

## Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 24, what more

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What more is there to say about the book of Ezekiel? Well, since I am a Christian and hopefully, I'm addressing Christians, there is indeed more to say. What I want to look at this time is the relationship of the book of Ezekiel to the New Testament. When we read the book of Ezekiel, we are very much aware it's an alien book.

It's alien for us both as Westerners living in this day and age and as Christians. Perhaps the nearest we can get to appreciating those exiles in ancient Babylon that Ezekiel was talking to is to compare them with Syrian refugees forced to migrate because they've lost their homes and livelihood, huddled into a European refugee camp far from home and far from all they have ever known. But we only see those scenes like that on television from time to time, if at all, and that is not our experience, fortunately, and is not likely to be.

A useful approach is to think in terms of family, family ancestry. Many Americans have researched their family trees and traced their roots back, say, to the United Kingdom, and some have even travelled over there and been thrilled to see their family name on an old tombstone in a cemetery or in a church listing of births, marriages and deaths. That family spirit is the sort of way that Paul thought about the Old Testament, the stories it tells, and the characters it describes.

In 1 Corinthians 10, he mentions a story about the Israelites in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. The striking thing is that he calls the Israelites our ancestors as he begins the story in 1 Corinthians 10:1. You might think this is Saul, the rabbi, preaching in the synagogue to his fellow Jews. That could make sense of his reference to our ancestors, but no, he carries the idea over into his Christian teaching as Paul the Apostle, very often to Gentiles as well as to Jews who put their faith in Jesus.

We all, he says, have a kinship with them and they're part of the family of God and his people, just as we are. Those Israelites in the wilderness feature in our spiritual family tree, even though not genetically. And he goes on to say that we can learn from them.

He says in verse 10 the story was written down to instruct us. And then again, in Romans 4, Paul calls Abraham our ancestor, Romans 4.1. He goes further in chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, in saying that Abraham is the ancestor of all who believe, whether uncircumcised or circumcised. There's a family likeness, he is saying, and we can recognize ourselves in those old literary photos of Abraham in the book of Genesis.

Let's think about the book of Ezekiel. It may surprise you to learn that the Old Testament is an old friend of the New Testament writers. The United Bible Societies publish a Greek New Testament.

At the back there are two indexes, one of formal quotations from the Old Testament that appear in the New, and the other index of verbal allusions that show the New Testament writer had a particular Old Testament passage in line. When we look at the first index, we might be disappointed by only two quotations from Ezekiel in the New Testament. But when we look at the second index, we find no less than 139 references to the New Testament based on the book of Ezekiel.

139 references. And I've checked every reference in this second index and find out, not surprisingly, that a number of them are purely literary and do not have any theological carryover of much significance. A few weeks ago, I was reading a novel, a mystery novel, and there were two characters in it, a husband and wife, and the wife was angry with the husband, unreasonably, the husband thought.

He wanted a reconciliation, and this is what he said: If we are against each other, who will be for us? Well, obviously, this an allusion to Romans 8:31: if God is for us, who is against us? But the context is quite different, and the reference is just a literary one and nothing more. And so Revelation 7:1 mentions the four winds and the index says, aha, that's harking back to Ezekiel 36 in verse 9. But there are no other parallels with Ezekiel 37 in Revelation 7. John knew the phrase from Ezekiel in a couple of other Old Testament passages, and he used it just as a familiar phrase. So, we have to be careful in what conclusions we draw, even though there may be a likeness, some verbal likeness between passages.

But most of the New Testament's references to Ezekiel have a deeper intention than that, and we will be referring to a number of them as deliberate and spiritually meaningful. We have seen that the book of Ezekiel deals with two eras: an era of radical judgment upon Israel and a coming era of salvation. In this respect, it follows the same pattern as a number of other Old Testament prophetic books.

And when we turn to the New Testament, we find that features of the salvation aspect of the pattern are picked up, and the New Testament message is presented as the intended fulfillment. Four features are especially important for all the prophetic books that are picked up. The New Testament wants to say that it is looking forward to the New Testament in these four themes.

Here it is, says the New Testament. In the first of those four, I'm going to cite what prophecy in the Old Testament is looking forward to and as a future fact and how the New Testament wants to pick it up. I'm going to be speaking generally about the prophetic books, but I want to compare where there are parallels in Ezekiel and where there are not.

