

THE BIBLE in a nutshell



Ezekiel

—by Peter Hammond

“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it...”

Ezekiel 22:30

At the age of 30, when he would have started his priesthood, Ezekiel was called to be a prophet. While Jeremiah was warning the people in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was ministering amongst the exiles in Babylon. At the same time, Daniel was serving in the courts of Babylon.

present the prophecies and visions entrusted to him by God.

The historic context

More than a century before, the ten Northern tribes of Israel had ignored the warnings of the prophets, Amos and Hosea, and had been

the rubbish heap continually burning).

After the death of Josiah, came a series of bad kings. Jehoahaz ruled for just three months before being taken in chains to Egypt. Then came Jehoiakim, who was unconcerned about the spiritual state of the nation and put his trust in the superpowers of Egypt and Babylon.

Go to the house of Israel

“... He said to me, ‘Son of man...all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted... do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house...receive into your heart all My Words...whether they hear, or whether they refuse...I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel...”

When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning...that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand...Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul...” Ezekiel 3:1-27.

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me.”
Ezekiel 3:17

Ezekiel is the only prophetic book that is autobiographical, with the prophet writing in the first person. Ezekiel demonstrates a fascinating and unique style of ministry. He used symbols, parables, poems, proverbs and artistic street theatre to dramatically

judged for their immorality and idolatry, conquered by Assyria and deported out of the land.

Despite the disaster that had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Judah indulged in immorality and idolatry, ignoring the prophets: Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah. The people of Judah even degenerated to the extent of sacrificing babies to the pagan god Molech (in the Valley of Hinnom, which our Lord Jesus used to describe Hell – Gehenna,

Who was Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was born into the priestly family of Zadok in 622BC. Ezekiel was among the first Judeans to be deported into Babylonian exile, in 597BC, when Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem. (In this exile, to reduce the conquered people to helplessness, Nebuchadnezzar deported 7 000 army officers and soldiers, 1 000 craftsmen and around 10 000 artisans). Ezekiel lived in the city of Tel-Abib, on the River Chebar. The name Ezekiel means “God Strengthens”.

A Vision of the Glory of God

In 593BC, Ezekiel saw a majestic and mysterious vision of the Glory of God. Ezekiel describes the transcendence, omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of our holy and awesome God. Surrounding the Throne of God are four living creatures: angels, who have the features of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. These angels represent intelligence, dignity, strength and speed. They face East, West, North and South. All parts of the universe are open to the gaze of God. He is all-knowing, omnipresent and all-powerful. Ezekiel saw wheels within wheels and supernatural brilliance, in glory so terrifying that he fell face down before this vision of the Glory of God. Ezekiel saw a vision of the Son of God high above the Throne, who looked like glowing metal, full of fire, with brilliant light surrounding Him. The voice of Almighty God was like the roar of rushing waters and the tumult of an army. A rainbow surrounded the Throne reminding him of God’s mercy to Noah and the animals. The holiness and transcendence of God as the Eternal Judge is a major theme of the Book of Ezekiel. God is sovereign, not only over the affairs and destiny of Israel, but of all nations.



Idolatry and immorality

Ezekiel reminds his people why their country was suffering ruinous attacks from the Arameans, the Moabites and the Ammonites: The people of Judah were guilty of idolatry, immorality and ingratitude. The Judeans were worshipping Asherah, Tummus and the Sun god,

had become so useless and worthless, it was only good for firewood. (In John 15, our Lord uses a similar parable).

Personal responsibility

While the destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon had come about partly as a result

“How degenerate is your heart!” says the Lord, “you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot...you are an adulterous wife, taking strangers instead of her husband.” Ezek 16:30,32

even in the Temple. Ezekiel calls Jerusalem “The bloody city” because of its ruthless exploitation of widows, orphans and strangers, and because of the murders tolerated in the city.

Apostasy of Jerusalem

Ezekiel 16 describes Judah as a queen, who had become a prostitute. The two eagles referred to by Ezekiel, represent Pharaoh in the West and Nebuchadnezzar in the East. Judah is described as a wild vine, that

of the cumulative guilt of generations of Israelites, who had lived in rebellion against God and His Laws, Ezekiel emphasised individual consequences of disobedience in chapter 18. In eternity, each of us will be judged for our own sins. *“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”* Ezekiel 18:20. »

Ezekiel

- Ezekiel was 25 years old when he was taken to Babylon
- He was 17 when Daniel was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C
- Ezekiel received his prophetic commission when he was 30
- Ezekiel overlapped the end of Jeremiah’s ministry and the beginning of Daniel’s
- 4th of 17 books of prophecy
- 26th Book in the Bible
- 4th of 5 major prophets



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Regardless of how individuals respond to the warning, if they hear the message, the prophet has fulfilled his duty.

