

Ezekiel Chapters 3 and 4 - John Karmelich

Title "Fulfilling our purpose for God!"

One of the things Christians ponder is what to do after one is saved? Should I quit my life and work as a missionary? God rarely bangs us on the head to say something like, "Start working over there, talk to those people and don't stop till I say so!" God gives us gifts, and ministry work requires using our gifts for His glory! Let me share my story as an example: I once taught a bible class at my old church. I saw people leaving before I began taking copies of my notes. It got me to ponder if I could post them on the church web site! Once it was on the internet, I got a bunch of thank you notes from around the country! That's how this ministry started! When God calls us to do something, it is rarely "Go there, do that and wait for further instructions!" If you're "new at this", think about what we desire or what we have a gift for? What God desires is to use our lives as a witness for Him! When we ask Him to guide us, we will discover a desire for a greater purpose to live! Sometimes it ends up being practical needs. As I say a lot, no one has the spiritual gift to take out the trash, but it needs to be done!

The reason I am getting into all of this is the main plot point of these two chapters is God explaining to Ezekiel what he expects him to say to the Israelites he is called to speak to! A fascinating thing is God says they won't listen. So why bother? There is an accountability issue at play here! Not all Christian missions revolve around preaching the Gospel to nonbelievers! God calls most of us to be a witness to those around us! In effect that's what Ezekiel's called to do. The reason for that is so people don't have excuses on judgement day! Today almost anyone can download a bible on a smart phone! It removes a reason for saying "We didn't know better"! Obviously not every person goes to heaven. So why preach to nonbelievers? Aren't we "wasting our bullets"? Of course, we should use try to use good judgement for whatever God's calling us to do, but a key point is obedience. To give you a simple example, I don't preach to my siblings. I use Mark 6:4 as my reason for not pounding a bible over their heads! As I was taught, most people who reject Jesus must "step over Him" to go to hell!

As we study what God called Ezekiel to do, the key issue isn't the specifics of what He calls him to do, but to grasp that God calls all of us who trust in Him to use our lives for His glory. As we study details of how God used Ezekiel, think about your own calling and hopefully, we will all learn a few things to apply to our calling! With that tough assignment stated, let's look at these two chapters!

In the first two chapters Ezekiel saw a vision of God's throne room, which let's be honest was strange as it read like something out of a science fiction movie. We'll get a bit more of that here. Still the focus is on what Ezekiel was called to do. Chapter 3 begins with Ezekiel told to go eat a scroll! I don't think it's literal. The idea is to study God's word as we can't teach others about Jesus if we don't know it. We do not have to be an expert on Day 1, but no matter what God calls us to do, a daily habit of Bible study is always part of our ministry! The text said the taste was as sweet as honey! While many will reject His message, to the believer, it's always a wonderful thing to digest!

Next in Chapter 3 is a lecture by God to Ezekiel saying in effect, you're to preach to fellow Israelites in captivity with you! They won't listen, but in effect that's a non-issue! God doesn't want anyone to have the excuse they didn't know better! It's a reminder we're not rewarded on how many people we save! I should state for the record only God can save people! (All we are called to do is be a witness for Him!) If He calls us to preach to the people who will reject Him, and He prepares us for that mission, then it's a matter of obedience to what He (not our church or our friends) want us to do! To state the obvious, it doesn't mean we abandon our family in a time of need! God will guide us through tough decisions!

Then (just to remind us Ezekiel gets weird every now and then), the Spirit lifted him up and he heard a powerful sound (he describes it being like an earthquake)! The vision included those strange creatures I described in the last lesson. (Read that one for details). Here God leads Ezekiel to where others were (fellow Jewish exiles in captivity in the Babylonian Empire)! I suspect all that "weird vision stuff" took its toll on him, so he didn't say a word for seven days!

Next comes Ezekiel's marching orders. I find when God calls us to a ministry, he finds ways to make it obvious in the beginning! As I said for me, I was getting emails from around the United States. That is the sign I received! God made it clear to Ezekiel that he was called to be a "watchman on the wall". In the era when cities had walls, guards stood on those walls watching for enemies. That in effect is what God called him to do! It didn't matter if the Israelites responded or not! God called Ezekiel to preach a message of repentance. If the Israelites didn't listen, Ezekiel still gets heavenly rewards, as he did what God told him to do! Most Christians are not called to say preach on street corners or say at a sporting event to nonbelievers. It's a specialized calling some feel led to do so. If Christians are doing what God called them to do and not hurting anyone so be it! It's not a ministry we're all called to! Sometimes we are called to be a witness to nonbelievers, so go with what God's calling us to do at any given moment!

