
Contents

Introduction	4
EZEKIEL	
1. The Man Ezekiel	6
2. The Book of Ezekiel	15
3. Ezekiel's Vision, Call, and Commission	26
4. Ezekiel's New Audience	35
5. The Resurrection of Israel	40
DANIEL	
6. Background of Daniel	51
7. Survey of the Book of Daniel	62
8. Daniel and His Three Companions	68
9. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Daniel's Vision	73
10. Manifestations of Israel's God to Gentile Nations	79
11. Visions of the Two Beasts and Seventy Weeks	85
12. Vision of the Conflicts of Kings	91
Bibliography	100

Lesson 1

The Man Ezekiel

When God began to send His people into captivity for their sin, that did not mean He would no longer speak to them. If God was to purge the nation of their corrupt idolatry, they needed to hear more of the very word they had so stubbornly resisted. Among the Jews taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in his second invasion of Judah in 597 B.C. was a man by the name of Ezekiel. This was the one whom God chose to be His *prophet to the exiles*, while Daniel served as God's *ambassador to the court* of the captor king.

In this lesson we shall study about the *man* Ezekiel. This will serve as helpful background for the following lesson, which is a survey study of the *book* of Ezekiel. From that point the lessons will be devoted to detailed analyses of various passages of Ezekiel.

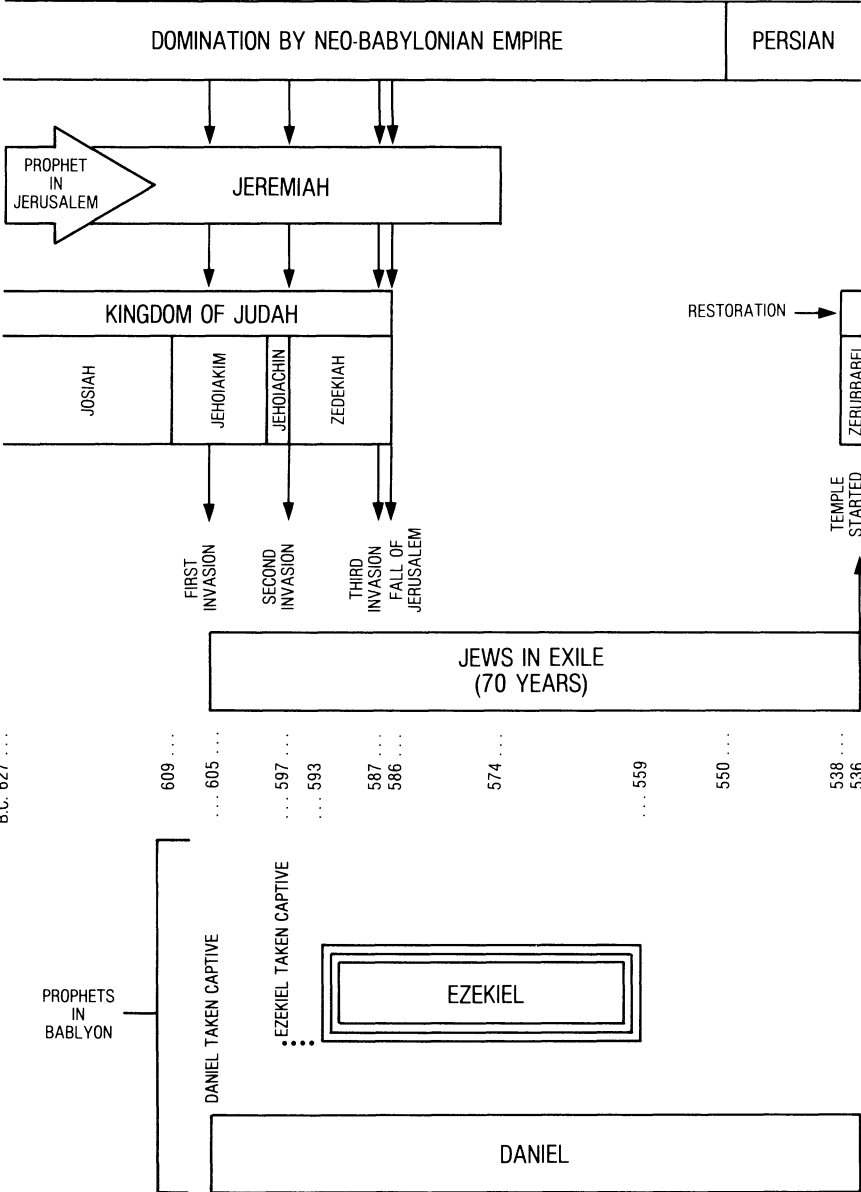
I. EZEKIEL AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The Bible cannot be charged with needless duplication. Whenever there is duplication, it is with divine purpose. The ministry of Ezekiel is an example of this. Much of what Ezekiel preached was very similar to Jeremiah's preaching, which the former prophet must have listened to often in Jerusalem, up until his exile at age twenty-five.¹ And yet the two prophets were very different from each other, partly in what they said and partly in the setting of their ministries. Concerning the latter, study Chart A, titled "Ezekiel and His Contemporaries." (Refer also to Chart Z.) The main thing to