The watchmen

Large watchtowers were placed overlooking the fields of agriculture and men would stand watch, guarding the fields which contained the community's food supply. The watchmen needed to be alert to any threats, whether from thieves or from fire. The watchman also had to be alert for any sign of invasion.

The watchmen, on the walls of a fortified town, were to monitor all the approaches and at the sign of any threat, would sound the warning so that the town could shut its gates and prepare to defend against any attack (Ezekiel 33).

Vigilant and alert

The vigilant watchmen would observe the daily life of the community. He could see much of the activity in the streets, and in the markets. He would know the people, their work, their habits and their lifestyles. If his tower was near the city gates, he could also observe the business of the city conducted by its officials.

God uses this role of the watchman to illustrate the responsibilities of a minister to both critically evaluate the conduct of society, and to deliver messages of warning and instruction. The Word of God declares that: "we who have received the Word of God must give warning to the wicked."

Personal choice

Ezekiel makes it clear that each individual is responsible for their personal state. It does no good to blame one's ancestors. While we do suffer, here on earth, the consequences of bad choices of our predecessors, on the Day of Judgement, each one of us will stand alone to give an account for those things we are personally responsible for. You may not be to blame for how you were brought up, but you are to blame, if you stay that way.

anyone have any hope of victory in a war against Almighty God.

A solemn responsibility

A prophet of God has a solemn duty to deliver a most sober and serious message. Unless the citizens acknowledge their sins, repent and resolutely obey the Word of God, they will die in their sins (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

However, regardless of how individuals respond to the warning, if they hear the

"My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord..." Ezek 37:12,13

The greatest threat

The danger of God's judgement upon wickedness is a far more serious danger than that of an invading army threatening a city. One may be able to defend a city against a foreign invader. However, no one can escape the scrutiny of an all-knowing, everywhere-present, all-wise God.

Nor can anyone escape judgement from an omnipresent Judge. Neither can

message, the prophet has fulfilled his duty. Duty to respond is ours. The results are in God's hands. However, if the messenger fails to deliver the warning, their blood will be required at his hand (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

The failure of the leaders

The prophet Ezekiel firmly fixes the blame for the coming destruction of Jerusalem on the prophets, priests and kings. Therefore the Messiah will be Prophet, Priest and King. Ezekiel cut off his hair, leaving just a few strands to symbolise

that many people of Jerusalem would die by the sword, others would be burned and the remainder would be scattered to the winds. Only a small remnant would remain in the land.

The false shepherds

"...Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?...The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor

appears 74 times in Ezekiel. In Chapters 4 to 24, regarding judgements on Jerusalem, the wording is: "Then you will know that I am the Lord." In Chapters 25 to 32 in the prophecies against the nations, the refrain is: "Then they will know that I am the Lord."

In the last section of Ezekiel, (Chapters 33-48), which deals with the restoration of the Temple, the wording is: "Then the nations will know that I am the Lord."

In chapter 11, Ezekiel declares that

We are surrounded by what seem to be dead churches and confronted with lifelessness and disorder. Our prayer is: "Will You not revive us again that Your people may rejoice."

bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost... So they were scattered because there was no shepherd...Therefore, you shepherds, hear the Word of the Lord...Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand...I will deliver My flock from their mouths..." Ezekiel 34:1-10.

Prophetic insights

God gave Ezekiel supernatural insight, foresight and oversight. Ezekiel and Daniel are the best examples of apocalyptic (unveiling) language in the Old Testament. There are more prophecies in Ezekiel and Daniel than in any other prophets of the Old Testament. The Book of Revelation cannot be understood without carefully studying Ezekiel and Daniel, on which Revelation is clearly based.

