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Book of Ezekiel
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The Prophet Ezekiel by Michelangelo Fresco Cir 1508-1512

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The Book of Ezekiel
Message Five
EZEKIEL INTERNALIZES GOD’S WORD
September 20, 2015
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EZEKIEL TAKES GOD’S WORD IN DEEPLY

Ezekiel 3:1-12

1 And he said unto me, Son of man, eat that which thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat the roll. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

4 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 5 For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; 6 not to many peoples of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, if I sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee. 7 But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and of a stiff heart. 8 Behold, I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead hard against their foreheads. 9 As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house. 10 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thy heart, and hear with thine ears. 11 And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear 12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of Jehovah from his place (ASV, 1901).

GOD COMMANDS EZEKIEL TO PREPARE TO SPEAK TO ISRAEL

Ezekiel 3:1

1 And he said unto me, Son of man, eat that which thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel 2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat the roll (ASV, 1901).

We are nearing the completion of God’ inauguration of the prophet Ezekiel into the prophetic ministry. We now see the completion of the fundamental equipping of Ezekiel with a deep inculcation of God’s Word. In Jewish special services such as on the Sabbath or holidays selections of the prophets are read in the morning aloud after the Torah selection is read. It is called a haftarah. While the reading of the Torah follows all books in
order from Genesis through Deuteronomy the prophet haftarah is very selective. This section of Ezekiel from the heavenly vision of the Cherubim, Chariot, God and the Scroll are one of the selections. It culminates with the eating of the scroll and Ezekiel being lifted up by the Cherubim and Chariot (Ezekiel 3:12).

On the two fast days, Yom Kippur and Tisha B’Av (The ninth day of the month of Av or July 26, 2015), a haftarah is recited at both morning and afternoon services. Tisha B’Av is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, and over the centuries many tragic events happened—or were traditionally said to have happened—on this date. Some of these include:

1. The decree going forth from God to the people stating they should not enter the land because of their unbelief after hearing the report of the twelve spies Moses had sent to Canaan (1400 B.C.).

2. The destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians (586 B.C.).

3. The murder of Gedaliah who was the first postexilic governor of Jerusalem appointed by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem. The death of Gedaliah was a traumatic event for the Jews who were already crushed almost to annihilation by the destruction of the Temple, the ruin of the Jerusalem, and the deportation of most of its leaders (581 B.C.).


5. The murder of thousands and thousands of Israelites by the Romans during the rebellion led by Bar Cochba at the city of Bethar (A.D. 134).

6. Plowing down the site of the Temple and the surrounding area following the Bar Cochba revolt in Jerusalem by the Roman commander Turnus Rufus (A.D. 135).

7. The slaughter of a total of 1.2 million Jews in The First Crusade (A.D. 1096).


11. Germany starting World War I that led to the Holocaust (A.D. 1914).

12. Heinrich Himmler approving the Final Solution for the Nazi implementation (A.D. 1941).

13. The beginning of mass deportation of Jews to death camps by the Nazis (A.D. 1942).

The sadness and mourning that Jews feel on this day are reflected in the various practices of Tisha B’Av, including abstaining from joyous activities like study of Torah, from eating and drinking, from sexual activity, and from wearing leather. The ancient rabbinic sages held that the ninth of Av was preordained to be a day of tragedy. There is great comfort for the mourners hearing of Ezekiel’s awesome experience of seeing God’s appearance upon a throne, supported by the spectacle of Cherubim and the Chariot with fire displaying a sense of God’s majesty. While the book of Ezekiel had a difficult time
getting accepted by the Rabbis it was officially recognized at the Council of Jamnia, which seems to have taken place around 90 AD established and closed the canon authoritatively for nearly all Jews. It has been their canon ever since. It took nearly a thousand years after that for it to finally be accepted in the haftarah. By the eleventh century AD the practice was established according to the Jewish halakhic-liturgical composition known as the Mahzor Vitry of 1105 AD.1

As God says to Ezekiel, “eat that which thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel” He is saying to Ezekiel that he must be obedient and not be rebellious like the “House of Israel.” Because of the difficulties Ezekiel would encounter bringing God’s Word of truth to the rebellious Israelites the Scroll is characterized as being comprised of lamentations, and mourning, and woe (Ezekiel 2:10b). So he is commanded to open his mouth and consume its tragic and sobering contents. Interestingly God here refers to the Jews as He does throughout the Bible, “The House of Israel.” It is a term referencing them as His children. Even though they have sinned greatly He still loves them and will provide the necessary correction to ultimately bring them to Him in loving obedience. Consider His corrective Words to them in Leviticus, loving but not tolerating their sin.

Leviticus 26:44-45

44 And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am Jehovah their God; 45 but I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am Jehovah (ASV, 1901).

Similarly the Bible describes other scrolls, which have been given by God.

1. Jeremiah’s scroll. “When Thy words were found, I did eat them; and Thy Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jeremiah 15:16).
2. Zechariah’s flying scroll (Zechariah 5:1–4)
3. Jesus received the scroll to open with its seven seals (Revelation 4 and 5).
4. The little book (or scroll), which John received and ate, which was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly (Revelation 10:9–10).

All of these scrolls provide imagery, which have a single meaning. They all symbolize God’s Word itself. The Word must be received; it must be eaten. By eating God’s Word must be taken in us fully and completely consumed. It must become part of our very essence. The prophet obeyed and ate.

