

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 29: A New Way - Ezekiel Part 2

Daily Reading for Week

- Ezekiel 31-33, Psalm 40
- Ezekiel 34-36, Psalm 41
- Ezekiel 37-39, Psalm 42
- Ezekiel 40-44, Psalm 43
- Ezekiel 45-48, Psalm 44
- Ezra 1-3, Psalm 45
- Ezra 4-7, Psalm 46
- [Read Scripture Video: Ezekiel Part 2](#)

Focus of time together

To identify the promise God made to Israel through Ezekiel and other prophets of bringing about a new, mysterious way for Israel to faithfully follow their covenant with Him. Also, to reflect on the implications of this promise for all humanity.

Connecting Exercise

Share which of the recent books we've read in YOBL over the last month that you enjoyed the most and why (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel).

Opening Prayer

Read Ezekiel 34:25-31 aloud

Intro to Discussion

*Great deathly powers have passed
The black and bitter cold" the wind
That broke and felled strong trees" the rind
Of ice that held at last*

*Even the fleshly heart
In cold that made it seem a stone.*

*And now there comes again the one
First Sabbath light" the Art*

*That unruléd" uninvoked"
Unknown" makes new again and heals"
Restores heart's flesh so that it feels
Anew the old deadlocked*

*Goodness of its true home
That it will lose again and mourn"
Remembering the year reborn
In almost perfect bloom*

*In almost shadeless wood"
Sweet air which neither burned nor chilled
In which the tenderest flower prevailed"
The light made flesh and blood.*

Wendell Berry III ©1980® from A Timbered Choir The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997

Last week, we looked at the first half of Ezekiel and saw the culmination of Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and continued idolatry. Not only were they defeated and sent into exile to live as slaves to first Assyria and then Babylon, but the glory of God left the heart of the Temple in Jerusalem. God's faithful guiding presence, always with them since the Exodus, picked up and left. Soon after, Babylon burned Jerusalem and the Temple to the ground. The curses which God made clear would happen if Israel was unfaithful to the covenant were now fully realised.

This is the darkest moment in Israel's history. Israel (and Ezekiel) are left with many questions. What does it mean that they are God's people if they are no longer in the land, no longer have the Temple to worship in, and the presence of God no longer dwells among them? Was it even possible for Israel to be faithful to the covenant when generation after generation had failed? How is God going to bring about the renewal of the world and the nations through Israel (see Genesis 12) if Israel is utterly destroyed? In the midst of this despair, God's answer is one of surprising hope. Yes, Israel is reaping the just reward of their evil, idolatry, and covenant unfaithfulness. But God is still faithful to His covenant.

Ezekiel 34-48 are God's promises of hope and restoration to Israel at their lowest. In Ezekiel 34, He promises to replace their bad leaders and to lead (shepherd) the people Himself back from exile into the land He promised them. In Ezekiel 36, He addresses the inability of Israel to uphold covenant faithfulness. He will purify them, sprinkle them with clean water (language tied to purity laws in Leviticus), and replace their hearts of cold, stubborn stone with ones of warm, responsive flesh. In Ezekiel 37 (the infamous and often misunderstood Valley of Dry Bones, which is not a passage about bodily resurrection), God promises to revive and restore Israel as a nation from a state of

complete deadness to one of new, Spirit-breathed life. In Ezekiel 39:25-29, He promises that as a newly renewed nation, Israel will reflect God's holiness to the nations around them, thus fulfilling the vision of Genesis 12. In Ezekiel 40-48, He promises through symbolic architecture that He will once again dwell among His people. In Ezekiel 43, God's glory returns to dwell in this newly rebuilt Temple after having left in Ezekiel 10-11. Finally, in Ezekiel 47, there is an Eden-like picture of a river of pure water flowing from the centre (where God's glory dwells) of the Temple outward. Everywhere it goes, this river brings abundant life — even reviving the Dead Sea from a state so salty that no life can exist to a place teeming with fish and life. Israel's restoration will lead to the restoration of God's creation itself.

Whole Group Discussion (75 minutes)

Questions for Listening to Scripture (15 minutes)

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

Imagine yourself as an Israelite in exile in Babylon. You have heard that the Temple and Jerusalem have been burned to the ground. In light of this reality, what would it be like to hear the promises in Ezekiel 34-48?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture (60 minutes)

These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.

We are going to take the next 60 minutes to hear and reflect on the promises of God to Israel in exile. Try to place yourself in the shoes (or sandals) of an Israelite living in exile in Babylon. As each promise is being read, pay attention to the images and language. Feel free to write down any particular phrase or verse that stands out in your mind as particularly beautiful or hopeful.

Have multiple people open to the following passages in the Book of Ezekiel and read:

- Ezekiel 34
- Ezekiel 36:22-37
- Ezekiel 37
- Ezekiel 39:25-29
- Ezekiel 43:1-9
- Ezekiel 47:1-12

1. What strikes you about the tone of Ezekiel 34-48 compared with the tone of Ezekiel 1-33?
2. Which of the images and promises given in Ezekiel 34-48 do you find most striking and affecting? What is it about this image or promise that is connecting with you in this moment?

Closing Prayer

Close your time by identifying and praying for the places in our lives, community, city, and world that most need to see the kind of hope and revival found in the Ezekiel passages we read. Try to use the language of those particular passages to guide your prayers.