



Introduction to Ezekiel

The Prophet's Background

At the time of his calling in 593 BC, Ezekiel was among the Hebrew exiles, having been taken to Babylon during the second wave of captures from Judah in 597 BC. Ezekiel was married, but his wife died just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Given his family's priestly background and the fact that at his age men would start to be introduced to Temple service, Ezekiel is called instead to be a prophet for Yahweh. His lifetime spanned the reigns of the last kings of Judah, from Josiah until the fall of Judah to the Babylonians in 586 BC. He was born in the year before the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) was found while the Temple was being repaired in Josiah's reign, and this find gave impetus to Josiah's religious reforms. Thus, Ezekiel's formative years were spent under these ultimately failed reforms, and he would have been 14 years old when Josiah was killed.

The Historical Situation

Ezekiel has more chronological references than any other of the prophets, and his ministry can be dated precisely from 593 to 573 BC, a tumultuous period which precedes and follows the fall and destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Though Scripture describes Josiah as a good king, none of his successors were. Josiah was immediately succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz who ruled for only three months before he was taken hostage by the Egyptians (r. 609 BC). The Egyptians installed another of Josiah's sons on the throne, Jehoiakim, on the throne as a vassal and he ruled for eleven years (r. 609-597 BC). After the Battle of Carchemish, Jehoiakim became a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon for three years, before rebelling. In retaliation, Nebuchadnezzar encouraged Judah's neighbors, in particular, the Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites to plunder it. Upon Jehoiakim's death, his son Jehoiachin assumed the throne, ruling only three months before being deported to Babylon as a captive in 597 BC. This was the second time that Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Judah; the first was in 605 BC after the Battle of Carchemish. The Babylonians installed their own vassal on the throne, Zedekiah, who himself was deposed in 586 BC with Babylon's final invasion of Judah and its destruction of the Temple. As a result, Judah ceased to exist as a country and its people – or at least its ruling elites – were hauled off into captivity.

The Covenantal Significance of the Book

Ezekiel was among the exiles, but his ministry prior to the destruction of Jerusalem focused on prophesying God's righteous judgment upon Judah for its sins. He had to disabuse the people of the popular ideas that the exile was not their fault and that their captivity would be over quickly. After Jerusalem fell, his ministry shifted to give the people hope that God would restore a remnant of His people, as He promised in Deuteronomy 30:1-3. Given his priestly background, Ezekiel devotes much attention to Yahweh's holiness, transcendence, and glory. Ezekiel foresaw the day in which God renews his covenants with His people and restores His presence among them. This theme can be seen in the departure of God's glory from the Temple at the beginning of the book and His return to the New Temple at the end. This eschatological imagery would be later picked up in the Book of Revelation.



Outline of Ezekiel

I. Ezekiel's Call as a Prophet and Initial Vision (chs. 1-3)

- A. Preface (1:1-3)
- B. The Vision of the Throne Chariot (1:4-28)
- C. The Call (2:1-3:15)
- D. The Watchman (3:16-21)
- E. The Spirit Comes Upon Ezekiel (3:22-27)

II. Oracles of Judgment on Jerusalem (chs. 4-24)

- A. Symbolic Actions Regarding the Siege of Jerusalem (chs. 4-5)
- B. Prophecies Against the Land (chs. 6-7)
- C. Vision of the Temple's Corruption (chs. 8-11)
- D. Symbolic Acts Regarding Jerusalem's Exile (ch. 12)
- E. Prophecies of Divine Judgment chs. 13-24
 - 1. False Prophets (ch. 13)
 - 2. People of Idolatry (ch. 14)
 - 3. Parables of the Vine, the Wife, and the Eagles (chs. 15-17)
 - 4. A False Proverb Refuted (ch. 18)
 - 5. Parables of the Lioness and the Vine (ch. 19)
 - 6. Review of Israel's Rebellion (ch. 20)
 - 7. Babylon as the Sword of the Lord (ch. 21)
 - 8. The Sins of Jerusalem (ch. 22)
 - 9. Parable of the Immoral Sisters (ch. 23)
 - 10. Parable of the Cooking Pot and the Death of Ezekiel's Wife (ch. 24)

III. Oracles Against Foreign Nations (chs. 25-32)

- A. Ammon (25:1-7)
- B. Moab (25:8-11)
- C. Edom (25:12-14)
- D. Philistia (25:15-17)
- E. Tyre (26:1-28:19)
- F. Sidon (28:20-26)
- G. Egypt (chs. 29-32)

IV. Oracles for the Restoration of Israel (chs. 33-48)

- A. The Fall and Exile of Jerusalem (ch. 33)
- B. The Lord as the Good Shepherd (ch. 34)
- C. Oracles Against Edom (ch. 35)
- D. Blessing on Israel (ch. 36)
- E. Restoration of Israel (ch. 37)
- F. The Final Battle of Gog and Magog (chs. 38-39)
- G. The Glory of the Lord Returning to the Temple (chs. 40-48)