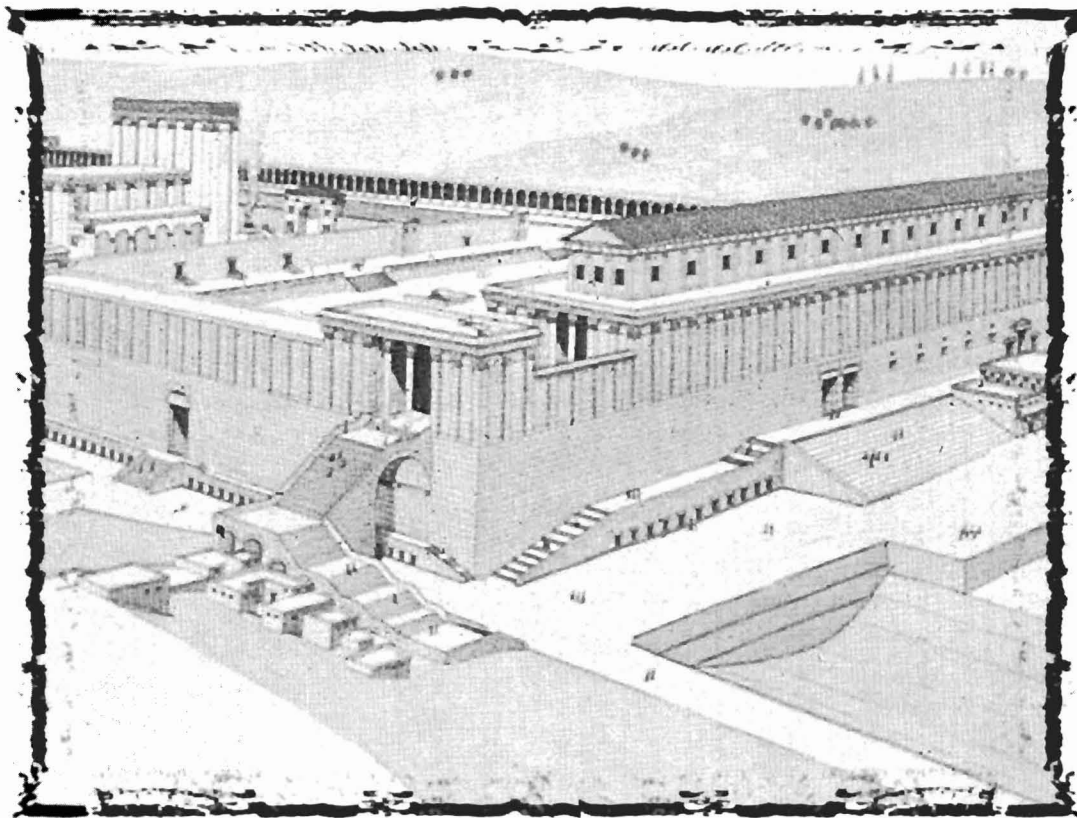


EZEKIEL



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Artist's drawing of Herod's Temple, Jerusalem

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. His ministry spanned the time period in which Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed

Ezekiel was one of the persons taken into Babylonian exile in 597 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem. According to Ezekiel 3:15 and 8:1 Ezekiel had his own house in exile. He lived in the city of Tel-abib on the river Chebar.

According to Ezekiel 1:2 he receives a call to be a prophet in the fifth year of the Exile—probably 593 B.C. The last oracle in the book that has a specific date is in Chapter 29. Ezekiel 29:17 refers to the twenty-seventh year of exile, which was 571 B.C.

Ezekiel's career as a prophet lasted for at least two decades. It could have been longer since much of Ezekiel is not dated

and could have come from a later period.

Before looking at the specific content of the Book of Ezekiel, two general comments about Ezekiel will help us better understand the book as a whole. First of all Ezekiel came from a priestly background. Thus, unlike most of the other prophets, Ezekiel was strongly interested in priestly matters, in worship, in dietary laws, in ceremonial forms, in matters of clean and unclean, and in meticulous fulfillment of the Law.

