

EZEKIEL

Introduction

Author. Ezekiel, the son of Buzi was a priest in Jerusalem. Little more is known of the man. He was taken captive to Babylon with the deportation of Jehoiachin (1:) where he resided at the river Chebar (1:3). He was married and had his own home in the exile (24:16-18) and was a contemporary of Daniel (14:14, 20; 28:3).

Date. Ezekiel was called as a prophet in the fourth month of the fifth year of the captivity, approximately July, 593 B.C. (1:1). The last dated prophecy is in the first month of the 27th year, approximately April 571 B.C. (29:17). Thus, his ministry endured at least 22 years.

Audience. While Jeremiah preached to unrepentant hearts in Israel, Ezekiel ministered to Jewish captives in Babylon. After the fall of Jerusalem, however his message turned to one of consolation for the people of Israel.

Occasion. Babylon had secured dominance over the Mediterranean world by defeating Pharaoh Necho in 605 B.C. Jehoiakim's rebellion brought Nebuchadnezzar's army into Judah so that Jehoiachin, the successor of the recently deceased king of Judah was deposed and led captive to Babylon along with the choicest citizens of Judah. Included in this company in 597 B.C. was Ezekiel. His ministry began in 592 B.C. to a people who did not understand the seriousness of sin against a holy God.

Structure. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah, the book of Ezekiel has the following basic sequence of messages: 1) oracles against Jerusalem, 2) oracles against the nations, 3) consolation for Israel. His work is fairly consistent chronologically with his messages reflecting the historical situation revolving around the fate of Jerusalem. Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel prophesied, for twenty-four chapters, about God's impending judgment of the nation. After their fall he concentrated on God's judgment of the nations (25-32). His conclusion involves the restoration of the nation (33-48).

The structure of the book also reveals a certain symmetrical balance. The vision of the desecrated temple fit for destruction (chapters 8-11) is balanced by the vision and promise of a restored temple (chapters 40-46). Although the book opens on a note of God's wrath (chapter 1) this is balanced by a God of comfort ("The Lord is there," 48:35). Ezekiel's own call to be a watchman of judgment (chapter 3) is also offset by his call to be a watchman of the new age (chapter 33). The book also demonstrates literary variety with four visions (chapters 1-3; 8-11; 37:1-14; 40-48), twelve symbolic acts (3:22-26; 4:1-3; 4:4-8; 4:9-11; 4:12-14; 5:1-3; 12:1-16; 12:17-20; 21:6-7; 21:18-24; 24:15-24; 37:15-28), and five messages in the form of parables (chapters 15; 16; 17; 19; 23).

Message Statement. While the situation, and consequently Ezekiel's message, changed his basic thrust of God's glory remained constant. The message of Ezekiel may be summarized: *The glory of God is seen in God's judgment of Israel, the nations and his restoration of Israel.*

Argument

- 1A THE PREPARATION OF THE PROPHET 1:1-3:27
In this introductory section Ezekiel is introduced and prepared for his mission by a vision of the Glory of God. Once he has been fully impressed with the glory of God he is then commissioned to the prophetic office and instructed as to his task.
- 1B His Identification 1:1-3
The "thirtieth year" of which Ezekiel speaks probably refers to his age. Being a priest, this was the age at which he would have actively entered the service of the priesthood. Because

he is in exile and the temple is doomed his service takes on the prophetic mode.

