

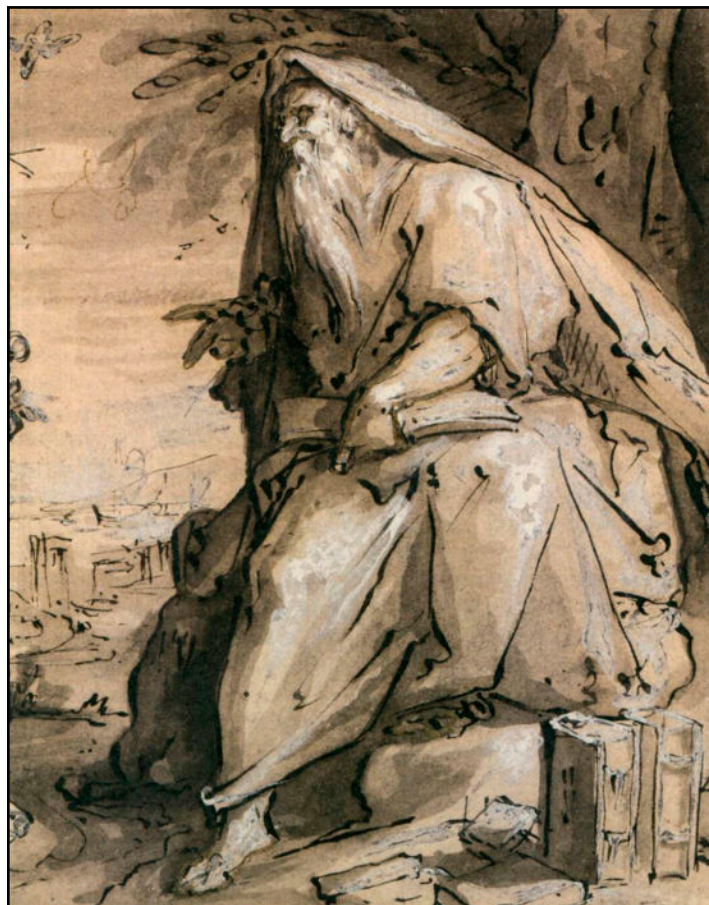
The Life and Ministry of Ezekiel, The Mute Prophet

There is a man in the Old Testament named Ezekiel. The first time we read about this man is in Ezekiel 1:1. From the first verse we know that he was 30 years old when he received his first vision from Yahweh. The second verse helps us understand that the first vision occurred in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile. That would be the year 597 B.C. That means this man was born in the year 622 B.C. and was taken captive to Babylon when he was 25 years old in 597 B.C. We are also told that he was relocated near the Chebar canal along with other exiles. The canal was close to the ancient city of Babylon, about 825 miles from the city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 1:3 gives us the name of his father, Buzi, but we do not know anything about him. We do not know anything else about his parents or if he had brothers or sisters.

We are told that he was a priest, but we do not know anything about his duties (Ezekiel 1:3). We know from Ezekiel 4:13-14 that he had been careful to not defile himself by eating the wrong food. We know that he had hair on his head, a mustache, and a beard because Ezekiel 5:1 states that on one occasion Yahweh ordered him to shave off the hair of his head and cut off his beard. Ezekiel 24:22 says he had a mustache. We know that he also wore a turban, a robe and shoes (Ezekiel 5:3; 24:23). Ezekiel 8:1 does tell us that he had a home. Ezekiel

24:18 indicates that he had a wife. But we do not know her age or if he had any children. We are never told if he had any friends. Those are the few facts that we know about this man of God.

EZEKIEL, CALLED TO BE A PROPHET. Then in the opening chapter of the book of Ezekiel, we are told the prophet saw an awesome vision of Yahweh and some cherubim. This vision cannot be found in any other book of the Old Testament. In the vision, the prophet saw Yahweh riding a war chariot.



Yahweh appears as a rainbow of colors while He is sitting on a throne. His throne rests upon four cherubim each with four faces, that of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle. Below each cherub was a wheel that had the appearance of a sparkling beryl gem. Each wheel had a second wheel which was perpendicular to the first wheel and was within the first wheel. The wheels had eyes all around. When the wheels moved, they moved instantly without turning! The four cherubim supported the chariot and the four wheels were the wheels of the chariot. The vision looked like a war chariot carrying Yahweh

to battle.