Second, Ezekiel's activity was far more unusual and imaginative than that of any other prophet. For example, Ezekiel lived in exile, hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, and carried out his ministry there.

Nonetheless, he did much of his preaching as if he were actually in Jerusalem addressing its citizens rather than speaking

to the exiles. He claimed that the Spirit carried him from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Book of Ezekiel falls into four distinct parts. Chapters 1 to 24 are prophecies of judgment and warning to Judah and Jerusalem about the coming destruction. These prophecies primarily date to the time before the fall of Jerusalem.

Chapters 25 to 32 are speeches against or condemnation of foreign nations, especially Egypt and the Phoenician city of Tyre, as well as other neighbors of Judah. These prophecies come from various times in Ezekiel's career.

Chapters 33 to 39 are prophecies about the judgment and future restoration of the people. These date from after the fall of Jerusalem.

Chapters 40 to 48 describe the ideal and restored land of Israel, the sacred city, and the holy Temple, which the prophet sees in a vision. Now let us examine the book more closely.

The first three chapters of the book describe the prophet's call and commission. Ezekiel sees a vision of God that comes with a stormy wind out of the north accompanied by a great cloud and lightning. From the wind and cloud come four creatures with composite features, partly human and partly animal, each possessing four wings and four faces. The faces are those of a human being, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Accompanying the creatures are four wheels with rims and spokes—with eyes filling the rims. Wheels are inside the wheels, and as the creatures move, so do the wheels.

Over the creatures and wheels Ezekiel sees a platform with the likeness of a throne, on which one sits with the likeness of a human form. The one on the throne then commissions him. Ezekiel 2:3-7 describes Ezekiel's commission. Read verses 3 and 4.

The prophet then sees a hand holding a scroll that has writing on it, front and back.

God commands the prophet to eat the scroll. He does so, and it tastes as sweet as honey. The rest of Chapter 3 describes how the prophet sits overwhelmed for many days before he begins his activity.

The vision of Ezekiel is a revelation of the glory of the Lord. Read Ezekiel 1:26-28 for a description of that glory. Then answer these questions.

a. How did Ezekiel describe the throne of the Lord God?

b. Ezekiel described the appearance of the Lord. Write that description below.

c. To what did Ezekiel liken the brightness round about God?

EZEKIEL 4-11

Chapters 4 and 5 describe acts the prophet carries out to symbolize the coming fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the chosen people. He draws a portrayal of Jerusalem on a brick and then attacks it with war toys. He lies on his side for many days, symbolizing the length of time the



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Coin with facade of Jerusalem Temple on one side

people will be punished. He eats a sparse diet that symbolizes God's breaking of the staff of bread. Ezekiel cuts off the hair of his head and face and uses it to symbolize the people of Jerusalem, some of whom will die by the sword, others will burn, and the remainder will scatter to the winds.

Ezekiel tells his people that God's glory is leaving the people and the Temple. He describes the reasons for God's leaving in Chapters 7 through 11. Chapter 8 especially describes the pagan forms of worship that the prophet sees in his vision of the Jerusalem Temple.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem is depicted in Ezekiel 5. Read Ezekiel 5:7-12 for the answers to the following questions.

a. Why was God determined to execute judgment in the midst of Jerusalem? (5:7)

b. How extreme were conditions in Jerusalem to be when God executed judgment? (5:10)

c. What part of the people might survive the war, and what would become of them? (5:12)

2. Now read Ezekiel 6:8-10. What is God's purpose in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the survivors?

EZEKIEL 12-32

In Chapter 12 Ezekiel carries out further symbolic acts. And in Chapter 13 he preaches against the prophets. Chapter 16 presents Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem's history. God describes her as a harlot.

In Chapter 18 Ezekiel argues that each person is responsible for his or her own

sins and that God judges each person according to her or his condition at the time of the judgment. The prophet here opposes the view of some of his contemporaries who argue that their troubles are due to the sins of their fathers. The people try to excuse themselves by quoting the proverb: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Ezekiel speaks of this principle of divine judgment in Ezekiel 18:20. Read this verse.

