

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. Today we introduce the book of EZEKIEL - PART 2.

POINT 6. THE EXPLANATION OF THE NEW TEMPLE, NEW CITY AND NEW LAND OF ISRAEL

Ezekiel chapters 40-48 prophesy the time of *the new temple, the new city and the new land of Israel*. Ezekiel prophesied the final glorious time in which *the kingdom of God* finds its fulfilment in the new Israel.

First. The agreement between the inner renewal and outer forms.

Ezekiel proclaims that “the display of God’s glory” (39:21) and “the outpouring of God’s Spirit” (39:29) must find expression in the new life in the new land! God’s glory is not only exalted above the earth, but descends in the forms of new life on earth. God wants to share his completeness to his new creation! In the prophetic picture of Ezekiel, the new forms of life find expression in the new temple, the new temple service and the new land and new city (cf. Isa 11:1-9; Rev 21 - 22).

It is noteworthy that Ezekiel 40-48 does not speak of *the creation of new forms* of life in Israel, but rather of *a reformation of the old forms* of life in Israel! The forms that Moses received in the Law remain the foundation for the new forms of life in the new Israel. But these new forms of life are permeated by the Holy Spirit and will therefore change the old forms of life in several ways. Ezekiel not only prophesied the inner renewal through a new heart and new spirit, but also the necessity that this inner renewal will have a new outer form. His message is that a new body belongs to a new spirit. Only when the whole world becomes the reflection of God’s glory, then God’s honour is upheld. Ezekiel prophesied that this future revelation of God’s glory would happen *in and through Israel*. By comparing Ezekiel 1 with Ezekiel 40-48, we see that the glory of God, which the cherubim represented transcendently, will go in and through Israel forth into the whole world. This is represented by the cherubim going “straight ahead” (1:9,12) and the new people of Israel likewise going “straight ahead” when they come to worship the Lord on the great festival days (46:9). *The new Israel will be on earth what the cherubim are in heaven!* Just as the cherubim are the bearers of the divine life, likewise in the new Israel there will be a river of life (47:1-12). The throne of God, which hovered above the heads of the cherubim (1:26) has made its place in the new temple (43:7). The new name of the new city will be “the Lord is there” (48:35). Just as the throne vehicle had the form of a square (1:5-9), likewise the new temple area (42:15-20), the new city (48:15-17) and the whole area of the city, priests and Levites (48:20), which will be the new centre of the new Israel will have the form of squares (cf. Rev 21:15-16). In this way, *every outward form on earth is filled with new inner life*. In the new temple, the people, priests and prince come in and out, to bring the new sacrifices and to celebrate the new festivals. The new city is shared by all tribes and each tribe has its gate (48:30-34; cf. Rev 21:12-13). And each tribe has an equal inheritance in the new land. Thus, Ezekiel’s vision concerning what he saw of the Lord himself in chapter 1 results in his vision concerning what the new temple, the new city and the new land in chapter 40-48 will look like. Ezekiel shows that *when God imparts his life in the inner man, then it will find expression in outer forms, which are in agreement with the inner reality!* He shows that *God’s method is not from outer conformity to inner conformity, but rather from inner renewal to outer renewal!* The new life and power present in the new people will always press for similar new forms in their outward life.

Second. The new society is no longer living under the dominion of sin. Although the new Israel would be living on earth, Ezekiel describes the new Israel as no longer subject to the destroying power of sin. The rights and duties of the prince are very limited: it is not said that he must maintain justice in the land or defend it against attacks or promote its material welfare, but only that he must provide for the offerings of the great festivals (45:9-17). The same is true of the people: all they must do is bring sacrifices (46:19-24). The prince is satisfied with his small task, the Levites accept that they may no longer serve as priests, and the priests teach and judge without anyone resisting. The financial contributions flow without trouble. Lies and deceit no longer exist in merchandise or industry. The poor no longer fear the rich. The festivals are celebrated automatically. There is absolutely no sign of the intervention of a government. *The picture is of a society no longer living under the domain of sin*. Sin has been robbed of its dominion (cf. Rom 6:6-7).

POINT 7. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EZEKIEL’S PROPHECIES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS.

Ezekiel is a prophet of the Old Testament period, but prophesies about the New Testament period in terms of the Old Testament realities.

First. The Old Testament prophets saw all future events only in prophetic perspective.

Ezekiel described all these end-time (eschatological) events as happening close to his own time. This is because he could only see things in *prophetic perspective*, that is, *he saw all future events as one whole picture in which the*

relationships of the distinct parts were in reality different than what they seemed. It was as if he stood in a lane of trees, in which he could clearly distinguish the trees closest to him, but the further the trees were separated from him, the more they flowed into one another. He could see *that* certain end-time (eschatological) events would happen, but he could not distinguish clearly *when* they would happen. For the prophets of the Old Testament, all these end-time events would happen together “in the last days”, “in the time coming.”

