

Ezekiel

Summary

A younger contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel was similarly called to a ministry of prophetic judgment to the tribe of Judah while its people were exiled in Babylon. While Jeremiah was a prophet of "tears," Ezekiel was a man of "visions." The book that bears his name is neatly divided into four major sections: Ezekiel's call to prophecy (chapters 1-3), judgment on Judah for her faithlessness (chapters 4-24), judgment on the surrounding Gentile nations (chapters 25-32), and finally, hope for Israel's future restoration to the one true and holy God (chapters 33-48). Ezekiel's prophecies came during a time of confusion for the Israelite tribe of Judah. Their people were giving only lip service to God's promises to their forefathers and had reached a state of severe moral and spiritual decline. This ultimately ended in God's discipline directed at His wayward and faithless people through their capture and deportation (605 B.C.) by a rising foreign power (Babylon). Ezekiel boldly proclaimed both the coming judgment and the future hope of restoration for those who returned to God. Ezekiel's book can be a challenging read because of the fantastic visions used to convey his message, but take heart! Behind the perplexing imagery, there remains a clear picture of a God who loves His people and His grand plan for their restoration.

Author

The author of this book is the prophet, Ezekiel. Ezekiel was born and raised in Jerusalem but was carried away to the Babylonian exile, likely with the second deportation in 597 B.C. when he was about 25 years old. His prophecies occurred from 592-570 B.C. while he was living in Babylon.

Date

The book can be dated with considerable precision. It was written near the end of Ezekiel's ministry as a prophet, likely in 570-568 B.C., towards the end of his life.

Primary Characters

Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1-48)

The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar II (Ezekiel 29)

Historical Moments

Ezekiel's Call (Ezekiel 2)

The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37)

Major Theological Themes

A Holy God Expects Faithful People - The book frequently returns to the theme of faithlessness as the source of Judah's woes, with strong calls to repent and return to God or suffer His discipline. This subject forms the major theological theme of this book.

God Is Sovereign Over All of History and All People - Like the earlier prophet, Isaiah, Ezekiel makes it clear that God's sovereignty extends to all people, not just His own. Chapters 25-32 contain a piercing judgment against Judah's surrounding neighbor nations, whom God had used only temporarily as His chosen instrument of discipline for wayward Judah. In this sense, the book of Ezekiel establishes unmistakably that God's holy standards lay claim to not only the hearts of individuals but also to the hearts of nations.

The Basis for True Hope Can Rest in God and None Other - Clinging to the false hope of self-reliance or the provisions of man will ultimately prove hollow and meaningless. On the other hand, turning to God in faithful dependence results in a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26) and the promise of a hope that is true and everlasting!

Lessons Learned from Ezekiel

God Still Requires Faithfulness from His People - One of the biggest challenges facing those who claim to know Christ is to live faithfully in a culture that is centered on self-seeking pleasure. Ezekiel's prophecy is a reminder to those who ignore this important biblical doctrine. Jesus Himself recognized this as a challenge for His followers; His famous prayer in John 17 includes a strong plea to God to help His followers to be *not of the world* (John 17:16). This is a powerful prayer and we can take heart from the fact that those who resist the culture's false prescription for fulfillment and regularly exercise faithfulness can expect an unimaginable restoration of the world and eternal life with the Father.

Respecting and Praying for Authority Figures - God's people are to not only claim His promises and practice His precepts personally, but they should remain in regular prayer for their national leaders to the same end. Ezekiel, among other prophets, teaches the danger of national leadership that has gone its own way, independent of a sovereign God. This is a strong reminder to us to exercise our right to legally participate in our government, to submit to its authority, and to pray regularly for its leadership (see 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Romans 13).

The Promise of Eternal Life - Our world is full of false claims and religions, but God expects our loyalty and in turn grants us the promise of eternal life. Though Ezekiel's prophecies can be challenging because of the vivid visions and imagery, do not miss the promise of resurrection to a new life that is free from the tug of sin. Ezekiel pictures a *valley of dry bones* that suddenly come to life again *through the Spirit of the living God* (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Believers today have this same hope through faith and trust in God through Jesus Christ. One day these bones of ours will be made alive again and in a way that lasts forever. This should cause the reader to challenge the many false claims and promises of the culture with a renewed sense of loyalty and faithfulness to our loving God.