

The Exilic Prophets: Ezekiel & Daniel

In this lecture, we will deal with Ezekiel and Daniel's prophecies. Generally speaking, Ezekiel is a prophet who deals with the covenant, whereas Daniel is a prophet who deals with the kingdom.

Ezekiel's name is mentioned only twice in the whole of Scripture, in Ezekiel 1:3 when his prophecy is introduced, and in chapter 24, which deals with the death of his wife who he is not allowed to mourn. At the time of his wife's death, he is not allowed to put on any mourning clothes and he is asked by his neighbors, "What is this all about?" The Lord had told him, "Ezekiel, you are typifying what is to take place with Jerusalem." The Lord's bride will disappear.

Daniel, however, is referred to numerous times in the prophecy of Daniel itself, and he is also referred to a number of times by Ezekiel as his compatriot, which puts him in the same category as, for example, Noah. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus actually quotes Daniel, saying, "So when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel..." Daniel is there called a prophet. Many people, especially liberal scholars, have had difficulty accepting this, saying that Jesus went along with a common understanding of the day. It is true that Daniel's place in the Old Testament Scriptures is not with the major prophets, but he nevertheless is considered one of the prophets and he is a prophet of the kingdom. Before we proceed, let us pray.

*Lord, our God, we stand before You. You are our God, the great and glorious one who Ezekiel saw and who Ezekiel obeyed, who Daniel saw and who Daniel obeyed. These men of such different circumstances were faithful to You. God, teach us to be faithful so that we may proclaim the glories of Your kingdom, Your faithfulness as a covenant God, and rejoice with them in this certainty that the mediator, the Lord Jesus, is our Savior and Lord. Bless us here as we gather. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

The time of Ezekiel and Daniel is the time of the exile, an epic of revelation, which was introduced by Jeremiah. Ezekiel and Daniel are the prophets of the exile, while the last three minor prophets were during the post-exilic era. This time of the exile is the time of the Mosaic covenant curse. What had been prophesied repeatedly by the prophets, repeating what Moses had stated in chapters 27 and 28 of Deuteronomy, became a reality. In the midst of those realities, Ezekiel lived and prophesied. Ezekiel was among the captives, the slaves on the banks of the river Chebar. Daniel was deported 10 years before Ezekiel. Ezekiel was likely deported in 596 BC, while Daniel had been deported 10 years before since Daniel was of royal blood. But this was not only the time of the curse; it was also the time of the remnant.

The first chapter of Ezekiel, about the glory cloud, is strange and hard to comprehend. The last nine chapters about the rebuilding of the temple are also difficult, and the dimensions even seem to be incorrect. Thus, Ezekiel is not an enticing book to study. But, speaking now of the remnant, consider how few people he sees as constituting the remnant in chapter five:

Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then, take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of the siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city and scatter a third to the wind for I will pursue them with a drawn sword.

Ezekiel's hair and beard represented the population of Judah—one-third to be burnt and die in the city, one-third to be struck by the sword, and one-third to be scattered to the wind. "But take a few strands

and tuck them away in the folds of your garment.” Again, “Take a few of these and throw them into the fire also,” some of the remnant even will be destroyed. The fire will spread and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel and this is what the sovereign Lord says, “This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations with countries all around her, yet in her wickedness, she rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her.” It will be a small remnant, because they broke the Mosaic covenant. They would not heed the will of the Lord as it had been revealed through Moses. A small remnant indeed.

This was also the time of the son of man, the watchman. This comes in the last half of the book. Ezekiel spoke the first 32 chapters in the context of Jerusalem still standing, even though many people were already on the banks of the river Chebar because they had already been carried captive. Their hope was still alive because Jerusalem was standing and functioning, their hope was in Jerusalem. But in chapter 33, the escapee came to tell them that Jerusalem had fallen. Then all of a sudden Ezekiel, the son of man, becomes the watchman and the son of man, representing the great Son of Man. The prophet, the prophet of judgment, becomes the prophet and watchman over the remnant, on behalf of the great shepherd, to guide and direct the people into the future, into the covenant of peace. Israel still needed a watchman, the remnant needed a watchman, so while Ezekiel remains the son of man, he also becomes the watchman.

