

Guest Preacher - Mr Donald Macaulay

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

- [0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the chapter that we read. The book of Ezekiel, chapter 11.!
- And particularly the final words of that verse. Yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.
- The book of the prophet Ezekiel is perhaps not as well known as it ought to be. I can't remember the last time I heard a sermon on Ezekiel by someone else.
- But it's a book that is well worth studying, although it is extremely, if I say difficult to understand, there are parts of it that are quite difficult to understand.
- But the book of Ezekiel, sometimes called a prophecy, sometimes called the visions of Ezekiel, is to the Old Testament as the book of Revelation is to the New Testament.
- [1 : 35] What Ezekiel sees in the course of the book are visions. And all the words of prophecy that come with these visions are spoken to him by God.
- Who was Ezekiel? What is the background situation to this? We need to put it in context to understand the full significance of it. And if you turn quickly to chapter 1, at the beginning of chapter 1, we see the background of Ezekiel himself.
- And we're told there that it says, In the 30th year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chiber Canal or river, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
- On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakim, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Busi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chiber Canal.
- And the hand of the Lord was upon him there. And that places it for us, first of all, its location, and secondly, its chronology.
- [2 : 57] We know that Jehoiakim was exiled to Babylon in 597 BC. And Ezekiel almost certainly was exiled at the same time.
- Some think that he may have been exiled in the second wave of exiles, others in the first. In the first, for example, Daniel and his companions were taken away.
- And the details of all that can be found at the end of 2 Kings and in the book of Chronicles, if you're interested in the history of what was going on.
- But again, just to summarize it very briefly, this is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, coming against Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And he comes three times.
- And in the third time when he comes, Jerusalem is destroyed, as is the Temple of Solomon. And we read that in these two exiles, the first and second wave of the exiles, first of all, the royal family and all the nobles are taken away to Babylon.
- [4 : 12] And in the second wave, almost all the priests and what you would call the academics, the more intellectual or the wealthier people of Jerusalem and the area round about are also taken away.
- And you notice that they're taken away into exile. They're not taken away as slaves. And although it's a captivity, it is nevertheless an exile.

And that's what Ezekiel uses the term various times for us. And we saw that in the Psalms that we sang.

And perhaps you were wondering a little bit about Psalm 137, where the final verse of it speaks about battering the heads of the children against the stones.

Now, just to put that in context, this was very common at the time. When people were taken into slavery or into captivity, little children up to the age of five or maybe even a wee bit older than that, it was quite common in babies as well simply to take them by the feet and smash their head against a stone.

[5 : 29] And the purpose of that was quite simple. It sounds horrific, but it was very practical in a sense. Because there was no way that little children or babies would have survived on a march of over a thousand miles to Babylon.

And therefore, it was quite normal among the conquering forces to carry out that kind of execution. Because what mattered very often for them was the selling of the women as slaves and so on, the men also.

But the Israelites, those from Jerusalem, are not being taken in that way. One of the remarkable things that we see is that the peoples that are taken into captivity in Babylon, not just the Jews, but others as well, are actually allowed to continue worshipping their own gods.

They are not obliged to follow the Babylonian or later the Assyrian forms of worship. They're allowed to continue with their own worship.

And this is where we find Ezekiel among the exiles by the Kiber River or the Kiber Canal. And this is about 200 miles further north from Babylon.

[6 : 57] And it appears that there was a settlement there of a large number of the Jews. Now, this is contemporary with Jeremiah prophesying in Jerusalem.

And contemporary also with Daniel being in Babylon. They're all more or less at the same time. And you will remember that the purpose of God allowing this to happen and allowing the temple to be destroyed was because of the idolatry of the people.

If you go back to the final chapters of 2 Corinthians of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles and so on, you'll find that virtually all the kings who reigned at this time with one or two notable exceptions like Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them worshipped idols.

And the same thing had been true in the northern kingdom, in the kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes of the north. And that was why God had sent the Assyrians to conquer them. And those ten tribes are taken into captivity in Assyria and it's there they disappear.

We never hear of them again. We have no idea where the ten tribes ended up. Some say that their descendants spread all over various parts of the Middle East and then into Europe and so on.

[8 : 30] But that's another story altogether. It's a very interesting story but it's another story altogether. And so we come to Ezekiel here and he is worshipping along with a group of the exiles at the banks of the Kiber Canal.

And as we saw in the first chapter son of Buzi the priest. Ezekiel was a Levite and therefore he led the people in worship.

And he is chosen particularly then by God to reveal to the people through the visions that he's given what God is doing and why he is doing it.