In Chapter 20 Ezekiel gives his version of the people's history. He pictures that history as one of continual sin and faithlessness that began even before the people left Egypt. The rest of Ezekiel's sermons of judgment in Chapters 20 to 25 are similar in content to those mentioned previously. Chapters 25 to 32 contain speeches against foreign nations.

Skim through Ezekiel 25–32, which contains oracles against foreign peoples. Which peoples does Ezekiel condemn in these prophecies?

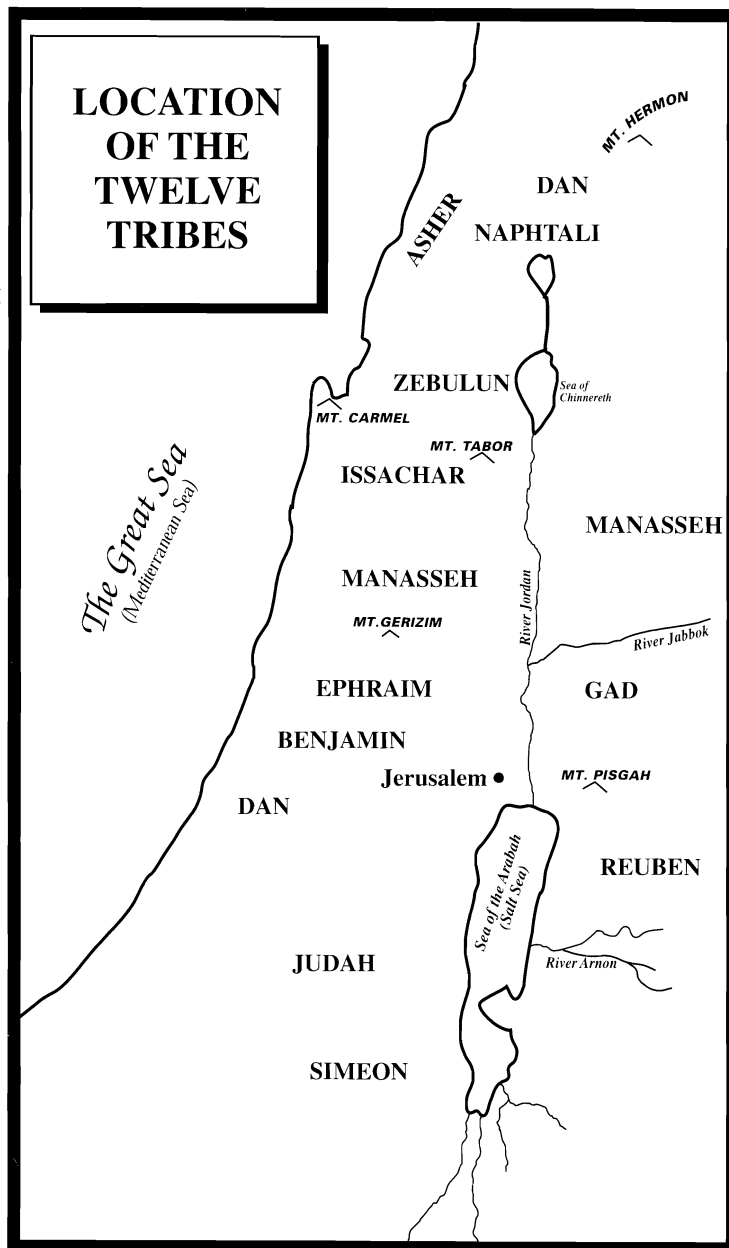
a. (25:2)

b. (25:8-9)

c. (25:12-13)

d. (25:15-16)

e. (26:2-3)



f. (28:20-21)

g. (29:2)

EZEKIEL 33-39

We find Ezekiel's hopeful prophecies of the good time beyond the judgment in Chapters 33 to 39. Chapter 37 is a typical proclamation of Ezekiel. In this chapter, he views the people in exile as a valley filled with unburied bones. He discusses with God whether the bones can live. God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones. Read Ezekiel 37:7-10, where he describes the events that follow.