Now Ezekiel, as we look at the message itself, is called upon to make sure that the people understand that the old age, the age of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, has come to an end. He is the one to introduce them into the next epoch that becomes the introduction to the New Testament period.

The Mosaic covenant plays a large role in Ezekiel’s prophecies, particularly in the first 17 chapters. The glory presence of chapter one is, in a way, a restatement of the glory that was at Mt. Sinai when the children of Israel were there. Compare those descriptions. Ezekiel is far more elaborate, but when Solomon had built the temple and the glory cloud came in, it was that same glory cloud, the same presence who was at Mt. Sinai. Where does the glory cloud come from, according to chapter one of Ezekiel? It comes from the north, but now it is not the blessed presence; it is the judgment presence. That glory cloud represented “I am with you.” The great covenant blessing now becomes a symbol or a representation of God the holy one in His wrath, as He comes with the Babylonian powers to bring in the curse.

After Ezekiel sees that vision, he has his call in chapter two. Ezekiel 2:1 says, “He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand up upon your feet and I will speak to you.’” And then came the Spirit. This is sometimes translated as, “As I was rising the Spirit came upon me,” but it has more of the sense of, “And came the Spirit on me, while he was speaking with me.” The Spirit came along with the Word. God said, “Stand up,” and Ezekiel goes on to say, “As he spoke to me, the Spirit came into me and raised me.” The Spirit made him stand up and caused him to see the message that he had to proclaim. “I will give you words to speak, but they will be words that I will put in your mouth.” Later on, in chapter 3, the Spirit says to him:

Go, shut yourself inside your house. And you, son of man, they will tie with ropes; you will be bound so that you cannot go among the people. I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, though they are a rebellious house. But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth...

Ezekiel would not be able to say anything of his own accord; he could not make commentary on the prophecies that he was given. When the Spirit spoke to him, then his tongue would come loose.

Ezekiel has often been called a paranoid or a schizophrenic, because of the unusual experiences that he was forced to have, but it was in that way that Ezekiel was called. Ezekiel was placed under tremendous pressure and at the same time, he was given a tremendous aid. In fact, he was used by the Spirit of God to give this message of judgment. The sure judgment was that the fall would come to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem. He had to tell those people there who were trusting in the temple, that the Mosaic and the Davidic period was finished. The time of the tabernacle and the temple, the time of the city of David, was finished. People did not want to hear it, so he had to demonstrate it by activity; he had to preach it by word. And the reason for this sure judgment was the terrible desecration of the temple.

I took a course on Ezekiel with Dr. Meredith Kline at Westminster Seminary in the early 1950s, and I was assigned to study chapters eight and nine for a paper. I had never realized to what extent Israel had departed from the Lord until I studied chapters eight and nine. The temple and the city was defiled—the women mourning in front of Tammuz, the elders worshipping all kinds of lewd things in the walls of Jerusalem and turning their backs to the temple in order to worship the sun and the gods of Babylon. That description of how the temple was desecrated has stayed with me ever since, helping me realize how patient God must have been, for these people were going from sin to sin. We read in chapter 10 that the glory cloud departed, the opposite of when the tabernacle had been built and the glory cloud came. When the temple was completed, the great glory cloud enshrouded it and entered it. Now in chapter ten, the glory cloud lifts. It had already lifted, according to chapter nine, when the man with the ink bottle went out marking the few that were still faithful, represented by the few hairs that were not burnt. Then the glory cloud had gone to the entrance, but chapter ten tells us that the glory cloud left the city and departed through the desert.

Yahweh, the covenant God, had made His departure. He was no longer “I am with you.” Was the covenant broken? Not from Yahweh’s point of view. He had kept His covenant for He said, “I will curse you if you disobey Me,” and therein lies the heart of the curse.

