

Ezekiel
A Look at the Book
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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel writes his own story. His visions and messages are generally in the order in which they happen. He gives us an organized record of all his experiences, paying great attention to detail. Ezekiel is both the name of the sixth-century B.C. prophet and the title of the book that records his preaching. Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens" or "May God strengthen," appropriate for a prophet called to proclaim a message of uncompromising judgment and later a message of a restoration for God's sake.

As a young man, Ezekiel is a priest, married and living in Jerusalem. In 597 BC, the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar besiege the city. Jerusalem is captured, and the temple of Solomon is ransacked of its treasures.

Ezekiel is taken captive, along with many of Jerusalem's citizens. King Jehoiachin and 10,000 of his soldiers, skilled workers and business people, are all deported to Babylonia, 700 miles away.

Ezekiel finds himself living on a barren land near the Kebar River.

God's people have been extremely unfaithful and God has been extremely gracious but judgment is about to be poured out on them for their unfaithfulness.

Several years pass and when Ezekiel is about thirty, God calls him to be a prophet. His messages are to remedy and re-charge God's people in exile.

Ezekiel's attention is always on what God is doing—in the punishment of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. In fact Ezekiel gets the news early before it ever goes to print. Like Isaiah, he felt the weight of God's holiness and it was of vast importance to Him. Like Jeremiah, he acts out some of his prophecies. Like Daniel, he sees visions, which leave him completely speechless. Like Hosea, he experiences heartbreak. Of all the prophets of the Old Testament, Ezekiel is certainly the strangest, however.¹

His life that we read of in exile is not a prison-camp existence. The people are allowed to settle down and form communities. They have their own elders, who organize worship and teaching. Jeremiah advises the exiles to establish a normal life, build houses, plant fields and raise families.

However, the Lord is very upset at their idolatry and their complete disregard for His holiness; therefore, Ezekiel will pronounce that judgment is coming.

¹ Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.) (324). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg. (Adapted)

The judgment given in Ezekiel is completely overwhelming. Sometimes as we read these prophets the language seems somewhat crude and certainly harsh to our modern ear. But we can learn so much about our God if we'll stop and listen to what He's wanting to teach us in His word. I think of what Paul said in Romans, "behold the kindness and the severity of God."

We love to talk about His kindness don't we? We love sermons about his grace and mercy towards us, but when we hear the harsh punishment proclaimed by prophets like Ezekiel we bristle. We don't like to consider the severity of our God.

Make no mistake our God is good and kind beyond on comprehension, but there is severe judgment reserved for those who reject His love and chase after other gods.

Both are encompassed and abundantly evident within the great work of Ezekiel.

1. Call of the Prophet (Chapter 1:1-3, 28, 2:1-7)

a. God with Him. (1:3)

- *The hand of the Lord came upon Him.*

God's hands are unmistakable. Ezekiel knew he was in God's grip. He felt the mighty hand of God take hold of him. In this great commission of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry to go and prophesy against a rebellious people we see God is with Him. Echoed many years later in the great commission to Jesus' disciples, we are assured He too would be with them until the end.

- *The Spirit indwelled him (2:1)*

The prophet filled with the spirit of God was given the difficult task of proclaiming the truth of God's impending judgment on Judah and other Gentile nations. Undoubtedly, his best efforts would have been futile to such stiff-necked people apart from God's Spirit empowering Him for the task. We too, can only accomplish God's will from the indwelling power of God's Spirit.

God wasn't just with Ezekiel, he put his word in him.

b. God's Word in Him. (2:8, 3:1-3,10)

- God gives his word to Ezekiel, he tells him to eat it and though it's full of words of sorrow it tastes as sweet as honey. But, then God says something crucial. Let my words sink deep into your heart first. Listen to them carefully before you go and share them. This is a reminder for you and me as well. Before we speak into someone else's life, before we open our mouths to speak, we had better make sure we fill ourselves with God's word and let it sink deep

into our hearts and nourish us – enrich us – before we open our mouths.

God was with Ezekiel, He put His Word in Ezekiel, but He would work through Ezekiel as well.

c. God Working Through Him. (3:16-21)

- “Watchman” is used several times of prophets (cf. Isa. 56:10; Jer. 6:17; Hosea 9:8). Watchmen were stationed on city walls, hilltops, or specially designed watchtowers. A watchman was to be on the alert for approaching enemies and warn the city’s people of any impending attack. This gave city dwellers outside the walls an opportunity to seek protection and gave the people time to secure the gates and man the defenses. Similarly, as God’s watchman, Ezekiel was responsible for sounding the **warning** of impending judgment to Israel. He was to warn both the **wicked** (Ezek. 3:18–19) and the righteous (vv. 20–21).²

We, like Ezekiel, carry the responsibility of warning those under God’s wrath that disaster is eminent. *How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?*

2. Condemnation of the People (4-24)

One of the things I find most interesting, though, is his bizarre prophetic sign-acts. Sign-acts refer to the way the prophet embodies and dramatizes a particular prophetic message.