- 2B His Vision of God 1:4-1:28
Ezekiel's vision not only prepares him for his task of telling of the glory of God but also sets the tone for the book. Through judgment and blessing, through destruction and preservation, God's reputation in the minds of rational creatures would be enhanced. God is seen as intelligent, majestic, strong and swift. He is mobile and not bound to the land of Palestine. He is separate from the sinfulness of this world. When God's glory is symbolically revealed it takes the form of brilliant light (1:27). Ezekiel summarizes his experience in the words "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (1:28b). It was this message which Ezekiel was commissioned to communicate to Israel.
- 3B His Commission to the Prophetic Office 2:1-3:3
As with his contemporary, Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, Ezekiel is warned that he is taking the message of God to a rebellious people. Whether or not they listen Ezekiel must speak to them because of his commission.
- 4B His Instructions 3:4-27
Ezekiel's instructions begin with his responsibility to be a faithful messenger no matter how difficult the message or how recalcitrant the recipients. He is then transported in spirit for seven days among the exiles, and by this means made willing to accept the post of prophet (3:12-15). His specific post was that of a watchman, charged with warning the wicked of God's displeasure and judgment. (3:16-21).
- 2A THE GLORY OF GOD REVEALED THROUGH JUDGMENT OF THE NATION 4:1-24:27
This section of the book includes symbols, sermons, visions and other explanations of the judgment of God on Jerusalem. Chronologically these messages are dated from the summer of 593 B.C. until the beginning of the siege in 588 B.C.
- 1B Symbols of Judgment 4:1-5:17
Several symbols of judgment are laid before the people with both actions and numbers carrying significance for the observer. The first involves a clay model of Jerusalem which the prophet demolishes. He then lies on his left side for 390 days (the judgment of the northern kingdom) and 40 days (that of Judah). During this period the prophet is restricted to a repulsive diet representative of that which would be allowed a city under siege (4:9-17). Ezekiel then shaves his head and destroys his hair in various ways to symbolize the fate of the people. After the symbolic acts are executed and explained, God's purpose in the judgment is reviewed in 5:13-17. It may be best summarized in 5:13b: "And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal."
- 2B Sermons of Judgment 6:1-7:27
Through a series of prophetic sermons Ezekiel foretells the destruction of Jerusalem. The first sermon involves the reasons and purpose of coming judgment (6:1-14). Once again the familiar theme of God's glory is indicated in the words: "And they will know that I am the Lord, when their people lie slain among their idols, on every high hill and on all the mountaintops . . . places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols" (6:13). The second sermon focuses upon the certainty and character of the coming judgment (7:1-27). The vocabulary of the chapter, doom, disaster, bloodshed, sword and calamity, bespeaks its message.
- 3B Visions of Judgment 8:1-11:25
This section is dated approximately September, 592 B.C. The attention is focused upon the

temple, first its defilement and then the awful punishment which was to befall the place because of those abominations, namely, the departure of the glory cloud and the consequent termination of the theocratic relationship between God and the nation of Israel. By means of these visions the prophet is made to understand the justice and legitimacy of God's destruction of the land; but even given such wickedness, God's promises of restoration and return to favor are repeated.

- 1C The vision of wickedness 8:1-18
Ezekiel is transported (in a vision) to the temple precincts in Jerusalem while the temple was still standing. Significant is the mention of 8:4 that "the glory of the God of Israel was there" This is followed by Ezekiel's witness of many kinds of idolatry and false worship and is met with a statement of God's determination to punish (8:17-18).
- 2C The vision of destruction 9:1-11
Symbolic of the wrath of God and perhaps the worst manifestation of it, the glory cloud moves from above the cherubim to the threshold of the temple (9:3). Then certain angels began to wreak destruction on the guilty.
- 3C The vision of burning 10:1-22
In this vision, a man clothed in linen is instructed to gather some coals from the fire between the cherubim (cf. 1:13) and scatter them across Jerusalem, depicting the total destruction of the city. The city had first of all been prepared by the marking and destruction of those guilty because of their idolatry. Important to this account is the narrative of the gradual and reluctant departure of the glory cloud from the temple (10:3-5), and finally from the sacred city (10:18-19).
- 4C The vision of judgment 11:1-25
In this vision Ezekiel is transported to the presence of 25 elders at the gate of Jerusalem. After he prophesies judgment against these evil and indifferent leaders, he also foretells of God's restoration of the people. Finally, in one climactic message, the glory cloud departs from the city to the Mount of Olives.
- 4B Certainty of Judgment 12:1-19:14
While the message of judgment is certainly not new, the contribution of this section seems to be its emphasis upon the reality of that judgment. Through symbolic messages, sermons and parables Ezekiel hammers out the message of coming punishment.
- 1C The sign of the baggage 12:1-16
Ezekiel packs his bags and departs from his house, at night, through a hole in the wall. This action is symbolic and prophetic of the way Zedekiah would attempt to flee from the city. Unfortunately his flight would be in vain as Nebuchadnezzar's army would capture and then blind him, preventing him from seeing Babylon (12:13).
- 2C The sign of trembling 12:17-28
Ezekiel eats and drinks in fear and trembling. His situation portrays that of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. More importantly the fulfillment will come quickly.
- 3C The prophets judged 13:1-23
Ezekiel pronounces judgment against both false prophets and prophetesses. These were evidently engaged not only in false prophecy but also forms of black magic (13:18).