And so, we can distinguish where Ezekiel stands among the prophets, and in what respects he's sharing their point of view, and in what respects he does not. And so, we can pinpoint more exactly where Ezekiel stands in relation to the New Testament. So, there are four features.

And one, the New Testament's presentation of Jesus as a Messianic king. It's harking back to the Old Testament prophecy in this respect. And secondly, God's covenant with his people.

Thirdly, there is the gift of God's spirit. Fourthly, the influx of the nations to join the people of God, Israel. So, what I want to do is to see how Ezekiel fits into this New Testament trend of claiming fulfillment of God's ancient promises given through the prophets.

First of all, Jesus as Messianic king. Ezekiel looked beyond the sad history of Davidic kingship in the closing decades of Judea's history, and he reclaimed the tradition of Davidic kingship associated with justice and righteousness. He regained the tradition of the king as the agent of God's rule in ruling Israel, God's will in ruling Israel.

Ezekiel was an ally of earlier prophets who made such a claim. Like Jeremiah, he looked forward to a united Israel of north and south instead of the confinement of the Davidic dynasty to a throne only over Judah. In chapter 37, Ezekiel declares in that symbolism of the two sticks, not only would the two former nations be reunited, but says God through Ezekiel, My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd, one shepherd under over one community.

That word shepherd in chapter 37 recurs in Ezekiel 34 in verse 23, in speaking of the return of the exiles to their own land. There is one shepherd as the Davidic king, who will rule over them. So, in two chapters, Davidic kingship is mentioned.

In the New Testament, it is significant that John 10, which picks up that shepherding metaphor, which we saw related ultimately to kingship. It says there should be one flock and one shepherd, one flock and one shepherd. And John has especially Ezekiel 37 in mind, the promise of a wider kingdom than Judah.

And certainly, John, in chapter 11 and verse 52, has a sense of this wider dominion of the Davidic king. In verse 52 of John 11, unwittingly, the high priest prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation and not only for the nation but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. And certainly, included in that from John's perspective, this is under the auspices of Jesus and the work that Jesus is going to do.

So, there's been a gathering together there. But we mustn't exclude a mission also to the Samaritans, a mission to those people who were descended from the tribes of

the Northern Kingdom. And that mission to the Samaritans seems to pick up this idea of one kingship, one nation, a reunion of North and South.

In John's gospel, Jesus's overtures to the Samaritan woman are exemplified in chapter 4 of John. In Acts, it comes out in the risen Lord's threefold call to witness in Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8. Also, Philip's ministry in Samaria is in chapter 8 of Acts. And so there's this moving out. Jesus, the realm of Jesus, is to move out to the North.

And this thought of the Northern Kingdom being united with the South, I think it's picked up in these places. Of course, the shepherd-sheep analogy in John 10 owes a lot to Ezekiel 34. Shepherding, remember, is a metaphor for kingship.

Jesus's predecessors were condemned in John 10 by Jesus as Ezekiel condemns the pre-exilic kings in comparison with the standard that God will have for the future. In John 10, Jesus claims the messianic role that the future king would hold as the prophets look forward to him. And Ezekiel has his own part to play in these shepherding passages.

And then Luke 19, verse 10. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost. And this, in fact, is picking up, say, our index of allusions at the back of the Greek New Testament.

This is picking up Ezekiel chapter 34. And verse 11. What does God say he's going to do? Thus says the Lord God, 34:11, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

And he says the same in verse 16. I will seek the lost. And so here is the work of Jesus doing the work of God.

The New Testament claims that he is performing the shepherding role and operating as God's agent in coming as the Son of Man to seek out and save the lost. So, that mission was not exhausted in terms of having the exiles as their initial concern.

It had a wider and greater relevance in the work of Jesus. Ezekiel also spoke of a coming king in 17:23 in terms of a new shoot that would grow into a magnificent cedar. Mark's Gospel seems to pick up this reference along with parallels in Matthew and Luke in terms of Jesus.

The Mark reference is in chapter 4 and verse 32. It's the parable of the mustard seed. That tiny mustard seed that is going to grow into a large tree.

And there in chapter 17, in the promise of kingship, new kingship, new Davidic kingship, there's this mention of this little seed which is going to grow, this sprout

that's going to grow into a large tree. This is being picked up here in the parable of the mustard seed to describe the growth of the Kingdom of God and to describe how Jesus is portraying his work in terms of that role in Ezekiel 17. Well, that's the first theme that the prophets want to speak of, and the New Testament wants to pick up for itself as fulfilled in Jesus.

