



EZEKIEL

Survey of the Old Testament: The Prophets

Fall 2005

Introduction

Background

Name & Author: From the start of the book we learn that the book has been written by a man named Ezekiel (1:3). Ezekiel is a priest, the son of Buzi, and he was in the land of the Chaldeans.

Ezekiel was deported to Babylon, along with King Jehoiachin, during the second siege of Jerusalem. King Jehoiakim had died during his rebellion against Babylon. His son, King Jehoiachin ruled for 3 months before Babylon had retaken Jerusalem and deported the king along with Ezekiel and others. Ezekiel was 8 years old at the time of his deportation.

When Ezekiel was 13 years old, in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile when he received his first vision and his call by God. As part of the priestly family, Ezekiel would have been eligible to begin serving as a priest in the temple at the age of 13. However, as an exile he would not be able to fulfill his priestly calling. Instead, God calls him as his prophet in Babylon.

Date: Ezekiel provides date markers 13 times throughout the book. The prophecies are, with one exception, presented in chronological order.

Dating in Ezekiel				
Event		Year	Month	Day
The first year of Jehoiachin's captivity (2 Kings 24:12)	June 597	—	—	—
The beginning of Ezekiel's ministry and his first message (1:1-3)	June/July 593	5	—	5
Ezekiel's 2 nd dated message: the vision of temple abominations (8:1)	Aug./Sept. 592	6	6	5
Ezekiel's 3 rd dated message: response to the elders' inquiry (20:1)	July/Aug. 591	7	5	10
Ezekiel's 4 th dated message: Jerusalem's judgment (24:1)	Dec./Jan. 589/588	9	10	10
Beginning of the final siege (2 Kings 25:1)	Dec./Jan. 589/588	—	—	—
Ezekiel's 5 th dated message: judgment on Tyre (26:1)	March/April 587-586	11	—	1
Ezekiel's 6 th dated message: judgment on Egypt (29:1)	Dec./Jan. 588/687	10	10	12
Ezekiel's 7 th dated message: judgment on Egypt (29:17)	March/April 571	27	1	1
Ezekiel's 8 th dated message: news of Pharaoh's defeat (30:20)	March/April 587	11	1	7
Ezekiel's 9 th dated message: news of Pharaoh's final defeat (31:1)	May/June 587	11	3	1
Siege of Jerusalem in progress (Jer. 21:1-2)	587	—	—	—
Ezekiel's 10 th dated message: lament over Pharaoh (32:1)	March 585	12	12	1
Ezekiel's 11 th dated message: lament over Pharaoh (32:17)	April 585	12	12	15
Destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:8)	Sept. 586	—	—	—
Ezekiel's 12 th dated message: news of Jerusalem's fall (33:21)	Dec./Jan. 586/585	12	10	5
Ezekiel's 13 th dated message: millennial vision (40:1)	March/April 573	25	1	10

Source: The Expositor's Bible Commentary

These 13 dates center around 3 specific events in the history of Judah:

- Chapters 1-24 take place before the final siege of Jerusalem (597 – 591 BC).
- Chapters 25-31 take place during the two-year long siege of Jerusalem (587 BC).
- Chapters 32-48 take place after the destruction of Jerusalem (585 – 573 BC).

Audience: Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah. However, while Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem, Ezekiel's audience were the exiles in Babylon. Specifically, Ezekiel prophesied in Tel Abib near the river Chebar, a tributary of the Euphrates River in the southeastern section of modern day Iraq.

The deportees in Babylon were not treated as captives. The Jewish exiles were able to travel freely in Babylon, live in houses, and engage in business activities¹.

As the exiles received news from home, Ezekiel's prophecies provided God's commentary on the events taking place in Jerusalem, providing an explanation of the causes of Jerusalem's fall, a call to personal accountability for the fall, and encouragement after the fall.

Style

To the modern reader, Ezekiel seems a weird book. His prophecies are often in the context of visions which include unusual and strange. He sees strange creatures and contraptions (chapter 1). He is teleported thousand of miles to Jerusalem where, like the invisible man, he is able to creep around the temple to see the odd activities taking place there (chapter 8). He sees a valley of dry bones come to life and get joined together (chapter 37). He is transported in time to a new temple which he measures with great detail (chapter 40).