THE SCROLL IS SWEET

Ezekiel 3:3

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels

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with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

The prophet Ezekiel loved God’s Word and even though it was characterized as lamentations, and mourning, and woe, he realized that it was truth and directly from the Creator of the Universe. The subject of the scroll was God’s message of the truthful inevitable outcome of Judah’s rebellion and judgment. The sweetness he expresses over consuming God’s Word is the exposure to and realization of truth. So while the message itself contained bitterness the reality of dealing with and knowing God’s truth produced sweetness, repose or satisfaction. Jesus said that “Thy Word is Truth” (John 17:17b) and affirmed that it sets one free when He said, “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The sweetness as warning and understanding (truth) of God’s Word is also expressed elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 19:10; 119:103).

GOD SENDS EZEKIEL TO ISRAEL

Ezekiel 3:4-7

4And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 5For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; 6not to many peoples of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, if I sent thee to them, they would hearken unto thee 7But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and of a stiff heart. (ASV, 1901).

In repetition and as an inauguration He again calls Ezekiel a Son of Man and says with greater force go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. Say them verbatim in Hebrew my language, exactly as I said them to you. He is affirming the purity of the Hebrew language as His language. He is saying to not use Aramaic which is the language of Babylon. The sanctity and content of my language are best conveyed exactly as I have spoken them. Clearly over time because of the seventy year length of the captivity the Jews began to use Aramaic more than Hebrew. The prophet Daniel wrote, at a later time than this vision and command, in Aramaic. The prophet Ezekiel, God and the people all spoke the same Hebrew language at this time so there was no need to translate what God was saying in this prophesy. After saying He said, the people would understand Hebrew and therefore the message they still would not obey God. God says that other nations who do not understand Hebrew would have listened and obeyed with repentance. Jonah’s experience at Nineveh with the fierce Assyrians is an implied example. Therefore God is explaining the difficulties and resistance Ezekiel will experience in conveying God truth to the Jews because their hearts were hardened and they were rebellious. Even other Gentile nations when approached with God’s truth would respond in obedience but not Israel. Israel would reject him when actually it was God who was being rejected. Their response to God in past times was a sign of the response that Ezekiel could expect. Even though the extent of the prophecy was directed to the whole the house of Israel, not every Israelite had rejected God. Some loved God and sought to obey Him. Daniel, his friends, Jeremiah and Habakkuk all are examples of God fearing, obedient Israelites.
HARD HEARTED ISRAEL

Ezekiel 3:8-9

8Behold, I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead hard against their foreheads. 9As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house (ASV, 1901).

God now explains to Ezekiel that He has divine protection through special strength, which will not allow him to become discouraged or intimidated by them. The Hebrew word for hardened is hāzaq and it has the same root as Ezekiel’s name which means God will strengthen or God will harden. So God will make his forehead like the hardest stone or harder than flint. Forehead expresses determination or defiance (Isaiah 48:4; 50:7, “face” is lit., “forehead”; Jeremiah 3:3). “Flint,” the hardest stone in Israel, was used by the Israelites for knives (Joshua 5:2–3) and other implements. God says that He will make Ezekiel even harder than flint. The Hebrew word translated as adamant is shamir. This has been described as type of worm that can split rock and is said to have been used in the construction of the Temple by Solomon because of the prohibition of using metal tools.2 This can be rendered as God telling Ezekiel that even though you will individually be as weak as a worm in front of all the rebellious Israelites you will have the power to split their brow. That is, you will have My Divine power to succeed in getting my message out to them. Do not fear the unbelievers.

GOD’S CONCLUDING WORDS LAUNCHING EZEKIEL’S MINISTRY

Ezekiel 3:10-11

10Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thy heart, and hear with thine ears. 11And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear (ASV, 1901).

Ezekiel would have to take these Words of God and implant them deep within his heart, which would also now be heard through his ears. Previously God was just speaking “in” him. Ezekiel would hear from God in a continuing revelation throughout the entire duration of his ministry. The stress of these verses comes with the word “All” My words. The prophet was to deliver the entire counsel of God (Acts 20:27) just as Paul told the Ephesians. The message had to be placed deep within Ezekiel’s heart before it could be articulated and affirmed. The affirmation of our salvation through belief in the saving grace of the Resurrection of Jesus has the same solidifying connection of heart and voice.

Romans 10:9

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (KJV).

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Once more God is telling Ezekiel to go to the children of Israel and repeatedly tell them regardless of whether they will listen or not. These words were from God. This was inspiration. As the Holy Spirit teaches us so in this example God’s Spirit was teaching and assuring Ezekiel of the truth of God’s Words and the need for him to deliver them. Similarly in the New Testament we see man’s wisdom subordinated to God’s Spirit teaching.

I Corinthians 2:12-16

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (KJV).

The truth has to continue to go out regardless of whether people will heed the Word of God or not. It will hit its mark and not return to God void (Isaiah 55:11).

THE DIVINE CHARIOT LIFTS EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 3:12

12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of Jehovah from his place (ASV, 1901).

The conclusion of this meeting with God is the transportation of Ezekiel by the Chariot with the Cherubim driven by God’s Spirit. The rushing sound was the wings of the Cherubim and the wheels of fire. The Cherubim were moved to praise at the conclusion of His launching of Ezekiel’s ministry for God when they said, “Blessed be the glory of Jehovah from his place.”