Now it's not often that we can figure out what God is actually doing. If we look at the situation of our world nowadays we wonder at times what God is actually doing.

but you can be absolutely sure that God is still at work. God's sovereignty is one of the themes that comes across clearly here in everything that is going on with the captives in Babylon.

[9 : 56] They had been told by Jeremiah in Jeremiah's prophecy Ezekiel repeated again that this captivity passed for 70 years literally a generation and that then some of them would return and the temple would be rebuilt and that's what you see in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah.

You see the temple the second temple the temple of Zerubbabel being rebuilt and the presence of the Lord coming there again. But the visions that Ezekiel are given and there are a large number of them throughout the book are of course couched in imagery and symbolism that perhaps are a little bit difficult for us to follow in today's world.

But nevertheless we see at the beginning of this chapter that the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord which faces east. Now that was of course facing towards Babylon.

And then we meet these twenty-five men and God tells us God tells Ezekiel that these are the men who devise iniquity in verse 2 and who give wicked counsel in the city and who forbid people to build houses etc.

and so on. And again if you look at Jeremiah Jeremiah had written to the exiles saying to them to build houses in Babylon and so on because they were going to be there for quite some time.

[11 : 41] But it is quite clear from what we are here the city is the cauldron and we are the meat that's what they think. The Jews thought that those particular Jews thought that because the temple was there and the presence of God as they thought was still there therefore nothing would happen to them.

But you see that from the next section onwards God is saying that he will bring judgment on them. And you see that in verse 8 you have feared the sword I will bring the sword upon you declares the Lord God and I will bring you out of the midst of it and give you into the hands of foreigners and execute judgments upon you you shall fall by the sword.

And we can see clearly the Lord's purpose and we get this confirmed in later scriptures as well is to cleanse Jerusalem of its inhabitants.

When Eshra and Nehemiah return from the exile to start rebuilding the temple and the wall the city is basically deserted and requires to be repopulated and to go to the end again of the story it is repopulated mainly by the Jews who come back from Babylon.

As far as we know Ezekiel never returned we can't find any clue anywhere in the narrative that he ever returned to Jerusalem neither did Daniel they lived out their life in Babylon the Lord had different purposes for them there and we can see and work out that Ezekiel was there for at least 23 years or a bit longer than that we don't know exactly and so God's sovereignty and God's judgment are brought to the fore right from the very beginning and you notice how Ezekiel laments this as he says in verse 13 ah Lord God will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel and this is after Pelatiah has suddenly died and again the judgment of God has been on him here interesting that

[14 : 12] Pelatiah the meaning of the name in Hebrew is that God delivers but this was one of the men who was leading Israel or the Jews astray here ah Lord God ah Adonai Jehovah it is in the original the covenant God will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel are you going to destroy and kill everyone in the city and the word of the Lord then comes and he says and coming to verse 16 therefore say thus says the Lord though I removed them far off among the nations and though I scattered them among the countries yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone if you're using the

AV it says I have been a little sanctuary to and it's the same translation in Gaelic it's big in Gaelic as well but that translation is not quite correct the translation that we have in the ESV is much much better because it's the meaning of the word is a time reference I have been a sanctuary to them for a while or for a season in the countries where they have gone you think about the word little that's used in the AV and in the Gaelic there is nothing little about God we cannot describe God as little in any way in terms of his glory in terms of his power in terms of his sovereignty and yet it is so clear that the one thing and we see it time and time again throughout the

Old Testament that God will not tolerate idolatry especially in the city of Jerusalem where the temple was one wonders nowadays how many idols are we still worshipping instead of being for example worshipping God this morning how many people are following the idols of sport of very I'm sure you can think of other different idols that people have that keeps them away from the house and from the word of God I'm sure that when we examine ourselves in detail you and I have our own idols I know what mine are

I'm not telling you it's up to you to figure out what your own idols are what is an idol anyway it's simply something that you put in the place of where God ought to be God ought to be first in your worship God ought to be first in your thoughts and your devotions and in your mind at all times it's easy to say that it's another thing to do it's another thing to do it I've seen quite a few people I know in our own village and it seems to me that their idol is their livestock particularly their sheep they're there morning noon and night seven days a week looking at them chasing them around playing with them feeding them doing this that and the next thing some of them do go to a church but the sheep seem far more important than the worship of

God and each of us you and I need to examine our own idols and this is what God is getting at here I have been a sanctuary to them what was the meaning of the word sanctuary well if you go back into the Old Testament again!

