

NOVEMBER 1

Ezekiel 1-3:15

I remember hearing Howard Hendricks talk about his early days reading the Bible. Hendricks taught *Bible Study Methods* at DTS and, I think, was without a rival in teaching that course. Anyway, I expected him to say that he took to the Bible like a duck to water. He did, too, a dead duck. He started in Ezekiel and his Bible became a paper weight for a long time thereafter. After charging through Isaiah and Jeremiah, I hate to tell you that you'll probably need to gird up the loins of your mind to get through Ezekiel. Daniel will be fun to look forward to, and thankfully there is lighter fare in Hebrews and the other epistles. This is the benefit of reading a one-year Bible. If you are in a group with others who are also reading along, that makes it that much easier.

If you're getting tired, you are understanding why many people don't read through the Bible. Yet, you've got to get to this place of difficulty and get to the end so that you can inspire others to finish. Hendricks used to tell us that reading the Bible was like mining. Anyone can find the occasional nugget lying on the surface, but to find the richest ore, and the true heart of God (and that's the point, isn't it) you have to go deep. Digging is work, but that's when the treasures are found. The more you read, the easier it gets and the rewards drive you on. We are in pursuit of a deeper understanding and love for God. In order to follow the Word made flesh, you have to know His Word.

So, before we begin, I'll give you a little background on Ezekiel and offer a few suggestions to make the journey more active for you.

If you're asking me, Daniel and Ezekiel have similar purposes. In Daniel you see God preparing the nations for the return of Israel to its land and for the coming kingdom. In Ezekiel you see God preparing the people for their return to their land and preparing Israel for the coming kingdom. Ezekiel will also fill in some of the detail on the people we have just read about in Jeremiah. The first part of Ezekiel will show why God had to judge the people who remained in Jerusalem. The people living with Ezekiel in Babylon are the remnant. Those who were left in Jerusalem with Jeremiah were to be judged. Everyone was rooting for the folks back in the city, but the Lord would show the exiles that a corrupt culture must be judged. They, too, needed to change their hearts if they expected to go back to the land.

One of the important phrases to look for and underline in Ezekiel is, *Then they will (you shall) know that I am the Lord*. That is a very powerful statement. There are other phrases and statements. If toward the end of Ezekiel you notice something and think, "I wonder if I've missed this earlier in the book," just make a note to yourself at the beginning of Ezekiel and look for it next year. It keeps you alert. In fact, when you find *they will know*, not only underline it; but number it and see how many you find.

The counting of years in Ezekiel began when Ezekiel, along with about 12,000 others and King Jehoiachin, was taken into exile. Ezekiel began his ministry when he was 30, in what was probably the 15th year of exile, which began when Daniel was taken. That would make Daniel and Ezekiel, probably, the same age. Thirty was the age a priest began his ministry. The last we hear from Ezekiel, he is 52 years old. The life of a prophet, as we've seen with Jeremiah, was not really glorious. Ezekiel saw amazing things, but he paid an awesome price for it. As protection from the people and as a sign to them, Ezekiel was unable to speak for several years. Shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed, God told him that his wife would die and he was forbidden to mourn her death. Finally, when a messenger came from Judah and told them that the city had been destroyed, God allowed him to speak freely. In between, Ezekiel was commanded to act out many zany things in public, which I'm sure made him face tremendous ridicule. And of course, as he saw what God thought of the people, it also brought sorrow and weight to Ezekiel's heart as

he ministered to Israel. On the other hand, the Lord used Ezekiel to begin the process of healing the hearts of these very corrupt people. And to strengthen Ezekiel and give him joy and hope, God showed him things that were rivaled only by the visions the Apostle John saw in Revelation.

Today we'll see Ezekiel's commissioning as a prophet.

Ezekiel 1

Vs. 1-3 We've already mentioned some of this. Ezekiel was 30, the normal age to begin serving as a priest. Jesus also began His ministry at 30. Chebar was located just above the city of Babylon where the Euphrates and Tigris are close together. Nebuchadnezzar used the Jews to widen a river to create the "Grand Canal." I don't know if they had gondola rides like in Venice, but if they did I'll bet they were just as expensive.