While these visions strike us as odd and cryptic, this genre fits a style of literature which was popular in Babylon at this time. There are numerous examples of "dream vision" literature from seventh and sixth century BC Mesopotamia. Since Ezekiel was writing to exiles in Mesopotamia, his audience would have been quite familiar with this style of writing and it would not have seemed odd or unusual to them².

Structure

The book of Ezekiel is structured along chronological lines. The three major sections of the book correspond to the 3 events in Judah's history.

Prophecies of Judah's Judgment						Prophecies Against Other Nations				Prophecies of Judah's Restoration										
Ezekiel's Call	Defeat of Jerusalem	Departure of God's Glory	Against The False Prophets & Elders	Against the Kings	Inevitability of the Jerusalem's Fall	Against Judah's Neighbors	Against Tyre & Sidon	Against Egypt	Restoration of Israel	God's Glory Returns										
1	3	4	7	8	11	12	14	15	19	20	24	25	26	28	29	32	33	39	40	48

¹ Alexander.

² Nelson Study Bible.

Purpose

Ezekiel is called by God to be the watchman of Israel. In Ezekiel 3:17-21, God tells Ezekiel that his role is to take the words of God and use them to warn his people. It is not Ezekiel's responsibility to bring about repentance, only to communicate the words of God.

If Ezekiel, the watchman, does not provide warning to Israel, then he will be responsible for the destruction of the people. But if he communicates the warning, then responsibility lies with those who heard the warning of the watchman and ignored it (Ezekiel 33:2-9). The message of the watchman is for the people to turn away from their wickedness so that they might live (Ezekiel 33:11, 14-15).

The purpose of the book of Ezekiel is to bring the exiles to a point of personal accountability for the destruction of Jerusalem and call them to repentance.

Theme

First, the explanations, warnings and encouragement are all given in the context of the presence of God's glory in the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's message is given after he sees the glory of God. Ezekiel sees God's glory leave the temple in Jerusalem in response to the abominations taking place there. Finally, Ezekiel predicts the restoration of God's glory in a new temple which will be built in the future.

Secondly, repeatedly Ezekiel declares that his prophecies are given so that the exiles might know that Yahweh is their God. The phrase "know that I am God" is used 65-times in the book of Ezekiel.

Prophecies of Judah's Judgment (chapters 1-24)

Ezekiel's Call (chapters 1 – 3)

The First Vision (1:4 - 3:15)

Description of the cherubim (1:4- 25)

Ezekiel's vision begins with a description of some amazing creatures, which he saw by the Chebar River in Babylon. He uses incredible detail as he draws for us a picture of what these creatures look like. The importance of this description becomes apparent as we work through the book. Each time hereafter that Ezekiel has a vision of the glory of God, he refers back to the "vision I saw by the River Chebar" (43:3).

Description of the Glory of the LORD (1:26 - 28a)

The appearance of God himself follows the arrival of the Cherubim. This is a revelation of the glory of the LORD. As discussed in Jonah, while God is omnipresent, and while no one has seen God, there are times in human history where God has revealed more of himself in a specific place. This is described in scripture as the glory of the LORD. Ezekiel is chosen to see this revelation.

Ezekiel's Response & the Spirit's Entry (1:28b - 2:2)

His response is not unexpected. He falls on his face. Yet it is this very act of humility that seems to trigger a response in God, who asks him to stand on his feet. Ezekiel then receives the Holy Spirit and is able to then understand what God is saying³.

³ For more details regarding the Holy Spirit's work of revealing the truth, see John 14:26 and 1 Corinthians 2:13

Ezekiel's Call (2:3 - 3:15)

God then gives Ezekiel his mission:

(Ezekiel 2:3 NASB) "Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day."

His mission is to proclaim the Word of the LORD to the Israelites living in Babylon. God warns him that they will not want to listen and that he needs to be ready for that.

The Second Vision (3:16 - 3:27)

After the first vision, Ezekiel remains astonished for seven days, when God reiterates Ezekiel's mission:

(Ezekiel 3:17 NASB) ""Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me."

Then God revealed his glory to Ezekiel again, and Ezekiel finds himself flat on his face again. God responds by filling him with the Holy Spirit and giving him a specific message.

