

Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 2

Ezekiel's revelation of God in the vision of the fiery chariot-throne had seven theological implications for the young priest:

- First, the vision proclaims God's transcendent glory as Ezekiel sees Yahweh's radiance emanating from the Divine Presence.
- Second, the vision proclaims God's holiness. It is why the cherubim cover their bodies with their second pair of wings in modesty before the holy God who sits apart on His throne, separate from all created beings (1:11).
- Third, the vision proclaims God's sovereignty, enthroned over all creation.
- Fourth, the vision proclaims God's continuing interest and concern for His people and the progress of human history in which they play a role.
- Fifth, the vision proclaims the presence of God among His covenant people despite their exile in a pagan land.
- Sixth, the fire emanating from the Divine Presence on the throne not only would recall for Ezekiel other theophanies (the burning bush and God's Divine Presence on Mt. Sinai), but he had to be aware that fire was a symbol of Yahweh's Divine Judgment (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Jericho). Preaching God's Divine Judgment against an apostate covenant people will be a major part of Ezekiel's mission. In thirteen months, the glory of God will depart from the Jerusalem Temple, removing the last hindrance to Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- Seventh, the vision serves notice to Ezekiel that such revelations of Yahweh are a prelude to the call to divine service.

The ministry of a prophet of Yahweh is a vocation like no other, and Ezekiel's life will never be the same after his encounter with God.

The second commissioning speech in Chapters 2-3 calls for preparation in 3:7-9:

1. God warns His prophet, if the people reject Ezekiel, they are also rejecting God (3:7a).
2. God assures Ezekiel that He will receive the emotional resources he needs for the challenge: *8 But now, I am making you as defiant as they are, and as obstinate as they are; 9 I am making your resolution as hard as a diamond, harder than flint. So do not be afraid of them, do not be overawed by them, for they are a tribe of rebels.* Yahweh promises to give Ezekiel the strength he needs to fulfill his mission, giving him what his name means, "God strengthens."

The scroll in Chapter 2:

1. It was a rolled-up scroll that God unrolled in front of him (2:10a).
2. The scroll was full of writing on the front and back, implying a well-defined and complete message (2:10b).
3. When Yahweh unrolled the scroll, Ezekiel noticed a disturbing text that he described in three words that point to disaster: *lamentations, dirges and cries of grief* (2:10c).

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The eating of the scroll was significant for several reasons:

- First, the command to eat the scroll comes immediately after the warning not to be rebellious like his countrymen. The eating of the scroll represents the prophet's readiness to obey and serve. Ezekiel passed the test without hesitation.

- Second, the combination of the commands to “eat” or digest God’s word and “go and speak” define the action of his mission.
- Third, the event illustrates the nature of the prophetic office. The divine word that he carries in his body fills, nourishes, and empowers him. It is a divine word written down first and then delivered, unlike the messages of other prophets that are delivered in oracles and written down afterward.

God concludes Ezekiel’s commissioning in a final speech with many of the same points He raised earlier and repeats in 3:10-11. However, God adds two additional points:

1. The exiles are the specific focus of the prophet’s message (3:11a).
2. He must announce Yahweh’s message verbatim and remain unaffected by their reaction (3:11b).

In Ezekiel’s responsibility toward the doomed wicked in 3:18-19, Yahweh uses three verbal commands: “warn,” “speak to warn,” “save his life.” God lists Ezekiel’s responsibility to sinners in two steps:

1. If Ezekiel fails to warn the sinner and the sinner forfeits his life because of his sins, Yahweh will hold Ezekiel responsible.
2. However, if Ezekiel fulfills his duty to the sinner by warning him of the consequence of his sins, Ezekiel saves his life even if the sinner fails to repent and forfeits his life.

In 3:20-21, God lists Ezekiel’s responsibility toward the backsliding righteous in three steps:

1. If Ezekiel fails to warn the backslider and he dies in his sins, God will hold Ezekiel responsible for the person’s death.
2. If Ezekiel warns the backslider and calls him to repentance, he saves the backslider life and his own.
3. If Ezekiel warns the backslider and the person fails to repent and dies in his sins, God will not hold Ezekiel responsible.

In Chapters 4-5, God orders Ezekiel to perform several symbolic acts that are object lessons foretelling the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem that begins in 588 BC:

1. Ezekiel inscribes a plan of Jerusalem on a clay tile/tablet and models a siege.
2. Ezekiel lies on his left side for 390 days [150 days*] and on his right for 40 days.
3. Ezekiel eats a meager diet and restricts his intake of water.
4. Ezekiel bakes bread and uses dung for fuel.
5. Ezekiel shaves his beard and head and divides the hair into three equal parts.

*Septuagint translation.

The meaning of the symbolic acts in 5:1-4:

- The shaving of his head and beard are signs of mourning for the fall of Jerusalem under the swords of their enemies.
- The one-third of the hair burned inside the model of the city represents the third of the population that will die of plague or starve to death.
- The second third will die by the enemy’s swords.
- The last third of the hair represents the population taken into exile.
- The saving of the few pieces of hair represents the salvation of a remnant and the loss of those who will never return from exile.

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