1. Jeremiah may have been as much as twenty years older than Ezekiel. Ezekiel and Daniel were about the same age. Concerning Ezekiel's familiarity with Jeremiah's message it has been said that Ezekiel was "the prolongation of the voice of Jeremiah." The two prophets were brought into juxtaposition especially in connection with Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, to whom Ezekiel was ministering. (Read Jer. 29.)

EZEKIEL AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Chart A



observe on Chart A is that both Daniel and Ezekiel did not begin their prophetic ministries until they were deported to Babylonia. Daniel was taken captive in 605 B.C., in Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion of Jerusalem, and began his prophetic ministry in that same year. (Read Dan. 1:1-7.) Ezekiel was deported to Babylon in 597 B.C. along with King Jehoiachin and hosts of citizens, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem the second time. (Read 2 Kings 24:10-16.) Ezekiel was not called to prophesy until after he had been in Babylonia for about five years. Thus Jeremiah was the lone prophet in the land of Judah for the last twenty years before Jerusalem's fall; Daniel and Ezekiel served as prophets only in captivity.

The different ministries of the three contemporaneous prophets may be identified thus:

1. Jeremiah: prophet mainly to the Jews in Jerusalem, before the city fell.

2. Daniel: prophet mainly to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, in Babylonia.

3. Ezekiel: prophet mainly to the exiles in Babylonia, before and after the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was *the* prophet of the captivity.

It is interesting that in Ezekiel's book there is no mention of Jeremiah, whereas Daniel is mentioned three times (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3). Daniel, because of his favor at the king's court, was well known throughout Babylonia by the time Ezekiel arrived in the country. Daniel's prophecy refers to Jeremiah once (Dan. 9:2), and the name Ezekiel does not appear in either of the other two books.

II. THE TIMES IN WHICH EZEKIEL LIVED

The idolatry that Ezekiel saw as Judah's blight before he left Jerusalem was the same condition he faced in the settlements of Jewish exiles in Babylonia. The judgment of captivity did not stir the first contingents of exiles to repentance. In fact they found it very hard to believe, as Ezekiel was prophesying, that Jerusalem would actually be destroyed by the Babylonians. They were loath to believe that Jehovah had given world dominion to Babylon, and that His will was for Judah to submit to this enemy. Hence it was necessary for Ezekiel in Babylon—and Jeremiah in Jerusalem—to show the people how unfounded were any expectations of immediate deliverance.

This, of course, was not a message the people liked to hear. A small minority responded, but for the most part the people would

not believe the prophet's words. They succumbed to the evil influences that surrounded them and lost faith in the covenant promises of Jehovah. Then, too, the presence of the false prophets (some of whom had been brought to Babylon in the first two captivities) made the ministry of Ezekiel difficult, because they were contradicting all that Ezekiel preached. Ezekiel told the Jews they had better settle down and make homes in Babylon, because the bondage would last seventy years. But the false prophets insisted that this captivity was only temporary and that they would soon be back in their own land.