What an incredible vision for this thirty years old, flesh and blood man to see. This vision was given to him because Yahweh planned to change the life of this young priest by calling him

to become His prophet. Let's read Ezekiel 2:1-3,

Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day." Ezekiel 2:1-3 (NASB)

We need to notice that Yahweh did not ask this priest to volunteer to become a prophet. Yahweh did not ask or plead with him to serve Him. There were no bulletin notices or pleas from the church pulpit for volunteers. Just as Yahweh commanded Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh, Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to become a prophet to Israel. In verse 1 we simply read, "Son of man, stand on our feet that I may speak with you." Then in verse 3, Yahweh said, "I am sending you to the sons of Israel." Yahweh did not ask Ezekiel if he wanted to go. Yahweh simply said, "Stand up, I have a ministry for you." I have picked your ministry and the people to whom you will minister. You will minister to rebellious people. They will hear your words and ignore you. They will compliment you to your face, but they will hate you. That was the ministry of this thirty-year old man alongside the Chebar canal in a foreign land. At that moment he became both a priest and a prophet. What is truly amazing about his call to minister for Yahweh is that Yahweh simply commanded him to serve. That is how Yahweh called each of the apostles, including Paul. That describes a true call by Yahweh upon anyone to serve Him. That is how the Holy Spirit calls each believer. He gives us the spiritual gifts that He wants us to use in ministry to others. He wants us to use our spiritual gifts. That is one way the Holy Spirit ministers to all of us!

EZEKIEL'S PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. From a human perspective, Ezekiel's ministry was sad for four reasons. First in Ezekiel 2:5, Yahweh told him that the people to whom he would minister would ignore him. In Ezekiel 3:7-8, Yahweh repeated the disappointing news that the people would not listen to him. That means the rebellious people would remain rebellious.

The second piece of sad news, is that Yahweh told him that he would be mute throughout his ministry until the Babylonian army conquered the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah. He would not be able to talk with his wife and children, if he had any children, nor could he talk to others. Therefore, he must have communicated by writing or sign language. The only time he could speak was when Yahweh specifically gave him something to say (Ezekiel 3:26-27). Then the prophet would speak the Word of the Lord. So, Yahweh told him that he would be a mute prophet. At least he knew what to expect. Everyone of his messages would be prepared by Yahweh. He did not need to write his own messages.

The third piece of sad news was that he would be confined to his house and could not leave unless Yahweh told him to leave (Ezekiel 3:24-25). That means his ministry would be performed from the house most of the time.

The fourth piece of sad news is that Yahweh would destroy the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the nation of Judah.

Then Yahweh began to give Him three pieces of helpful news. The first helpful news that Ezekiel was given was in Ezekiel 3:1-2, 10. Yahweh said in verses 1-3,

Then He said, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth." Ezekiel 3:1-3 (NASB)

So the prophet ate the scroll, which symbolized the Word of God. Then in verse 1, Yahweh told him to take Scripture into his heart and listen closely to what he read. That is how we can be encouraged and be positive in a very disappointing ministry. We must be in His Word and listen to it closely. We must not hurriedly read His Word and look for a quick fix. We must read His Word, digest His Word, listen closely, and then it will have meaning.

The second helpful news was about his responsibility. The news gave him direction. Ezekiel was going to be a watchman (Ezekiel 3:14-21). His ministry was one of warning the righteous to not sin, and to the wicked to repent and to not con-

tinue to sin. Yet even though he warned them they would not repent. So, Yahweh told him that his ministry would be ineffective.

The third piece of helpful news is given in Ezekiel 3:8-9. Yahweh promised to strengthen him. It is interesting that the Hebrew meaning of Ezekiel's name is "whom God will strengthen." Ezekiel needed to be strengthened.

At that point Ezekiel had directions from Yahweh about his ministry. He would be mute, house-bound, speak prophecies prepared by Yahweh, and be ineffective. The vast majority of the people to whom he ministered would die during the next Babylonian invasion in the years 588 – 586 B.C. He had been given clear and positive direction from Yahweh, but what a disappointing ministry it would be!

EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY. Then chapters 4-24 of the book of Ezekiel describes the first part of his ministry. At the very beginning of his ministry, chapters 4 and 5 state the prophet performed several skits to teach the people that Yahweh would destroy their nation. The skits taught the people that two-thirds of the population of Jerusalem would die and the remaining third would be scattered. The fathers and mothers would eat their sons due to famine. The city would be ravaged by plagues and bloodshed.

In Ezekiel 6-9, Ezekiel rebuked them for their idol worship, for profaning the temple, and for their bloodshed. Yahweh announced that the temple and city would be destroyed and all of the wicked within the city of Jerusalem, except for the righteous would be killed.

In chapter 10-11, Yahweh announced that His Shekinah glory would leave the temple, move to the Mount of Olives and leave.

Then in chapters 12-14, Ezekiel performed skits and spoke in proverbs to illustrate that eventually more people would be taken into exile again, people would be scattered, and the land of Judah would be stripped.

From chapters 15-23, Ezekiel was told to announce judgment upon his own people for sacrificing their sons and daughters as food to idols and for making their sons walk through the fire of Moloch. He denounced the different sins of the wicked leaders, the false priests, and the false prophets. Yahweh said Judah was like a useless vine. It was good for nothing.

Interleaved through these chapters, the prophet announced good news about a future day when the Messiah would come, restore Israel, and give her a glorious future.

His ministry must have been difficult. Imagine giving your own leaders, priests, prophets, and people such terrible news for four long years. Thirty-four times during these four years the prophet announced the "Word of the Lord" and then gave them horrible news. The temple, the city, the nation, and they themselves would be destroyed, except most of the righteous. It is difficult enough for us to read these various announcements of judgment. Some of us may wish that we could hear something new during our studies of the book. We can be confident that they did. How much more did Ezekiel, who had to give this horrible news, then witnessed the people's rejection of his messages, and endured the criticism that occurred.

Then in Ezekiel 24, Yahweh told Ezekiel that the desire of his eyes would die. Throughout his ministry he did not say anything about himself. Now for the first time, we learned that this mute, house-bound, seemingly ineffective male prophet did have feelings. When his wife died, Yahweh did not allow him to reveal his emotions to anyone. He could only groan silently. He could not publicly mourn, or weep her death. His wife would die but he could not express his grief. The person whom he loved the most among those wicked, unrepentant, rebellious people was going to die as a sign to them. Yet, they would not listen just as Yahweh had told him. So, why did she have to die? Yahweh wanted to give them a sign. They would lose the temple they loved, just as Ezekiel would lose his beloved wife. After the prophet told the people his wife would die, she died that evening. Her death was a sign the temple would be burned to the ground. When she died, Scripture records for the first time that Yahweh called the prophet Ezekiel by his first name.

It is a surprise that Yahweh called this man by his first name at this point, for Yahweh had always called the prophet the "Son of Adam" 93 times throughout the book. The Hebrew phrase for "Son of Adam" literally means "Son of Man." One commentator said that the Hebrew phrase just simply means "man." But when Ezekiel's wife died, Yahweh called the prophet by his first name for the first and only time in the pages of Scripture. Imagine Ezekiel hearing Yahweh say his

name — Ezekiel! You can find that occasion in Ezekiel 24:24. I wonder how this flesh and blood man felt. I hope it gave the prophet great joy to know that Yahweh loved him. I believed that Yahweh waited until the moment of his wife's death to do that in order to give Ezekiel comfort.

Ezekiel was also a sign to the people in two ways. First, Yahweh told him that he could not mourn, weep, or publicly grieve the death of his wife. His behavior was a sign to the people that they would react in the same way. But they would not mourn for Yahweh's temple, they would mourn, weep, and groan for themselves as they rotted in their own sins (Ezekiel 24:23). Then the people would know that the Lord indeed had spoken. That was the repeated message that Yahweh gave to the people through Ezekiel.

Then 18 months later the Babylonian army defeated the people, burned the temple to the ground, tore down the city, and killed many people who were fleeing throughout Judah. After that, the prophet gave more prophecies against some of the surrounding nations. Then he gave prophecies into the far distant future about the valley of dry bones, the battle of Gog and Magog, the second coming of Christ, and the millennial temple. That was his ministry.