- 4C The elders judged 14:1-23
 As the elders of Judah appear before Ezekiel he accuses them of idolatry. After his condemnation God emphasizes the futility of intercession. Job, Noah and Daniel could not rescue these guilty ones.
- 5C The nation as a fruitless vine 15:1-8
 As a worthless vine deserves burning so also Jerusalem was burned in the siege of 597 B.C. A worse siege was yet to come however, from which Judah would not escape (15:7).
- 6C The parable of the adulterous woman 16:1-63
 In a graphic parable God compares Judah to an adulterous woman. Although Israel's behavior is described in loathsome terms God yet promises to establish an everlasting covenant with her.
- 7C The allegory of the branches 17:1-24
 Two branches are described in an allegory and then interpreted. The first branch, Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon and the second branch, Zedekiah, would be deported as well. In contrast to these foolish leaders God's promise was of another tender branch which would become a splendid cedar, evidently referring to Messiah and his kingdom. It may be in partial reference (Daniel also using a metaphor like this) to this passage that Jesus speaks the parable of the mustard seed.
- 8C The proverb of the sour grapes 18:1-32
 Apparently the exiles to whom Ezekiel preached comforted themselves with the thought that the punishment they were suffering was the fault of their ancestors rather than their own. "The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge" (18:2). Ezekiel responds with the clear theological principle that God is a most exact moral bookkeeper, and that it is the soul which sins who is punished with death (18:4). The conclusion to this section is an appeal for repentance from God who takes *no pleasure in the death of anyone* (18:32).
- 9C The lamentation for princes of Israel 19:1-14
 In the words of Ezekiel *This is a lament and is to be used as a lament* (19:14). The plight of the Davidic household and in particular, Jehoahaz taken prisoner to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C., and Jehoiachin, taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C., is lamented. At this point the household has no one who is *fit for a ruler's scepter* (19:14).
- 5B The Legitimacy of Judgment 20:1--24:27
 This series of oracles was delivered in 591 B.C., two years after the former section. In these chapters Ezekiel rehearses carefully the goodness of God to Israel and the rebellious spirit of that nation. Again the emphasis is upon the judgment which is to follow and the justness of that judgment.
- 1C God's dealings with the nation 20:1-44
 The theme concerning the name of God is that the Lord will protect His honor even as Judah is judged for her wickedness. Although God has always been gracious to his people, they have demonstrated consistently their rebellious nature dating back even to the wilderness. It is this behavior which has brought about their present distress and their future destruction. Once again, however, God's hand of mercy will overcome their rebellion in his future restoration to the land. In this is seen the determination of YHWH (the God who keeps his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to protect the honor of his name.