This role of the messianic king and its ramifications as a shepherd, Ezekiel, is in mind even here in the New Testament. The second one is God's covenant with his people. God's covenant with his people is the second theme.

And we think especially of course of Jeremiah 31 as the focal point of reference for the New Testament's claim of a new covenant. But the New Testament also borrows covenant language from Ezekiel. In 2 Corinthians 6, verses 16 through 18, we have a medley of Old Testament quotations, and one of them is based on Ezekiel 37 verse 27, I will be their God and they shall be my people.

This double covenant formula presents an Old Testament ideal that Paul claims to be fulfilled in the church's relationship with God. The writer to the Hebrews has a lot to say about the covenant. In 13:20, he describes the covenant as the eternal covenant. He says that the New Testament index, this phrase is derived from Ezekiel 37:26, the everlasting covenant that God promises to make with his people.

And so, the writer to the Hebrews is saying, here it is, here is Ezekiel fulfilled. So, there aren't many references to the covenant where Ezekiel is picked up but there are some. Thirdly, there is the gift of God's spirit.

We may know that the New Testament depends on two scriptures, and a more obvious one is the end of Joel chapter 2, where God says I will pour out my spirit. But the other one is the promise in Ezekiel 36:26 and 27, which is anticipated in chapter 11. And we have the saying in both places: I will put my spirit upon you.

But when you look at the Greek translation of that text, it says I will give my spirit in you. And Paul refers to this Greek text in 1 Thessalonians 4:8, in referring to God who gives his Holy Spirit to you. And so, he's read his Ezekiel, and he knows that promise occurs twice in Ezekiel.

A more extended use of 36:26 and 27 occurs in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. And here, Paul indulges in a metaphor, and he speaks of the Corinthian church. You are a letter of Christ prepared by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Now, one clue in our English versions, certainly in the New RSV and in the NIV, it says human hearts.

But that's a more sophisticated way of saying what the Greek says: hearts of flesh. Hearts of flesh. And so, there's a comparison between tablets of stone and hearts of flesh.

And, of course, we have the comparison of stony hearts and fleshy hearts in that reference there in Ezekiel 36 and verse 27 following. And Ezekiel had promised that the exile's stony hard-heartedness toward God would be replaced with soft-heartedness, as soft as yielding flesh. And God would do this work by putting his own spirit into the exiles.

And Paul applies this to the Christian experience of this contrast. This contrast of stone and flesh. But he gives it an extra twist because what he does, he applies it to the tablets of the law.

And he's got a different dimension from Ezekiel. He adds this extra thing. And he is saying, well, Judaism by itself, dependent on the tablets of the law, is not going to save us.

And we need that gift that Ezekiel spoke of, of the Holy Spirit. And then we shall have hearts of flesh. And Paul is thinking of the argument that he would later formulate in Romans 7 to 8, that the Mosaic law had proved impossible to keep.

Why? Because of the waywardness of human hearts. In other words, they were hearts of stone towards God. As he says in Romans 8:4, it was only the gift of the Holy Spirit that enabled the just requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

And so, in this respect, Paul is agreeing with Ezekiel in 1831, that the secret of obedience to God's declared will is for the exiles to appropriate God's gift of a new heart and a new spirit. Which would later be defined in terms of the Spirit of God. The letter to the Hebrews also shows the influence of Ezekiel 36, 35.

It's verse 35 in this case. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean from all your uncleanness. Well, this is a metaphor for God's forgiveness of past sins and a new start.

And it comes from Ezekiel 36 and verse 35. No, it's 25, isn't it? I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. It says there in 36, 25.

Later, in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 22, he speaks again in a similar way. He offers this very opportunity to the backsliding recipients of his letter in speaking of our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. So that's the link between Ezekiel 36:25 and Hebrews 10:22.

In both cases, speaking of a metaphor for forgiveness. John's Gospel and I've mentioned this earlier in our lecturing, also draws on Ezekiel 36, 35, and 36 in chapter 3 in Nicodemus' dialogue with Jesus in John 3 and verse 5. Jesus answered, very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. Being born means looking forward to the start of that eternal life, which is what the chapter is going to talk about later, John chapter 3. But there's mention of water.

And this seems to be a reference to 36, it's 25 and 26. I keep getting those verses wrong. 36, 25 and 26.

