



First Baptist Church At The Villages

INSPIRING FAITHFULNESS • EZEKIEL • EZEKIEL 1:1-28; MATTHEW 16:13-17 •

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Main Point

Fresh revelation from the Lord is necessary whether He is transforming a new heart or encouraging a committed one

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When was a time you received unexpected news? Was it good news or bad news? How did you react in the moment?

Do you feel like you typically expect to hear God speak to you in times of Scripture reading, prayer, or musical worship? Why or why not?

When is the last time you remember God speaking to you? What was the context (Bible study, prayer, a sermon, a conversation with a friend, etc.)?

John 6:44 tells us that the only reason any of us find salvation is because God reveals Jesus to us. His revelation doesn't end at the moment of salvation, though. Throughout our faith journey, God continues to draw us near to Him, revealing Himself to us by His Spirit (Jn. 4:24). We find examples of this in both the Old and New Testaments. In the midst of exile, Ezekiel saw visions of the glory of the Lord of Israel. This revelation shaped his life and ministry from that time forward. Later in the New Testament, in the midst of a culture that questioned Jesus at every turn, Peter also received revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, which shaped his life and ministry from that time forward.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Ezekiel 1:1-3.

Where was Ezekiel when God spoke to him?

The Israelites had been exiled from the promised land to pagan Babylon. They had rebelled against God and were suffering the consequences. They were cut off from their homeland and their families, and were unable to worship in the ways they were accustomed. This was a time of profound grief in Israel's experience, and is the subject of the Book of Lamentations. Yet, it was in this context and moment that God revealed Himself to Ezekiel.

Who initiated the revelation—God or Ezekiel? Why is it significant that God initiated this revelation?

What does it mean that, “the Lord’s hand was on him”? Is this true of believers today, or does the Lord’s hand only fall on certain people in certain circumstances? Explain.

As New Testament believers, from the moment we come humbly in faith to Jesus, God's hand is on us (1 Pet. 5:6; Jn. 10:29). Fresh revelation from the Lord, then, is ours to receive every day by the power of the Holy Spirit as we study God's Word, pray, join other believers in community, and serve.

| Ask a volunteer to read Ezekiel 1:4-28.

What stands out to you the most about the heavenly vision Ezekiel was given?

Ezekiel was a priest. He already knew God. Why, then, do you think God gave him this revelation?

Why is revelation from God important for coming to know Him initially? Why is it still important for those who have already come to know Him?

Have you ever tried to express to another person something God revealed to you? Did you find this easy or difficult? How does God reveal the truth about Himself to believers (See John 16:13)?

Ezekiel was awestruck by what he saw, and certainly found it difficult to express. We, too, may find it difficult to picture. However, the vision was meant to encourage Ezekiel's heart, and by sharing it, encourage the hearts of his fellow exiles and, in effect, ours today. Throughout history, God has revealed Himself to His followers by His Spirit. Following the ascension of Christ, all who place their trust in Him have been given the presence of the Holy Spirit at all times. His followers give testimony to the revelation they receive from the Spirit, and God reveals Himself to those who receive and seek out that testimony.

| Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 16:13-17.

Rather than question the merit of the people’s answers (v. 14), Jesus questioned the personal beliefs of His disciples. Why do you think this was the case?

Jesus wanted the disciples to move beyond the culture’s understanding of who He was. He wanted to know what they personally believed about Him, and as we see later in the text, He wanted them to know what they must believe about Him. Jesus also wanted to be sure His disciples were prepared before His death and so He questioned if they understood His identity, in particular that it entailed suffering. Because the disciples would carry His message into the world, they needed to be clear on His true identity, not given to whatever the culture at the time thought about Him.

What do we learn about Jesus from Peter’s response?

Why did Jesus praise Peter for his confession? What does this tell us about the way that we learn the truth about God?

To this pointed inquiry, Peter affirmed his faith in Jesus with two specific titles: Messiah or Christ (“anointed one”) and Son of the living God. Peter declared publicly that Jesus was the promised One from the Old Testament who fulfilled all the prophecies of God’s anointed messenger. But Peter’s answer didn’t come on His own; it came because God had revealed it to him.

Jesus affirmed Peter’s response for at least two reasons: it was true, and it was revealed to Peter by the Father. Others attributed Jesus’ work to a human prophet. Peter looked at the same evidence and pronounced Jesus the Christ. Jesus attributed Peter’s confession to insight stemming from divine revelation rather than human deduction. The language does not specify how God revealed Himself, but it does affirm that God led Peter to his correct understanding. This is still the way God reveals Himself to people today.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How does this inform you about how you can receive fresh revelation from God?