- 2C The forest fire 20:45-49
 Babylon is pictured as fire sweeping down from the north. In the midst of his prophecy Ezekiel relates that the people still consider his words as mere parables, not reality.
- 3C The sword 21:1-32
 The sword of divine destruction is used first against Jerusalem (21:18-27) and then against Ammon (21:28-32). This message of God's judgment against the nations is a foretaste of the second major theme of the book, (2A). As Nebuchadnezzar approached the area he turned away from Ammon in order to attack Jerusalem, but God assures Ammon that her time would come for judgment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.
- 4C The smelting furnace 22:1-31
 The same familiar theme is echoed in this figure of a smelting furnace. Towards the end of the section the recipients of judgment are detailed, from the prophets to priests to princes to common people.
- 5C The parable of the two sisters 23:1-49
 As opposed to idolatry which was the subject in chapter 16, the topic of this section is the foolish and forbidden political alliances which Israel sought with foreign nations. These parables are quite graphic as they present Israel's sin in a repulsive light. The language of the chapter underscores God's and Ezekiel's disgust with Israel for playing the worldly game of international politics rather than relying upon the Lord for her security, as serious a case of religious infidelity as idolatry. The two sisters described are Samaria, or the Northern Kingdom (Oholah) and Jerusalem, or the Southern Kingdom (Oholibah).
- 6C The parable of the boiling pot 24:1-14
 This final parable of the section is dated as January 15, 588 B.C. the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. The parable ends with the ominous words, *The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent* (24:14).
- 7C The death of Ezekiel's wife 24:15-27
 In the ultimate object lesson, God takes away the *delight of Ezekiel's eyes* at the same time he is taking away the Temple from Jerusalem. Ezekiel's wife died the same day the temple was burned, probably August 14, 586 B.C.
- 3A HE GLORY OF GOD REVEALED THROUGH JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS 25:1-32:32
 As is so often the case in the prophets, announcements of judgment on Israel are accompanied by oracles of judgment on the nations. These make clear that although judgment must begin with the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), the pagan nations would not escape God's wrath. The messages of judgment often turn out to be backhanded messages of salvation for Israel as her enemies are defeated (28:25-26). This section also makes plain that although the nations may enjoy temporary dominance over Israel, their day of judgment will come. The superiority which they will enjoy for a time is from the hand of Israel's God and not their own. It is also from YHWH that punishment will one day be exacted. Each of these seven oracles (the last of which concerning Egypt has seven parts) are all introduced by the phrase *The word of the LORD came to me.*

In distinction to other prophecies against the nations (Jeremiah 46-52) this one does not include the nation of Babylon. In fact, the one which receives the emphasis in this section is Egypt, the very nation upon which Judah was trusting in the final days of her siege. Rather than being a comfort to

Judah, purpose of this section seems to be more apologetic in nature stressing the judgment of the nations in whom Israel trusted, and thus the foolishness of not trusting the LORD.

- 1B Judgment on Ammon 25:1-7
Ammon's sin was her delight in the destruction of the Temple (25:3). God's judgment is certain.
- 2B Judgment on Moab 25:8-11
Moab too took delight in the judgment of Israel. God himself will inflict punishment on Moab.
- 3B Judgment on Edom 25:12-14
Edom in particular took revenge on Judah in her distress and so is guilty of judgment.
- 4B Judgment on Philistia 25:15-17
Philistia too is castigated for her vengeful spirit. God will therefore take vengeance on her.
- 5B Judgment on Tyre 26:1-28:19
In distinction from the other oracles, this one is dated from around February or March 586 B.C. during difficult, but not the most desperate, days of the siege. Tyre was the island capital of Phoenicia. Because of its geographical location (26:2) it played a central role in international trade and relations. The oracle against Tyre comes in two parts: the destruction of its city (26:1-27:36) and then its king (28:1-19). The author skillfully weaves in the part which the spirit of Satan played in the workings of the king of Tyre.
- 6B Judgment on Sidon 28:20-26
Although not as guilty as Tyre, Sidon was a vicious neighbor of Israel which deserved judgment.
- 7B Judgment on Egypt 29:1-32:32
These oracles against Egypt are dated from 588 to 586 B.C. (29:1; 30:20; 31:1; and 32:1, 17), from just before the siege of Jerusalem to just after its fall. It was during this period that the promised help from Egypt against the Babylonians failed to materialize. Thus, this section serves as a well-timed rebuke of Israel's sin of political harlotry.
In 29:17-21, a prophecy from the 571 B.C. is inserted, having to do with recompensing Nebuchadnezzar for the lack of booty taken at Tyre. God would give Babylon victory over Egypt to make up for the fact that little wealth was won in Tyre. This is the latest of all chronological allusions in Ezekiel. It is inserted because of its obvious relationship to the context of judgment on Egypt.
- 4A THE GLORY OF GOD REVEALED THROUGH RESTORATION OF THE NATION 33:1-39:29
Before God can provide for the nation in terms of land worship (40-48), the people themselves must be restored. The reestablishment of the theocratic relationship is the theme of this section. Because of the mercy and grace which this action requires it is, of course, a clear demonstration of the glory of God.
- 1B The Background 33:1-33
Before restoration could begin it was necessary to record the complete and utter hopelessness of the people, best summarized in the fall of Jerusalem.
- 2B The Restoration 34:1-39:29
Every area of Israel is in need of repair. She needs new leadership, protection, relationship