And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be free of all your uncleannesses. And so, it's talking of forgiveness, talking of forgiveness there, harking back to what Ezekiel has said. And then also being born of the Spirit.

This, too, looks on to the next verse in Ezekiel 36, which speaks of a new heart and a new spirit—in fact, God's spirit. So there's a picking up of Ezekiel 36.

And so that's the justification for Jesus saying, are you a teacher of Israel, yet you do not understand these things? You should have read Ezekiel 36 and know what it means. And here I'm telling you what it means in terms of my own mission. Then, the last theme that the prophets like to speak of as relating to the future of God's history with his people is the influx of the nations.

And this is fairly common in the prophets. But we need to say at this point that the book of Ezekiel has hardly anything to say about this theme. And reasonably so when you think of his own historical context.

He was dealing in his ministry with problems the exiles were experiencing. And such broad-mindedness would not have been relevant to him or to the exiles. And that broad-mindedness we find in the book of Jeremiah and in the so-called second Isaiah voiced pretty freely.

Interesting enough, Ezekiel's negativity in refusing to speak of the nations is relevant to Paul. He can pick up that negativity in his own way in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6, and verse 17. There are a group of verses there from the Old Testament.

In verse 17, Come out from among them, come out from unbelievers, be separate from them, says the Lord God, in touch, nothing unclean, then I will welcome you. Now that's interesting. If we look more closely at that phrase, I will welcome you.

It seems to be looking back to a particular pair of verses in Ezekiel 20, verses 34 and 41. And there, God promises a return from exile by gathering the exiles from the

nations and bringing them home, gathering them from the nations. But in the Greek version, instead of saying gathering, it says accept or welcome.

Paul found this in his Greek version of Ezekiel, which he is quoting here. In the context of 2 Corinthians 6:17, which talks of the relationship between believers and unbelievers and this coming apart from the nations, I will accept you, I will welcome you as you come from the nations. Paul applies this text to the need for Corinthian Christians not to engage in unhealthy relationships with unbelievers.

The nations in Ezekiel become unbelievers in Paul's perspective. And this is very much where Ezekiel stood. But Paul can pick it up from within the Christian community that there are nations out there, Gentiles as it were, spiritual Gentiles, and we don't have anything to do with them.

Be careful, mind you're not defiled but by them. Ezekiel does predict a limited restoration of Egypt in chapter 29 and of Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 16 but not in a very strong or a significant way. However, there's one very significant positive perspective in which Ezekiel takes foreigners seriously and that is something that we saw in chapter 47 and verses 22 and 23 within Israel.

He speaks of the granting of property rights to resident aliens; they're foreigners, but they're to be welcomed as never before into the people of God, accepted as full citizens instead of second-class citizens. At least on this small level, Ezekiel can give a handshake of welcome to aliens. One might say that the cultural equivalent of resident aliens in the New Testament was the Gentile God-fearers who attended synagogue worshippers, synagogue worship, and, in a sense, they were second-class worshippers.

They hadn't been circumcised, they'd been converted as adults, and they weren't going to succumb to the right of circumcision, but they wanted to worship, they wanted to worship and be as nearly Jewish as they could. But there was a line of demarcation between the true Jew and the Gentile God-fearers. But in Acts 10, this is a principle I'm talking now of rather than an actual verse in Ezekiel, the principle.

In Acts 10, Peter welcomes one such, Cornelius, into the Christian faith as a test that God-fearers can become full members of the Christian community, something that hadn't happened in the Jewish community of synagogues, full membership. And so, there's a parallel of sorts. Even though there isn't a precise leaning on Ezekiel, it's the same principle at work. So, what have we been doing? We've been looking at four Old Testament pointers to the future that the New Testament wants to pick up, and we've been trying to see how far, to what extent, if any, Ezekiel picks up those pointers.



But now let's look at three distinctive themes that we find in the Book of Ezekiel and how the New Testament reflects them. And the first is the sanctifying of God's name, which you don't find, I believe, in any other prophet but it's a major item in the Book of Ezekiel, the sanctifying of God's name. And the major passage is in chapter 36 and in 21 through 23.

God had been forced to act in a punitive way towards his people by expelling them from the land but in so doing other nations had misunderstood him and assumed he was a weak god who'd been forced to capitulate to stronger foreign gods. And those other nations saw a defeated people when they looked at Judah, and they jumped to the wrong conclusion that their god had been defeated, too. And so, his holy name had been profaned or treated as common and despised.