[18:57] the word! sanctuary referred particularly to the Holy of Holies that part of the tabernacle which was forbidden for anyone to enter except the high priest on the day of atonement once a year and with the blood of the sacrifice of the sin offering and it was in the sanctuary that God's presence dwelt in the tabernacle remember that that was where the ark of the covenant was the cherubin that spread out their wings above the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant and the cherubin are looking down on the mercy of God where the high priest would sprinkle blood for his own sins and for the sins of the people and of course that points us forward to the sacrifice of the

Lord Jesus Christ the cross of Calvary the atonement that was rendered there that's what the word atonement refers to it's a lovely word if you break it down atonement atonement with God to be atonement with God to be at peace in your relationship with God and this is what the sanctuary was all about of course in the Old Testament shadow of what was to come in the Lord Jesus Christ that had to be carried out once a year by the high priest but now as the writer to the Hebrews tells us now we have a better sanctuary and we have a better high priest even Jesus Christ the righteous one who through his own blood has satisfied the wrath of God once and forever because in the old sanctuary this ceremony had to be carried out every single year but that is no longer necessary so

I have been a little sanctuary or a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone a special place where you can come to meet with the Lord God each one of us should have our own little sanctuary perhaps your own private place in your home where you meet with God either as a family or individually or both each and every day that's what the sanctuary is all about meeting with God you remember that Moses spoke to God face to face there and again of course although that's not literally true nevertheless that is the purpose that you and I will be able to come into a sanctuary to meet with the Lord in prayer and through his word each and every day and so often we hear people complaining things are not what they used to be don't feel the presence of

God anymore don't feel the worship is the same as it used to be etc etc how much of the responsibility lies with ourselves that we ourselves are not worshipping in the way that we used not spending time with God in the way that we used not spending time with his word in fact perhaps we go through the rituals of prayer and worship even on the Sabbath rather than anything else but to really spend time with God is more important than anything else I have been a sanctuary to them and it's not just to the exiles it's to you and I as well if you are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ because you and

I are exiles in the same way this is not our final resting place this is not where we will be for eternity we are in exile from the promised land if we can put it metaphorically like that as John Bunyan does in the pilgrim's progress we are in exile until we finally are taken home to glory to heaven and as in exiles as in Psalm 137 how can you sing the Lord's song in a strange land because this is a strange land and it's only through his power and presence of the spirit in our worship that we can sing the Lord's song at all this is no continuing city we're reminded every single day all you have to do is look at

[24 : 40] Heb News or anywhere else to see the amount of deaths that go on day by day in our island never mind elsewhere in the world the number of people who are taken into eternity with no thought of what that means I have to challenge you this morning and say to you have you a thought of what eternity means where you are going given everything that has been done for you through the atonement rendered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ are you still like Pelotia and the others here worshipping idols or it's a hard message sometimes but yet that's the message of the gospel that's the message that scripture gives us that the Lord is calling us to come to worship and not only calling us to come to worship but giving us a promise that goes with it and we see in verse 19 or verse 18 starting at when they come there they will remove from it that's from

Jerusalem and the temple all its detestable things and all its abominations and I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them and they shall be my people and I will be their God now that's not the only place in scripture where we find that written not in exactly the same words but in the same meaning the covenant that God the new covenant that God will make with his people in the new testament that's why it's called a new testament as the writer to the Hebrews says a testament is only in force is not in force until the author of the testament dies and therefore it's like a will that is left a testament and it involves this new covenant the new covenant that is coming and we see in all the prophecies

Ezekiel Jeremiah Daniel and the minor prophets Isaiah that all of them are looking forward to the coming of Messiah Messiah the Greek word is Christos Christ Messiah the Hebrew word the anointed one who is to come and it's prophesied from the very beginning of the book of Genesis God's curse upon the serpent that from the seed of the woman will come one who will bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel now I'm sure I've mentioned it before it's quite an amazing thing to think of it there even with our modern knowledge of biology etc we know that the seed comes from the man not from the woman but yet scripture is very clear the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent or the devil

Genesis 3 and this is looking forward of course to Messiah coming the Christ coming the one who will redeem his people from sin and bring them under the covenant of grace the new the old testament saints looked forward to it they never saw it but they looked forward to it some of them saw it more clearly than others Isaiah saw it so clearly in chapter 53 of Isaiah if you read Isaiah 53 you see the details that are given there 500 years before it happened but David saw it equally clear at a thousand years before it happened in Psalm 22 and if you read through Psalm 22 you see details of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ clearly there they shall be my people