Ezekiel places much blame on the leaders. This is in chapter 34 as well as throughout the first part of the book. He places the blame on the leadership, the priests. He mentions the priests and the kings, the elders and the prophets. He mentions all four groups for being unfaithful to the Lord, but judgment comes on Israel because of its leaders. I want to draw your attention to chapter 16, which speaks of Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness. God kept covenant all the way through. As Israel was departing, God had remained faithful, all the way through, all the time. But chapter 16 also tells of Israel’s unfaithfulness in terms of an unfaithful bride, an unfaithful wife and then the last part of chapter 16 tells us that the curse of the covenant had to be applied individually and communally. The man who sins shall surely die, but the whole community that sins will surely die as well. At the same time, Ezekiel 16:53 says, “However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters and your fortunes along with them.” It will not be only a restoration of Jerusalem, but also of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is going to be a complete restoration when God ushers in His everlasting covenant. Complete in this respect, that even the most despised representatives, the most despised people will be there. Chapter 17 goes on to say that the story of the eagles and the vine shows how people had not only desecrated the temple, but had also made treaties with other nations replacing their treaties or their covenant with God, instead of being a blessing to the nations.

If you preach on Ezekiel, or teach your Bible classes, whatever the case may be, it is easy to lift certain sections out of context. Keep this message in the context of the Mosaic and the Davidic covenant to which God had been faithful and to which Israel was not faithful. And God, keeping covenant, was bringing His curse upon the people.

Ezekiel makes reference to the Davidic covenant. In 17:22-24, he speaks of the Davidic covenant. “This is what the Lord, the sovereign Lord, says: ‘I myself will take a shoot from the very top of the cedar and plant it and I will break a twig from it and it will become a royal one.’” There he is surely referring to the Davidic house. He also refers to the remnant, that part of that kingdom that had been promised to David. But in chapter 34, we read how the Davidic house is indeed rebuked and accused because of their false shepherding activity. There were so many false ruling shepherds, but chapters 33, 34 and 36 tell us that the Davidic covenant is going to stand, and it will be an absolutely solid covenant. It will not be in its old form with a physical house in Jerusalem, but God will keep his Davidic house and He will have one people under that David. He will have one united people.

One major section in Ezekiel starts in chapters 34-37 and is concluded by chapters 38-39. There, in a sense, you get to the very heart of Ezekiel’s restoration prophecies with the Mosaic and the Davidic covenant in the background, which give him his retrospective stance speaking to the people at that time. Ezekiel also has a great future perspective. He lays open the future. He gives an eschatology and an outline, and we Christians struggle to see that outline clearly. There are great differences in the eschatological schools between the realized eschatologists, the liberals, the postmillennialists, the premillennialists, the amillennialists, and the dispensationalists with their various emphases. Please take note that this section, 34-48 (which includes the rebuilt temple section), has become fertile ground for eschatological thinking. And when you add Daniel to that, and Zechariah, eschatologists seem to have almost gone out of control. Many unusual things have been read into those passages.

At the same time, if you read a lot of Reformed material, you will not find very much dealing with these chapters. Calvin did not dare to touch these passages, and when he did he was very general because he did not know how to interpret and apply this material. But Ezekiel 34-39 (if you want to add the rebuilt temple, 34-48), basically deals with the covenant of peace. It does not deal with the Davidic or the Mosaic covenant but rather the covenant of peace. The covenant of peace is future, but is being slowly inaugurated. As I have mentioned before, Dr. Robertson identifies the new covenant of Jeremiah with this covenant of peace that Ezekiel speaks about.

I see these as two aspects of one great teaching. There is a great future with the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants in the background having laid the stage. The people are disobedient, but God keeps His purposes in mind and carries them out.

Then, will Canaan be re-inhabited by God’s covenant people? Will Jerusalem become the center again, in about 1000 years? Many people find evidence for this in this section. There is no doubt that the prophets speak about this, and Dr. Joe Ridderbos discusses this matter in his four-volume work, *God’s Word Through the Prophets*. Much of this theology has been worked out in fine detail by German and Dutch theologians. Ridderbos points out how the prophets use the language of that day, the life symbols of that day, which people understood. The prophets would glorify the language and symbols, they would beautify them and expand on them. Thus we cannot take the Bible literally in many of these passages. No one takes all of the Bible literally. No one takes all of the prophecies literally.