Who is someone you know who needs to receive the revelation from God that leads to salvation? Do you regularly consider that God can use your testimony as revelation in the life of someone else? Why or why not?

What steps do you need to take to share with others about the truth you have learned about God?

Pray

Thank God for revealing Himself to us through His written Word and the Person of Jesus Christ. Invite Him to continue revealing Himself to you as you study Scripture, pray, and join in fellowship with other believers. Commit to share what He teaches you with others.

Commentary

| Ezekiel 1:3-14

1:1 The Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew OT, connects this date— in the thirtieth year—with Josiah’s reforms in 621 b.c., but it is not easy to see any connection between the events in Josiah’s reign and the time of this prophecy (2Ki 22:8-13). A rabbinic tradition understands the number as a reference to the Year of Jubilee. The editorial explanation (Ezek 1:2-3) takes “the thirtieth year” as equivalent to the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile. Thirty was the age at which priests qualified for induction into their office (Num 4:30). Just as Ezekiel was 30 and saw heaven open at the banks of a river, Jesus was 30 when He saw heaven open at His baptism in the Jordan River (Mt 3:16; Lk 3:21-23).

Ezekiel was among the 8,000 soldiers and nobility who had been sent into exile along with the king (2Ki 24:14-16) in 597 b.c. The Chebar, a river in Babylonia where the Jewish exiles settled, was the site of Ezekiel’s visions (vv. 1,3; 3:15,23; 10:15,20,22; 43:3). The Hebrew *nehar kevar* corresponds to Akkadian *nar kabari/u* “the Kabar Canal,” a body of water mentioned twice in Akkadian documents from the Babylonian city of Nippur in the fifth century b.c. In the land of exile, God tore the heavens open and invited Ezekiel to see His glory, which was the grounding of both Israel’s judgment and hope. The only other reference in the OT to the opening of the heavens occurs in Gen 7:11, although Isa 64:1 speaks of the Lord rending the heavens. In the NT, the heavens were opened at Christ’s baptism (Mt 3:16). Stephen saw the heavens open and was given supernatural perception of heavenly realities (Ac 7:56). Similar cases of the heavens opening are found in Rev 4:1; 19:11.

There are important similarities between the visions given to Isaiah and Ezekiel. Both prophets saw heavenly winged creatures serving God. Both underwent symbolic preparation for the prophetic ministry—Isaiah’s lips were cleansed by fire; Ezekiel ate the scroll. Both men were commissioned to go to a people who would not respond to the prophetic message.

While Ezekiel was physically present with the exiles throughout his vision, he was so overwhelmed that he was oblivious to his surroundings. The initiative for Ezekiel’s vision and prophecies lay solely with God, as was so with all true prophets.

1:2 The date given in verse 1 is anchored in verse 2 by the time of King Jehoiachin’s exile. In fact all the dates in Ezekiel are figured in relation to this. Jehoiachin reigned only three months and ten days (2Ki 24:8; 2Ch 36:9). His removal and deportation provided the reference point for Ezekiel’s prophecies. A king’s

accession to the throne was the normal time-marker by which prophecies were dated (2Ki 25:27; Jer 52:31). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, the date of Jehoiachin's captivity was April 22, 597 b.c.

1:3 The name Ezekiel means "may El strengthen or toughen." The other person in the OT known as Ezekiel was also a priest from the Levitical line (1Ch 24:16). Since foreign lands were considered unclean (Ezek 4:13; Am 7:17), it is not surprising that Israelite exiles would seek communion with God close to running water (Lv 14:5,50; 15:13; Num 19:17; see Ac 16:13). In Ezekiel the name Chaldeans is interchanged with "Babylonians" (12:13; 23:15,23). God's hand is a manifestation of His power (Ex 9:3; Dt 2:15; 1Sam 5:9; Isa 41:20). The power of the Spirit of God on the prophets enabled them to communicate divine truth.

1:4 The Babylonian army is described as an atmospheric storm. Storms and clouds were often associated with appearances of God (Job 38:1; Ps 18:7-15; 29:3-9; 104:3; Isa 29:6). The phrase fire flashing back and forth occurs elsewhere only in Ex 9:24 in the account of the plague of hail. The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud led the Hebrews in the wilderness (Ex 13:17-22). God's appearance on Mount Sinai was characterized by lightning, smoke, and fire (Ex 19:16-18). God is characterized elsewhere as a consuming fire (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:28-29).

