



The Book of Ezekiel

*NOTES COMPILED FROM THE BAKER ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE BIBLE (ED. WALTER A. ELWELL),
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ABOUT THE PROPHET AND THE TIMES

The book of Ezekiel is a major prophetic book of the Old Testament originating in the time of the Babylonian exile ([see timeline, back page](#)).

Ezekiel was a member of a priestly family. His writings show that he was trained in temple service, as he knew the regulations for sacrifices, rituals and the people's expectations of a priest.

The testimony of the book itself indicates that Ezekiel lived and preached in exile (1:1,3; 11:24-25). Ezekiel was exiled in 597 BC. He was called to bring God's word to the deportees at Telabib; he was granted a vision of the horrible practices in the temple court; and he was familiar with Jerusalem and Judah having lived there and from reports on affairs in Jerusalem coming to the exiles through messengers.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel's contemporary, was prophesying in Jerusalem at the same time, but there is no evidence that Jeremiah and Ezekiel knew of each other's ministry.

In exile Ezekiel the priest spoke God's word about the future of the temple to his fellow exiles, who were eking out a meagre existence. They hoped for a speedy return to Judah and a change for the better in the international situation. Their hope was flamed by the spirited preaching of false prophets, likened to foxes among the ruins (13:4), who piously said, "The Lord declares..." but they were actually self-commissioned (13:6). They deceived the people with a message of peace at a time when God's judgement was about to be poured out on his people (13:10). Much time had passed since true visions - of God's judgement - had been given to the people.

Ezekiel was called to serve his community by symbolic acts, visions, and verbal messages in order to convince the people that God's judgement was imminent (12:23).

BOOK OF EZEKIEL OUTLINE

BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (CHAPTERS 1-24)

Ezekiel's Call (1:1-3:21)

- Ezekiel's circumstances described (1:1-3)

Against all expectations, the Lord revealed himself to Ezekiel in the land of Babylon. In calling Ezekiel to a prophetic ministry, God assured his servant that he had not forsaken his people, even though they had been banished from the promised land.

- Ezekiel's vision of God (1:4-28)
 - i The four living creatures and the chariot
 - ii The four wheels
 - iii The radiant expanse

The vision of God's glory, though difficult, is the key to the book of Ezekiel. God's chariot is a familiar OT representation of his coming in judgement. The wheels may signify God's total control over the whole earth; and the eyes that God sees all that happens and knows the plight of the exiles.

- Ezekiel's call and commissioning (2:1-3:1-27)
 - i Stand on your feet... do not be afraid
 - ii The eating of the scroll
 - iii From the glorious vision to the mission field
 - iv The watchman bears responsibility to relay warning

In 3:27, Ezekiel is told to say, "He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house." In the gospels, when Jesus says things like, "Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" (Mark 8:18) or "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15), those who were familiar with the Hebrew scriptures would have recognized an allusion to the prophetic voice of Ezekiel.

Prophecies of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (4:1-24:27)

- Through symbols (4:1-5:17)
 - i A brick (the siege of Jerusalem) (4:1-3)
 - ii A posture (the duration of the exile) (4:4-8)
 - iii Bread (scarcity) (4:9-17)
 - iv Shaving (destruction of the people of Jerusalem) (5:1-17)
- Through sermons (6:1-7:27)
 - i The cause of the coming judgment (idolatry) (6:1-14)
 - ii The character of the coming judgment (severe) (7:1-27)

The phrase “And they shall know that I am the Lord” occurs repeatedly in Ezekiel. This points to divine judgment as a means of bringing about a recognition of the sovereignty of God.

- Through visions (8:1-11:25)
 - i Wickedness in the temple (8:1-18)
 - ii The slaying of Jerusalem’s inhabitants (9:1-11)
 - iii The burning of Jerusalem (10:1-22)
 - iv Evil rulers and departed glory (11:1-25)

The message of doom for Jerusalem contains four elements of hope in chapter 11: restoration of the people; restoration of the land; purification of the people; renewed fellowship between God and his people. The prophet develops those four themes in chapters 33-48.