I will be their God this is God's promise through the covenant of grace was this old testament promise here for the restoration of the Jews back to Jerusalem and again if you follow the history of that you know of course and that many of you will know that in the intertestamental period that's a period between the close of the old testament and the opening of the new 400 years that are there etc there is a very interesting piece of history there where again the temple is desecrated and destroyed and through the revolt of the maccabees the worship of god is re-established and that is why it is necessary for herod in the new testament to rebuild the temple again although he's doing it for his own glory rather than anything else but it is in that temple and outside that temple that the lord jesus christ tells us that the day will come when that temple will also be destroyed he says to the disciples you see these stones he says not one of them will be left standing that's why the jews gather at the wailing wall the wailing wall is the only bit left of what was supposedly solomon's temple there's nothing left of herod's temple it was destroyed by the romans in ad 70 and so our promises are not upon a place of worship but the one we worship that is who we need to look to at all times the one whom we are worshiping they shall be my people and

[31 : 44] I will be their God and the declaration there is as a trinitarian God father son and holy spirit and so many people think that the spirit is not really manifested in the old testament at all well all you have to do is look at the beginning of this chapter and see how wrong you are the spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord which faces east and then you see at the end in verse 22 then the cherubin lifted up their wings!

with the wheels beside them and the glory of the God of Israel was over them the cherubin notice again the angels closest to the presence of God the same as the cherubins that we see on the ark of the covenant as well and the glory of the God of Israel was over them what an amazing sight Ezekiel saw have you ever wondered what the glory of the God of Israel would look like you go back over the visions of Ezekiel and you see something of it but you see it more clearly in the revelation that John is given particularly in chapter 4 or 5 when he is given access through the door that has opened in heaven into the throne room of God what do we see then verse 23 the glory of the

Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city that's the Mount of Olives why is it standing there because it is there that it will be fully manifested again in the garden of Gethsemane by the Lord Jesus Christ and the spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea that's just another word for Babylon to the exiles then the vision that I had seen went up from me and I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me I wonder how much they understood I wonder sometimes how much I understand and perhaps I wonder how much we all understand of what the

Lord is doing of God's sovereignty of God's judgment on idolatry and of God's judgment on evildoers we don't seem to see the Lord working in the same way now as we did then but perhaps that's because we're not able to discern it in the same way but that God is at work even although it appears to human beings that he's not with so many so many people say how can God you know be doing things when he's allowing so much war and hunger and pain and famine and all the other things that happen throughout the world it's interesting how we're so quick to blame God for anything rather than blame man's inhumanity to man and the work of sin within us but never mind we can look and see that we still have a little sanctuary a sanctuary that we can go to that we can go to the word of

God and we can go to the presence of God in the same way and perhaps you and I would like to see the kind of visions that Ezekiel saw well I don't think that will be the case I might be quite wrong there are people still who see visions of the presence of God but again I don't have time to go into that in any detail at the moment but it's not the vision that you want it's the presence you want the presence of God to be with you so remember take time to go into your little sanctuary take time to read and study the word of God and above all take time to come to the Lord Jesus Christ and to confess that you have need of him more than anything else in this world for that is the blood that cleanses from all sin and that what

[36 : 56] Peter says Lord to whom else can we go for you alone have the words of eternal life let us pray our father in heaven we thank you that we are able to meditate on these things although we see them perhaps through a glass darkly but nevertheless we thank you that your spirit opens up the word to us and we can see something of the glory of God and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the passages that we were looking at we thank you for the cross of company we pray oh Lord that you would lead each and every one of us to see our need of our redeemer to see our need of the blood that cleanses from all sin and to come to know you as a living saviour we thank you for your presence with us this morning be with us now and take us to our homes in safety and pardon sin through

Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Let us conclude by singing in Psalm 125 on page 419 a psalm perhaps that sums up they and the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Sion Hill which at no time can be removed but standeth ever still as round about Jerusalem the mountains stand all way the Lord his folk doth compass so from henceforth and foray and so on to the end of the psalm psalm 125 they in the Lord that firmly trust they in the

Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion hill which hath no time can be removed but standeth ever still!

as round about Jerusalem Jerusalem the mountains stand away the Lord his folk doth compass!

from hands forth and foray for ail men's road upon the Lord of just men shall not lie!

[40 : 35] lest righteous men stretch forth their hands unto!

in! in equity! do thou to all those that be good thy goodness Lord impart!

and do the good to those that are upright within their heart but as for such as turn aside after their crooked way God shall lead forth with wicked men on Israel peace shall stay grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever Amen