

# *Introduction To Our Study in Ezekiel*

I would like to dedicate the articles in several of the upcoming newsletters to the book of Ezekiel. I humbly share these thoughts from Ezekiel with you as one who is heart-fully seeking to know Christ as my Life in these scriptures. I am not presenting a theological commentary on the book, but simply sharing from places where the Spirit has been ministering to me. Because the Spirit is ministering Christ to me in this particular book, I pray the articles will carry with them a release of His care that can minister the reader.

## *The Condition of the People*

There is much to be considered in relation to the state of the people and what they have and are going through at the time of the beginning chapter of Ezekiel. Contextually speaking, if you look at the final chapter of Lamentations that precedes verse one of Ezekiel, you will find Judah at the lowest point in the history of her people. In reading these verses we can “taste” a bit of the bitter season God’s people were experiencing at this time. *“Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution: we labor, and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. We got our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honored. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned! For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it. Thou, O Lord, remains forever; thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us forever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.”*

It can be hard to think realistically concerning the actual experience of the things we read about historically. By the first verse of Ezekiel, those captives who were Ezekiel’s peers had already gone through tremendous trials. Before being drug out of their homeland, they had endured much of the turmoil in Judah concerning the controversy over the Babylonian threat and first deportation. Great debate and violent reaction had stirred in the King and the people as

they resisted the message that Jeremiah preached concerning embracing the captivity as something God was allowing. Ezekiel's mates had seen the first group of captives being hauled away, causing the reality of their predicament to become a little more focused. Then they experienced their own removal at the hands of the heathen. They had to leave ALL they had known and loved, built and grown to walk a 600 mile journey into a foreign land with no certain future in their minds. Abraham and Isaac walked a three day journey to sacrifice on mount Moriah. These Judeans were walking for weeks away from any known "altar" into a fate that felt controlled by the enemies of God. By the time Ezekiel had received his first vision by the river Chebar... he had already been in captivity for five years. At this point Jerusalem had not yet fallen, and the captives in Babylon from the first and second deportations were probably still holding out hope to return to the Temple and life back in Jerusalem as they had always known. But things are only going to get worse, for Jerusalem herself will soon fall in utter destruction. A final group of captives will join them from the homeland, and all but the very young who live a long life will finish their days in Babylon.

## *Tragedy*

The human capacity to handle continual tragedy and crisis has its limits. The shock that assaults and engulfs one in such times can only remain for so long before we begin to acclimate and settle into what remains of life as we knew it. During the time of readjustment following catastrophe there is the tendency to let go of dreams and hopes that feel shattered, and simply "settle for less" in a state of disillusionment. Certainly the captives in Babylon with Ezekiel had experienced these emotions and reactions to some degree. The hope of their destiny as a people bearing the glory of God to the world probably appeared shattered in the eyes of most. It many have seemed like while in Babylon it was time to settle for less, and make a life there without the hopes and dreams of all that Jerusalem represented to their hearts and identities. Psalm 137 describes a people weeping by the rivers of Babylon... hanging up their harps and refusing to sing as they mourn the loss of all Jerusalem meant to them. Yet, it was by one of those "rivers of Babylon" that God opened His heavens to Ezekiel and released a view of Himself in union with us that revealed a hope based on the reality that life comes out from death, and the way of the Cross in a people brings forth an increase of the true Kingdom of the Son enthroned within.

## *"Now"*

The very first word in the book of Ezekiel is EXTREMELY SIGNIFICANT. That word is "NOW". *"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I*

*saw visions of God.*” Not only is the first word of the book signifying the importance of where things were at spiritually... but it emphasizes the exact time of the “NOW” by defining the year, month and day in which the heavens opened to Ezekiel in the midst of the captives. NOW, when everything looked ruined. NOW, when they had utterly failed. NOW, when they realized that God has utterly rejected them (our flesh at the Cross (Lam. 5:22)). NOW when “self” no longer sat in God’s seat in the temple and priesthood. NOW when their hearts were broken and their spirit’s contrite. NOW when the people could no longer fall back on religious types and shadows. NOW God opens the heavens, reveals Himself in glory, and cries out the purpose of His heart is yet to dwell in them. There is no “settling for less” in God’s heart concerning these captives. The plan of God is reaching forth from heaven above to bring them into God’s expected end (Jer. 29:11) which is to bring forth His Son in them (Rom 8).

### *Crisis Becomes a Catalyst*

*“For Jerusalem is empty and desolate, a place haunted by jackals. But Lord, you remain the same forever! Your throne continues from generation to generation. Why do you continue to forget us? Why have you abandoned us for so long? Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to you again! Give us back the joys we once had! Or have you utterly rejected us? Are you angry with us still?” (Lam. 5:18-22)*

The heavens may feel like brass and tragedy may seem to triumph when we believe that our failures have defeated God’s passion to bring forth His Son in us. But “as it is in heaven” will come forth in earth based on Christ’s victory on Calvary and not the wretchedness of our flesh. In the darkest moments of our lives, the Cross upon which we were crucified is still true. THERE, crucified with Christ, our flesh was “utterly rejected” (Lam. 5:22). NOW the heavens of God’s heart still reigns as He moves to raise up from our ashes the beauty of His Son from within us. Resurrection will come, but death and burial must occur first. To understand this Divine principle / pattern is to embrace God’s hope (Col. 1:27) in our darkest hour.

Crisis can become a catalyst into embracing our death with Christ, if the heart turns to the Lord in the midst of it. If the heart only perceives purposeless suffering, then the great NOW of Ezekiel chapter one will go unnoticed, or seem like a meaningless adverb. Hebrews declares that all that can be shook, will be shook in both heaven and earth so that what remains is unshakably and eternally Christ Himself in us. God shakes so that the true Temple can be built, raised in Him so that nothing in heaven, earth, or beneath the earth can ever tear it down.

*.... to be continued*