

WHO IS THIS GOD?

Who am I?

The search for identity, purpose, and meaning has become an obsession for many people. It seems that in today's world, there is a need to be noticed, to "be somebody." The social media boom has created a new position of power called an *influencer*, and every young adult—and a huge number of not-so-young ones—dreams of being able to influence the actions of others. Or at least to be listened to. Or maybe just to matter.

Genealogy companies like Ancestry and MyHeritage have exploded because everyone wants to have roots. If we can't find meaning in our daily lives, maybe we can find it in our past. Maybe discovering that we are the direct descendant of someone important can vicariously confer some sort of importance on ourselves. "I'm the eleventh great-granddaughter of King Henry VIII, so...yeah." But that turns into a dead-end road, too, as the March 2025 bankruptcy of 23andMe proved. It may feel great to have important ancestors, but when we come back to real life, we are confronted with the realization that we're still just Ima Jean living in a duplex in Pocatello, Idaho.

Who are you? And, let's add one more question: Why does it

matter? There is one group of people with whom the answer to the first question makes all the difference. In fact, the entire book of Ezekiel answers that question. The people of God had forgotten who they were, or, maybe better put, they had forgotten what being the people of God meant. The Lord was about to change all that. Ezekiel was there to tell them, "This is what is about to happen, and this is why it's about to happen." Jerusalem and the country of Israel were about to be leveled, and their sin was the reason. God had picked Israel out from all the other nations to be His special people. They needed a serious refresher course on the privilege that status held, and the important responsibility that accompanied it.

But Ezekiel's book isn't just about reminding the people who they were. Israel and the world had forgotten their Creator. They had shunted Him to the side like an old-fashioned, has-been God. That was about to change. When the Lord had finished everything He promised in this book, all would know "that He is the Lord."

So You're an Israelite

If you were to ask an everyday Jerusalemite during Ezekiel's era about their identity, they could likely recite to you the Bible stories they had heard from birth. Much like the fantastic epics you'd hear today from many indigenous tribes, Israel's origin tale was a link that bound the people together. But it was not one that most deep down believed or, at the very least, cared about. They were just tales of the ancient times when the great Creator God, who lived on the fiery mountain, thundered out a bunch of rules and brought His people into the land.

It's likely that embellished tales of Noah and the flood and the plagues of Egypt were passed down to the generations around after-dinner campfires. But what about the creation story, Cain killing Abel, the sons of God and the daughters of men, the faithfulness of Abraham, and the trickery of Rebekah? Did people still talk about these

things? And how many would have a clue as to the long night when a man wrestled with God? That bout went back and forth until the theophany, God in human form, finally defeated the man, Jacob, by putting his hip out of socket. Yet when God moved to go, He found that Jacob was still hanging on with all his strength.

He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So He said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:26-28).

That is the christening story of the nation of Israel. However, most Israelites of Ezekiel's day had likely only heard it occasionally amongst the evening songs of the Babylonian gods Marduk and Bel and Tammuz. And even if they did know the story by heart, it would likely only serve as wishful thinking at best, or biting irony at worst. Israel, the people who have struggled with God and men and have what? Prevailed? Looking around the Promised Land in the era of the Babylonian Empire, the last description anyone would have assigned to the Israelites was that they were a prevailing people.

But as cynical as Israel's name sounded under the given circumstances, it was a God-given name. Therefore, it was accurate. What the people didn't understand was that their sinful actions and those of generations of their ancestors had shifted them from an era of victory back into a time of struggle. In his prophetic book, Ezekiel made it clear that this rebellious battle between the descendants of Jacob and their Creator and Chooser was once again back in full swing. Yes, the Israelites could look to their temple and understand they had a rich history with God. But in their actions, the people

were intent on showing that they wanted to reject the rules of the God of Jacob, while still keeping His overall protection. The classic cake-and-eat-it scenario.

The Lord, for His part, regularly reminded the people that no matter what their actions, He wasn't going anywhere. In fact, like a Father disciplining His wayward child, He was determined to stay in it until His progeny's stubborn will was finally broken. He still is today. A time will come in the not-distant future when God's chosen people will once and for all time recognize that He truly is the Lord, a goal found throughout Ezekiel's book.

You Don't Choose Your Father

Of all the people in the world, why did God choose the Jews? There were so many other options out there, so many people groups who were blindly loyal to a god or a nation or an ideology. He could have gone to East Asia with its Hinduism. The Hindu's goal of *moksha*, in which a soul unconsciously merges back into Brahman, the universal god, lessens the importance of the individual here on earth. To their thinking, all descended from the universal soul and to the universal soul all will one day return, so why is there any need for individualism or personal will during this life? Someone without an individual will is very easy to control. Or what about the Islamic militias and jihadists who commit suicide based on false promises and outright lies? You can't find a more dedicated disciple than one who is ready to blow himself up for what he believes to be true. Really, if God was looking for a people who were ready and willing to be His obedient minions, He could have done much better than the people of Israel.

Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, wasn't looking for easy or mindless or blindly obedient when it came to choosing His people. He wanted folks who would give Him a challenge. He needed a nation that would allow Him to show the world who He was through the display of His merciful attributes of grace, long-suffering, and forgiveness.

Israel had the option of living the easy way or the hard way, but God always knew His people would choose the hard way. That was why He spoke the following words to Moses, giving the prophet a final song to teach the people:

Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them (Deuteronomy 31:19-21).