That's why Israel's return from exile and rehabilitation was necessary to restore God's standing among the nations. This is what chapter 36 is saying loud and clear. And you may remember that this theme is projected forward to the Gog invasion in 39-7.

It would threaten God's reputation if this invasion happened, and so it had to be repulsed. And the theme is also projected back in the Book of Ezekiel in chapter 20, verses 9 and 22. God does not punish Israel as it deserved in Egypt or in the wilderness simply to prevent his name being profaned.

As it says, for his namesake. God is acting for his namesake on Israel's behalf. 20-44 says this and refers back to this theme.

The crucial passage in Ezekiel is in chapter 36. God's great work of restoring his people to the land and equipping them with a new heart and a new spirit so that they would henceforth obey him. That great work would sanctify his name and prove his holiness, prove his power at work in bringing his people back to such a wonderful point.

And I suggest that the prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples picks up this theme. Hallowed, sanctified be your name in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. It is praying for God to do a great work to bring about his kingdom fully and finally so that his will is done on earth just as perfectly as it is in heaven.

The petition is leaning back on Ezekiel chapter 36 and it's applying its ultimate truth to God's full and final salvation which is to be launched by the second coming. The old text is re-read in the light of God's new work in Christ. A second theme that runs through the book of Ezekiel is the exiles' future reaction of shame after they have been forgiven and find themselves back in the land.

And in a variety of places we find this coming out again and again in Ezekiel. Ezekiel 16, towards the end of that chapter, the exiles are told that when they are restored and forgiven, taken back to the land, that doesn't mean that they're to forget their sinful past. No, their sinful past is to be a motivation not to sin and it's to accentuate the grace of God towards them.

And so, shame is here; it's also brought out in chapter 20 and again in chapter 36, and furthermore, at the end of chapter 39, this point of shame is so necessary. And Paul, in Romans 6:21, finds it too, something that's positive, that you were doing things back then, you did things of which you are now ashamed, of which you are now ashamed. It's important to remember that shame, and it's a reminder that you mustn't and will not do those things again.

And so, he speaks of the former lifestyle of Christian converts and so things of which you are now ashamed must belong only to the past but you still remember them. And then, too, in 1 Timothy 1:15, thematically, this comes up again as Paul refers to himself as the foremost of sinners or the chief of sinners. And then the third theme that runs so much through the book of Ezekiel is one of judgment.

The readers of the book are overwhelmed by the emphasis upon God's judgment falling upon Judah all the way through the first half of the book. And perhaps they have as much trouble with this judgment as people proverbially do with the begats of Genesis. It sounds like hellfire preaching that we associate with the Victorians.

No, God's love is what we must preach, surely. Well, the New Testament itself is very aware that the good news of God's love is good only for those who first heard the bad news of their sin that has alienated them from God. And in fact, in Romans, we've said before, in Romans 1 through 3, the gospel is presented but only as a second phase after it must be made very clear that one has to listen to and accept bad news of sinfulness and of judgment and of the wrath of God even that falls, must fall upon the human race unless and until they can move forward to the good news of what God has done on their behalf in Christ.

That God has absorbed that judgment in that crucifixion scene in which his son Jesus took part. And I would like to say that if we ever preach on John 3:16, God loves the world and so on, we must do it with full recognition of John 3:36. And verse 36 says, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath.

In chapter 3, there's a double mention of the wrath of God and the love of God. And there's mention of judgment there in verse 18 and 19. Those who believe in him are not condemned but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. Light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. And so, we must be careful that we preserve the tension that we have running through the Old Testament and also through the New Testament.

A tension of the judgment of God, the anger of God, and the love and forgiveness of God because they are both there together, and we cannot have one without the other. And we are misrepresenting God as we present him only as a God of love. That's the good news.

But it must be done in conjunction with the bad news of judgment. And so, Ezekiel is a good predecessor because he has so much to say about judgment and in that case because the exiles didn't want to hear. He has to say it again and again and again in different ways to drive that lesson home.

Of course, Christians are free of that last judgment as a threat looming over the human race. Paul wrote in Romans 8, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God in Christ, as I say, has absorbed the judgment for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But that good news comes only after the bad news. And so, in Ezekiel 2, we have that sequence of first judgment and then salvation. So, in its own way, the New Testament is very much the same.

