

# Ezekiel

## *A Suggested Outline of Ezekiel*

- I. The Ordination of the Prophet (1–3)
- II. The Condemnation of Judah (4–24)
  - A. A disobedient nation (4–7)
  - B. A departed glory (8–11)
  - C. A disciplined nation (12–24)
- III. The Condemnation of the Gentile Nations (25–32)
- IV. The Restoration of God's People (33–48)
  - A. They return to their land (33–36)
  - B. They experience new life and unity (37)
  - C. They are protected from their enemies (38–39)
  - D. They worship the Lord acceptably (40–48)

## **Ezekiel 1–36**

In the year 606 B.C., the Babylonians began the first of several deportations of the Jews; Daniel was in this group. In the second group (597 B.C.) was young Ezekiel, then about twenty-five years old. He was taken to Tel-abib near the ship canal Chebar (3:15). There he lived in his own house with his beloved wife (8:1; 24:16ff). Five years after Ezekiel came to Tel-abib, he was called to be a prophet of God, when he was thirty years old (592 B.C.). This was six years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, so while Jeremiah was ministering to the people back home, Ezekiel was preaching to the Jews of the captivity in Babylon. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest called to be a prophet.

His book may also be divided into three sections, following the prophet's call in 1–3: (1) God's judgment on Jerusalem, 4–24; (2) God's judgment on the surrounding nations, 25–32; and (3) God's restoration of the Jews in the kingdom, 33–48. Chapters 1–24 were given before the siege of Jerusalem; chapters 25–32 during the siege; and chapters 33–48 after the siege. Though the prophet was in distant Babylon, he was able to see events in Jerusalem through the power of the Spirit of God. Ezekiel not only proclaimed God's message to the people, but he had to live the message before them. God commanded him to do a number of symbolic acts in order to get the attention of the

people: play at war (4:1–3); lie on his side a certain number of days (4:4–17); shave his hair and beard (5:1–4); act like someone fleeing from war (12:1–16); sit and sigh (21:1–7); and, the most difficult of all, have his wife die (24:15–27). It was not easy to be a prophet.

In this section we shall concentrate on Ezekiel's visions of God's glory.

## I. The Glory Revealed (1–3)

Ezekiel ("God strengthens") was a priest in captivity (1:1), and was thus unable to exercise his ministry since he was away from the temple and the sacred altar. But God opened the heavens to him and called him to be a prophet. He had been in captivity for five years when his call came; priests began their ministry at the age of thirty (Num. 4:3). See Ps. 137 for a picture of the spiritual condition of the captives. Jeremiah had told them to settle down in Babylon for seventy years, but the false prophets told the people that God would destroy Babylon and set the captives free (read Jer. 28–29). It was Ezekiel's task to tell the people that God would destroy *Jerusalem*, not Babylon, but that there would one day be a glorious restoration of the people and a rebuilding of the temple.

The phrase "The Word of the Lord came" is used nearly fifty times in this book. How wonderful to know that God's Word is never far from God's people if they will only listen. John heard the Word when an exile on Patmos (Rev. 1:9ff), and Paul received the Word when in prison. What did Ezekiel see that day?

### A. *A fiery whirlwind (1:4).*

This symbolized God's judgment on Jerusalem, Babylon coming out of the north. The storm cloud with its fiery lightning meant destruction for Jerusalem.

### B. *The cherubim (1:5–14).*

These creatures symbolize the glory and power of God. They could see in all directions and move in all directions without turning. The four faces speak of their characteristics: the intelligence of man; the strength and boldness of the lion; the faithfulness and service of the ox; and the heavenliness of the eagle. Some see in these faces the four Gospels: Matthew (lion—king); Mark (ox—servant); Luke (man—Son of Man); John (eagle—Son of God from heaven). The creatures could move quickly to accomplish the will of God.

### C. *The wheels (1:15–21).*

Each creature was associated with a set of wheels, two wheels in each set. The wheels in each set were not parallel to each other, like the rim and the hub of a bicycle wheel; rather, they were at right angles to each other, like a gyroscope top. The wheels were constantly turning and, since they faced in all four directions, they could move in any way without changing motion, just like the cherubim. They were "full of eyes" (v. 18), picturing the omniscience of God as He rules His creation (Prov. 15:3), and the

movements of the wheels and the cherubim coincided. All of this speaks of God's constant working in the world, His power and glory, His presence in all places, His purpose for man, His providence. The world was full of terror and change, but God was at work.

*D. The firmament (1:22–27).*

This was a beautiful “platform” above the wheels and the cherubim, containing the throne of God. God is still on the throne, and His will is being accomplished in this world even if we do not always see it. The complex movements of the cherubim and the wheels reveal how intricate is God's providence in the universe; only He can understand it, only He can control it. But there is perfect harmony and order.