Ezekiel then envisions the restoration of both Israel and Judah under the rule of David.

Chapters 38 and 39 are rather unique. In them, Ezekiel talks about Gog from the land of Magog who attacks the chosen people, wages war against them, and finally loses. We do not know who Ezekiel is describing in these chapters, but persons throughout history have associated Gog with a particular enemy of their time.

Chapter 34 is an oracle about the shepherds (leaders) of Israel. They have failed in their responsibilities. A messianic promise follows. God will appoint a new shepherd. Read 34:23-31, and respond to these questions.

a. With whom is the messianic shepherd identified? (verse 23)

b. In the messianic days, how will the Lord relate to the sheep (people)? (verse 25)

c. God will meet two needs of the people in those days. What are those needs? (verse 29)

d. What will be the mutual relationship between the Lord God and the people of Israel at that time? (verses 30-31)

EZEKIEL 40-48

Chapters 40 to 48 contain a sketch of the restored community in the land of promise. Ezekiel first of all describes the structure of the restored Temple, giving measurements of its courts, gates, and chambers as well as descriptions of the Temple building and its decorations. In Ezekiel 43:2 the prophet says he sees the glory of God returning to the restored Temple. Chapters 43 through 46 describe the various activities in the Temple. Ezekiel even comments in 46:21-24 on the kitchens in the new Temple. He tells us that this is "where those who serve at the temple shall boil the sacrifices of the people."

In Chapter 47 Ezekiel describes a great stream—perhaps the river of life—which he sees flowing from beneath the Temple. The stream is full of fish, and its sweet waters flow into the Dead Sea, making it

fresh. Along the stream grow trees that bear fresh fruit each month and whose leaves are for healing. Finally, he sees the land of Canaan divided into twelve equal districts—a district for each of the twelve tribes. This allotment of territory and the location of the tribes form the content of Chapter 48.

SUMMARY

Ezekiel paints a marvelous portrait of expectation about the renewed people, with a new Temple in a renewed land where life is idyllic, almost like that in the garden of Eden. When you think about the contents of Ezekiel's prophecy, remember the following elements.

- (1) Ezekiel's predictions of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 1–24)
- (2) Ezekiel's condemnation of foreign nations (Ezekiel 25–32)
- (3) Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37)
- (4) Ezekiel's vision of a battle between Gog and Israel (Ezekiel 38–39)
- (5) Ezekiel's vision of the restored community in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40–48)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. A key phrase in the Book of Ezekiel is *the glory of the Lord/God*. You will recall seeing it on page 93 of the workbook questions (Ezekiel 1:28). The glory of the Lord departed from the Temple in Jerusalem and came to Chaldea (Babylon), we are told in 11:22-24. Later, in his vision of a new city and Temple, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord return to Jerusalem and the Temple (43:1-5). Discuss what this movement of the glory of the Lord might have symbolized. If you had been in exile in Babylon and Ezekiel described these visions to you, do

you think you would have been uplifted or depressed as a result? Where is the glory of God today?

2. Ezekiel was called to be a watchman for the house of Israel (3:16-21). God told him that, "if . . . you give them no warning, . . . their blood I will require at your hand." How does this warning apply to every Christian today? Compare the responsibility that God gave Ezekiel with the one now given to Christians. How are the two warnings similar? How are they different?

3. A prevalent idea in the Old Testament was that the penalty for the sins of one generation could fall on following generations. Deuteronomy 5:9 mentions God's "punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation." But in 18:1-32, Ezekiel calls the people to personal accountability. They cannot blame their misfortunes on their ancestors. What aspects of our modern life could cause future generations of Americans to condemn us?

4. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones teaches that God is the key to life, that the presence of God's spirit makes the difference between death and life. Where do you see examples of the Spirit bringing life today?

DAILY READINGS FOR DANIEL

- Day 1: Daniel 1:1-7
Day 2: Daniel 2:31-45
Day 3: Daniel 5:13-28
Day 4: Daniel 7:1-14
Day 5: Daniel 7:15-28
Day 6: Daniel 9:1-10
Day 7: Daniel 12:1-13