

JESUS, EZEKIEL'S CONTEXT

[Last week](#) we stepped right into [the muddy earth of Ezekiel](#), [a prophet](#) delivering words meant to disturb, convict, and lead to recognizing and embracing the grace of our good Father in confusing times. If, by the way, you felt the words too harsh and our use of them in the Gathering as confusing or stirring questions in you; please take a few moments and listen to "[Reading a Difficult Text](#)".

Reading Ezekiel in the context of his prophetic exhortations is vital for us not to dismiss the importance of the words and events in the redemptive story to which we are a part, and even necessary for us to recognize the often repetitive nature of our rebellious hearts and cultures. However, it is also imperative that we read Ezekiel in the fuller story of Jesus of Nazareth. The writer of Hebrews put it this way,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Jesus himself tried to tell those who would listen and believe him that the accounts and commandments Moses wrote were about him ([Jn. 5:46](#)) and that "Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" ([Jn. 8:56](#)). After his resurrection, Jesus joined a couple of his friends grieving his departure heading away for Jerusalem. Before they could recognize him, Jesus, "beginning with Moses and *all* the Prophets...interpreted for them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself" ([Lk. 24:27](#)). Whatever value—and there is significant value—in reading scripture in context, **the broader and never advancing framework of "all Scriptures" is the Jesus we come to know in the four gospels.** Jesus born, Jesus buried, Jesus beheld in his regal station is not only the hope for which Ezekiel endured but the reality in which we engage Ezekiel's words today; which is first-and-foremost, why we are reading Ezekiel with John's gospel. But it is not the only reason!

We could have picked any of the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to ground us through Ezekiel. Yet, we purposefully chose John's gospel because **John chose Ezekiel's book to model his own after!**

John is the most unique of the four gospels, which is why the other three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are referred to as the *synoptic gospels* because of the similar nature of their descriptions of Jesus. These three accounts share similar structures, describe similar events, and while adding unique depth and detail, describe Jesus similarly. John, however, deviates a bit! For example, while Mark jumps straight away into Jesus' ministry, none of the synoptic gospels contain such an "exalted introduction of Jesus" like John. In [chapter 1](#) of John's gospel, he portrays Jesus as the *Word of God, the life, the light of men, the glory of the only Son from the Father, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, and the one who will have the *heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending* upon him. There is no question in the reader's mind after John's introduction who Jesus is and what is the purpose of his presence. The other three accounts tend to tell more of a chronological story that reveals overtime the identity and purpose of Jesus, which brings me to the second example of John's uniqueness.

After his grand descriptor of Jesus, John starts his story with an event that takes place at the end of the other gospel stories: the cleansing of the temple. In [chapter 2](#), John has the story of Jesus famously overturning money-changers tables, making a whip and driving out the offenders violating "my Father's house" with their

economics of religion, along with Jesus' declaration that the temple in which he was performing his aggressive act, would be destroyed and raised again in just three days. This event for John set the tone for Jesus' ministry. In the other three gospels, this event takes place at the end of Jesus' ministry. In all four cases, it is a revelatory episode, but it has a different significance in John's gospel. But why? Why these differences, and a host more?

There is an interesting fact that we need to note to appreciate John. Biblical scholar and minister, C.K. Barrett, pointed out that in Matthew's gospel there are 124 references to what we call the Old Testament ("O.T."). In comparison, Luke contains 109 and the shortest of the gospels, Mark, has 70 such references. But, John only has 27 direct "scripture" references. However, as Barrett goes on to explain, it would be a mistake to think that John was somehow less enamored or aligned with the biblical history to which he contributed,

"John is unquestionably using the O.T., but...his use is very far from the simple 'proof-text' method of, say, Matthew...**For [John] the O.T. was itself a comprehensive unity**, not a mere quarry from which isolated fragments of useful material might be hewn. It was not (in general) his method to bolster up the several items of Christian doctrine and history with supports drawn from this or that part of the O.T.; instead, the whole body of the O.T. formed the background, or framework, upon which the new revelation rested...and we may again draw the conclusion that though John uses the O.T. he uses it in a novel manner, **collecting its sense rather than quoting.**"

John prefers the use of allusion, metaphor, or motif rather than the full citation when alluding to the story that Jesus entered into, and to which Jesus is the crowning episode. This is because, as John himself says ([20:30-31](#)), his account of Jesus is written with intentionality to awaken his readers into a new life, to interpret the events of their day (and ours) and their future (and ours) through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This prophetic task which Jesus undertakes, "gives meaning to the journey and distresses; and today's decision to trust in the call of God," for it "is a decision pregnant with future."

For John, Jesus was *the* Prophet, the one long ago promised to bring the fullness of promise to Abraham ([Gen. 15](#)) and the goodness of the promised land ([Deut. 18:15-18](#)) to the entire world. Jesus, the presence of God, was, like the prophets before him, primarily concerned with the relationship and mutual partnership between God and his people, and so John choose to model his account after the,

"...prophet and priest whose life and work point far beyond himself into the future. Only with difficulty can we write off the affinities of Ezekiel with the life and work of Jesus...[Ezekiel's] obedience, the vicarious nature of his ministry, and the content of his message set our faces toward the NT figure of Jesus and prepare us for the incarnate Son. Ezekiel builds a prophetic bridge between the Testaments and makes the passage far smoother than it would have been without him." (Hassell Bullock)

Immersing ourselves in [Ezekiel and John](#) will help us better understand Jesus' identity and purpose, as well as our own as we [follow Jesus together](#). So, over the coming weeks, we will explore in further detail "the affinities of Ezekiel with the life and work of Jesus," through John's gospel. We'll draw out the structure and metaphors they share. We'll meditate on how Jesus reverses the manifested curses of Ezekiel through his "I am" sayings. We'll let the contrast of God's judgment in Ezekiel and through Jesus mold our interpretation of God judging in our time and our role in this place. And we'll celebrate the realized hope of "God with us" even as we await a day when he cannot be ignored!