Defeat of Jerusalem (chapters 4 – 7)

Ezekiel's Sermon Illustrations

God gives Ezekiel a series of illustrations to demonstrate his message to the exiles. First, God asks Ezekiel to set up a model of the city. Then he is set up a siege against his model to illustrate the coming siege against Jerusalem. Ezekiel's model of Jerusalem and toy soldiers and siege machines was to serve as a sign to Israel (4:1-3).

Then God asks Ezekiel to lie down on his left side for over a year (4:4-5). After that he is to lie down on his right side for another 40 days (4:6). The 410 days represent the number of days that Babylon would lay siege to Jerusalem. Of course, it is difficult to lay on one's side for over a year, so he is to be tied up in ropes so he can't turn over. Imagine the bed sores!

While Ezekiel lies on his side, his food and water is limited and he is to cook over a fire made of human dung. This is to represent the famine and lack of resources which Jerusalem would face while under siege. Understandably, Ezekiel isn't too excited about cooking over human dung, so God relents and allows him to cook over cow's dung instead.

In chapter 5, Ezekiel is to shave his head and divide his hair into three piles (5:1-2, 12). The shaving of the head is a sign of shame amongst the Jews, and especially for a priest. The first pile would be burned representing people being consumed by famine. The second pile is to be hit with a sword, representing people who will be killed by the sword. The third scattered to the wind, representing those taken into exile.

In chapter 12, God tells Ezekiel to pack his bags and set them out, and then pretend to leave Jerusalem with his bags (12:1-7). This was to prepare the people for the coming of more exiles from Jerusalem after it is destroyed. Those that are spared from famine and sword and arrive in Babylon for exile are coming to demonstrate to the exiles that that Yahweh is God (12:16).

In each of these cases, God has Ezekiel do some dramatic object lessons in order to get the attention of the exiles.

Unforgettable Sermons		
Passage	Ezekiel's Activity	Explanation
4:1-3	Writing on a clay tablet	Ezekiel used a clay tablet to sketch out or build a model depicting how Babylon would lay siege to Jerusalem.
4:4-8	Lying on his side	Ezekiel lay on his side to demonstrate that the length of Babylon's siege would correspond to the number of years Israel had sinned against their God.
4:9-17	Baking bread over dung	Ezekiel baked his bread with a fire fueled by dung, which was offensive to the Jews. Ezekiel was illustrating that their impending captivity would force them to eat polluted food that would mirror the filthiness of their sin.
5:1-4	Shaving his head	Ezekiel shaved his head as a sign of mourning. The burning of a third of his hair symbolized the fires that would destroy Jerusalem; the chopped hair stood for the people who would die by the sword; and the hair scattered in the wind represented those Jews who would be taken away into captivity.
12:1-16	Packing his bags	Ezekiel pantomimed leaving Jerusalem to prepare the watching crowds for the coming exile of the citizens of Jerusalem.
12:17-28	Quivering	Trembling and shuddering while he ate, Ezekiel acted out the awful fear the Jews would face when their enemies swept through the land.
20:45-49	Facing south and preaching to the forest	Ezekiel preached toward the south in order to show that God would send judgment on Judah, the southern kingdom.
21:1-32	Preaching about a sword while sighing	Facing Jerusalem, Ezekiel used, instead of fire, the picture of a sword to prophesy destruction. His deep sighs were intended to demonstrate the heavy hearts the people would have.
24:15-27	Refusing to mourn for his wife	God took Ezekiel's wife as a sign of the overwhelming sadness the nation would feel when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.
37:15-28	Holding two sticks together	Ezekiel pictured the restoration of Israel by writing on one stick the name of Judah and on the other the name of Joseph, and then holding them together.
Source: Nelson's Study Bible		

Prophecies of Judah's Destruction

In chapter 6 God condemns the mountains of Israel. The sin of the people will affect not just themselves, but the entire land. The mountains are especially marked out for destruction, for it was in the high places where the Israelites and Judeans erected their shrines and altars to the idols. All the cities and dwelling places and the high places will be destroyed so that "you will know that I am Yahweh" (6:6-7, 13-14).