Daniel spoke of a return into covenant fellowship with the Lord from which we cannot be separated, in which He will give us a renewed, reborn heart. Ezekiel has spoken of this already in chapter 36 and then in chapter 37. The vision of the valley of dry bones shows the Spirit coming with the word, and as the Spirit activated him, so the Spirit will activate the dead bones and bring life to the new community. I believe that Ezekiel 37 is a unique prophecy of Pentecost. We find an initial fulfillment and from then on, the Spirit will be doing His work bringing new life to dead bones, both individually and to the whole

community. Will the community have a time of peace? Will there be a covenant of peace for the community? Yes, because the parasite kingdom will be utterly and totally destroyed.

In chapter 35, Ezekiel speaks of Edom's departure. In chapters 38 and 39, he speaks of Gog and Magog and the tremendous battle that is coming. People have said that Gog and Magog are represented today by Russia, perhaps. This year that country is not said to be representing Gog and Magog, but now some say Lithuania and Estonia, and who knows what will happen in the not too far future. Gog and Magog have been used to represent other forces.

I can remember the days of Hitler. I was born in 1921, and in 1939 Hitler started his rampage. I was 18 years old and an avid history buff. I read the newspaper and I used to sit and listen very attentively to the radio when the news reports came out. I will never forget my father, who was born in the Netherlands, but swore off allegiance to his home country. He left the Netherlands in 1910 when he was 20 years old. In 1940, when word came that Hitler had bombed Rotterdam and parts of Amsterdam, tears rolled down his cheeks because he was born between those two cities. "Gog and Magog have struck. But Gog and Magog will not triumph." Was he saying that Hitler really represented Gog and Magog? I remember talking with him, and he said, "No. Gog and Magog in the Old Testament time represented some of the tremendous Satanic powers which Hitler represents today." There may also be times that the United States and Canada and some of the Western world have been seen as Gog and Magog powers too, but one thing is sure, anyone who does not represent the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will fall. The parasite kingdom will always have its representatives in this world, but they will fall and God's work will surely be completely exonerated. The temple will be rebuilt, as we see in chapters 40 to 48 – the symbolic temple, which represents God with His people – with rivers of living water coming forth (chapters 46 and 47). The Spirit was mightily at work and Ezekiel, seeing the glory cloud come, seeing the glory depart from Jerusalem, sees God's people rebuilt, restored, renewed, obeying, worshipping, serving. The covenant of peace becomes a grand and glorious reality.

It is not easy to deal with Ezekiel chapter by chapter, but if you keep the bigger picture in mind, the Lord will bless you too. You will see how Ezekiel is a covenant man representing the past, speaking the present under the curse, speaking of the faithfulness of God to come, speaking in terms life that his audience could understand and relate to.

Daniel lived at the same time as Ezekiel, and Daniel was a kingdom prophet. Dumbrell deals with that in page 201 of *Covenant and Creation*. We see the concept of royalty in the first couple chapters of Daniel, where we read of the royal young men behaving royally under the pressure of the king. They dared to stand up and be faithful to their God (chapter 1). "Dare to be a Daniel" is a hymn which I had my children sing less and less after I started working with the Old Testament. It is not that I do not want them to be strong and brave and proud to be God's representative, but it is moralistic to think that if you act like Daniel you will be all right. What made Daniel the man he was? It was not his own daring. It was the Lord who worked in Daniel. It was the Lord who came to Daniel. It was the Lord who had taken hold of Daniel in his youth, when he was a young prince at home. It was the Lord who never let Daniel go, for God wanted a spokesman in the palaces of the great conquering kingdoms of Babylon and the Medopersian Empire. Daniel was God's chosen servant and the whole book of Daniel is in a palace setting. He should have been in the palace of the sons of David, but he wound up in the palace of the conquering kings.

It is interesting that Nebuchadnezzar is called "A servant of the Lord" by Jeremiah, and Cyrus in chapter 44 and 45 is also called *avdi*, "my servant." It is in the palace of these people that Daniel was serving. He was serving the Lord under God's appointed representatives who have had to wield the rod of

judgment, but God wanted those people to have His Word. He wanted those people to know that there was a sovereign Lord, and God in his sovereignty had Daniel at the heart of those conquering, ruling kingdoms. There, Daniel had to go through one experience after another. The devil tried to destroy the Word of God in the conquering kingdoms, first by tempting the young men to become Babylonian in life, culture and style and then by trying to get them to bow to an image. Later in life, when the Persians had overcome Babylon, they tried to destroy Daniel, the praying, trusting man who represented the Lord. They had him thrown to the lions, or the devil as it were. But the devil never won. Daniel came through, supernaturally, miraculously, powerfully, unbelievably. His friends likewise stood strong before the Lord. God upheld them and the preincarnate Son of God was with them, in the fiery furnace. They were not alone. God kept covenant. He was with them, Emmanuel, in the fiery furnace, in the palaces. That is the first point of the story of Daniel. All during the interaction with the kings in the palace setting, these royal young men knew what it was to be faithful servants of the Lord.