*E. The rainbow (1:28).*

There was a rainbow in the storm. Certainly this told Ezekiel that God's mercy and God's covenant would not fail His people. See Gen. 9:11–17, where the rainbow was appointed as a sign of mercy and also Rev. 4:3 and 10:1.

Noah saw the rainbow after the storm, the Apostle John saw it before the storm, but Ezekiel saw it within the storm. This entire vision of God's glory shows God at work in the world, judging the sins of His people, but still keeping His covenant of mercy. The result of this vision was total collapse on the part of Ezekiel (1:28). But God set him up on his feet, called him to be a watchman, fed him with the Word (see Jer. 15:16; Job 23:12; Matt. 4:4; Rev. 10:9), and filled him with the Spirit. “They shall know that I am the Lord”—this phrase is found seventy times in this book; it summarizes the ministry and message of Ezekiel.

## **II. The Glory Removed (8–11)**

A year later, God gave Ezekiel another vision, this time of the sins of the people back in Jerusalem. The glory appeared again (8:2), and God took the prophet in vision to the holy city. There he saw a four-fold view of the sins of the people: (1) an image set up at the north gate of the temple, possibly of As-tarte, the foul Babylonian goddess, 8:5; (2) secret heathen worship in the hidden precincts of the temple, 8:6–12; (3) the Jewish women weeping for the god Adonis, who was supposed to die and be raised from the dead each spring, 8:13–14; and (4) the high priest and the twenty-four courses of priests worshiping the sun, 8:15–16. Is it any wonder God planned to destroy the city?

Of course, the glory of the Lord could not remain in such a wicked place. The glory had come to the temple, 8:4; but in 9:3 the glory moved to the threshold of the temple. The throne of glory was now empty. It would become a throne of judgment. In chapter 9 we see God's servant putting a mark of protection on the faithful remnant of believers, lest they be slain in the judgment to come. Then, in 10:4, the glory of God moved above the threshold of the house, hovering there before judgment was going to fall. In 10:18 the glory moved with the cherubim off the threshold to the eastern gate of the temple (v. 19); and finally in 11:22–23, the glory moved out of the temple to the top of the Mount of Olives. “Ichabod—the glory has departed” (1 Sam. 4:21).

Why was the glory removed? Because God cannot share His glory with another. The idols and the sins of the people had driven Him away. Their sins may have been hidden from the people, but God saw them, and God judged them. So today God will remove His glory and His blessing from our lives unless we serve Him faithfully with honest and pure hearts.

### **III. The Glory Restored (43:1–12)**

In chapters 40–48 the prophet sees the future restoration of Israel and her glory in the kingdom. He describes the restored city and temple, greater than anything Israel has ever known. In 43:1–6 he sees the glory of God return to the temple. Note that the glory will return by the same route it used when it departed. Of course, Jesus Christ is the glory of the Lord and He will return the glory of God to the nation of Israel. Certainly the Word given in chapters 40–48 was not fulfilled when the Jews returned to their land after the captivity, so it must have a future fulfillment when Jesus returns to earth to reign.

God is concerned with His glory. We are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19–20) and magnify Him in all that we do (Phil. 1:20–21). Our good works are to glorify God (Matt. 5:16). But we can sin away the glory of God from our lives. Certainly the Spirit of God will not leave us (Eph. 1:12–14), but we may grieve the Spirit and lose the glory of God in our daily walk (Eph. 4:30). Secret sins do not remain secret very long. God sees them and, before long, others see them too.

## **Ezekiel 37–48**

These closing chapters look forward to the future of Israel and Judah, to a time when God will do a new work and His glory will return to the land.

### **I. The New Nation (37)**

#### *A. Revived (vv. 1–14).*

At this time, both Israel and Judah were ruined politically. Assyria had scattered Israel, and Judah had just been captured by Babylon. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted a return from captivity, but Ezekiel's vision goes even farther down the years. He saw the time when the dead nation would come alive again. In the vision, he saw very many bones in the valley (literally, "battlefield"), and the bones were very dry. It was a picture of utter defeat, with the bones of the armies bleached and unburied. What a vivid description of the Jewish people! Through the power of God's Word, the bones came together and formed men, and through the power of the Spirit ("wind"), life was given to them. This does not teach a bodily resurrection, or even the salvation of the Jews. Rather, it pictures the future revival of the *nation*, when the Jews will be brought up out of the "graves" of the Gentile nations where they have been scattered. Politically, this

took place May 14, 1948, when the modern nation of Israel entered the family of nations again. Of course, the nation is dead spiritually; but one day when Christ returns, the nation will be born in a day and be saved.

### *B. Reunited (vv. 15–28).*

The division of the nation into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms was the beginning of their downfall. One day God will reunite all the tribes under their true David, Jesus Christ. He will make a covenant of peace with them (v. 26) and bring glory to His people once again.