III. EZEKIEL'S PERSONAL HISTORY

Of Ezekiel's personal history we are told very little. However, enough information may be garnered from various Bible references to project a biographical profile of this fascinating prophet.

A. Name

The name Ezekiel is written in Hebrew as *Yebezqel*, meaning "God strengthens." The prophet was truly a tower of strength in the midst of a defeated people. Also God made him strong to resist the opposition of hardhearted and rebellious Israelites (read 3:8-9).

B. Birth

If the phrase "thirtieth year" of 1:1 refers to Ezekiel's age at that time (593 B.C.), then he was born in 623 B.C., during the reign of good King Josiah. Ezekiel was a mere child when the book of the law was recovered in the course of renovating the Temple in 621 B.C. The years of his boyhood and youth were thus spent in the bright reformation period that followed that recovery.

C. Family

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was born of a priestly heritage. His father's name was Buzi, a priest possibly of the Zadok line (1:3; 40:46; 44:15). Ezekiel was married, but it is not known if he had any children. The darkest day of his life was when the Lord announced to him two tragic events: the siege of Jerusalem (24:2) and the death of his beloved wife (24:15-18).

D. In Exile

When Ezekiel was about eighteen years old (605 B.C.) the Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) made their first invasion into Judea, carrying away some captives, among whom was Daniel (see Chart Y). Eight years later (597 B.C.) they came again, and this time Ezekiel was among the captives, who constituted the upper classes of Judah. Read 2 Kings 24:10-17 for the historical record of this (cf. Ezek. 1:2; 33:21). Some of the exiles were incarcerated; others were made slaves; many were allowed to settle down in their own homes in various settlements of the exiles (cf. Jer. 29:1-7; Ezra 2:59; Neh. 7:61). It was of divine providence that Ezekiel was among those granted such liberties. His home was in Tel-abib (3:15), a principal colony of exiles near the fabulous city of Babylon. Tel-abib was located by the canal Chebar ("Grand Canal"), which flowed "from the Euphrates fork above Babylon through Nippur, winding back into the Euphrates near Erech" (cf. 1:1, 3; Ps. 137:1).

Ezekiel's home was a meeting place where the elders of the Jews often came to consult him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). It may be that his home was open to any of the exiles who wanted spiritual help.

E. Call and Commission

Five years after his arrival in the strange land of Babylon, Ezekiel received his call to the prophetic office, to minister to the exiles in Babylonia.² What he experienced and heard in this call is recorded in the first three chapters of his book.

Like the other prophets, Ezekiel received a vision of God that put him on his face in the dust before his Maker (1:26-28). Compare Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6) and John's vision (Rev. 1:10-18). Observe that in each instance it was the Lord Jesus Christ who was seen, and that each vision produced the same humbling effect upon the beholder. Compare the three visions, and observe the different ways in which the Lord manifested Himself. To Isaiah, His *holiness* was emphasized; to Ezekiel, His *power*, majesty, and government; and to John, His *love*. Concerning this, someone has written, "How surpassingly blessed, that this infinitely holy, all-powerful One loves us so that He will come down among us and teach us!"

2. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 364.
3. His activities during this five-year period are not chronicled for us, but we may assume that he ministered to his people's spiritual needs and did much studying of the law and the prophetic writings. God was preparing the priest to be the prophet during these years.

Twenty-two years later (see 29:17), when Ezekiel was around fifty-two years old, he was still prophesying to the exiles. It is not known how much longer his ministry continued.