For example, the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied that the return of Israel from exile in Babylon and the restoration of the land to Israel would be immediately followed by the coming of the Messiah King and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and these events would be immediately followed by the final judgement of the godless nations and the renewal of the whole earth. They prophesied that all these end-time events belonged together “in the last days”. But the Bible clearly shows that these events were in fact separated from one another by centuries! The coming of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place *more than 5 centuries after* the return of Israel from the Babylonian exile and the restoration of the land to Israel! God did *not* reveal to the prophets that there would be great lengths of time between these events.

The prophetic perspective of the prophets also explains why Ezekiel described what he saw in his visions without taking the factual proportions into consideration. The temple mountain is “a very high mountain”, something mount Zion was not (40:2). The new temple buildings are separated from the new city (48:15), which was not the case during the times of the kings and also was geographically impossible. The new land of Canaan is seen as a long rectangle, the coastal area of the Philistines is now included, while the part of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan is left out of consideration, all facts which were never the case during the time of the kings (48). Finally, each tribe gets the same size of inheritance, all in parallel strips of land stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Jordan and in a different area than it had before.

Second. The Old Testament prophets did not know the mystery that God’s future plan included the Gentile nations. According to Ephesians 3:4-6, the prophets of the Old Testament were not enlightened about the *mystery*, namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles would be heirs together with Israel (Rom 8:16-17), that believing Jews and Gentiles would be members of the same body, which is the Church (Eph 2:15-16), and that believing Jews and Gentiles would be sharers together in God’s promises made to Israel (2 Cor 1:20-22). The prophets in the Old Testament did not know the mystery or plan of God that the Gentile nations would become heirs of this future glory together with Israel and that on equal footing with Israel (Eph 2:11-22; 1 Pet 1:10-12). 2 Corinthians 1:20 says that all the promises God has made in the Bible are “Yes” and “Amen” in Jesus the Messiah. This means that *all the promises God has made to believing Israel as “his people” during the Old Testament dispensation, are promises to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ!* Although the prophets in the Old Testament did not know this truth, the apostles in the New Testament did know this truth! For example, in Romans 9:25-26, the apostle Paul quoted two promises that God made to *Israel* during the Old Testament, but understood them as also applying to the *Gentiles* in the New Testament! He quoted Hosea 2:23 and 1:10, in which the rejection and restoration of Israel during the Old Testament period has its parallel in the exclusion of the Gentiles from God’s covenant favour in the beginning and their reception into that favour later (Eph 2:11-22)!

Because the Old Testament prophets did not know this mystery or plan of God, Ezekiel could only see the future glory of God as happening *in and through Israel*. Ezekiel’s picture of the future glory of God’s kingdom does not break through the boundaries of God’s Old Testament people. Because Ezekiel lived before the time of fulfilment, which arrived with the first coming of Jesus Christ, he could only describe this future worship of God in terms of what people could understand in his time, that is, in terms of the Old Testament temple and its ceremonies (ch. 40-48), and not yet in terms of the New Testament “worship of God in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4: 23-24)! Ezekiel could only picture the future revelation of God’s glory in terms of the Old Testament forms, like the people of Israel, the temple and its sacrifices and priests, and the land of Israel. God gave Ezekiel a revelation of the future glory of all his future people, but *only with words and pictures and within the reference framework, which the Jews in his day would be able to understand.* **Third.**

The prophets of the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation.

2 Corinthians 3:14 says, “To this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. ... Only in Christ is it taken away!” Thus, whoever tries to understand the Old Testament prophecies without the new and complete revelation that Jesus Christ has brought, will be like a person having his mind and heart covered with a veil! It is not possible to interpret the Old Testament prophecies correctly without the New Testament revelation. Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 10:1 say that the Old Testament Law and its forms are “a shadow of the things that were to come; *the reality*, however, is found in Christ.” Therefore, *the Old Testament revelation must always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation! The “shadows” of the Old Testament revelation must always be interpreted in the light of the “realities” of the New Testament revelation!* The Old Testament teaching concerning the end-time (eschatology) pictures the glorious future of God’s people only in terms of *the new Israel*. But the New Testament teaching concerning the end-time (eschatology) unfolds the Old Testament teaching concerning the end-time much further and shows that it not only includes the believers from Israel but also the believers from the Gentile nations. The New

Testament revelation teaches that God's end-time plan involves *all the people of God*, whether they are believers in Christ from the Jews or believers in Christ from the Gentiles!

POINT 8. THE MAIN MESSAGES WHICH EZEKIEL PROPHESED.

First. Ezekiel prophesied messages of judgement.