If you think Ezekiel's job is tough so far, you haven't read anything yet! When God got him to where He wanted him to be, God made him mute as a sign to the Israelites. A little like how God dealt with John the Baptist's father (Luke 1:20), Ezekiel could not speak till God said "now"! When God wants us to do something, a danger is jumping out in front of what He wants us to do! I'm positive most missionaries will tell you that's always a danger. That is why I always preach to pray for good decisions, then make the best decision possible with what we know at that moment. I know missionary work is often trial & error! We must go forward and trust that God's guiding us for His glory! In short, God tells Ezekiel to state in effect, "Here's what I want, obey or suffer!" To prove God sent Ezekiel (Chapter 4), he'll show how Jerusalem is going "down for the count" (be destroyed) as false prophets were saying in effect, don't panic, God will wipe out our enemies soon, so we can all go home soon!

Speaking of showing Jerusalem will be destroyed, time to talk about Chapter 4: The way God worked through Ezekiel was he was to build for those Israelites a model of Jerusalem. I am terrible at drawing, but Ezekiel who was trained as a priest drew on a tablet a model of Jerusalem. It was then time for him to pretend the city will be destroyed. I picture Ezekiel with toy soldiers pretending to attack a model of Jerusalem while the Israelites watched him! Bottom line, he built a model of that city under attack!

As I stated, Ezekiel gets weird a lot in this book! He is told to eat a specific minimal diet to symbolize how the residents of Jerusalem will have to ration food and water to survive! There's a strange verse of him being told to cook his dinner over human dung. He asks for cow's dung as a substitute. As most of us know cow's waste doesn't smell any better! If all that isn't strange enough, he's told to lay down next to it for 390 days on one side of his body and another 40 days on his other side. I doubt he laid there all of the day, but as part of his daily demonstration for proof that God's sending a message. Here's the weird part, each day represents a year! If you think what I've written so far is weird enough, you're right. For those of you who like to go way out in left field, let me share something I learned years ago. You don't have to memorize the next paragraph as a good Christian. It's an interesting theory and that's that!

As most of us know the Israelites were in captivity 70 years (as predicted by Jeremiah and stated a few times in the bible). In effect there are two starting dates: One is tied to the first siege of Jerusalem. The second is tied to its destruction. The short version is, there is nothing specific that happened in the 390 and 40 years that Ezekiel was told the days represented. Leviticus 26 says if the Israelites won't listen,

God will make their punishment seven times worse. That's 430 years, minus 70 in captivity, or 360 (in Jewish years, keep in mind the Jewish calendar is only 360 days). When you do the math and allow for leap days, a 365-day year, etc., the end of the 360-year times 7 prediction comes out to May of 1948. It is the time Israel became a nation again. If you start with the date Jerusalem was destroyed, and do that math again, it ends in June of 1967. That's when the city of Jerusalem became part of Israel again. Yes, I know this is a strange way to do math, but it's interesting to consider. In short, Ezekiel's laying down ties to modern Israel dates. Here's a link for more details: <https://www.khouse.org/articles/2000/276/>

Now that I've made the leap way out in left field, time for us to return to Ezekiel Chapter 4. In effect, I am done! Remember it is just the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry and God wanted to show signs to his audience that God really called him! In about 7 years, if my math is right, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Key point being that God spoke to Ezekiel. Remember he lived about the same time as Daniel (who worked in the king's palace), and Jeremiah who stayed in Jerusalem to the bitter end, to preach to those Israelites still there! I'm just saying that God never gives up calling those He's called to be a witness for Him, so He preaches "till their death" that God calls us to live as He requires us to live and to be a good witness for Him!

OK John all of this is interesting, but we Christians are called to live by grace! That doesn't mean we're to live however we want! It means we're to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. It's why we were saved in the first place! It means we are to live as He desires. We don't have to eat kosher, but living as God desires and being a good witness for Him is what He desires of us! All of us believers are in effect told to go to our mission fields. One of my favorite wall signs (at my old church) was by the exit. That sign read, "You are now entering your mission field!" I realize some Christians are specifically called to be long distances from home, while others are called to work "nearby". A former pastor of mine said that all of us need to "be on the front line firing the bullets or on the back line providing the ammunition! It is a reference to prayer on the "back line"! Each of us is called to make a difference for Him.

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on that link on the same page! It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks for reading all this!