- Through signs, messages and parables:
 - The certainty and causes of judgement (12:1-24:27)
 - i Sign of the prophet’s baggage (12:1-16)
 - ii Sign of trembling (12:17-28)
 - iii Message against false prophets (13:1-23)
 - iv Message against the idolatrous elders (14:1-23)

The people needed to face the nature of their God: He is magnificent; and when he speaks, his words are powerful and come to pass. Thus, the devastation of the land and the people’s exile were a fulfillment of God’s Word through the prophets. The judgement was meant to produce recognition of the Lord, repentance and return to God.

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- v Parable of the fruitless vine: Jerusalem (15:1-8)
 - vi Parable of the adulterous woman: Jerusalem (16:1-63)
(Her youth, sins, condemnation and restoration)
 - vii Parable of two eagles (17:1-24)
 - viii Proverb of the sour grapes repudiated (18:1-32)

In chapter 18, the people are charging God with injustice, for they believe themselves to be under God's judgement for the sins of their ancestors. Although the Ten Commandments do say that God may punish 'the iniquity of the fathers... to the third and the fourth generation,' the prophet vindicates God's justice telling the people that they are not being punished merely for their ancestors' sin. Each person must be directly accountable to God. And God is ready to forgive any sinner who repents. "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live." (Ezekiel 18:32)

- ix Lamentation for the rulers of Israel (19:1-14)
- x Message concerning Israel's unfaithfulness (20:1-32)

In chapter 20 the prophet concludes God's argument against his people. He reviews the history of Israel's past, starting with God's self-revelation in Egypt. In Israel's judgement and restoration the nations will see the holiness of God, which does not tolerate unfaithfulness in Israel.

From the time the Law was given to Israel, the expectation that they would be set apart by holy living was clear. Leviticus 18:1-4 says: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God.'"

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- xi Promise of future restoration (20:33-44)
 - xii Forest fire (20:45-49)
 - xiii Sword (21:1-32)
 - xiv Smelting furnace of judgment (22:1-31)
 - xv Parable of the two sisters (23:1-49)
 - xvi Parable of the boiling pot (24:1-14)
 - xvii Sign of the death of Ezekiel's wife (24:15-27)

Those oracles and parables conclude the first division of the book. Ezekiel has stated God's case against the rebellious house of Judah in many ways. He has countered arguments against the fulfillment of God's Word and against the justice of God. He has reassured the exiles that God will not leave the righteous and that the future of Israel begins with a righteous remnant. The pendulum of Ezekiel's writing has swung from judgment to restoration, while the clock was bringing Judah closer to the hour of its fall.

INTERMISSION: PROPHECIES AGAINST THE FOREIGN NATIONS (CHAPTERS 25-32)

Prophecies against foreign nations (25:1-32:32)

The prophet's organization of his material included, between prophecies of Israel's judgement and restoration, the oracles of God's judgement on Israel's neighbours who had encouraged and rejoiced in its fall.

- Judgment on Ammon (25:1-7)
- Judgment on Moab (25:8-11)
- Judgment on Edom (25:12-14)
- Judgment on Philistia (25:15-17)
- Judgment on Tyre (26:-28:19)
- Judgment on Sidon (28:20-26)
- Judgment on Egypt (29:1-32:32)

AFTER THE FALL OF JERSUALEM (CHAPTERS 33-48)

Prophecies of Israel's restoration (33:1-39:29)

- Ezekiel's appointment as a watchman (33:1-33)

Ezekiel 33:32 could easily describe people today. Thus far Ezekiel's ministry had not met with success. The exiles who had heard his messages were full of appreciation for Ezekiel's rhetorical and literary abilities.... but they were slow in applying the prophetic word to their own lives.

- Israel's Shepherds (34:1-31)
 - i False shepherds (34:1-10)
 - ii The true Shepherd (34:11-31)

The prophetic vision in chapter 34 telescoped the events of the restoration of Israel after the exile, the coming of Jesus the Messiah (cf. John 10), and the full restoration of the sin-cursed world.