In chapter 7 Ezekiel predicts the coming two-year siege of Jerusalem (7:10-11). He describes the army outside the city ready for battle (7:14-15), but no one from inside the city is going out to face battle. Instead they are suffering famine and plague (7:15). Their wealth and money will be unable to buy food (7:19) and commerce is at a standstill (7:12-13). The violence of the people has taken hold and now punishment is assured (7:26-27).

Departure of God's Glory (chapters 8 – 11)

Background on God's Glory Filling the Temple

The Tabernacle

After the Exodus, the Israelites encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 24:15-18, God's glory is sitting on top of Mt. Sinai as He gives the law to His people. The next 7 chapters of the book

give the detailed instructions of how the people are to build the tabernacle. Then from chapters 38-40, Moses records how the Israelites carried out God's instructions for building the tabernacle.

The climax of the book comes in Chapter 40, when the tabernacle is completed and Moses dedicates the temple. The cloud of God's glory comes over the tabernacle and fills it with God's glory. So great was this revelation of God's glory, that Moses himself could not enter the tabernacle.

This was the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Israel -- that he would be their God and dwell among them. God's glory stayed with Israel in the tabernacle. He revealed himself to them in a special way in this specific place and time.

The Temple of Solomon

Several centuries after the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, God's glory continued to dwell in the tabernacle made of tents. Finally, under Solomon, a temple was built to Yahweh in Jerusalem. Upon the completion of the temple, the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies.

(1 Kings 8:10-11 NASB) "And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, [11] so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD."

That God would dwell among the Israelites was amazing to Solomon, who in his dedication prayer asks:

(1 Kings 8:27-29 NASB) ""But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have built! [28] "Yet have regard to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Thy servant prays before Thee today; [29] that Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which Thou hast said, 'My name shall be there,' to listen to the prayer which Thy servant shall pray toward this place."

God chose the temple at that time to be a place where He revealed more of himself. His glory dwelt in Jerusalem, within the Holy of Holies, as His fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant.

The Abominations in the Temple (Chapter 8)

The Israelites had a commitment to keep in this Mosaic covenant as well. Because of God's holiness, He would not be able to stay where abominations were taking place. Ezekiel 8-11 reveals the abominations of the people in the temple itself, and then the inevitable departure of God's glory from the temple.

There are six abominations that God reveals to Ezekiel in a vision:

Idolatrous Portrayals on the Wall (8:10)

The inner walls of the temple had been covered with images of "abominable beasts" and idols. The idolatry of Israel had permeated into the Temple of Yahweh itself.

Hidden Idolatry (8:11-12)

The elders of Judah are inside the temple practicing idolatry, thinking that because they think that Yahweh has forsaken them. As such, they do not think God sees their idolatrous sins practice in secret.

Weeping for Tammuz (8:13-14)

Tammuz was the Summarian god of fertility, who every summer would die and become god of the underworld, as the hot Middle Eastern sun would dry up the ground.⁴ It is likely that the women were weeping at the annual rite of this god's death in the late spring.

Turning their back on God (8:15-16)

Twenty-five elders of Judah turn their backs on the temple of Yahweh, right in front of the temple and worship the sun. This is a tremendous insult, physically turning their backs away from the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling place, and worship the creation rather than the creator. In essence, they are turning their spiritual backs on God. God responds by asking, "Is it a trivial things to the house of Judah to commit abominations which they commit here?"

Violence (8:17)

This idolatry breeds violence.

Insulting God (8:17)

Scholars are not exactly sure what the gesture of putting the branch to their nose is. However, it is a clear insult to God. It is a defiant and deliberate snubbing of Yahweh.

God's Glory Leaves the Temple*God's Fury (Chapter 9)*

Next in Ezekiel's vision, God calls six men, described as the keepers of the city, to go throughout the city and mark those who "cry over all the abominations." Then, to kill all those who do not have the mark.

God's Glory Departs (Chapter 10)

Ezekiel then watches as the glory of the LORD departs from the temple. This happens in stages as God's glory first leaves the Holy of Holies (10:4) and pauses at the threshold of the temple. Ezekiel describes the process in detail as the cherubim move with God's glory from place to place. Then in verses 18-19, the glory of the LORD leaves the threshold and rests above the east gate of the temple.

