

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today's topic is **A DISCIPLE SHARES WHAT HE LEARNS FROM EZEKIEL**.

In Ezekiel 1-24, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied *the destruction of the old Israel*, that is, of Judah, Jerusalem and its temple. And in Ezekiel 33-39 he prophesied *the reconstruction 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 would *not take place without the coming of the Messiah*, the One who would be the King of new Israel and who would shepherd the new Israel for ever and ever.

This change from the old Israel to the new Israel would *not take place without repentance, conversion, renewal of heart and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit*.

And this change from the old Israel to the new Israel would *not take place because of Israel keeping the law, but only because of God's grace*. That is why Ezekiel prophesied the coming of the Messiah, the necessity of conversion and the reformation of life!

(S) **Ezekiel chapter 18** is a prophecy about the individual responsibility of every person to convert.

First. Responsibility. People 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 3rd and 4th 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 ancestors could have on their descendants, 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 their children.

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 lives 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 warns, "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 the Bible teaches that *the principle of solidarity between fathers and children does not abolish the principle of individual responsibility!*

Second. Conversion. Ezekiel 11:8-20 and 18:30-31 teach that only when people repent, turn away from their life of sin and are being born again by God's Spirit, they would really be God's people and God would really be their God! God's salvation works in two directions: He *saves people out of their degenerate life* and he also *saves them to be renewed people*.

(T) **Ezekiel chapter 33** is a prophecy about the turning point in Ezekiel's ministry. As long as the temple stood, Ezekiel's task was to proclaim *the coming destruction of Israel*. After the temple had been destroyed and Israel had been exiled, his task was to proclaim *the future rebuilding of Israel*. The Lord's mercy would triumph over his judgement (Js 2:13)! Because the Lord's absolute condition for rebuilding and renewal is conversion, Ezekiel's task was to proclaim that everyone must turn from his sin and do what is just and right (10-20).

(S) **Ezekiel chapter 34** is a prophecy about the Lord as the Shepherd of Israel. Ezekiel prophesied against the evil "shepherds" of Israel (1-10). They included the kings, princes, officials, tribal elders and family heads, who had not taken care of God's flock, but had ruled harshly and brutally over God's sheep. Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord himself through the Messiah would be the Shepherd (11-16) and he would care for the weak, but judge "the rams and goats" that oppress the sheep through their violence and injustice (17-22).

(T) **Ezekiel chapter 36** is a prophecy about the people renewed and the land of Israel restored by the Lord. Ezekiel prophesied that the land of Israel would be replanted and rebuilt *before* the exiles returned to Israel. Never again would they be deprived from their inheritance (1-15). He prophesied that the former profaned land and its people would be

cleansed, not because of anything Israel was or did, but only as a result of God vindicating his own holy name before the nations. The restoration and renewal of Israel would be based only on God's sovereign purpose and grace! That is why Israel is reminded of their sins, how they profaned God's holy name among the nations (22-23). The Lord would accomplish his purpose through deeds which neither the nations nor the masses of Jews believed he would do. He would bring them back to the land Israel (24), cleanse them so that they might again come into his presence (25), give them a new heart and cause the Holy Spirit to live in their spirit (26), so that they would willingly follow God's will (27). Only when this renewal has happened, - and *only then* (36:33; 37:13-14) - would *the new Israel* be fit to *live in the new land* and would God's original purpose be realised, namely that Israel would be the Lord's people and the Lord would be Israel's God. (28; Ex 6:7; cf. 2 Cor 6:16). Then the former ruins would be rebuilt and the former desolate land would be cultivated and the land would become like the garden of Eden (33-35)! And the people of Israel would again be very numerous (37-38). In Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel prophesied in one prophecy the coming kingdom of God as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the first coming of Christ and as the new earth at the second coming of Christ!

