

## Ezekiel and John an Introduction

Over the next several months, we are going to dive into the visions and vernacular of the prophet Ezekiel, which at times might feel quite overwhelming! Take just a moment and read the [first two chapters of Ezekiel](#). It is a quick [read](#).

Born to be a priest, Ezekiel finds himself void of vocation when he and thousands of his countrymen and women are marched off to Babylon as the latest incorporation into this cosmopolitan empire. Removed from his land and his livelihood, Ezekiel is surprisingly confronted with the presence of God in this strange place and commissioned to be a prophet to God's people in their exile. While the calling is certainly noble, the purpose of a prophet leads the worker into a costly and challenging task. In Ezekiel's case, the task consisted of revealing to the people of Israel that the unthinkable will occur, God's holy city and temple, his dwelling place amongst humanity, will be destroyed and his presence removed from those who consider themselves his descendants.

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, get the house of Israel and speak with my words to them...’ Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes. Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you, therefore thus the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done and the like of which I will never do again...” (Ezek. 3:4, 5:5-9)

No wonder Ezekiel needed the heavens opened to him, to behold visions of divine beings and hear the audible voice of GOD himself in order to speak such predictions upon his kinsman and cherished home! But before we get lost in the details, the spectacular sights, gut-wrenching accusations, visceral judgments, and, eventually, stupendous hope; we need to step back and consider how we should interact with Ezekiel's prophecies, both understanding them and digesting them.

To start, watch this video from the Bible Project on [“How to Read the Prophets”](#)

Did you notice the description of the prophets in the film? These often marginalized and mostly rejected spokespersons were representatives for God whose primary concern was the relationship and mutual partnership between God and his people. Their purpose was to urge people to trust in God alone and hold singularly to that allegiance, often in very dramatic fashion. The prophets were to awaken a recognition of the cosmic reality in which they and the

people's everyday lives played out; giving weight to their common relationships and roles, as well as their political ones.

Each of the Old Testament prophets went about his task uniquely, and yet, each hit upon four common themes:

1. They **pointed out inconsistencies** in what the Israelites said they believed and how they actually lived.
2. They **called for repentance**, a turning away and letting go of any ideas, actions, expectations, etc.; that were out of line with God's vision for the world and a good life.
3. They **warned of judgment**; the bringing of justice when evil would be overcome, referred to as "The Day of the LORD."
4. They **grounded hope** ultimately and fully in God's character and faithfulness.

Admittedly, the imagery, poetry, and polemical language of the prophets, especially Ezekiel, makes it difficult for our modern minds to meditate on these texts. We do not often consider the cosmic descriptions as material for contemplation, and *yet that might precisely be the point of its use!*

The language of the prophets was meant to provoke, to jar, to awaken its hearers so that they might respond. So, rather than getting lost in the contextual details, **we should let the visions and vernacular hit us full on as we ask the questions the prophets themselves would hope their listeners would ask:**

1. What inconsistencies am I living in, relationally, behaviorally, ideologically, and practically?
2. What do I need to turn from, and what do I need to grab turn towards?
3. In what way(s) is God acting in our history to bring justice?
4. Where is my hope grounded, and how?

Whether reading Ezekiel or any of the other prophets, it would be helpful to keep these questions in mind. Even more so, it would be beneficial to remember that **we read the prophets not merely through the context in which they were written, but through the (mostly) fulfilled hope to which they point.** This realized salvation is why we will be reading Ezekiel's prophetic words alongside "the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us" to which the apostle John focuses his gospel.

We will go into greater detail on the multiple reasons for the pairing during an upcoming [Christ City Cast](#), but the primary reason we have intentionally paired [John's gospel](#) with Ezekiel because, in this gospel account, **Jesus assumes the role of a prophet *par excellence*.** Similar to the words and deeds of the Old Testament prophets, John casts Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection as both a warning and a promise, a revelation and a renewal, a jarring encounter

meant to get us to respond. As we interact with Jesus' life alongside the visions of Ezekiel, let us ask the prophetic questions of ourselves and with one another:

1. What inconsistencies am I living with? (Relationally? Ideologically? Behaviorally?)
2. What do I need to let go of and cling to?
3. Where is the cross of Jesus bringing justice in my life?
4. What / who am I hoping in? And, how?

There is no better way to enter into Ezekiel than through the prince and good shepherd whom Ezekiel foretold. As the commentator Hassell Bullock so succinctly states,

We have therefore seen [in Ezekiel] a 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. While he was not *the* Son of Man, he was indeed oriented toward his appearance. Ezekiel's obedience, the vicarious nature of his ministry,, and the content of his message set our faces toward the New Testament 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."

So, why don't you pick one of the questions above, then ask the Holy Spirit for ears to hear and eyes to see the answer to your question as you read and meditate on the prophetic reality of Jesus in [John 1:1-18](#).