*Lying on his side for a number of days, then switching to the other side, symbolic of the number of years of exile for both Israel and Judah (4:4-8)

*Cooking food over human excrement, symbolizing that in exile the people will eat ‘unclean’ food (4:9-15)

*Cutting, weighing, binding, and burning his own hair, symbolizing those who will be taken away, the remnant, etc. (5:1-4)

*Packing his luggage for exile (12:1-7)

a. Judah

- Idolatry in the temple (8:1-17)
- Retell Story

² Dyer, C. H. (1985). Ezekiel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Eze 3:16–19). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. . (Adapted)

In his bestseller *The Reason for God*, Keller further develops this line of thought, showing the reader examples of the "particular kinds of brokenness and damage" caused by idolatry:

If you center your life and identity on your spouse or partner, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person's problems will be overwhelming to you.

If you center your life and identity on your family and children, you will try to live your life through your children until they resent you or have no self of their own. At worst, you may abuse them when they displease you.

If you center your life and identity on your work and career, you will be a driven workaholic and a boring, shallow person. At worst you will lose family and friends and, if your career goes poorly, develop deep depression.

If you center your life and identity on money and possessions, you'll be eaten up by worry or jealousy about money. You'll be willing to do unethical things to maintain your lifestyle, which will eventually blow up your life.

If you center your life and identity on pleasure, gratification, and comfort, you will find yourself getting addicted to something. You will become chained to the "escape strategies" by which you avoid the hardness of life.

If you center your life and identity on relationships and approval, you will be constantly overly hurt by criticism and thus always losing friends. You will fear confronting others and therefore will be a useless friend.

If you center your life and identity on a "noble cause," you will divide the world into "good" and "bad" and demonize your opponents. Ironically, you will be controlled by your enemies. Without them, you have no purpose.

If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don't live up to your moral standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating.³

The consequences of idolatry in our lives is complete and utter destruction. The same was true for Israel. It cost them everything....including the very presence of God's glory. (chapter 10)

- False Prophets
- Jerusalem – A useless vine
- An unfaithful wife
- Jerusalem worse than a prostitute

Ezekiel had a very difficult calling. Pronouncing judgment continually and becoming a physical example at times of the suffering had to be unbelievably taxing on the prophet.

³ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (Dutton, 2008), pp. 275-276, and Tim Keller, "Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age," www.thegospelcoalition.org

In all of this, Ezekiel is a picture of these terrible events....he often acts out these signs. One that is particularly terrible is found in chapter 24:15-24. Look at it with me.

Often in our suffering, in our loss, in our hardship we experience the greatest platform to reflect God's glory....that they may know that He is the Lord their God.

b. Gentile Nations (25)

- Ammon 25:6
- Moab
- Edom
- Philistia
- Tyre
- Egypt

So we see the call of the prophet, the condemnation of the peoples, and finally the coming of the promise.

3. Coming of the Promise (36:22-27)

- a. Turning Point, In the midst of the severity, God shows His gracious kindness.
New heart.
- b. The Valley of the Dry Bones (37:1-14)

Our story is a lot like the people of Israel

c. Restoration

- New Temple, he describes in his vision the courts, the gates, the chambers for the priests, the altar and much more.
- The truth is our God is a God of restoration.

Don't you love to see an old car that's been rusting out in the sun in some junkyard somewhere taken by a skilled craftsman who restores it.

You've seen the television shows where a master builder comes in and takes a beat up destroyed, condemned house and makes it new.

That's who our God is. He makes things new...he restores.

In Ezekiel we see the call of the prophet, the condemnation of the people and the coming of a promise.

I don't know if you've noticed, but God called the prophet Ezekiel "son of man" a lot. 93 times in fact. There was another rather prominent character in Scripture called "son of man."

One son of man took on God's word to prophesy about it
The other Son of Man was the word and came to dwell among us

One son of man was sent to warn of the eminent judgment because of God's wrath
The other Son of Man was sent to die to satisfy God's wrath

One son of man saw a dream of a coming restoration
The other Son of Man is the reality of a kingdom restored

For Jesus the Son of Man

Mark 10:45

⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but ^uto serve, and ^vto give his life as a ransom for ^wmany."

I wonder what your need is tonight? Are you in need of God revealing Himself to you? Maybe you need to take in His word? Could it be that God has showed you tonight that you've put something or someone in front of Him? Do you need to see revival in your life like the dry bones that were brought back to life? Do you know you have a heart of stone that you need God to make a heart of flesh? Whatever your need is tonight, I pray you will respond as God's spirit leads you.