The Restoration & Final Departure of God's Glory*Prediction of the Return from Captivity (11:1-21)*

At the East Gate we see additional abominations and God's judgment on the leadership of Judah. In view of the fury of God shown, Ezekiel asks a very legitimate question in verse 13:

(Ezekiel 11:13 NASB) "Alas, Lord GOD! Wilt Thou bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?"

God responds in the following verses by disclosing a time when Israel will be gathered and restored, and they will follow God in obedience. This is the restoration of Israel which was fulfilled only in part by the return from captivity, but which will be fulfilled in full at a yet future time.

The Final Departure from the Mountain (11:22-25)

God's glory, accompanied by the cherubim, then leaves the east gate of the temple and rests on the mountain east of the city. This is the Mount of Olives.

⁴ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Moody Press: Downers Grove IL, 1974, p. 99.

The Fulfillment of Christ

As Dyer puts it in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, “It is no coincidence that Christ ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12) and promised to return at the same place (Acts 1:11, cf. Zach 14:4)”⁵

In John 1:14 we learn that Jesus himself is the fullness of God’s glory. Jesus himself states:

(John 13:31-32 NASB) "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; [32] if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately."

God is glorified in the redemptive work of Jesus. He is the glory of God that is revealed and rejected by Israel. Keil states that Christ’s ascension, then, is an act of judgment upon the Jews.⁶ This is not so implausible of a theory, for, as we learned in Daniel, the final destruction of Jerusalem comes after the Messiah is cut off (Daniel 9:26). The temple has been forsaken, and judgment has come to Israel for not only idolatry, but for rejecting the Messiah (Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 21:42-44).

Prophecies Against the Leadership (chapters 12 – 19)

Prophecies Against Prophets & Elders

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel faced false prophets who contradicted his words of judgment. The people didn’t believe that Ezekiel’s prophecies would come true (12:22, 27). So God promises Ezekiel that his words will be coming true and the prophecies will not be delayed any longer (12:23, 28).

Ezekiel then condemns the false prophets. God will be against the prophets and they will be cut off from Israel (13:9a). They have declared that there will be peace, whitewashing the buildings (13:10). All of these prophecies are given “so that they may know I am Lord Yahweh” (13:9b).

The elders of Israel come to visit Ezekiel in chapter 14. God tells Ezekiel to condemn them for their idolatry and their hypocrisy in coming to him for counsel (14:3). Those who have idolatry in their heart and then come to seek a word from the Lord will be cut off from the people (14:7). This is done “so you will know that I am the Lord” (14:8).

These are strong words of warning. We are called to proclaim the truth of God’s word, and not white wash the message. We are not to tickle people’s ears and deliver the comfortable message. We are to be true to the Word.

In addition, we are warned not to come seeking a word from the Lord if we don’t intend to do anything with it. If we are looking to obey the Word, if we have idolatry in our hearts, we are condemned in the same way as those who prophecy falsely.

Prophecies Against the King

After Ezekiel condemns the elders and false prophets, in chapter 17 he gives a parable of two eagles, one small and one great. The great eagle represents the King of Babylon and predicts the coming exile of King Zedekiah by Babylon. In chapter 19 Ezekiel proclaims a lament for the princes of Israel. He compares the King of Judah to a lion (a common picture of the throne of David), but this lion has been put into a cage (19:9). The branch and root of Jesse has been extinguished (19:14).

Personal & Corporate Responsibility (chapter 18)

Ezekiel quotes a proverb used by the exiles:

The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge

⁵ Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, ed., Victor Books, 1988, p.1249.

⁶ C.F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, as discussed in Taylor, p. 113.

As the exiles were looking at the fall of Jerusalem, there was a sense that this was due to the sins of their fathers, but they themselves were not responsible. The fall of Jerusalem was not causing the exiles to be introspective or consider their own culpability in the destruction of Jerusalem.

So God tells the people that they are no longer to use that proverb. The son does not bear the punishment for the father's sin, nor does the father bear punishment for the son's sin (18:20). Those who practice righteousness will not be punished (18:9), but those who practice evil will be punished (18:10-13).