(S) **Ezekiel chapter 37** is a prophecy about the people of Israel renewed by the Lord. In verse 1-14 Ezekiel did not give an Old Testament teaching about the resurrection from the dead, but proclaimed the good news that God would renew Israel. 'The valley full of dead bones lying unburied' is a *symbol* representing the whole house of Israel, destroyed by violence and scattered among the nations, without life or hope (11). The 'graves' are not literal, but are a *symbol* representing the countries to which Israel had been scattered. The Israelites were living in exile, just as dead bodies were lying in the graves (12-13). In this hopeless condition of the exile God would reveal his grace to her when she fully realised that God had left her (11-12). God himself would 'open their graves' and 'bring them up from their graves' are *symbols* representing the fact that God would bring them out of the countries where they had been exiled. God would put his Holy Spirit in them and resettle them in their own land. *Only a born-again Israel would live in a born-again land* (36:33).

In verse 15-22 Ezekiel prophesied that the exiles from the former northern kingdom of Israel and the former kingdom of Judah would be re-united in the restored land. And in verse 23-28 Ezekiel prophesied that the glorious future of Israel would be under the rule of the true king David, who is a *symbol* of the coming Messiah. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel prophesied in one prophecy the return from exile, the coming of the Messiah, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant which would be an everlasting covenant (Heb 8:6-13). These matters were all fulfilled at the first coming of Christ.

(T) **Ezekiel chapter 38-39** is a prophecy about the final defeat of the enemies of Israel by the Lord. Israel's return and regeneration would not be complete without answering the question concerning the opposing nations.

First. From early times, Israel had been harassed by the nations from all sides. First the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites, then the Philistines and Canaanites, then the Arameans and finally the Assyrians and Babylonians attacked Israel from the north. More and more Israel began to regard 'the Gentile nations' as the inimical powers against God and God's people. Ezekiel prophesied that the last trial of God's people, Israel, would be an attack by the opposing nations in order to try to rob Israel of its peace and riches. But God would protect his people and destroy the opposing nations!

Second. Ezekiel says that this prophecy concerning Gog and his hordes had also been prophesied before by other prophets (38:17; 39:8). The north had always been the great unknown to Israel, from where the inimical powers against God was expected to come (Isa 14:31; Jer 1:15; 6:1,22). These northern nations were great hordes of horsemen, and Israel knew them as "Scythians", who since 630 B.C. were notorious in the whole of western Asia and also devastated the fruitful plain of Sharon and Philistia. Although the names of the attacking nations change and sometimes was Assur and sometimes was Babel, there would come a time when the opposing nations together would attack Jerusalem (Joel 3:1-16; Jer 6:22-23; 25:15-33; 30:23-24; Zeph 1:14-18; 3:8-9; Zech 12:2-9; 14:1-21). Although the name "Gog" is not mentioned in these prophecies, they all refer to this same end-time event.

Third. The leader of the attacking hordes, called "Gog", was a historical person, but became *the personification* of the inimical powers opposed to God. Ezekiel did not need to explain to the Israelites who Gog was and where the land of Magog was, because these were known facts to the exiles. Gog is described as the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, which was located in the north in Asia Minor. He was most probably the known Gyges of the Lydians, who was a fierce king in Asia Minor in about 660 B.C. Most likely Ezekiel took this Gog or Gyges from Asia Minor as *representative* of the alliance of nations attacking Israel from the north. "Gog" becomes the Old Testament Antichrist, the last enemy who must be defeated before the kingdom of God would be completely established in Israel.

Fourth. The opposing nations are named as Meshech, Tubal, Magog and Beth-Togarmah, who were Phrygians and Cappadocians living in the north in Asia Minor; Persia and Gomer, who were Iranian people originally living in the east; and Cush and Put, who were North African people living in the south. It is noteworthy that the traditional enemies of Israel are *not* mentioned among these nations attacking Israel, because in Ezekiel 24-32 they had already come to know the power of the Lord and no longer dared to attack the people of the Lord (36:36).