The life experiences of these young men give us a tremendous theological message. When we go to chapters seven through nine (in a way the message is already introduced in the vision of chapter two), what is the heart of Daniel's message? "There is a sovereign king who is Lord over all." Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge that. Daniel had to speak concerning the eternal king, the sovereign Lord. That was his message. This was in part because the kings around them did not understand the covenant. It would not have meant much to them. So Daniel, when he addresses the kings, does not talk about God as a faithful covenant keeper. He talks to them about who the sovereign, covenant-keeping God is. He presents God the King. Also, when speaking about the eternal kingdom, Daniel lets these kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, know that their kingdom is not the eternal one. Their kingdom is not the one that is the all-powerful, sovereign, all-inclusive one. Their boundaries may have stretched thousands of miles, but they were strictly in the service of God, under God's rule and reign. The kingdom of God would certainly absolutely triumph. Why? Because He is the Ancient of Days. He sits on the throne. When Daniel gets to his prophecies in chapters seven and nine, he then lets it be known that he is aware that the message of the eternal kingdom cannot be separated from the covenant message that God had given all along. The destruction of the early kingdoms is a sure fact. Just as Ezekiel spoke in the Gog and Magog prophecies and concerning Edom in chapter 35, Daniel saw in the two visions the destruction of the great kingdoms of his day and the ones that were immediately coming.

There is a big debate about which earthly kingdoms are represented in Daniel. Is it Assyria and Babylon first of all, and then Midia and Persia, and then the Greek and the Roman? Or is it the Babylonian and the Midian and then the Persian and then the Greek, because that is Daniel's time? I struggled with those different interpretations as I was writing my book, *A Messianic Prophecy*. What is referred to here? I found that the more careful I was in staying with the text, the more I was able to be at ease, because it is not always clear. I said only what is referred to specifically and literally in Daniel. But this is a fact, that Nebuchadnezzar knew that his kingdom was going to come to an end, and that the kingdom that would destroy his kingdom was the big rock that came rolling down the mountains and completely crushed and pulverized everything. This rock was not cut out by man's hands. It suddenly came, Paul said this rock was the Christ. In chapter seven we read of the Son of Man who comes before the Ancient of Days and receives the kingdom. He is the one who will remove all these kingdoms. This is a prophecy of the eternal king who will destroy all these temporary kingdoms. The earthly kingdoms will leave because the kingdom of the Christ and of the Son of Man is sure to triumph, though not necessarily as a physical kingdom on earth anymore. Daniel's perspective is far greater and far more inclusive than that.

I conclude this lecture by calling your attention to Daniel 9:1-4: "Daniel, in the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – in the first year of

his reign, I, Daniel understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years.” Notice how Daniel knew what Jeremiah was prophesying back then in Jerusalem. “So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: ‘Oh LORD, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong.’” They had not kept the covenant. Daniel knew how to pray. He knew not only to confess his sin, but he also knew how to put it all in the proper setting. God is the faithful covenant keeper, who never withdrew His love. God kept His covenant and this covenant, as he goes on to say later in chapter nine, will surely and fully and completely be confirmed. By whom? The Anointed One, the Messiah, the descendant of the Davidic kingdom. Daniel was aware of the covenant, at least the promises of the covenant. But he put it all in the broad context of God as the sovereign king: “We who are here in exile, we who are here, whether in a slave camp or in a conqueror’s palace, we are subject to a king that is far greater than any of these tyrants on earth. Our covenant God is our sovereign God. He will never leave us or forsake us. Trust Him.” Daniel did. He lived to be an old, old man. We do not know when he died, but we know that he lived a fearsome, fearless life in the service of God.