From the very beginning, the people struggled against God. Abraham twice lied about his relationship with his wife. His son Isaac followed suit. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was a deceiver of the first class. After the people came out of Egypt, it was just a short time before they were worshipping a golden calf. Then there was grumbling and rebellion and stealing devoted things, then more idolatry. The Bible is replete with stories of Israel's failures. Yet God never once let the people's sin change His mind about His choice.

Sure, in the occasional pique of His anger, God was ready to wipe the whole lot out. During the golden calf incident, He said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them

and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation" (Exodus 32:9-10). But even as He threatened to wipe out the nation, He was already planning to rebuild the nation with a member of that same nation. The Jews had been chosen by God, and He would always keep a remnant. Why? Once again, it's because He wants people to know Him.

And it's not just in the past that God proved Himself through the nation of Israel. In chapters 36–39, we'll see that Ezekiel promised a time in which Israel will gather once again as a reestablished nation and prosper greatly economically, although spiritually it will still be distant from its Creator. Once the country is settled and peaceful, it will be attacked by an overwhelming army. But God will supernaturally intervene, protecting His still-rebellious people. The world will recognize this divine involvement, prompting God to once again declare, "Then they shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 38:23).

Could God have made a better choice than Israel? Using our human peabrain, we might find reasons to say yes. However, because of the perfect wisdom possessed by the All-Knowing, we can be sure that the true answer is undoubtedly no. The Jewish people are not perfect, yet they are the perfect people for God's plan.

A Historical Grounding

"Amir, this is Ezekiel! When are we going to get to the war? I want to read about Gog and Magog and military alliances and all that kind of stuff!" I hear you, and I get it. Chapters 36 and beyond of Ezekiel excite me too. However, we need to lay a foundation. After all, that's what God did. If He thought it best just to jump right into a massive horde marching down from the far north, He wouldn't have included 30-plus chapters of very important prophetic material first. But it is these early prophecies that lay the groundwork for what is to come, because we'll see many similarities as we go between what Jerusalem was facing in Ezekiel's day and what Israel and the rest of

the world will have to endure in the end times. So, stick with me. This early business is more important and a whole lot more interesting than you may think.

As I already mentioned, by the time of Ezekiel, Israel's days of wine and roses had passed. After becoming a kingdom under Saul, the nation had flourished through the leadership of Kings David and Solomon. In fact, when Solomon ruled, envoys from countries across the globe journeyed to see the wealth of Jerusalem and to hear the unmatched words of wisdom from its ruler. But, toward the end of that great king's life, cracks were already being seen in Israel's commitment to God, and they were coming from the top down. Although he knew God's law through and through, Solomon either ignored it or felt like parts didn't apply to him. Or at least *a* part didn't apply to him. Through Moses, God said this to the people when they entered the Promised Land:

You shall make no covenant with [the people] nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly (Deuteronomy 7:2-4).

Don't marry those foreign women! They'll turn your hearts toward their gods! Solomon read those words and thought, *Yeah, that's true for all those dummies. But I've got wisdom from God, so I'd never fall into that trap. Now, where are those cuties from Ammon?* The king dove in headfirst to the level that only kings can, and 700 wives and 300 concubines later, it happened exactly as God had said it would.

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not

loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kings 11:4-8).

That began the downward cycle for Israel. With Solomon's son Rehoboam, the kingdom was split in two, with the south calling itself Judah and the north keeping the name of Israel. From that time on, the northern kingdom found itself continuously on the wrong side of God. Not one king followed Him, even up through their destruction and deportation by Assyria in 722 BC.

In the south, it was hit-and-miss with the kings, with more misses than hits. When this book's timeline begins, we are just into the sixth century BC. Ezekiel is a priest who was ripped out of his comfort zone in 597 BC when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had invaded Jerusalem for the second time. This time when the king left, he took 10,000 of its citizens with him to Babylon. Ezekiel was one of these exiles.

For those of you who may be trying to line up the timing of Ezekiel's deportation with that of Daniel, let me lend a hand. Daniel was taken as a teenager to Babylon in the first exile in 605 BC. He was of the royal line and was groomed to serve in the palace. Eight years later, Nebuchadnezzar came back and instituted a much larger deportation. Ezekiel, in his twenties at the time, was just one of the mass of people who made the long journey to start a new life in a foreign land. He settled around Tel-abib, along the Chebar River, about 100 miles

or so south of the capital city of Babylon. Four years passed, and he was just starting his life as an exiled priest when God appeared. The Lord called him to be a prophet, and when He did so it was with an amazing flourish, as we'll see in the next chapter.

With the calling of Ezekiel, we now have three prophets at work. Jeremiah is still back in Jerusalem trying to convince the stubborn Israelites to repent and save themselves. It is a futile work. Daniel, likely in his early twenties, has already shown himself as a standout to King Nebuchadnezzar and is on the fast track to Babylonian leadership. Then there's Ezekiel, the common man's prophet. His primary audience was the exiles, but his ministry reached back to Jerusalem and to foreign nations.

Both Ezekiel and Daniel would have known of the great prophet Jeremiah, and Daniel, at least, had probably met him just because of his royal ties. There is no reason to think that an everyday Levite who was too young to be a priest, as was Ezekiel, would have had any interaction with the old prophet. As for Ezekiel and Daniel, undoubtedly Ezekiel would have known of Daniel, who had probably become a hero to all of Israel's exiles in Babylon. Did they ever meet? It's likely, especially once Ezekiel began building his own prophetic reputation. Daniel's position would have afforded him a great amount of independence and movement, and it's hard to imagine him not traveling to Tel-abib or inviting Ezekiel up to the capital city. I wonder what that meeting would have looked like as these two prophets sat down over a cup of tea and some baklava.