END OF EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY. The last prophecy that Ezekiel gave is recorded in Ezekiel 29:17. The verse says his last prophecy was given in the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin's exile, which corresponds to the year 570 B.C. We have already discovered from Ezekiel 1:2 that Ezekiel became a prophet in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile. So if we do some math, and subtract the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile from the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin's exile, that tells us Ezekiel was a prophet for 22 years. Then since we know he was 30 years old when he became a prophet, we discover he was 52 years old at the end of his ministry in the year 570 B.C.

Then we never hear from him again. His name does not appear in any other book of the Bible. So, what happened to the prophet Ezekiel? Jewish tradition says that the captives to whom he spoke the Word of God killed him by dragging him across rocks. What a sad and thankless reward he received from them for his faithful service to Yahweh. If the Jewish tradition is correct, then the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11

does include him along with the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah when verse 35 says some were tortured to death. Ezekiel was a faithful prophet for the Lord. Matthew 10:41 tells us that God's prophets receive something called a prophet's reward. So, Ezekiel will have a special reward for his ministry.

Ezekiel is an example for us!

CONCLUSION. Now I want us to compare ourselves to the prophet Ezekiel. Find Luke 14:25 in your Bible. The passage I want to look at is from verse 25 to verse 35. In this passage Jesus reveals an important characteristic of being His disciple. Verses 25-27 say,

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:25-27 (NASB)

So, we are told that Jesus is speaking to a large crowd. He speaks in hyperbole. He makes an extreme statement to teach us a principle. He makes two important points. First, He says that if anyone comes to Him he must hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even himself. That is the requirement for being a follower of Jesus Christ. If we are not willing to love Christ more than everyone in our family and ourselves, then Jesus tells you and me, we cannot be His disciple. The Greek word for "cannot" means "do not have the power" or "do not have the ability." That is, Jesus must be the most important person in your life.

Then in verse 27, Jesus drives the point home when He adds, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." We understand the word cross for Jesus died on a cross. He carried the cross to Golgotha, the place where He was crucified. So when Jesus tells us that we must carry our own cross, He means that following Him is like a death sentence. We are to die to self. A true Christian is one who loves Jesus Christ so much that he will be willing to suffer hardship, endure pain, deny self, and even die for Him. Jesus gives us this principle first.

Then Jesus gave two illustrations. The first illustration is

verses 28-30. It is about a man who wants to build a tower. Jesus' point is that if a man is wise, he will determine how much it costs before he starts building. The second illustration is about two kings who planned to go to war. Again, Jesus' point is that if a king is serious, he will determine if he can win on the battlefield. If he cannot, then he will seek peace. The common message is that a wise person will count the cost of following Jesus for Jesus demands everything from us. So, in verse 33 He said,

So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Luke 14:33 (NASB)

That is, just as Ezekiel gave up everything to serve God, so we must be willing to give up everything for Jesus. Those who are not willing to give up everything for Christ were never Christians. The sign a person is a Christian is that they are willing to give up everything for Christ. Ezekiel did. He was a mute, house-bound prophet who spoke prophecies prepared by Yahweh, and appeared to be ineffective. Two-thirds of the people to whom he ministered were killed. In the process he lost his wife. He suffered emotional pain, disappointment, and may even have been tortured to death for God. He gave up everything for God. That is the ministry Yahweh gave to Ezekiel, and he was faithful.

Then in verses 34-35, Jesus gave us another principle.

Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Luke 14:34-35 (NASB)

First, Jesus said salt is good. Salt is good for many things, but if it is tasteless, it cannot be used to season our food. Then in verse 35, He answers the question, "What is salt good for if it has lost its taste?" The answer is that salt is useless. It is not good for the ground. It is not good for anything, except to be thrown out. The message is that someone who is unwilling to give up everything for Christ is useless. That person is not a real Christian.

Luke 14:25-35 describes Ezekiel. He never told Yahweh,

"No!" He just kept submitting to Yahweh's will. He was accomplishing His purpose. He was a priest and then a prophet until he was tortured to death. He was salt that was useful to God. In heaven Christ will reward him for his faithfulness. This is a call for you and me to be like the prophet Ezekiel.