1:5 The prominence of the number four in Ezekiel's vision (four living creatures) is related to the ancient custom of envisioning earth in four parts (cp. "four corners of the earth" in Isa 11:12) or four directions ("north and south, east and west" in Gen 13:14). Ezekiel's use of "four" symbolizes the divine capacity to control the entire world. From Ezekiel 10 we know that the four creatures were cherubim (10:5,20). Cherubim were embroidered on the curtain of the tabernacle (Ex 26:31). They were placed on top of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, where the tablets of covenant were kept (Ex 25:18-22). They were enforcers of divine judgment. When Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden of Eden, cherubim were appointed to prohibit their entry back into the garden (Gen 3:24). Elsewhere God is said to be He who "dwells between the cherubim" (1Sam 4:4; 2Sam 6:2; Ps 99:1).

1:6 In the description of the living creatures, the gender of the creatures vacillates. Out of 45 descriptions, only 12 take the grammatically proper feminine plural, while the others are all masculine plural. In many ways the vision defies the capacity of human speech to provide description. Words cannot do justice to the vision of God. While we can know true things about God, He is ultimately beyond our full comprehension.

1:9 The outspread wings of the cherub in the holy of holies "touched" one another (1Ki 6:27); the verb used here occurs in Ex 26:3 and elsewhere for the interlinking of cloth strips that made up the curtains of the desert tabernacle. Whatever direction the four living creatures wished to take was straight ahead for one of the four. Thus, all directions were "straight ahead."

1:10 The lion was considered the fiercest of beasts (Num 23:24; 24:9; Jdg 14:18; 2Sam 1:23; 17:10), while the eagle was the most magnificent of birds (Dt 28:49; 2Sam 1:23; Job 39:27; Jer 48:40; Lam 4:19). The ox was the most valued of domestic animals (Job 21:10; Pr 14:4; cp. Ex 21:36). Humans were given dominion over all the creatures God made (Gen 1:28; Ps 8:6-7).

1:11 Each creature had one pair of wings raised upward, touching the wing tips of the adjacent creature. This feature is identical to the cherubim over the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. The cherub in the holy of holies also functioned as a symbolic footstool for the invisible throne of God (Ex 25:18-22; 1Sam 4:4; 2Sam 6:2; 2Ki 19:15; Ps 80:1; 99:1).

1:13 The fiery character of the living creatures (burning coals of fire) is reminiscent of the seraphim of Isa 6 who were also fiery winged creatures. Fire will figure in the punishment of Jerusalem in Ezek 10:2 (Ps 50:3; 97:3).

1:14 In Nah 2:4, the chariots appear “like torches; they dart back and forth like lightning.” Matthew 24:27 depicts lightning going from one part of the world to the other.

1:16 The Septuagint took beryl to refer to a bright yellow precious stone, probably topaz.

1:18 The rims were the circumferences of the wheels. The eyes in the rims symbolized divine omniscience and watchfulness (2Ch 16:9; Pr 15:3; Zech 3:9; 4:10; Rev 4:6).

1:26 Made of lapis lazuli, the sapphire stone was one of the most prized stones in the ancient world.

1:27 Fire is often associated with the appearance of God (Ex 3:2-15; 24:17; Rev 4:1-4). The vision of the throne is similar to what Moses and the 70 elders observed on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:9-11). Numerous features of Ezekiel’s vision are repeated in John’s portrayal of the heavenly throne (Rev 4:2-8).

1:28 The rainbow in Ezekiel’s vision recalls the ancient covenant God made with Noah and the human race (Gen 9). The glory of the Lord is a visible manifestation of God (Ex 16:7; 24:16-17; 40:34-35). The glory of the Lord also refers to the “pillar of fire” that accompanied the Israelites in their desert wanderings (Ex 16:10; Num 14:14). Clouds, like fire, are frequently associated with the appearance of God (Ex 19:16; Jdg 5:4). Ezekiel declared that he fell facedown. This is the posture a person assumed before a king in ancient times. The Bible teaches that man cannot see God and live (Ex 33:18,20). Thus God must reveal Himself in a way that dims His full glory. What Ezekiel saw was not God in His essence, but a representation. Hence words like “likeness” and “appearance” pervade descriptions of God throughout the chapter. God did not manifest His full glory, but revealed as much as could be beheld by a mortal man. Even this partial unveiling of God’s glory was enough to overwhelm Ezekiel. When God visibly manifests Himself, reverence and worship must follow, as biblical testimony from Moses onward makes clear (Ex 3:6; cp. Mt 17:1-9). The sound of God’s voice was like the voice John heard in his vision (Rev 1:15).