

Ezekiel

1A. Historical Background

Ezekiel locates his call to prophetic ministry when he was 30 years old and in exile in the land of the Babylonians in the 5th year of King Jehoiachin's exile (1.1-3; 586 is his 12th year in exile when he is told that the city is fallen, Ezek. 33:21; thus, Ezekiel was taken to Babylon when Jehoiachin was taken for his 37 year imprisonment, 2 Kgs. 24:11-16).

2A. The prophet's ministry

1B. From priest to prophet

In the year that Ezekiel would enter his vocation as a priest to mediate for the people of Judah (at age 30), he is unable to do so being in Babylonian exile. Instead, he becomes a prophet with an immediate message of judgment against the nation.

Apparently, the people in exile hoped for a speedy return to their homeland. Many were officials and leading men of the land (2Ki 24:15). They receive Ezekiel's message as "entertaining prattle" (20:49; 33:30-32, IOT 313) saying that he is just telling parables which indicates that they did not hear his message; they do not put it into practice. Some hear his message like a beautiful song to which they feign devotion but "their hearts are greedy for unjust gain" (33:31).

Ezekiel's opening vision is an awesome foreboding of the coming destruction for in it he sees a divine war chariot that comes as a fiery windstorm. Thus God comes with a message through his prophet Ezekiel to a rebellious and obstinate nation (2:3-4). This message is written on a scroll with "words of lament and mourning and woe" (2:9); it is for the exiles (3:15) from God's watchman, Ezekiel (3:17).

A storm of divine judgment is about to occur. Still Ezekiel must warn the wicked and summon them to turn from their evil ways saying "whoever will listen, let him listen" (3:27).

2B. Conduct

By modern standards the prophet's conduct appears pathological: he lies motionless for protracted periods (4:4- 7), is dumb or mute (3:24-27; 24:25-27; 33:22), does not mourn the death of his wife (24:15-27), has visionary transports (8:1-4), reports extraordinary stories and visions (1-3; 8-11; 15-18; 21; 23-24; 37-48), and engages in almost bizarre conduct (4:12; 5:1-4; 12:3-5 [he cooks with cow manure; shaves his head and beard with a sword; packs his bags and digs his way through the walls of the city]).

Thus some question his mental health. He carried out his ministry with great intensity as an embodiment of the message he spoke; he relayed God's message in word and deed.

3A. Literary Analysis

1B. Genre

The genre is enacted (drammatized) visionary prophecy.

The book is prophecy conveyed through majestic visions and descriptions of symbolic props and actions. Thus it is composed of enacted prophecies and apocalyptic visions.

The prophet's life embodied his message; the prophet dramatized his message in word and deed. The written message records Ezekiel's life as a prophet in the first person throughout (1:4; 2:2; 37:2-3; 40:2; 40-48). Thus, we have recorded prophetic enactments and visions. It is prophetic word and deed autobiography.

2B. Outline

Introduction 1-3 (call of Ezekiel)

Judgment on Judah and the Nations 4-32

On Judah, 4-24

On the nations, 25-32

Restoration 33-48

4A. Striking analogies and well-known sections

Clay tablet/drawing of the city besieged, 4

Shaving with a sword, 5

The end, doomsday has come, 7

God's glory leaves the temple & city with a promise of restoration 8-11.

Packing for exile through a wall with covered eyes (cf. Zedekiah, 2:12)

False prophets 13

Idolatry 14

Useless vine 15

Spiritual Prostitution 16

The two eagles (Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh) 17

Sour grapes and individual responsibility 18
 Lament for the princes 19
 Israel's history of evil but restoration for God's name's sake (20:44)
 Babylon, God's sword; He directs the evil king at a fork in the road 21
 Samaria and Jerusalem as two prostitutes 23
 The scorched cooking pot and death of Ezekiel's wife (delight taken) 24
 Babylon may be Gog that comes from the far north (39:2)
 The coming of destruction from the north by Babylon has a
 telescoped dimension which reaches beyond the NT to the second
 coming of Christ (Rev. 20:8).
 34:10 I will rescue my flock
 35, I will fight for Israel against Edom (cf. the book of Obadiah)
 36:25-26, 22, I will sprinkle clean water on you (cf. baptism)
 37:1-14 Dry bones will live; graves opened (cf. return to the land)
 37:15-27 One stick from two forever: in the land with David as king
 38-39 I will move against Gog in the distant future (38:8)
 40-48 There will be a new city and temple forever

5A. Theme

Although God departed from the temple, the city, and the land and turned his people over to the sword of judgment in the hands of her national enemies for their sins, the Lord promises for his name's sake that Israel will return and her restoration will eventually so unfold in the distant future that the city of Jerusalem will have a new people, and a new temple that emerges with a new name "The Lord is there." In contrast to "present Jerusalem" in bondage, "Jerusalem above" is the new covenant that is like a barren women with many children, the new covenant people of God (Gal 4.21-28; Isa 54.1-10). What is another name for the church: "The Lord is there." Should we not do with Ezekiel's promise what Paul does with Isaiah's?

