

1. Imagining the World of Ezekiel (To me, reading the book of Ezekiel is like the first time I ever-confronted calculus—dazed and confused! What is in the world is going on here? Can I figure this thing out? Well—I never did with Calculus, but with Ezekiel—yea, I think so. First let's get the context. Ezekiel was a priest living in Jerusalem when Babylon came calling in the first round of their war against Judah—as God's judgment was played out against Judah. He was among those who were taken captive and forced into exile in Babylon. God called him to be his prophet while Ezekiel was in a refugee camp on the banks of a river in Babylon. There he began to hear the voice of God and have some very vivid, life-changing experiences with God—all for the purpose of preparing him and teaching him what to do and say as God's preacher to his people. Judgment for them was not over. Babylon had only made a first strike. More was yet to come. Ezekiel was to serve as the "watchman"—sounding the warning and calling people back to a right relationship with their God. It was not an easy job. He did it not just with words, but also with dramatic actions—street art maybe—building a model of Jerusalem and destroying it; shaving off his hair; acting as a scapegoat—laying on his side and eating food cook over human excrement. All designed to drive a message home to Jerusalem and to other nations as well—judgment is here; payment for your sins have come due. And then there are his visions—of the glory of God; of the temple; two prostitute sisters; the valley of dry bones; of the future glory of God's kingdom. Like all of the prophets his message contains both judgment and hope. Here are some things we can learn from him)
2. Ezekiel Speaks to Us
  - a. God can leave the building—Ezekiel 1 & 10. (First of all—isn't his description of the presence of glory fascinating? As with other such attempts to describe God, it is full of wonder, splendor, majesty and awe. Like others also—Ezekiel could not handle it—fell facedown in 1:28. But the greater emphasis here is not just the incredible majesty of his presence, but what is God doing hanging out beside a river in Babylon? He is supposed to be in Jerusalem in the temple. The answer is in chapter 10—he leaves the building. This is really the final blow—not the Babylonians—and the ultimate consequence for all of Judah's sins of idolatry, immorality, injustice and oppression. God left them. Parallels abound in the NT with warnings of not quenching the Spirit in 1 Thess. 5:19 and defiling the temple of God now—our body—1 Cor. 6:12-20. Remember if we do not have the Spirit we do not belong to God—Romans 8:9)
  - b. Watchmen are needed—Ezekiel 2-3 33 (I love the image of Ezekiel eating the scroll—something to be said here too, about all of us digesting God's Word—needs to be in us. For Ezekiel this was crucial as he spoke this word into his world. He was God's preacher—a watchman for Judah—warning and teaching. Judah's shepherds had failed in this regard, so Ezekiel stood watch instead. God continues to highly value the preaching of his word—1 Cor. 1 and those who preach it—Romans 10:14-15. So we need to eat this book and then proclaim its treasures in grace and truth. Our world needs watchmen)
  - c. A reckoning will always come—Ezekiel 11 & 20 (really this is what the entire book is about. Warning after warning. Prophet after prophet. Patience upon patience. Yet Israel remained rebellious—chasing after idols—oppressing the poor—ignoring Torah. Ezekiel proclaimed—time is up! Judgment is here. God remains extremely patient—giving everyone the chance to repent; to return to him; to find him—2 Peter 3:9, but eventually this patience will end; it will be time to reap what we sow—Galatians 6:7-9 and face our own judgment—2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27. Will we think like Israel did, that this will never happen to us? If so check out what Paul says in I Cor. 10)
  - d. There is always hope ahead—Ezekiel 11, 20 & 40-48 (God did leave the building but he planned to return. He never completely forsook them and invested in the remnant to restore his people and their purpose—The Story—of making things ready for Christ—and Ezekiel concludes with a prolonged vision of a new temple in a new place for a new community of people living in the glory of God. It is called hope and as long as we breath, we have it—we have the chance to hear the watchman and heed the word; to turn to God and leave whatever hinders us behind. Hope—it hung on a cross and left a tomb to land right here in our hearts. Do you have it?)
3. "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit within them" –Ezekiel 11:19