In chapters 1-24, Ezekiel prophesied the judgement of God on the depraved remnant of Jews living in Jerusalem and Judah in order to cause the Jews living in exile in Babylon no longer to put their hope on king Zedekiah and also no longer to expect that they would soon return from exile to Judah. He prophesied against the sinful ways of the Israelites, especially against their gross idolatry and their unfaithfulness to the Lord. He prophesied against the corrupt leaders of Israel, against the evil kings, the corrupt priests and the false prophets. Ezekiel's prophecies of judgement against the evil leaders of Israel is summarised very well in chapter 22:23-31. The princes are like lions robbing their own people of their possessions and killing them. The priests do violence to God's law by teaching that there is no difference between the holy and the common or between the clean and the unclean. The government officials are like wolves tearing the people apart in order to make unjust gain. And the prophets whitewash all the corrupt deeds of the leaders for them by false visions and lying divinations. And finally, the people of the land practise extortion, commit robbery, oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien by denying him justice. In chapters 25 to 32, Ezekiel prophesied the judgement of God on the nations surrounding Judah during the time of Nebuchadnezzar's invasions.

Second. Ezekiel prophesied messages of salvation.

After the destruction of the old Israel, that is, of Judah, Jerusalem and its temple, Ezekiel began to prophesy the rebuilding of the new Israel. He prophesied the return from exile, the restoration of the land to Israel, the rebuilding of the land of Israel, the renewal of the people of Israel and the final defeat of the nations opposing the new Israel. But this change from the old Israel to the new Israel will not take place without the coming of the Messiah, the One who will be the King of new Israel and who will shepherd the new Israel for ever and ever. This change from the old Israel to the new Israel will not take place without repentance, conversion, renewal of heart and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this change from the old Israel to the new Israel will not take place because of anything the Jews are or do, but will happen only because of whom the Lord is and what he does! This glorious future of the new Israel will be based, not on works of the law, but on God's grace! Therefore, Ezekiel prophesied the coming of the Messiah, whom he calls the Lord's Servant, David. And therefore, he proclaimed the individual responsibility of man to repent, convert and reform his life.

Third. Ezekiel proclaimed the individual responsibility of every person.

Ezekiel 18 tells that those who opposed Ezekiel used a proverb saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." They blamed their ancestors for all the evil that was happening to them in their day. *The Bible teaches both the solidarity of people together with their nation, church or family as well as the individual responsibility of every person.* The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 says that God would punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God, but he would show love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. The Ten Commandments emphasise the bad and good influence fathers can have on their children, in order to warn them not to disobey God and to encourage them to obey God. The Ten Commandments warn against evil that has not yet been committed and make people aware that their personal sins affect not only themselves but also the generations of people after them. In contrast, Ezekiel warns against evil that has already been committed and makes people aware that God holds them personally responsible for their sins. He emphasises that every individual will be held responsible for the kind of life he lived on earth. Verse 21-22 says, "If a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the offences he has committed will be remembered against him." But verse 23-24 says, "If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, ... he will die. None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered." Thus, Ezekiel teaches that *the principle of solidarity between fathers and children does not abolish the principle of individual responsibility.*

Fourth. Ezekiel proclaimed conversion and renewal of heart.

In Ezekiel 18:30-31, the prophet proclaimed the need to repent and turn away from sin. This conversion is connected with rebirth of which Ezekiel also speaks. Only when people turn away from their life of sin and are being born again by God's Spirit, will they really be God's people and will God really be their God (11:18-20)! The work of God is not only negative in the sense that *he saves people out of their degenerate life*, but it is also positive in the sense that *he saves them to be his renewed people.*

Fifth. Ezekiel prophesied the coming Messiah.

In Ezekiel 17:22-24 the coming Messiah is pictured as a tender sprig taken from the very top of a cedar tree, which represents the house of David, and is planted on a high mountain of Israel, where it will become a splendid cedar tree, in which birds of every kind will nest and find shelter in the shade of its branches. All other trees, that is, all other nations will know that God sovereignly destroyed the kings of Judah, but raised up the Messiah King. God will re-unite the former divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, when he brings them back from exile to their land (34:20-31; 37:21-28).

There God will save them from all their sinful backsliding and cleanse them. There they will be God's people and he will be their God. And there his servant David will be King as well as Shepherd over them. There they will live in complete safety and peace *forever*, with God's sanctuary in their midst *forever* and with the Messiah King as their king *forever*.

It is very clear that Ezekiel is *not describing a limited future period of prosperity for the nation of Israel* under the Messiah King, but *an everlasting new condition, which can only be compared with the new heaven and the new earth of the New Testament!*

Because Ezekiel still belonged to the Old Testament revelation, he could only describe this glorious future of the new Israel in terms that the people of old Israel could understand, that is, in terms of a new temple and its new worship, a new city and a new land, and a new people living in the new land. *The Lord did not reveal to Ezekiel his future plan that the Gentiles would be heirs of this glorious future together and on equal footing with Israel. That plan was only revealed at the coming of Jesus Christ to the apostles and described in the New Testament!*

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Daniel 1-6. Next week we will introduce the book of Daniel - part 1.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".