



The call of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:1-8

Ezekiel 37:1-14; 18:1-9; 34:1-3, 11-16; 36:22-31

Ezekiel lived in a time of heart-break and even disillusionment (circa 620BC to 570BC). He was torn from his beloved city of Jerusalem and the Temple (circa 597 BC) where he ministered as priest and was settled in a Jewish agricultural settlement named Tel-abib alongside the river Kebar (1:1, 3). Five years later, through the sheer circumstances of exile, God's call came to him as a young man of twenty-eight. God can work through the most difficult circumstances with His over-ruling grace, e.g. Joseph's enslavement and imprisonment, and the exile with its purifying effect on Jewish religion. Think about other examples of this kind of thing.

Almost half of Ezekiel's life was given to the prophetic ministry (22 years out of 50), yet the years spent round the Temple precincts affected him throughout the rest of his life. Through the structure and sacrificial system of the Temple, he gained a vivid conception of the majesty, loftiness and holiness of God. His description of his call is perhaps the most mysterious and thrilling in the Old Testament, with his view of God (1:24-28) who called him (1:1-3; 2:1-8). Compare this with Isaiah's description of God:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Isaiah 6:1

Note how Ezekiel described impressively the continuing action of God upon his spirit;

Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound—May the glory of the Lord be praised in his dwelling-place!— the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the Lord upon me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—overwhelmed. Ezekiel 3:12-15

The call was issued for the second time stressing the inescapable nature of this call to be a “watchman for Israel”.

At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me”. Ezekiel 3:16-17

Notice too his dramatic flair of using prophetic symbolism more fully perhaps than any other prophet, e.g. the use of a drawing of Jerusalem in a condition of siege on a clay brick and a separating pan to proclaim that Jerusalem would be cut off without mercy (4:1-3). Compare also lying on the side and animal dung (4:4-17) or the hair shorn into three parts (5:1-4). Our Lord Himself perhaps used prophetic symbolism in the feeding of the 5,000, the elements of the Lord's Supper and even the cursing of the fig tree.

Ezekiel's experience was one with our Lord in its courage and preparedness to persist in spite of failure. He kept on for twenty-two years even though he was seldom ever listened to. Jesus Himself shows in His parable of the sower that three parts of the seed experienced failure.

Like Jesus, Ezekiel insisted on individual responsibility (18:4, 26ff). The people of Jerusalem are not to lay the blame on their fathers (18:2ff, 25) or on God. The blame lies at their own door - ***The soul who sins is the one who will die Ezekiel 18:4.***

If Ezekiel was a prophet of judgment, he had a rugged faith in the over-ruling grace and sovereignty of God. All things would be restored. We could scarcely have a more dramatic and unforgettable picture of restoration than the description of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37).

God is still seeking a Shepherd who will not fail His sheep.

For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord”. Ezekiel 34:11-15

If Israel does repent, it will be because of God's gracious action. He will sprinkle them with clean water and, as a result of this action, they will repent. God's action precedes and brings about renewal and forgiveness.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. [28] You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:25-28

“Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices.” Ezekiel 36:31