That does not mean that the exiles weren't experiencing hardship as a consequence of the sin of their fathers. This is an important principle: our sins cause hardship for others. But that hardship is not the same as judgment from God.

Furthermore, hardship does not serve as an excuse to continue in sin. Instead, each person will be judged according to their own sin (18:30a). The exiles should not be blaming the judgment on others, but instead the exiles should look to themselves and repent from their sins (18:30b) and make a new heart and new spirit (18:31). For God doesn't want to punish anyone (18:32). Therefore, repent and live!

When faced with hardship caused by the sin of others, we too must not blame others, but instead we need to examine ourselves and see what culpability we might have. God will judge us not based on how others act, but on how we act. Yes, we will suffer hardship, but if we repent we can be sure that we will have the Lord's protection.

Inevitability of Judgment (chapters 20-24)

The first set of prophecies are completed with the announcement by God that the King of Babylon has begun the final siege against Jerusalem (24:1-2). At the same time this happens, Ezekiel's wife dies. But Ezekiel is prevented from mourning his wife (24:16-18). This was to serve as a sign to the exiles that they were not to mourn the coming destruction of Jerusalem, for this was done so that they will know that He is Yahweh, their God (24:24, 27).

Prophecies Against Other Nations (chapters 25-32)

The second set of prophecies are given after Babylon begins its two-year long siege against Jerusalem. Things don't look good for Jerusalem, and the nations around Judah are reveling in the destruction of their neighbor. In response, God gives Ezekiel prophecies of judgment against the other nations for rejoicing in the destruction of Judah. This is in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, which states that those who curse Israel will be cursed (Genesis 12:3)⁷. This message would have been one of encouragement for the exiles, for God was still faithful to the Abrahamic covenant and did not rejoice in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Prophecies of Judah's Restoration(chapters 33-48)

Restoration of the Israel (chapters 33 – 39)

The Background to the Message of Restoration

On the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of his exile, refugees from Jerusalem arrive and report the news that Jerusalem has fallen (33:21). With that announcement, the final set of prophecies come after the destruction of Jerusalem (33:22). This destruction has taken place so that the exiles will know, first that Yahweh is God (33:29) and secondly that Ezekiel is a true prophet of God (33:33).

⁷ Alexander.

But after this report comes a message of hope.

Restoration of Leadership (chapter 34)

In chapters 12 – 19, Ezekiel condemns the leadership of Israel, including the false prophets, elders and the monarchy. With the destruction of Jerusalem comes the end of the monarchy and the extinction of the throne of David (19:14). These shepherds of Israel have not been tending the flock, and have been feeding themselves instead of the flock of Israel (34:3).

But, there is hope, for the Lord himself will be the shepherd for his people (34:11). He will care for them and gather them from exile (34:12-13). He will provide for them and care for his sheep. In addition, God will restore the throne of David and set up a descendent of David as the one shepherd (34:23-24). When that happens, he will bring “showers of blessings,” (34:26) and great fertility to the land. When that happens, the people will “know that I, Yahweh their God, am with them” (34:30-31).

Restoration of the Land (Chapters 35-36)

Not only will the monarchy be restored, but so will the land itself. In chapter 6, Ezekiel prophesied against the mountains of Judah. Now in chapter 35 God condemns another mountain, Mt. Seir, located in Edom. This is followed by a blessing on the mountains of Judah in chapter 36. The exiles will return, and God will cause the land to be fertile (36:8-10).

Valley of Dry Bones (Chapter 37)

After the restoration of the monarchy, and a restoration of the land, the people themselves need to be restored. This restoration is more than just a return of the people from exile (36:24), but a cleansing of the people from their sin (36:25). But this alone will not prevent the people from returning to their rebellious and idolatrous ways. Therefore God promises to change their hear (36:26) and to give them the Holy Spirit (36:27).

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 NASB)

This is followed with Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones. This vision is the same message as in the end of chapter 36. God will take the old dry bones of Israel and bring it back to life with flesh (37:21).

Protection from Gog (Chapters 38-39)

In chapter 38, Ezekiel predicts that in this time of restoration, there would be an army from the north, an army from Gog which invades the nation (chapter 38). While there is much conjecture about who Gog might be, the fact that it is an invasion “from the north” is significant. Both Assyria and Babylon invaded from the north. This attack will cause the returning exiles to remember their exile and could cause undo fear. However, unlike Assyria and Babylon, Gog is not an agent of judgment. In fact, God will defend and protect Israel from this invader (chapter 39). God will be the defender of his people in the time of restoration.