Chapter 34 is the key to the messages of restoration. The emphases include the outworking of the frequently repeated verse "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." The most significant aspects of the restoration theme include: 1) God's gracious restoration of his people to covenant blessing; 2) God's restoration of the nation of Israel to the land; 3) God's new covenant, giving his Spirit to his people, and his blessing on his people, assuring them of victory over their enemies; 4) God's appointment of a Davidic king, the Messiah, over his people; 5) God's temple restored among his people.

- Israel's Rebirth (35:1-36:28)
 - i Prophecy against Edom (35:1-15)
 - ii Prophecy to the mountains of Israel (36:1-38)
 - iii The valley of dry bones (37:1-14)
 - iv One nation under one king (37:15-28)
- Victory over Gog and Magog (38:1-39:29)

Visions of a new city (40:1-43:27)

- The temple (40:1-43:27)
 - i Introduction (40:1-4)
 - ii Outer court and gates (40:5-27)
 - iii Inner court and gates (40:28-47)
 - iv Temple (40:48-41:26)
 - v Chambers in the inner court (42:1-12)
 - vi Return of the glory of the Lord (43:1-12)
 - vii Altar of burnt offering (43:13-27)
- The service of worship (44:1-46:24)
 - i The Prince, the Levites and the priests (44:1-31)
 - ii Division of the land (45:1-17)
 - iii Offerings and Holy Days (45:18-46:24)
- The land (47:1-48:35)
 - i The river from the temple (47:1-12)
 - ii The boundaries of the land (47:13-23)
 - iii The division of the land (48:1-35)

There are various interpretations of chapters 34-48. Some interpret Israel as simply the nation and view the modern return of Jewish people to the land of Israel as a continuation of God's prophetic promise. They believe that God's plan for Israel is being fulfilled along with, and in addition to, his plan for the Christian Church. Other interpreters believe that Ezekiel wrote for the benefit of the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Christian Gentiles) who believe as Abraham did, in God's promises. It is possible on the basis of NT passages (1 Peter 1:10-11) to interpret Ezekiel's language as a prophetic expression of how God's grace would come to all those who become reconciled to God through faith in the gospel.

*"There's a wideness in God's mercy I cannot find in my own
me aching with a yearning, keeps me glad to have been caught
the love of God" - Rich Mullins
And He keeps his fire burning to melt this heart of stone | keeps
me aching with a yearning, keeps me glad to have been caught |
the love of God" - Rich Mullins
And He keeps his fire burning to melt this heart of stone | keeps
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TIMELINE

** THERE IS ALWAYS SCHOLARLY DEBATE ABOUT DATES.
THIS IS INCLUDED JUST TO GIVE YOU A SENSE OF THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS
IN THE FLOW OF OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE.*

c. 1440 BC The Exodus

Israel was led out of captivity in Egypt

Wilderness Wandering

While Israel was wandering in the desert, God gave the Law, a pattern for the tabernacle, and established the priesthood

The Conquest

Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan where they conquered and took possession of the promised land

The Judges

A series of divinely appointed leaders ruled Israel for about 450 years

c. 1050 BC The United Monarchy

God granted a king to rule over Israel; this period includes the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon

931 BC The Divided Kingdom:

North (Israel) & South (Judah)

After the death of Solomon, the northern tribes broke away and formed the kingdom of Israel; the southern kingdom, Judah, continued in the dynasty of David; Jerusalem, where the temple was, was in the Judah

722 BC Assyrian Conquest of the Northern Kingdom

NB. Prophets associated with the Northern Kingdom include Elijah, Elisha, Jonah and Hosea

605 BC Babylonian invasion of Judah

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took captives (Daniel)

597 BC Babylonian suppression of revolt in Judah

This time Ezekiel was one of the captives taken

587 BC Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem

This was in response to another rebellion; King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and the temple and carried off large numbers of the people into exile