

CONFRONTING WORDS

The [opening scene of Ezekiel](#), while brief, in stereotypical Hebrew fashion, would nonetheless have given more than enough information for the original listeners (and generations thereafter) to imagine the agony, disappointment, confusion and anger into which the vision of God's presence entered. It is Ezekiel's birthday. His thirtieth birthday to be exact. The day he would have been officially installed as a priest, that is, if he had not been involuntarily removed from his home five years earlier.

The son of Buzi the priest, Ezekiel witnessed one of the more aspirational chapters of Israel's recent history. Growing up in the capital, and being groomed for a religious / political role in the community; Ezekiel was present for renewal and purifying of his nation under the leadership of king Josiah. During this short-lived era, the law of Moses was rediscovered and, at least for a while, it seemed that Israel was returning to her God as well as her political place in the region. Ezekiel's training as a mediator between God and his people came at time when it was assumed that the relationship was in good condition. But then Josiah died in a failed political move, and some 10,000 Israelites, including Ezekiel, were marched off to Babylon, captives of a foreign king and subjects of foreign gods.

What happened? Israel was returning to the law, at least visibly. Was this not what God wanted, religiously observant people? How could God let his people go into exile? How could he let a clearly reprobate culture like the Babylonians overcome his holy people? How could he abandon them? How could he abandon Ezekiel? How would things ever be made right when they were so far from his presence?

The weight of the trauma pressed heavy on Ezekiel's shoulders that day beside the Chebar canal in Babylon. Angry at his oppressors, and perhaps God for allowing the oppression. Disappointed that God had not acted already to right the wrong, confused at why he was removed from home and vocation, and feeling the agony of what seemed a hopeless situation. In the midst of such emotion, God shows up. Brilliantly. Spectacularly. And with a terrifying message: the worst is yet to come.

Whatever relief Ezekiel experienced knowing that God had not abandoned his people—God's presence, after all, was leaving Jerusalem and manifesting before Ezekiel's eyes in Babylon where God's people were—was soon overshadowed by [the commission he received](#) to confront and not comfort. Ezekiel's job was to get the people of Israel's attention, and he would do so by demonstrating the forthcoming judgment, describing the reason for their situation: **Israel's appetite for the "world" around them.**

Now, it is one thing to state that Israel had long desired to be like the nations whom she was "set in the center" ([5:5-9](#)), after all, the grass often looks greener on the other side. Israel's leaders would hardly argue that they did not envy the economic structures and military might of their surrounding countries. Why wouldn't Israel model her economics and political strategy after those nations who had gone from good to great? She could still keep her general distinction via the temple and priests, and that old-fashioned exercise of circumcision. Why wouldn't she align herself with the important, the powerful, the successful? Such cohabitation seemed prudent in a volatile ancient world. [A prophet](#) proclaiming that Israel was living in the way of her neighbors would only garner enthusiastic agreement—especially from the leadership; rather than repentance. How could Ezekiel help the people see what was really at stake in their lust ([23:7-8,21,35](#))? Well, frankly, he spoke with vulgarity.

Employing a common poetic tool, God gave Ezekiel a few allegories that still shock the ears. **The images describe by Ezekiel offended all sensibilities and could not be easily shaken from memory, and that was the point.** These graphic depictions of Israel's heart and actions were designed to illicit disgust, and Lord willing, *humility* ([18:30-32](#)).

A little background before you read one of Ezekiel's more explicit allegories, the "Samaria" mentioned is the ten northern tribes of Israel that generations before had abandoned God's way by establishing their own place of worship and thus lost their inherited land. Israelites, even in the day of Jesus looked down on these "half-bread heathens" (think the "women at the well" in [John 4](#)). "Sodom" may need little explanation for most, but just in case, it was a city best known for its destruction all the way back in the days of Abraham in Genesis. Rampant with sexual perversion, amongst

other things, there was not a single righteous person—someone inclined to the ways of God—in her midst. Therefore, Sodom had become, and still remains, the archetype for human depravity and rebellion; and another one of those whom Israel considered herself far removed.

Alright, now, read Ezekiel 16, all the way through. Don't go too quickly. Let the visceral imagery hit you and weigh on your heart. **Consider** what it would have been like to hear these words in the midst of the trauma of exile. **Reflect** on emotions that come to the surface, who or what are they directed towards?

[READ EZEKIEL 16](#)

Israel's adopting of the best-practices, values, and ambitions of the nations to whom she was supposed to set the example, were not merely inconsequential compromises or trivial preferences. Israel chose (again and again) to follow her desires for what "the world" around her described as good and the means to achieve that good ([23](#)). Israel was, like all the others, playing God just like our first parents in the garden (Gen. 3). And, in her blending of God's way with other ways, Israel not only abandoned God's vision for flourishing, but became a leading contributor in oppressing ([22](#)). In her ignorance, forgetting the stories of her beginning, and in her arrogance, trusting in gifts, resources and earthly relationships; she turned her back on God even though her religious routines remained intact.

While we are not Israel twenty-five hundred plus years ago, we are certainly no less prone to lust after the "things of this world"; those best-practices, values, and ambitions that describe and obtain a vision of the good life. So, **for a moment, having heard the words of the prophet giving weight to our daily choices, ask yourself:**

- *What things of this world do I lust after (power, success, wealth, comfort, identity, purpose, and the means for achieving any/all these)?*
- *And, how do these impact the way I relate to both God, myself and the people around me?*

The solution to a ravenous appetite is not to try and suppress it, rather it is to satisfy it with quality sustenance (not junk food, or as we sang Sunday, "lesser loves"). In [John 6](#), the Jews are once again lusting after a king in the manner of the kingdoms around them when Jesus offers them something unexpected: eternal satisfaction.

"Jesus said, 'I am the Bread of Life. **The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever.** I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And **once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go.** I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

This, in a nutshell, is that will: that everything handed over to me by the Father be completed--not a single detail missed--and at the wrap-up of time I have everything and everyone put together, upright and whole. This is what my Father wants: that anyone who **sees** the Son and **trusts** who he is and what he does and then **aligns** with him will enter *real life, eternal life.*"

We cannot stop hungering, desiring the good life; but we can find satisfaction as we dine on the Bread of Life. When are cravings arise in the form of angst or ambition, let us be ones who start first with true sustenance, asking ourselves: Do I see Jesus? Am I trusting what he says and what he does? Am I aligned with (abiding in, [following](#)) him?