Vs. 4-28 We have had vague descriptions of the glory of the Lord earlier in the Bible. We saw the glory of the Lord appear to protect Israel as they left Egypt as a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. We saw the glory of the Lord fill the tabernacle and fill Solomon's temple. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the temple as he was commissioned for service as a prophet. There, it was fire and smoke. Here, Ezekiel (and all of us) for the first time ever see the detail of God's royal presence: His throne and the angels that go with Him.

Vs. 4-14 These *living creatures* are referred to as cherubim in Ezekiel 10. Since they are "different" from anything we have ever seen in Scripture, it shouldn't be surprising that other angels called cherubim in other places in the Bible look a little different. We'll have to ask God to clarify the differences once we get to heaven. It seems to me that the look of these creatures is symbolic in some sense, since all of it relates to creatures of earth. I'm content to let others try to figure out why one side of their head looks like an ox and another like a lion or an eagle.

Vs. 15-21 These are the *wheels* and the direction of the Spirit. Again, this is something God wants Ezekiel to see and be awed by. God doesn't need this elaborate moving throne to move.

Vs. 22-25 This *expanse* would be like the ceiling of a throne room, but this one is the supernatural version.

Vs. 26-28 And now we see Him who sits on the throne. Since God the Father is unable to be seen, this is probably the Son of God taking human appearance as He has before in the OT.

Notice that vs. 22 and 26 lead up to seeing God on His throne. Still, all of this is vague. Ezekiel sees a *likeness*. It is still true that no one has seen God.

V. 28 And to think, all of this display was simply to get Ezekiel's attention. When Ezekiel bowed, he heard the voice. Just like when God presented Himself to Elijah, the real point of all the other stuff was to get Elijah tuned to hearing the voice of the Lord. (1 Kings 19:12)

Ezekiel 2

Vs. 1-7 This is God commissioning Ezekiel to go to the rebels of the house of Israel. That is basically everyone who is in exile with him. One of the things to note here is the word *rebellious*. In my German Bible it says they are the "house of contradiction." That adds an interesting twist to the thought of their rebellion, as if it is sort of passive-aggressive. Sin makes all of us living contradictions. We think it's cute. God calls it rebellion. Thank the Lord for grace.

Vs. 8-10 This is where Ezekiel accepts God's commission to him. He takes the Word and he fully consumes it. That's what you're in the process of doing now, reading The One Year Bible. It is no accident that God has used people, regardless of nation or education, who have consumed the Word.

Ezekiel 3:1-15

Vs. 1-3 This looks to have been a very realistic vision, so I wonder what it was like eating that scroll. Was it like a wrap? It is interesting that here, the scroll was sweet with no after effects. In Revelation 10:10, it had a bitter after effect.

Vs. 4-11 As with every commission, there is the command to go. How many times do you find *go* in this section? God mentions here that He would give Ezekiel a supernatural hardness and determination. God would also protect Ezekiel in other ways and make him a very notable, living sign among his people.

Vs. 12-15 I don't know what Ezekiel was like before this event and commissioning; but now, seeing the people's sin and need as God does, he is bitter and upset and overwhelmed.

Now the fun begins.

We all hate to be embarrassed when we go out on the limb for God in the harvest; but as we'll see in Ezekiel, when God puts us in one of those situations, it is not to shame us. It is to make something memorable for someone else. Their response to that memorable moment can help them or be a source of judgment. It reveals the heart. We think we always have to be clear and smooth in the harvest, and we should aim for those things as we present the gospel and work with others. Yet, sometimes God prefers foggy, stilted, embarrassing and unforgettable.

Hebrews 3

One tension in Hebrews is understanding the warnings. What will really be lost if the people slip back into adherence to the law? Will they lose their salvation, or will they lose the effect of the grace of God in them in a dying world? This question has kept people very busy. My take on things is that you cannot lose your salvation, since it is a spiritual birth and a new creation. These can't be undone. But Jesus Himself warned His disciples several times that we are meant to be salt; but if the salt loses its saltiness, it is only good to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. And you remember too, in 2 Timothy 2:20, there are vessels for ignoble use. Those vessels are still in the house, but all the master can use them for is degrading kinds of things. I think the warnings in Hebrews are about losing saltiness, becoming unusable and trading away the power of grace for the false peace that comes from compromise and hiding.

