

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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God Revealed in

EZEKIEL

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POLITICAL CARTOONIST YAAKOV KIRSCHEN used to say he was an atheist. He didn't understand how any Jew could believe in God after the Holocaust. Years later he adjusted his statement and became an agnostic. He just didn't know. Later, he spoke at one of our events and talked about reading the book of Ezekiel. He told us that it was like reading today's newspaper. Then he startled us all by saying, "I am having a crisis of unbelief." Indeed, the book seems as relevant today as when the prophet first proclaimed the words to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel was a prophet and priest. His name itself seems prophetic. Yechezkel in Hebrew means "God will strengthen." Ezekiel would need to rely on God's strength. He grew up in Jerusalem in the years immediately preceding the Babylonian

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON, THERE WE SAT DOWN, YEA,



The Tigris River, located in ancient Babylon

conquest. He was taken into exile at the same time as King Jehoiachin in the year 598–597. He was the prophet of the exile. He was in Babylon when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. God used him to warn of impending doom, call the people to repentance and after the desolation of Jerusalem, bring words of consolation and future hope to the Jewish people in exile. In Psalms we get a window into the emotional state of the exiles: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion*" (Ps. 137:1).

As I read Ezekiel, three themes stand out to me: the glory of God, God's concern for His holy name (His reputation), and His

desire for Israel and the nations to know that He is God. Let's briefly consider each of these themes.

The Glory of God (*Shechinah*)

In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the prophet describes an amazing experience, saying, *“the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God”* (Ezek. 1:1b). Verse 28 is particularly moving, *“As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking”* (NASB). Like other prophets, Ezekiel's calling from God was dramatic and life changing. Ezekiel saw God's glory in heaven. He also knew



WE WEPT WHEN WE REMEMBERED ZION.

PSALM 137:1

firsthand the glory of the Temple in Jerusalem, and presumably had experienced the *Shechinah* glory of God there. I am sure he mourned its loss.

The *Artscroll* Jewish commentary on Ezekiel says, “It was the lot of Yechezkel to witness the tragedy which Israel had wrought—the departure of the *Shechinah* from its once hospitable abode because Israel no longer deserved its presence... Yechezkel saw and he cried out in hopeless despair, ‘*Alas God! Do you destroy the entire remnant of Israel in the outpouring of Your fury upon Jerusalem?*’ (Ezek. 9:8).”

Many of his prophecies were bleak, but not all. Even though his generation witnessed the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the departure of the *Shechinah*, God gave Ezekiel visions of the future—the people would return and the Temple would be built in Jerusalem (chapter 40). *Artscroll* goes on, “Yechezkel would see the glory of God borne on a chariot that was not drawing away from Zion—but was returning to it, never again to depart: *‘And the glory of God was coming to the House by way of the gate which faced eastward’* (43:4).” Some are of the opinion that this was fulfilled with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the description of the Temple Ezekiel saw (chapter 40) has significant differences. Most believe that it is the future (as yet unbuilt) Third Temple. Some Orthodox Jewish groups are preparing themselves for service in that future Temple.

The Name of the Lord

In Hebrew thinking, someone’s name is closely associated with his or her reputation or character. Today in English we also have that thought. When we say someone has a good name, it means we can trust that person and that he or she has a sterling character. In the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), God warns the people called by His name not to profane His name. Consider Leviticus 20:3, “*I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to*



**“FOR I WILL TAKE YOU FROM
AMONG THE NATIONS, GATHER
YOU OUT OF ALL COUNTRIES,
AND BRING YOU INTO YOUR
OWN LAND.”**

EZEKIEL 36:24

defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name.” God’s reputation was damaged when His people acted in ways contrary to His heart.

In Ezekiel 36 we find a passage of Scripture describing God’s motivation for bringing the people of the covenant back from exile and dispersion. God says, *“When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.’ But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,” says the Lord God, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land””*” (vv. 20–24).

Verse 20 holds a key to the meaning of this passage: *“These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of His land.”* God’s name was profaned in the nations because the effectiveness of gods in that polytheistic time was judged by their ability to keep their people well, prosperous and safe in their land. When the people of Israel were dispersed to multiple locations, the nations at that time viewed the God of Israel as ineffective. In effect, His reputation took a real beating. God thus says: I am bringing you back for the sake of My holy name (His reputation).

You Shall Know that I Am the LORD

It was and is important to God that the nations (Israel and the Gentile nations or people groups) will know Him and know that He is the LORD. This is abundantly clear in Ezekiel. In prophecy after prophecy, God says a very similar phrase: “Then you shall know that I am God,” or “Then the nations will know that I am God.” In fact, variations of this phrase appear more than 50 times throughout the book of Ezekiel.

In Scripture, the Jewish people are spoken of as the people of the covenant, the chosen people, God's special treasures and so forth. This has bothered many Christians. I have heard many questions or statements relating to this:

- How can it be that God loves the Jewish people more than other people groups?
- Doesn't God love everyone?
- How could God be so unfair?
- It isn't fair to the Palestinians that God would favor the Jewish people.
- Why are they the chosen people? Why, they don't even believe that Jesus (Yeshua) is the Messiah (Christ). Why aren't we (Christians) the chosen people?

The Gospel of John clearly says that God loves the world (3:16). Being the chosen people does not indicate that God doesn't love all peoples of the earth. It is clear to me that God chose the Jewish people for a special purpose. They were chosen to reveal Him to the world. They were chosen to write His Words (Scripture) for the enlightenment of the world. They were chosen to be the fathers, prophets and kings of the Bible. We see in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) that they were chosen as the earthly family of Jesus. They were chosen to be the apostles, and the entire early Church was Jewish. In fact, everything precious to our faith was delivered through the Jewish people.

Clearly God understood human nature very well. He knew that once the Jewish people were no longer in their land, His reputation would suffer. Even though He punished the people for their sin with exile, He repeatedly communicated a future time when they would be regathered to their land. In Ezekiel we learn of how the LORD is going to act in the time of the return, in the time of the battle of Gog and Magog and so forth. Each time something is prophesied, He takes care to say that when it happens, the nations will know that He is God.

Consider the following:

"Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it" (Ezek. 36:36 NASB).

“I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD” (Ezek. 37:14 NASB).

“And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever” (Ezek. 37:28 NASB).

Today we are in the midst of the fulfillment of the things Ezekiel received from the LORD. Every time we witness a plane full of new Jewish immigrants arrive in Israel, we are reminded of God’s promise to bring them home. As the news reporters tell the story, I know that is one way God is calling out to the nations: “Pay attention! I am fulfilling My promises. Know that I am God!”

God’s heart is for all people, and His deep desire is that all mankind will know Him—the God of Israel, the one true God! Today as we see Him faithfully keeping His ancient promises to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and King David, it is a clarion call to the world that the God of Israel is alive. It is a



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clear message that He is a God who is faithful, trustworthy, all powerful, all loving and who loves all men and women who are created in His image.

Instead of being jealous of the Jewish people, we should respect them, honor them and trust the God of Israel to continue faithfully keeping all His promises to them and to all people. We serve a great God! May we live to see the day the prophet Habakkuk foretold, *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (2:14).

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah, Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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