In earlier lectures, we distinguish between judgment with a capital J and judgment with a lowercase j. And we find that Ezekiel, when he moves forward into messages of salvation, he's very careful to give a challenge and a proviso. And he's saying, don't accept this good news blindly because you must have open eyes to hear that challenge. To see that challenge, too.

Open your ears to hear the challenge that God is calling you to a righteous life and a good life as you prepare for the hope that is to come. And there's this warning so often in his messages of salvation that the promise of salvation and warning to the people of God go side by side. And I think we mentioned at an earlier stage that Ezekiel's role is a sentry as he gives this positive message of salvation.

He's a sentry to warn his people. This is picked up in Hebrews 13:17. The writer urges his readers to submit to their Christian leaders who are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.

That very much reflects Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33, that yes, Ezekiel is to give a warning and he is to receive a warning, too, that this is a warning that he must pass on. And it'll go badly for Ezekiel if he doesn't pass that message of warning on. And this we

have reflected on is the sentry role for the leaders of those Christians in the letter to the Hebrews, having to give an account that they've indeed given this warning.

In fact, one can go on to say that the writer to the Hebrews himself is an embodiment of that sentry image that Ezekiel had to perform. And just like Ezekiel, the writer to the Hebrews with all those warnings throughout the book, he's carrying out the message of being a sentry and a watchman. We can see this warning coming out in a passage like Matthew 7:27, the way that the Sermon on the Mount ends with a warning to the disciples of Jesus who've heard this sermon.

And there's a warning that they have been hearing. Yes, they've heard, but are they going to put it into practice? That's another matter. And they're warned that if they don't put it into practice, they will face the downfall of a house built on sand and great was its fall. Under the text is Ezekiel chapter 13 and verses 10 through 12.

Remember how Ezekiel was speaking about those false prophets, and there was this rickety stone wall with no mortar, but the prophets had put on a white coating of plaster, and it looked beautiful, and it looked as if it was a solid wall. But when the storms came, what they depended on and what they taught would be swept away. It wasn't a solid wall at all.

It was only the whitewash on it, that whitewash plaster that made it look solid. And in actual fact, the language that's used there in Ezekiel 13 is being picked up by Jesus and reapplied at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. And there's the same phenomenon of followers of God who, in fact, do not obey what God is teaching.

And in this case, the disciples of Jesus are very ready to hear but not so ready to put it into practice. We've not mentioned yet the great debt the Book of Revelation owes to the Book of Ezekiel. If you add up that list at the back of the Greek New Testament, you will find that there are 139 allusions claimed to Ezekiel, but no less than 81 occur in the Book of Revelation.

And if you do your sums, that's 58% of the Ezekiel allusions all crammed into the Book of Revelation, one book compared with the rest of the books of the New Testament. And John's mind and heart were saturated with the Book of Ezekiel. We must also go on to say there are many other prophetic references there.

He knew the Old Testament very well and was very often bringing it in, presenting new messages to those churches. Well, we can't look at 81 references, but I want to single out some of the more important ones. The vision of God in Revelation 4 leans very heavily upon Ezekiel's vision of God in chapter 1. In Revelation 1 and verse 15, the vision of the Son of Man significantly applies to Christ, which is a detail from the vision of God in Ezekiel 1:15. And so, this is evidence, I think, of the high esteem in Revelation for the role of Jesus that it can be a comparison of Jesus with God himself.

When we come to the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18, and Babylon, we remember, stands for Rome, it's very closely based on Ezekiel's oracles against Tyre in chapters 26 and 28. And time and time again, the language about Tyre is used once more. Tyre stands as the enemy of Judah; it stands as a prototype or analogy for Rome.

That seems to be the justification for using that Tyre language very forcefully and frequently again. The most striking parallel is the order of climactic events in the end times laid out in Revelation 20 through 22. There, we have a timetable, but it's Ezekiel's timetable.

First of all, in Revelation 20 and verse 4, the Christian martyrs are raised from the dead. This corresponds to Ezekiel 37, which in its own context is a metaphor, but in the light of Christ's own resurrection, the metaphor of resurrection may now be applied literally to God's people.

And in particular, they came to life, it says in Revelation 24. And that reflects the Greek translation that's used in Ezekiel 37 and verse 10. And so, resurrection is the first in the series of events taking place, these eschatological events.