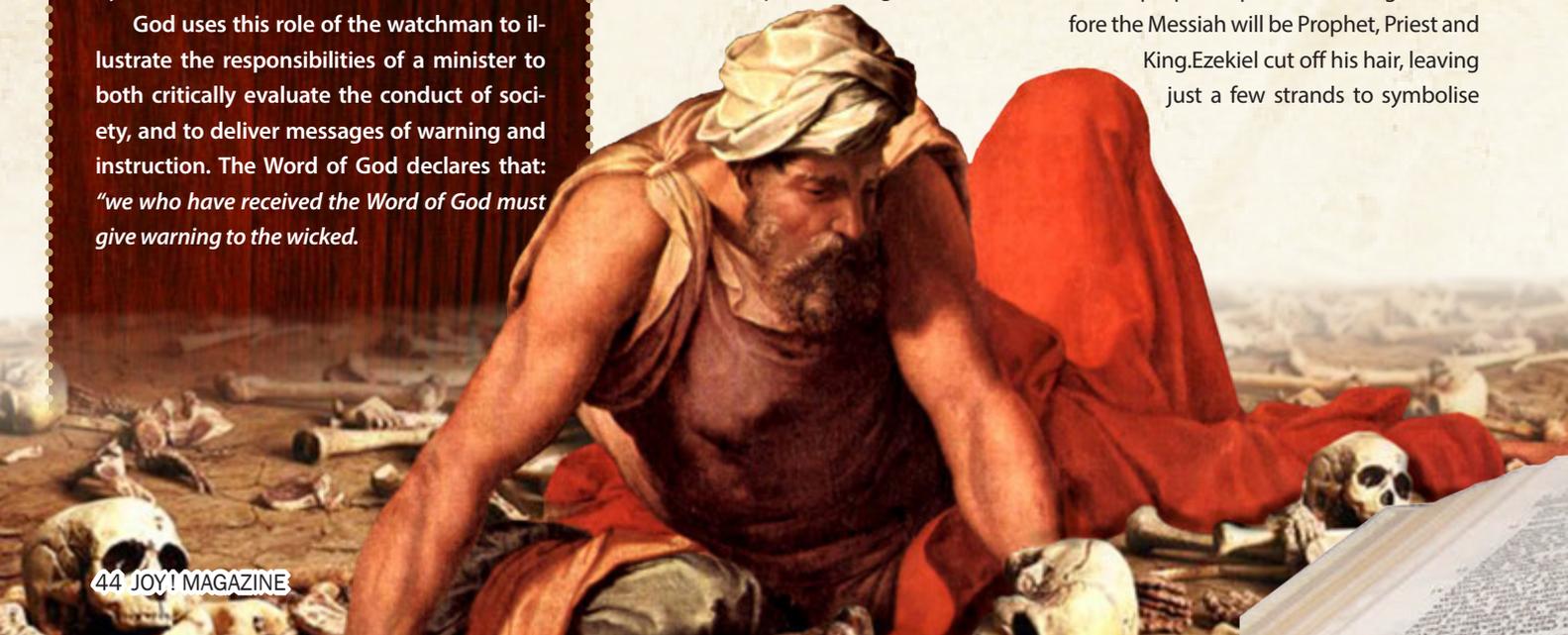
"Then you will know that I am the Lord"

the Glory of the Lord has departed from the Temple because of the wickedness and ungodliness of the prophets, priests, princes and people of Jerusalem.

The valley of dry bones

The Lord showed Ezekiel a valley full of bones and asked: "Can these bones live?" God commanded him: "Prophecy to these bones...hear the Word of the Lord! And as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over...and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army."

- When last did God speak to you?
- What did He say? Did you obey?
- When man listens, God speaks.
- When last did you experience the power »



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Ezekiel



Prophecy Against Tyre

The city of Tyre was the greatest port city in the ancient world. Yet, at the height of its power, God declared that this city would be destroyed, that its towers would be broken down, and that its stones and timber, and even its dust, would be laid in the midst of the water and it would become like the top of a rock, a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, (Ezekiel 26:4-14).

This strange prophecy began to be fulfilled, when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched his army to the walls of Tyre and, for 13 years, besieged the city. When the walls of the city finally crumbled, they found that many of the inhabitants had moved to an island half a mile out into the Mediterranean where they built an even more impregnable city.

For hundreds of years, one might have said that the prophecy given through Ezekiel was not completely fulfilled. Then Alexander the Great came, defeated the Persians and demanded the surrender of the port cities of the Eastern Mediterranean. Tyre alone refused to open its gates to him. So Alexander then conceived the boldest and most daring plan in siege history. He ordered a causeway to be built, across half a mile of the Mediterranean Sea, to the island of the new Tyre. All the walls of Tyre were torn down; the timber, the stones, the rubble and the logs and cast into the sea. They scraped the very dust of the city itself into the sea, to make this highway, to destroy the new Tyre. In this way, the prophecy in Ezekiel 26 was completely fulfilled.

of the Holy Spirit coming upon you?
• Is your spirit dry?

Bringing the dead to life

Just as the dead Lazarus was raised by the power of the Word of Jesus: "Lazarus! Come forth!" So we can see the power of the Word of God, as it is faithfully proclaimed, bringing the spiritually dead to life. "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Rom 10:17. "The Gospel is the power of God for the Salvation of everyone

sion of hope as God Himself intervenes and establishes His Kingdom on earth, to bless the nations.

