the center of the cloud came four living beings that looked human, ⁶ except that each had four faces and four wings.”

This is a very unique vision and among the strangest in Scripture. Each creature has four faces - the face of a man, the face of an eagle, the face of an ox, and the face of a lion. The creatures could move in any direction without turning, because the four faces saw in all directions at the same time. Pretty weird, eh? Then Ezekiel saw, under the creatures, a wheel within a wheel, and the wheels were covered with eyes. Magic Mushrooms? Then he looks up and sees a throne and a man on the throne in the heavens. Well now we're getting somewhere. This is a vision of the glory of God. Ezekiel is blessed to receive this vision, but what's the purpose?

Here was Ezekiel, born to be a temple priest, resolved to be a priest to serve the living God. He was shattered, depressed, disappointed at the way things had turned out. He was now captured and led to a foreign land and held prisoner under a ruthless pagan king. How could he possibly serve God in these circumstances? Did you ever feel this way?

God will never leave us abandoned. He will always make good on His promises to you and to me. So God smacks Ezekiel upside the head with this vision of His glory and strange creatures. He wants to get Ezekiel's attention, because he's about to show him something great and give him new direction for his life. Ezekiel didn't have the New Testament to refer to, but we do. These creatures are awfully familiar to us and described in John's Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Rev. 4:1-3, 6b-7 - Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this."² And instantly I was in the Spirit and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it.³ The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back.⁷ The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight.

Ezekiel and John were given visions of the greatness and majesty of God!

No human being can fully understand the exact meaning of these symbols and images, but one thing we do know, Ezekiel and John caught glimpses of the immensity, the authority, and the irresistible power of God. Truly awesome visions.

In both visions we see creatures with faces of a lion, a man, an ox, and an eagle. A lion always depicts sovereignty, supremacy – "the king of all beasts." A man is the picture of intelligence, of understanding, of wisdom. An ox is the symbol of servanthood, of sacrifice. An eagle represents power and deity, soaring over all creation. (Ray Stedman, Adventuring Through the Bible, p. 343).

It is significant that the four gospels present exactly these same qualities in their portrayal of Jesus Christ. He appears first in the gospel of Matthew as a lion, as the sovereign king. He appears in the gospel of Mark as the servant, the ox. In the gospel of Luke, he is man in his

intelligence, in his insight, in his understanding of life. And in the gospel of John, he is deity, depicted here as an eagle. These four symbols, taken together, reflect the character of Jesus Christ. (Ray Stedman, Adventuring Through the Bible, p. 344).

Ezekiel didn't have the advantage we do to realize the significance of the vision he saw, but we know that he saw the glory of God as it is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 4:6 – For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

It is by this vision of the glory of God that Ezekiel is given a new calling – **PROPHET**. His job would not be easy. He is to speak words of God's judgment to the people in captivity, a condition they caused for themselves by their rebellion against God in disobedience.

In chapters 4-24, Ezekiel is given prophecies dealing with the failure of the human race and the nation of Israel in particular. He sees the glory of God leaving the temple and rising out to the Mount of Olives and then departing to the sky. This was fulfilled by Jesus when he left the temple and crossed to the Mount of Olives, and into the Garden of Gethsemane. Later he was crucified, died and rose from the dead. He then ascended into heaven. Quite similar, no?

During the first 20-25 years of the captivity, Ezekiel was directed to speak to the people of Israel. In a number of strange prophecies and demonstrations, he made them aware of their failings. God had to exercise His judgment against this rebellious people. However God's goal in all this is not to abandon them and leave them punished, but to restore them to fellowship with Himself once again. He wants the same thing for all of us. We continue to this day to rebel against the will of God in our lives and by our actions. This may cause the judgment of God in our lives, but that's not what He wants for us. God wants recognition of our failings, repentance (turning away from that) and restoration to a full relationship with Him. This was Ezekiel's goal in his early prophecies. By what he said to the people and the symbols and his actions, Ezekiel was showing the people who God is and what He expects.

In fact, 62 times in 27 chapters, Ezekiel declares in speaking for God and in varying wording, “Then they will know that I am God.” 62 times this phrase is stated. This was the goal of God for His people, that by explaining the situation they are in and the results of their behavior, they would eventually know that **He is God**. The people were foolish in turning away from God.

God charges the prophet to convey His message in various symbolic and dramatic ways. On one occasion, in chapter 4, God asks Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days (that's more than a year) and then to lie on his right side for 40 days. This symbolizes the 390 years that God struggled to bring this nation to its senses and the final 40 years when judgment was imminent. (Ray Stedman, Adventuring Through the Bible, p. 344).

There are always consequences to our actions (good or bad). We talked about this at the last M.E.N. group meeting. Ezekiel was charged with getting this across to the people in hope they would realize what they did, why they were in captivity, and turn back to God, who was ready to accept them back and restore their fellowship.

Chapter 28 is a heavy judgment chapter but against spiritual forces as mentioned in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He talks against the king of Tyre – the spirit being behind the human king of Tyre and about God's judgment against these principalities and powers in the spiritual realm. He then describes the fall of Satan (only found here and in Isaiah 14). Isaiah describes Satan's sin or failure as pride. He exalted himself above God – not a good thing to do. Here in **Ezekiel 28:17-18** we read ...

Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty.

Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor.

So I threw you to the ground and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings.

¹⁸ *You defiled your sanctuaries with your many sins and your dishonest trade.*

So I brought fire out from within you, and it consumed you.

I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.

So, because of rebellion against God, Satan and his followers were cast to the Earth to rule and reign here. They influence every nation in varying degrees, and attempt to lead all away from God in rebellion and disobedience. I don't want to get you all spooked out here, so I'll just leave it at that. But, it is documented in Ezekiel and Isaiah – read it for yourself.

It's not all bad news, though. Ezekiel turns to the grace of God for the rest of the book. We are familiar with the famous story of the valley of Dry Bones in chapter 37. God revives dead Israel and breathes new life into the repentant people if they heed His warnings.

Ezekiel then begins to speak about the distant future – things of the end times. These are things yet to come even for us. God is sovereign and has a plan in place to the end of time. Nothing will stop its final result, but in our rebellion we can cause delays along the way.

Starting in chapter 40, Ezekiel describes the restoration of the temple of the Lord's millennial kingdom (Rev. 20). I mentioned how the glory of God left the temple and the nation and ascended from the Earth. Now Ezekiel begins to explain the restoration of the Glory of God to the temple and to the people of God. His presence and glory are re-established once more.

Ezekiel sees the throne of God and one seated on it. From the throne he sees water running out of the temple and continuing to the Dead Sea.

In chapter 47 we are given a great revelation. This is actually the text for today's sermon. Turn now to **Ez. 47:1-12** –

In my vision, the man brought me back to the entrance of the Temple. There I saw a stream flowing east from beneath the door of the Temple and passing to the right of the altar on its south side. ² The man brought me outside the wall through the north gateway and led me around to the eastern entrance. There I could see the water flowing out through the south side of the east gateway.

³ Measuring as he went, he took me along the stream for 1,750 feet and then led me across. The water was up to my ankles. ⁴ He measured off another 1,750 feet and led me across again. This time the water was up to my knees. After another 1,750 feet, it was up to my waist. ⁵ Then he measured another 1,750 feet, and the river was too deep to walk across. It was deep enough to swim in, but too deep to walk through.

⁶ He asked me, "Have you been watching, son of man?" Then he led me back along the riverbank. ⁷ When I returned, I was surprised by the sight of many trees growing on both sides of the river. ⁸ Then he said to me, "This river flows east through the desert into the valley of the Dead Sea. The waters of this stream will make the salty waters of the Dead Sea fresh and pure. ⁹ There will be swarms of living things wherever the water of this river flows. Fish will abound in the Dead Sea, for its waters will become fresh. Life will flourish wherever this water flows. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand along the shores of the Dead Sea. All the way from En-ge-di to En-eglaim, the shores will be covered with nets drying in the sun. Fish of every kind will fill the Dead Sea, just as they fill the Mediterranean. ¹¹ But the marshes and swamps will not be purified; they will still be salty. ¹² Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. There will be a new crop every month, for they are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing."

I am reminded of two scenes regarding such a river of life. **John 7:37-39** –

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! ³⁸ Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" ³⁹ (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

The river of the water of life is freely given to all who believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But it must be received personally, not globally. Jesus died for you, personally, and me. I can't expect to receive anything from the Lord except via the cross of Christ. I must sacrifice everything, my all, and die to self; then I can drink of the living water.

If we have received Jesus as our Savior, we are on a progressive journey. Ezekiel was shown the steps in this journey...

Step 1 – the water was up to his ankles – The superficial Christian life. Saved by the blood of Jesus, but no depth of spiritual life yet.

Step 2 – the water was up to his knees – Getting deeper with our relationship with God. We are realizing our need for Him and our desire begins to turn toward our fellowship with God.

Step 3 – the water was up to his waist – Now we're getting serious with God. We are crucifying our desires to His will and growing closer and more attentive to the will of God in our lives.

Step 4 – The water was deep enough to swim in – It was over his head. This is total commitment to God and his will. We are being carried along the river beyond our control, because we have yielded completely to His control. We can't touch bottom anymore, so we have to completely trust and yield to the Master for our very lives. He will never let us down.

"Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God." (Jim Elliot, quoted in Elizabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*).

What is your level of commitment to God right now? Be honest with yourself and God. He already knows. No matter where you think you are, you can always go deeper. God expects that from each of us. There really is no other way to have intimate fellowship with the Lord.

God's plan will not be stopped. We have the advantage of the N.T. and the book of Revelation to know what is yet to take place. It wasn't just for Ezekiel and his time. It's for our time and the future.

Rev. 22:1-6 - *Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.*

David Jeremiah has this as the key verse for the book of Ezekiel...

Ez. 36:27 – *"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 faced a huge disappointment in his life, but God turned it into an appointment for Him. In the darkness of captivity and the judgment of God against His people, there beamed hope through the prophecy of this O.T. hero. There is Light at the End of the Tunnel for all of us.

Whatever you are facing, whatever disappointment you may experience, know that God's plan for you is still intact. He will never abandon you – that is a lie from the enemy of our souls. Don't allow him to get the upper hand in your life. There is a Light at the End of the Tunnel. Focus on that and the truth of His promises in the Word of God.