Fifth. Ezekiel prophesied that this attack would happen “after many days, in future years” (38:8), “in days to come” (38:16; 39:8). With all the prophets, this expression means “the end-time” in the sense of “the time when the glory of the Messiah would shine over Israel and God’s purpose with Israel would have been fully realised (Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; Hos 3:5; Dan 10:14).

It is noteworthy that God himself would sovereignly bring Gog and his hordes out against Israel (38:3-9). This means that Gog would only be *an instrument* in the Lord’s hands (Prov 16:4). Although Gog would be fully responsible for his wicked actions, his actions would be determined and controlled by the Lord (Gen 45:5,8; Isa 5:26; 7:18-20; 10:5; Rom 9:17). This shows that the Lord is the sovereign Ruler of all the nations on earth and of all events that take place in history (Isa 41:4,22-29; 43:9-13; 44:8; 45:21). Therefore, this attack by Gog and his hordes would be no surprise to God.

Sixth. Ezekiel prophesied how God would sovereignly break the power of these opposing nations (38:19-23; 39:1-20). Through a mighty earthquake, hailstorms and burning sulphur, God would destroy these opposing nations (2 Pet 3:10; Rev 16:17-21; 20:7-9). The vast armies, their officers and their horses would become a great sacrificial meal, not for the gods, but for the wild animals (Rev 19:17-18). During this attack and destruction of the opposing nations, Israel would not have to fight, but would only be spectators of God’s mighty acts of salvation.

Seventh. Ezekiel stated the reason of this last confrontation between God and the opposing nations as God vindicating his holy name by displaying his glory (39:21-24). From that day onwards, Israel would know that the Lord is really their God. And the nations would know the real reason why the Lord had previously punished Israel, Jerusalem and the temple with destruction. In this passage, Ezekiel’s prophecy returns from the future to the present suffering of Israel. The destroyers are no longer Gog and his hordes, but the Babylonians (39:23). Thus, the picture of the last days serves to comfort Israel in their present situation of exile and assures them of the certainty of their coming deliverance. Also Israel must learn to live by faith, to believe God’s prophetic word, even when it might take a long time before it is fulfilled, and to submit to God’s sovereign guidance in their present lives.

Eighth. In Ezekiel 39:25-29, Ezekiel gave a summary of God’s end-time actions. He prophesied that a new period in Israel’s history was about to begin: The 3 great end-time actions would be the return from exile, the destruction of the opposing nations and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (39:29; Isa 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Joel 2:28-32; Zech 12:10-14).

(S) Ezekiel chapter 40-48 is a prophecy about the meaning of the new temple, the new city and the new land of Israel.

First. In these chapters, Ezekiel prophesied the final glorious time in which the kingdom of God finds its fulfilment in the new Israel. *The main characteristic of the kingdom of God in its final form is that there will be complete agreement between the inner renewal and the 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 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 city (cf. Isa 11:1-9; Rev 21 - 22).

Second. 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 which 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 a new 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 *an 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 chapter 1 with chapter 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) and 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 is filled with new inner life*. In the new temple, the new people, priests and the 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 to the inner man, 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.

(T) I would like to share about **the Messiah in the book of Ezekiel**. Ezekiel prophesied about the coming Messiah. In chapter 17:22-24, the coming Messiah is pictured as a tender sprig taken from the very top of a cedar tree, representing the house of David, and planted on a high mountain of Israel, where it would 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, representing all other nations, would know that God sovereignly destroyed the kings of Judah, but raised up the Messiah King.

In chapter 37:21-28, the coming Messiah is pictured as the Shepherd and King of the united tribes of Israel living in the new land of Israel. It is very clear that Ezekiel is *not describing a limited future period of prosperity for 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 all God's people in terms which the people of 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 land. *The Lord did not reveal to Ezekiel his future plan that the Gentiles would be heirs of this glorious future together with Israel and on equal footing with Israel. That plan was only revealed at the first coming of Jesus Christ to the apostles and described in the New Testament!* (Eph 3:2-6).

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.**

First. Every day have a quiet time from one chapter from Daniel, from Daniel 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12.

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".