God’s Glory Returns (Chapters 40-48)

Restoration of the Temple

The land, the leadership and the people have been restored to the land. However one significant event remains in the restoration. The temple must be restored. The culmination of this temple restoration comes when the glory of God returns and God dwells again with His people. Just as

God's disapproval was made evident by a vision of God's glory leaving the temple, so the promise of restoration is also focused on the temple and the return of God's glory.

Chapters 40-42 are a detailed description of a new temple that is to be built. The exact measurements of each gate, court and sanctuary are given in precise figures.

After this description, the glory of the LORD comes out of the East, and fills the temple. God declares that now there will be no more abominations in the temple. It is important to note that just as God's glory left the temple and departed toward the east, so also God's glory will return on the Mount of Olives and descend westward into the temple.

What follows is additional regulations described by God concerning who can be admitted into the temple, the division of land among the tribes of Israel, the sacrificial offering regulations, and other details of this restored city. There is also a great deal of discussion regarding a *prince*, which has some sort of political authority in this new land.

A Discussion of the Fulfillment

The question arises: when is this prophecy fulfilled? There are a number of interpretations as to which temple this really is and how it might be fulfilled. The following temples are often given as the answer to this question:

- Zerubbabel builds the temple at the end of the captivity. This is unlikely, for the temple described here is much larger than Zerubbabel's temple, and we have no evidence that the glory of God ever filled this temple.
- The temple rebuilt by Herod- The chief argument in favor of this temple is that this was the temple in which Jesus worshipped. This would fulfill the prophecy of God's glory re-entering the temple, for Jesus is the fullness of God's glory. However, this temple was shortly destroyed thereafter and Israel did not completely repent. A derivation of this interpretation is that the church inherits this promise and becomes the repentant nation of Israel.
- The temple is purely figurative and merely represents the worship of God in heaven. This is a purely subjective interpretation and does not fit with the detailed physical description given by Ezekiel.
- The temple is a literal temple that will be built and will be dwelled in by the Messiah after His Second Coming. This *Millennial Temple* will match the exact description given by Ezekiel, and the regulations and division of the land will fit with this prophecy at some point in the future.

The later was most preferred interpretation given by most conservative Christian scholars. However, it, too, has some difficulties. First, if this takes place in the future, why are sacrifices made on the altar when Christ was the ultimate sacrifice? Hebrews clearly said that the sufficiency of Christ's death negated the need for additional sacrifices. Secondly, why is the church not mentioned in the era? What happens to all the believers from the church-age who are not in need of a priest or a sacrificial system?

The most plausible explanation I found is given by Feinberg, who states,

...It must be recognized that Old Testament sacrifices never had any redemptive efficacy...But just as the Old Testament sacrifices could have value in pointing forward to the death of Christ, why may they not have equal value in pointing back to the death of Christ as an accomplished fact? The celebration of the Lord's Supper through the Christian centuries has added not one infinitesimal particle of the efficacy of the work of Christ on the cross, but who will dare to

*deny that it has value for the believer, since it is enjoined upon us as a memorial.*⁸

In answering the second objection, one has to look at the intended audience of Ezekiel. The prophet wrote to the Jews in captivity, not to the church. His emphasis is on the role of Israel in this period, not the church. To see the role of the church during this time, one needs to look to Revelation 20, for it was written to the church. Furthermore, to think that the church is God's final agent in God's eternal plan is probably arrogant and shortsighted.⁹

Nonetheless, God does promise to restore Israel, even after the abominations they performed. He is faithful to his covenant.¹⁰ The book ends with a wonderful capsulation of the whole concept of God's glory as it dwells with Israel. After describing the city in which the new temple resides, Ezekiel records the name of the city in the very last verse of the book.

(Ezekiel 48:34 NKJV)"All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE."

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⁸ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 234.

⁹ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁰ Although the Mosaic covenant required that he withdraw his glory from Israel, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants promised an everlasting kingdom over which He will reign.