All of this is being fulfilled through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Temple from whom Rivers of Living Water flow to bring healing to the nations (John 7:37-39).

Jesus said: "If anyone is thirsty, he should come unto Me and drink and out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living waters." John 7:37.

The Messiah Himself will become the Temple, from which rivers of living waters will flow out, bringing healing and blessings to the nations.

who believes." Rom 1:16.

Jesus in Ezekiel

As Ezekiel condemns the prophets, priests and princes of Judah, for their idolatry, immorality, ingratitude and injustice, He points to God, the True Shepherd, who will come to search for His sheep and seek them out, as a Good Shepherd. Because Jerusalem had become a bloody and immoral city of idolatry and injustice, God would build a New Jerusalem.

As the Temple had been desecrated with idolatry and inter-faith worship, the Messiah Himself will become the Temple, from which rivers of living waters will flow out, bringing healing and blessings to the nations (Ezekiel 47).

Living waters

As the Book of Ezekiel begins with doom and gloom, because of the wickedness of God's people, it ends with a glorious vi-

Paradise regained

The Book of Genesis begins with paradise lost, because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The prophet Ezekiel looks forward to the time when paradise will be restored, because of the obedience of the Second Adam. Jesus comes to make His goodness and blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

A New Covenant

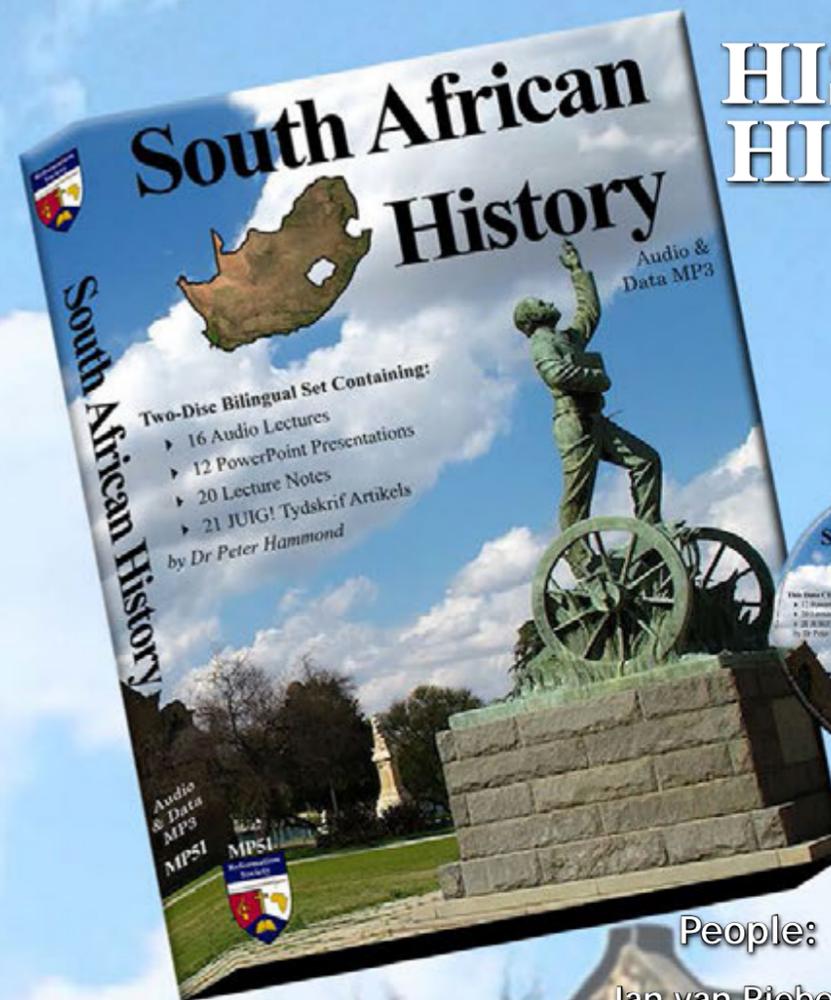
"I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them." Ezekiel 36:25-27. ■

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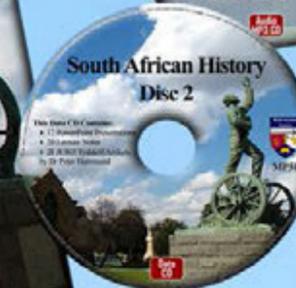
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