V. 1 Notice that the writer is not assuming that he is speaking to a mixed crowd. Here they are *holy brothers*; and in v. 12, they are still brothers. Notice they are to look at Jesus, who has been said to be God, the Son, the Savior, and a high priest who knew suffering and can intercede for us.

Vs. 2-6 As much as they revered Moses, Jesus is so much greater.

V. 6 Notice that holding *fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope*, is the measure of being *God's house*. If that confidence and boasting is lost, it sounds like the losing of saltiness. It isn't saying a loss of salvation, but there is a sense of no longer being that city on a hill giving light to the lost.

Vs. 7-11 To prove this, the writer quotes Psalm 95.

V. 11 Although that generation never entered Canaan, this is not saying that everyone remained unsaved and never came to God. Some people may have repented, yet because of their rebellion, they just never made it into the land. Even Moses and Aaron didn't make it into the land and they were definitely saved.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19ff, Paul talks about his sacrifice so that he could share in the blessings of the gospel. He was already saved. It gives me the idea that one can be saved and have an eternal home in heaven, but as a result of choices made on earth, never experience the power of grace and the blessings of the gospel in this life. The continued following of Christ in the harvest is

vital for growth and experiencing God's blessings. We lose a lot when we are neither salt nor light for Christ.

Vs. 12-14 The mention of "*today*" reminds me of John 9, where Jesus heals the man born blind and tells His disciples, *We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day*. So what if a Christian rebels and decides it's not worth the trouble? He never sees the grace he would have seen.

V. 14 *Share* is the same as in 3:1 and there is actually a "the" before Christ. I think this is the same thought that began chapter 3, sharing *in a heavenly calling*. You can still be saved and deny the calling or commission of the church, because you'd rather do something else or you don't like discomfort. To walk with Christ is to be with Him in the harvest. To hide is to deny Jesus.

Vs. 15-19 But if a person does deny and does not participate in this calling; that is, this companionship with Christ as a witness to humanity, it is really the *deceitfulness of sin* (v. 13) and *rebellion*. To hide is to deny Jesus.

In Philippians, Paul mentions that we are called to share the sufferings of Christ. Sharing or being a companion to Christ in suffering was Paul's own goal. Following Christ in the harvest means sharing what He endured for us, for His sake and for others. *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake*. (Phil. 1:29)

We serve in His house as servants in the harvest, but only if we want to. We can have a great life on earth and miss all that, but also miss His rewards and fellowship and rest/peace. He leaves us the choice of picking up the cross daily. Following is up to us. But some of us would rather work in the harvest following Him, and as a result, know Him even deeper.

Psalm 104:1-23

Vs. 1-4 This is an interesting way to begin this majestic psalm. Look at v. 2 and then look over at Ezekiel 1:22-28. Also, doesn't v. 4 sound like Hebrews 1:7? God is majestic beyond all of our imagination.

Vs. 5-9 All creation and its forces in nature obey the Lord.

Vs. 10-13 And through nature, God Himself takes care of the world of animals.

Vs. 14-15 And God meets all of the needs of man, just like Jesus said He could in the Sermon on the Mount.

Vs. 16-18 The trees of Lebanon and the mountains had grandeur beyond what man could grasp, and in them God made animals to dwell.

Vs. 19-23 And just like it says in Genesis 1:14, He made the planets and heavenly bodies for us to set times and seasons. It is interesting that in Genesis 1, God had already covered the earth with vegetation before He made the sun, moon and stars. The heavenly bodies were needed before the creation of the animals, because they are oriented to the sun, moon and stars, just like we are for our orientation to times and seasons.

God points to His own majesty and love in creation. It is ironic. The very thing that should make people question and conclude that there is a God is all around them, yet in an ironic sense, invisible to them.

Proverbs 26:24-26

These proverbs play off the proverb from yesterday. You can glaze something over, disguise and hide a sinful heart and evil motives, but God will make sure it is eventually exposed.