IV. EZEKIEL'S CHARACTER

Ezekiel the prophet was strong and fearless. This is what God made him (3:8-9), and this was his dominant characteristic. He had boundless energy and a love for the simple, clear, and direct. Though his disposition was firm, he had a shepherd's heart for his countrymen. "Ezekiel is the one who, in the first place, breaking in pieces the hard hearts with the hammer of the law, represents the strict inexorable judge, but therefore, pouring soothing balm into the open wounds, approves himself as the healing physician."⁴

Ezekiel's book reveals that he was methodical, artistic, and mystic. With a deeply introspective nature, he must have studied much the message of God as it applied to himself and his brethren. He was truly a practical theologian, and for this he has been called "the first dogmatist of the Old Testament" and "the prophet of personal responsibility."

V. EZEKIEL THE PROPHET, PRIEST, AND PASTOR

Ezekiel's ministry combined the labors of prophet, priest, and pastor.

A. Prophet

He was a seer to whom God gave many visions concerning the present and future. He was God's spokesman to the people, powerfully preaching against sin and challenging them to turn from idolatry to God.

B. Priest

Ezekiel was also God's priest. God said regarding the exiled Jews, "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (11:16). And so God gave Ezekiel to them to serve like a priest in this "sanctuary," a channel of communication between themselves and the God they had so shamefully dishonored.

4. *Calwer Handbuch* as cited by John Peter Lange, "Ezekiel," *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 2.

C. Pastor

The turning point of Ezekiel's ministry was the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 B.C. For the seven years prior to this (593-586 B.C.), he preached mostly of repentance and judgment (chaps. 1-24). Now, with their city destroyed—even as Ezekiel had predicted—the people found themselves in the valley of despair. This turned out to their advantage, however, for now they would begin to listen to Ezekiel, whose new message was one of consolation—the future restoration of Israel (chaps. 33-48). Little by little the people responded, turning from their idolatrous ways, led by their pastor Ezekiel. Ezekiel was their “consoler, a herald of salvation, an expositor of the necessity of inner religion, a prophet of the regathering, and the envisager of God's restoration of the Temple, worship, and land to a redeemed and purified Israel (33:11; 34; 36:25-31; 37; 40-48).”⁵

VI. EZEKIEL'S MESSAGE

Ezekiel's message was geared to the circumstances and needs of his audience. Keep in mind the historical setting that this lesson has been describing, and you will understand why these were his major points:

A. Sin Caused Exile

It was sin that brought the people's judgment of exile. The people must repent and return to God.

B. Seventy-Year Exile

The exile would last for seventy years, even though false prophets were preaching an early return. The people had a letter from Jeremiah (Jer. 29), which concurred with Ezekiel's preaching. The seventy-year captivity began in 605 B.C. with the first deportation of Jews (Jer. 25:11-12; Zech. 7:5). Before the Jews could return to Jerusalem, they must return to the Lord.

C. Future Restoration

There would be a future restoration of Israel for a believing remnant. The general impression of these consolatory messages was

5. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1962), p. 704.

that this restoration was in the far-distant future. Most of the adults of Ezekiel’s audience had no other hope than this, for seventy years of captivity precluded their returning to Jerusalem in their lifetime.

The tone of Ezekiel’s preaching was austere and impressive, for the prophet constantly stressed the sovereignty and glory of the Lord. The phrase “glory of the Lord” or its equivalent appears eleven times in the first eleven chapters of his book. The statement of God “They shall know that I am the Lord” or its equivalent appears about seventy times in the book. A comparison of the main themes of the four “greater prophets” is shown here:

- Isaiah: salvation of the Lord
- Jeremiah: judgment of the Lord
- Daniel: kingdom of the Lord
- Ezekiel: sovereignty and glory of the Lord

The captivity of Israel and Judah was God’s judgment for their idolatry. It was during the captivity years that some of the people returned to God. This was the beginning of the religion of Judaism, and because Ezekiel was the prominent prophet at this time, he has been called “the father of Judaism.”

Questions on Lesson 1

1. Who were Ezekiel’s contemporaries, and in what capacities did they serve?

2. Describe what you can recall about Ezekiel’s name, birth, family, exile, and call.

3. Describe Ezekiel's personality.

4. Compare the ministries of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

5. Compare the divine calls of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the apostle John.

6. What were the three main themes of Ezekiel's message to the Jews in exile?