Is there a future for Israel? Some students say, “No, for all these OT prophecies must be applied *spiritually* to the church.” We do not agree. These prophecies are too detailed to be “spiritualized” and applied to the church today. Jesus taught a future for the Jews (Luke 22:29); so did Paul (Rom. 11); and so did John (Rev. 22:1–6).

## **II. The New Victory (38–39)**

These chapters deal with the famous “battle of Gog and Magog.” Do not confuse this war with the Battle of Armageddon described in Rev. 19:11–21, because Armageddon takes place at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period that follows the rapture of the church. Nor is it the same as the battle involving Gog and Magog mentioned in Rev. 20:7–9, for that will take place after the close of the millennial reign of Christ when Satan will again be loosed. The battle given in Ezek. 38–39 takes place at a time when the Jews are safely living in their own land (38:8, 11–12, 14) in the “latter years” (38:8). When will this be? It seems probable that this will be during the first half of the Tribulation period, when Israel will be protected from her enemies by her covenant with the head of the Roman Empire (Dan. 9:26–27).

After the church is raptured, great events will rapidly take place in the world. The old Roman Empire will be restored in Europe, headed by a strong ruler who will eventually be revealed as the Antichrist. He will agree to protect the Jews for seven years (Dan. 9:27), which is the exact length of the Tribulation period, the seventieth week of Daniel (9:25–27). The first three and a half years of the tribulation period will be relatively peaceful, and Israel will enjoy rest in her land, guarded by the Roman ruler. But Gog will want the great wealth of the land (38:12–13) and about the middle of the Tribulation period will invade Israel without warning. Then God will intervene and destroy the invading army. So great will be the defeat that it will take seven months to bury the dead (39:12), and the people will burn the abandoned war instruments for seven years (39:9–10). The Roman ruler will hasten to Israel to keep his covenant, will discover that Gog is no longer a world power, and then will set himself up in the Jewish temple as the world dictator, thus breaking his covenant with the Jews (Dan. 9:27). This will be the “Abomination of Desolation” and the signal for great tribulation to begin on the earth.

## **III. The New Temple (40–46)**

Certainly this temple has never been built, so it must refer to a future time. Most students take this to be the great millennial temple that will be filled with God's glory

during Christ's thousand-year reign on earth. Ezekiel was told to reveal these plans to the people in order to make them ashamed of their sins and rebellions (43:10–11). It is not necessary for us to go into detail in our study. Note that the sizes are all increased, so that the entire "sacred area" is almost fifty miles square. How all of this is going to fit into the land and the city of Jerusalem, we are not told. Perhaps there will be changes in the land.

Since Christ has fulfilled the OT types (e.g., sacrifices, priesthood), then why should they be reinstated and practiced for a thousand years? Some believe that these practices will be to the Jew in the kingdom what the Lord's Supper is to the church today, a memorial of the work of Christ. However, it is likely that Ezekiel is using the language the people understood to convey truths about the future worship in the temple. The Passover spoke of redemption by the blood (45:21–24), and the Feast of Tabernacles spoke of God's care for His people and their joy in the kingdom (45:25). We cannot believe that saved Jews will want to exchange their close fellowship with Christ for ancient rituals that belonged to the age of the Law.

What will happen to this temple? When God creates the new heaven and earth, there will be no need for any temple (Rev. 21:1–5, 22). The New Jerusalem that John describes in Rev. 21–22 will far surpass anything Ezekiel ever saw! The entire holy city will be a temple to the glory of God.

#### **IV. The New Land (47–48)**

##### *A. Refreshed (chap. 47).*

The land will be refreshed by the healing waters of the river issuing from the altar of God. All of God's blessings must begin with the altar. Ezekiel is describing the healing of the land, the blessing of God upon the land that He chose for Israel. Note that there will be a new border for the land (13–21). On the west will be the Mediterranean Sea; to the north, a line running from Tyre to Damascus; on the east, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea; and to the south, from below the Dead Sea to the River of Egypt. This means that the inheritance will all be *inside* the land, with no tribes across Jordan.

We can see in this life-giving river a beautiful picture of the Spirit of God. The source is the altar, the death of Christ (John 7:37–39). The river became deeper, so that the prophet could swim in it. Oh, that we might go deeper and deeper into the things of God and stay out of the shallow waters! The river brought healing and life; so the Spirit heals and gives life today.

##### *B. Redivided (chap. 48).*

We have already noted the new boundaries of the land. This chapter explains how the tribes will be allotted their inheritance during the kingdom age. All of the tribes will be west of Jordan; the nation will no longer be divided. The tribes will have "belts" of land across the nation, from east to west. Seven tribes will be located at the top of the land: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, and Judah. Then will come the huge "sacred tract" for the temple area (vv. 8–20). At the bottom of the land will be five more tribes: Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. The tribes will all be there

and the Lord will be there! (v. 35) The name of the city shall be "Jehovah-Shammah":  
"The Lord is there!"