

The New Covenant in Ezekiel *An Introduction*

OR

Ezekiel for Believers in the Gospel Age

By no stretch of the imagination, however elastic, can this booklet be regarded as an exhaustive study of the new covenant in Ezekiel. Rather, as my chosen subtitle states, it is merely a short introduction to a very important topic. It goes without saying that such a major prophet, dealing with such a major topic, merits a far more extensive work than this. Having said that, its very smallness might serve a useful purpose for some.

Setting the Scene

Ezekiel prophesied at the same time as Jeremiah – that is, in the lead-up to and during Judah’s captivity – but whereas Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem, Ezekiel had been deported with the exiles to Babylon. Through him, God delivered a powerful message of judgment to Judah for their continued defiance, their persistent transgression of the Mosaic covenant and its law.¹ And he left the people in no doubt: it was God’s wrath against his people for their apostasy that had brought about their captivity, the destruction of the temple (2 Chron. 7:19-22), the end of kingship, and their consequent appalling

¹ The use of ‘Israel’ and ‘Judah’ in Ezekiel is more or less interchangeable, with the former being far more common. But he was addressing Judah.

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wretchedness as captives (Ps. 137). More was to come. Ezekiel, not mincing his words, set it all out in graphic detail.²

Alongside this, however, he offered mercy by calling the people to repentance, and declaring God's willingness to receive them back to himself, if only they would repent and return to him:

I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live (Ezek. 18:30-32).

Alas, left to themselves, under the old covenant, the people did as they had so often done in the past with such offers; that is, they continued to defy God and run after idols (2 Chron. 36:15-16). Consequently, captivity, and bitter captivity of long duration at that, was to be their lot (2 Chron. 36:17-21).

Indeed, Judah persisted in cherishing a kind of arrogance: they could come at any time, on any terms, in the certain knowledge that they were the chosen people, and that God would always hear them, even though they were determined to press on with their wilful disobedience! Or so they fooled themselves! But Ezekiel had a shock in store for them. God would have none of it. And he used Ezekiel to tell them so.

Ezekiel recorded the date and the circumstances:

In the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the Lord, and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them...'

And we know what Ezekiel, speaking in God's name, told the people. It could not have made pleasant hearing for those

² For this aspect of Ezekiel's message, see my 'Comfort for Grieving Saints'; 'Encouragement for those Who Grieve in Zion'.

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elders who smugly congratulated themselves that God was at their beck and call:

Thus says the Lord God, Is it to enquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you. Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them: 'Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God'. But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt...

Nor was that all: 'Therefore say to the house of Israel', the LORD declared to Ezekiel, giving the prophet the very words he wanted delivered to the people in the form of probing questions with a categorical conclusion:

Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things? When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you (Ezek. 20:1-8,30-31).

No hope here! End of story? Not a bit of it!