and life. God will provide all of these for the nation although her suffering is not yet complete.

- 1C Of shepherds 34:1-31
Although Israel has a history of incompetent and even wicked leadership God promises that one day the false shepherd will be judged and he will replace them with a true Shepherd who will care for the sheep, judge them and bless them.
- 2C Of protection 35:1-15
In the future God will protect his people from enmity and aggression. Edom is the foil here representative of the enemies of God whom God will destroy in order to protect his people.
- 3C Of new relationship 36:1-38
Because the condition of the land was a barometer of the people's relationship with the LORD, Ezekiel foresees a renewal of the land in the future when the people come into a proper relationship with God. In a clear statement of the future covenant to be struck between God and the nation Ezekiel speaks of new hearts and new spirits which will replace their old hearts of stone (36:24-28 et al.) This is parallel to Jeremiah 33.
- 4C Of new life 37:1-14
The renowned valley of dry bones vision clearly portrays both the spiritual deadness of the nation and the new life which it will one day receive. This full restoration to spiritual life and the land is clearly yet to be fulfilled.
- 5C Of unity 37:15-28
Ever since the days of Jeroboam the division of the land had been a testimony to the apostasy of at least the northern kingdom. In the future all of Israel will be united under one king, the Son of David.
- 6C Of permanent peace 38:1-39:29
This section is divided in three parts: the invasion of Gog (38:1-23); the defeat of Gog (39:1-20); and the lesson (39:1-29). God's purpose in the future is both to rescue his people by defeating her enemies one last time and to show his glory to the nations and to Israel by keeping his promises to them.
- 5A THE GLORY OF GOD REVEALED THROUGH PROVISION FOR THE NATION 40:1-48:35
After Israel has been given a new spiritual life (in the future) He will once again provide for her in a material way. This section involves God's millennial blessings in the provision of a new place and service of worship, and a new land for the worshippers. These messages are dated as April 28, 573 B.C.
- 1B A New Place of Worship 40:1-43:27
The new place of worship is, of course, the millennial temple. It is described in lengthy detail. The specificity is so great as to allow detailed diagrams of the new structure. It also discourages any symbolic interpretation of the material. The most natural interpretation would be that a structure of worship will be constructed in the millennial period. As a climax to this section, Ezekiel foresees the time when the glory of the LORD will return to this temple in the same way it left Solomon's.
- 2B A New System of Worship 44:1-46:24

After the physical place of worship is given, God next provides the guidelines for worship. Levites, Zadokites and the prince are directed as to how to use the system. Then stipulations for the support of the sanctuary are given. Finally directions for offerings at passover, the sabbath, appointed feasts and daily sacrifice are given. Special attention is given in this section to the person of the Prince. His exact identity is difficult to determine.

- 3B A New Land for the Worshippers 47:1-48:35
As before, when Israel entered the land, God now delineates the boundaries and its division among the twelve tribes. In addition the provision of a river originating at the Temple will provide the land with an abundant measure of fresh water, a blessing Israel had never enjoyed. In one last bittersweet promise God notes that the name of the city will be *THE LORD IS THERE*. The promise highlights His present absence from the city, and yet provides hope that one day, His glory will once again emanate from Jerusalem.

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