And then the risen martyrs' thousand-year reign on earth with Christ in Revelation 20 is followed by the conquest of, or rather Gog and Magog going to war and then being conquered. And in Ezekiel 38.8, we are told that Gog's attack occurred after many days of Israel's resettlement in the land after exile. And so, this millennium in Revelation, it's an application of that resettlement for many days in Ezekiel.

And then comes the Gog and Magog invasion after that. So, there are two stages: going back to the land for a long period and then the invasion of Gog and Magog. These are two stages that correspond to the sequence in Ezekiel.

And then the fourth one, John's being carried away to a high mountain and being shown the holy city Jerusalem coming down from heaven. In Revelation 21:10, it corresponds to Ezekiel in chapter 40 being brought to the land of Israel and set down on a very high mountain on which was a structure like a city, according to chapter 40 and verse 2 of Ezekiel. But in fact, it was the new temple.

Lastly, the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God in Revelation 22:1 leans on the description in Ezekiel 47. Then, there are two trees beside the river with their monthly fruiting and their medicinal leaves in Revelation 22:2. This obviously depends upon Ezekiel 47 and verse 12. Lastly, slightly out of order, in Revelation 21:21, the city gates are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Well, that compares to Ezekiel 48 verses 30 through 44. There's a remarkable parallelism between Ezekiel and Revelation. John uses Ezekiel 37 to 48 as the scriptural model for his own eschatological framework.

The question is often asked, what are we to make of Ezekiel 40 to 48? And actually, John in Revelation gives some answers to that question. And he does so even while he relates Ezekiel's message to the end times and applies it to a Christian setting. In fact, John makes a number of changes compared with Ezekiel and he seems to be deliberately doing it.

He does adopt the Ezekiel material to fit God's further revelation in accordance with the... He does adapt, not adopt. He adapts that revelation in Ezekiel to the further relationship that we have in the Christian revelation. And so, in Revelation 21:14, yes, the names of the tribes are put on the gates of the New Jerusalem just as they were on the gates of the New City.

But there's a supplement. There are some other names that go there. And on the foundations of the walls are the names of the 12 apostles.

So, we're moving on. Yes, to Ezekiel, but we can go further, and the 12 apostles' names get added there. And so, we're explicitly told that one must move on.

You don't take it as it stands, but there's more that can be said. And in a number of ways this is done. And the most striking is that we're explicitly told that John sought no temple.

And he says no to Ezekiel. He says yes to Ezekiel in so many ways in his eschatological framework, but now he says no. It's replaced by the full presence... We've got something better.

It's replaced by the full presence of God in the city. The presence of God and of the Lamb. John's title for the ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no separate priesthood. The prophets 40 to 48 spoke much of the priesthood as being closest to God. But if you read Revelation, all of God's people are priests.

According to Revelation 1:6, and so implicitly, he's cutting across what Ezekiel has to say. And he can say we have moved on. We love that idea of priesthood, but we can widen it.

It's not just an elite few within the people of God. He can say he's made us a kingdom. Priests serving his God and Father.

And so there we are. That's what we are. We're the priests, and we're not just the ordinary commoners.

In fact, we have that priesthood and the right to full access to the sanctuary, as the writer of the Hebrews wants to say in his own way. And two, there is no... By implication, there's no recurring atoning sacrifices as we had in the course of Ezekiel 40 to 48. They've been replaced by the work of the lamb who bears the marks of slaughter, according to Revelation 5:6. And there's that one sacrifice, the lamb who bears the marks of slaughter relating to the cross.

And that is the once and for all sacrifice as Hebrews 7 explicitly says and John is implying here. Another striking change is that in Revelation 22:2, John talks about those medicinal leaves, presumably for God's people in Ezekiel. But he says they're for the healing of the nations.

Of the nations. Ezekiel, we've got to bring in something else that you couldn't envisage, and there's good reason why you couldn't envisage that. But we move on.

And now there's this theme of the influx of the nations, which is brought into this old story that couldn't find any room for them. And so John there, of course, is bringing Ezekiel into line with the other Old Testament prophets who could preach a wider message of an international people of God. And then in the same vein, according to the best text in Revelation 21:3, John hears, God will dwell with humans as their God.

God will dwell with humans as their God. They will be his people. His peoples.

Oh, that's a transformation of the old covenant formula. They will be his people. One people, please.

Israel, please. No, they will be his peoples. And the new RSV reflects that better text, but unfortunately, the NIV does not.