Note the inseparability of the return to the land, the new covenant, the giving of a new heart, the coming of people from all nations by baptism into the new covenant community (Ezek 36.24-26; Heb 10.21-25).

Note the inseparability of return to the land with David as king and with God's sanctuary in their midst forever (Ezek 37.21, 24, 26-27) in relation to with city the fathers anticipated, the land of promise, that is, the better country, a heavenly one where God is called their God (Heb 11.9, 13-16). Thus, NT believers have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to Jesus (Heb 12.22, 24).

Thus, Israel becomes not my people (blended into the nations in exile) and her return to the land is to the better country, the heavenly one (cf. how Paul and Peter apply Hosea to the present church (Rom 9.24-26; 1 Pet 2.9-10 with exile language being applied to the new Israel, 1.1, 17 and the house of God refers to the people, 2.5).

Note: if we literalize land we must literalize David as king and the sancturay of the future with its sacrifices. This is truly problematic and has to be in our minds as we look at Ezekiel's Temple.

6A. Interpretation of Ezekiel's Temple

B. Murray (NBC 663-664) lays out some helpful guidelines.

These are not literal plans to be fulfilled to the letter. It is not a symbolic description that is exhausted in the notion that the NT church is God's temple. Nor does it describe a temple for sacrificing to be built after the second coming of Christ.

Why? 1) because of Jesus death, Heb. 10:18, 2) the heirs of the kingdom are no longer the Jewish nation but the Church, the new Israel (Matt. 21:43; I Pet. 2:9-10, and 3) John adapts these chapters to the eternal state; there is no temple in the city; the city is the temple; the lord is the temple, Rev. 21:9-22:6).

Ezekiel gave his prophecy under forms he knew, but we understand the nature of fulfillment from the perspective of Christ in the NT (we are the temple in the present age and the Lord is the temple in the eternal state).

7A. Message

1) God is holy

Because God is holy he will not overlook the sin of Israel.

2) The Israelites are sinful

They stand before him with all their history and the sins of their fathers with personal and individual responsibility, even in exile before the 586 destruction of the city of Jerusalem. They cannot claim that their teeth

are set on edge because their fathers ate sour grapes. Their teeth are set on edge because of their own sins (18).

3) God's purposes will be fulfilled

Still, their sins and God's judgment will not frustrate His purposes. God will show mercy to a remnant who will "survive the Exile, inherit his promises afresh, and enjoy restoration to the land" (IOT 325). On the Remnant see 6:8-10; 9:7-10 and 10:18 with 11:13, 17-19; 12:15-16; 14:22-23. Note the answer to the prophet's question, "will you destroy the entire remnant" (9:8).

God is sovereign over the nations of the earth, over time, and over the destinies of his chosen people.

8A. Message for us

1) This book should cause us to acknowledge the holiness, wisdom and sovereignty of God over the nations and in the bestowal of mercy.

2) We should acknowledge our responsibility personally. We are responsible for our sins and will bear its consequences if we spiral downward in disobedience to our Creator.

3) We should place our hope in God

But God will save a people through his rule of the nations (he directs them with hooks in their jaws, 38:4; as his drawn sword, 21:3, 19-21), through judgment, and through the bestowal of a new heart, all for his name's sake (36:22, 25-26; 17:22; 20:44; 11:17-18).

Ezekiel looked to the distant future to another destruction of the city when her Shepherd King would proclaim that not one stone of the temple would be left untouched by judgment. Again, it is because Israel would not be gathered in obedience to the Lord. She will kill her Shepherd destroying the temple of the living God themselves but Jesus will raise the temple in three days.

Then he will bring Israel from the nations to one stick, with one shepherd (Jn 10, other sheep). He will bring them by a sovereign and effectual call and they will hear. He will call them by name and form a new temple, a new place of the dwelling of God. Not in Jerusalem nor in Samaria, this new temple will be the people themselves, bought with the price of his blood as loving shepherd, and worshipping him in spirit and truth across the face of the earth (I Cor 5; Jn. 10).

Now the Lord is there among the nations and will be with us to the end of the age (Mt. 28).

Another huge step has been taken in the unfolding of the purposes of God in history that will culminate ultimately in the heavenly city in eternal Sabbath rest with God.

4) We must give all glory to God

See Ezekiel 36, God does not save us for our sakes! Our blessing is caught up in His glory.