It keeps to the lesser reading that we had back in the King James Version. They will be his people. But there's no longer a single people.

There are members of all nations. And so, Ezekiel spoke within the constraints of what the exiles needed to hear and in the context of his own priestly training. So as in the case of the Old Testament generally, there is both continuity and discontinuity between Ezekiel and the New Testament.

But one thing is, and discernment is necessary, but one thing is clear from the New Testament writers. Ezekiel, the book of Ezekiel, was a vital part of scripture. One that they took very seriously as God's word for them and for the church.

Continuity there, discontinuity. We embrace both, but we read Ezekiel, according to the New Testament writers. Of course, there's an enormous difference in one respect between what Ezekiel is constantly saying in his positive messages of salvation and in what the New Testament wants to say.

And every reader of the positive messages of Ezekiel realizes that there's an elephant in the room that Ezekiel could not see. It's also true in the case of the other Old Testament prophets. And what I'm speaking of is that there was indeed to be a return from exile, but it's a return to the land.

It's a return to the land. And when they did return to the land, life was not all roses. And the post-exilic prophets reflect the fact that life is pretty difficult.

And, of course, there's one Psalm's text that exemplifies this point of view. And it's Psalm 126, which talks of the return from exile. When the Lord restored the fortunes of exile, of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, our tongues with shouts of joy. Then it was said among the nations that the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us and we rejoiced.

But that's not the end of the matter. We got back, and things turned bad in a number of ways. And so that clause, restore our fortunes, it's no longer a fact.

It needs to be a prayer as well. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the water causes in the Negev. And there's a need for God to bring his full salvation.

And so, going back to the land, it did not, as Ezekiel and the other pre-exilic and exilic prophets like to say, it didn't mean in fact that full salvation. There was still that waiting. And so, Psalm 126 is the classic admission of this phenomenon.

And when we come to the post-exilic prophets, the fullness of salvation has to be projected into the future rather than being able to recognize it as a present fact. Going to the land, they did not find a Garden of Eden, as Ezekiel and other prophets said that they would. And so, this carried on into Judaism, that life is an interim.

Between mostly unconfirmed promises in the Old Testament and a complete realization. But we must add that the same is true of Christianity. The impression that the New Testament gives of the second coming of Christ being around the corner did not find realization.

And Christians have lived for many centuries in an interim between the first and second comings of Christ. In fact, the New Testament itself wants to think of two stages in the Christian life. And it's well expressed in Philippians 1:6. The one who



began a good work within you, among you, will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

And that Holy Spirit that launched the church came to be regarded as a first step, a first installment, the pledge of our future inheritance with redemption as God's people as yet unrealized, according to Ephesians 1:14. And so, in a way, the church is yet in exile, waiting to enter into its own promised land. But let's think, finally, of that land because so often Ezekiel thinks of restoration to the land, and it runs through all Old Testament prophecy, and it certainly dominates Ezekiel's positive messages. In general, the New Testament is so influenced by the theme of the influx of other nations and the salvation being extended to the Gentiles that it no longer thinks of the land.

And it thinks instead of the world rather than the land. There's a universalism as we think of the scope of God's word, whereas it's narrowed down to that geographical entity of the land. But one must say that in that two-volume work in Luke-Acts, there are a couple of signs, perhaps surprisingly, because there is also so much a Gentile perspective in Luke-Acts.

We have a representation that comes very close to the land view in the Old Testament prophets and in Ezekiel. And that comes in one case, Luke 21-24. Jerusalem is going to be trampled down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

And implicitly that's saying, ah, then Israel will have full possession of Jerusalem once more. And so, there's a land perspective there. And then, too, in Acts 1 and verse 6, the disciples ask the risen Christ, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel? And if you look closely at the answer of Jesus in verses 7 and 8, it speaks not of denial but of delay, delay.

First, it will be the nation's turn. And the implication is, aha, then we can think about restoring the kingdom to Israel, which sounds rather territorial. And so, it means, when you look at the New Testament as a whole, that the New Testament chooses not to give a crystal clear single answer about the land of Israel.

Though, of course, Paul could speak clearly about the people of Israel. In Romans 9-11, he looked forward to the people of Israel eventually acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah. And so, I leave those who watch these videos to do their own work on the basis of Ezekiel and pursue further its value from a Christian perspective.

This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session number 24, Ezekiel in relation to the New Testament.