
August 29 : Scriptures Ezekiel 1-4

SUMMARY

Let's start the book of Ezekiel on our *Cruisin' Through The Bible*. Who was Ezekiel? He was a priest who was taken to Babylon in the First deportation of around 10,000 Judahites in 598/597 B.C. Ezekiel dates much of his material around the first deportation. Ezekiel's prophetic ministry began when he turned thirty (1:1), the age when priests began their Temple service, and he continued for about 22-23 years. He prophesied to the exiled Jews in Babylon, and his messages revolved around the catastrophe of Jerusalem's fall. According to my very helpful Study Bible, before Jerusalem's destruction, Ezekiel's message was against the Judahites' rampant immorality, idolatry, spiritual indifference to God, and apostasy. After Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel's message changes to one of hope, looking forward to Israel's restoration. As you'll see, Ezekiel's messages apply to his day and look forward to the End Times when Yehovah will restore His people completely.

For the sake of orientation and familiarity, I present this chronology to you from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_captivity#Chronology:

- 609 B.C. King Josiah's death.
- 609 B.C. King Jehoahaz (reigned 3 months).
- 609–598 Jehoiakim's reign (11 years). He began giving tribute to Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BCE. **First deportation, purportedly including Daniel.** Therefore, Ezekiel was Daniel's contemporary. Ezekiel prophesied while Daniel served the Babylonian kings.
- 598/7 Jehoiachin's reign (3 months). Siege and fall of Jerusalem.
- March 16, 597 **Second deportation.**
- 597 Zedekiah (3 months) was made Judah's king by Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar II.
- 594 Anti-Babylonian conspiracy.
- 588 Siege and fall of Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple was destroyed.
- July/August 587 **Third deportation.**

-
- 583 Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of the Judah Province, is assassinated. Many Jews flee to Egypt and **possible fourth deportation to Babylon**.
 - 562 Jehoiachin's release after 37 years in a Babylonian prison. He remains in Babylon.
 - 539 Persians conquer Babylon (October).
 - 538 Cyrus' Decree allows Jews to return to Jerusalem.
 - 520–515 Many Jews return to Judah under Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest.
 - Foundations of Second Temple laid.

All that said, let's dive into Ezekiel's book. Chapter 1 opens with a remarkable sound and light show that stunned Ezekiel. This vision and Ezekiel's commission started five years after King Jehoiachin's exile, about 592 B.C. Like the prophet Isaiah, Ezekiel gets an open vision of heaven when the Lord commissions him as a prophet to his Jewish compatriots. Both Ezekiel and Isaiah see God on His throne accompanied by heavenly creatures. Isaiah's creatures had three sets of wings (*seraphs* or *seraphim*), one face, and stood above God's throne. Ezekiel's creatures have two wings (*cherubs* or *cherubim*) and four faces and stand under God's throne. The creatures transported God's throne around as the Spirit moved them.

There was an expanse that stretched over the four cherubim (1:25). The Hebrew word for "expanse" (*raqia*) is used in Genesis 1:6 to describe the firmament that separates the sky from heaven. Therefore, Ezekiel sees the heavens torn open with the Lord's throne in heaven, resting upon the expanse (1:26), carried about by His servants, the cherubim. Isaiah saw the seraphim above God's throne and heard them calling out, "Holy, holy, holy," which Ezekiel didn't see or hear. Ezekiel sees a vast cloud, flashing fire, lightning, and brilliant light, all manifestations of God's physical presence. He heard the "roar of a huge torrent, like the voice of the Almighty, and a sound of tumult like the noise of an army" when the cherubim flew (1:24). All of this was too much for Ezekiel. The sensory overload and the glory/holiness of God stun him, and he falls to the ground. Yeah, I think I would, too.

The Holy Spirit enters Ezekiel and helps him stand in God's presence. This enduement is the moment of his prophetic ministry anointing – the presence of the Spirit to act as the interface between his senses and the spiritual realm. What is Ezekiel's assignment? He is

to speak to the continuously and incorrigibly rebellious Israelites about their sin. Again, like Isaiah, the disobedient Israelites won't listen to God's word through Ezekiel. But they *will* know the Lord has spoken to them (2:5). Ezekiel is to deliver Yehovah's words whether they accept them or not. The words God commands Ezekiel to speak are not fun. They're prophecies of "lamentation, mourning, and woe" (2:10).

Yehovah continues Ezekiel's commissioning in chapter 3. God isn't sending the prophet to people who can't understand Judah's language. God is sending Ezekiel to those who understand but refuse to "understand and hear (obey)" what the Lord says to them (3:7). The Lord warns Ezekiel that he's going to go head-to-head with the stubborn Judahites. However, Ezekiel must not get discouraged if they won't listen. God's words are sweet to the prophet but will be bitter to those on the receiving end. After this, the Spirit "lifted me up and took me away," moved him in a hot emotional state to travel to a ruinous area, Tel-abib ("the mound of the flood"). There Ezekiel sat stunned for seven days (characteristically a mourning period) under the burden of the Lord's word working in and through him.

After the seven days, the Lord finishes Ezekiel's commissioning service with a severe charge: Regardless of the Lord's message, he *must* share it with the individual, whether they are righteous or wicked. If he doesn't, the Lord will hold Ezekiel responsible for whatever consequences are due to the person for the guilt of their sin. So let fly, Ezekiel, ol' buddy! Yehovah calls Ezekiel out to meet Him at the plain near Tel-abib and appears to the prophet as He had the first time at the Chebar Canal in chapter 1. Ezekiel's reaction is the same – he faints. The Spirit resuscitates him and helps Ezekiel stand in God's presence. God warns him of what is about to happen. Ezekiel is to shut himself in his house, likely as a symbol of the coming Jerusalem siege. During his home confinement, God will prevent Ezekiel from talking except when He gives the prophet words to speak (3:26-27). The prophet will speak God's words of judgment but not intercede for the Judahites as a priest would. Those who are willing to listen will listen, and those who aren't willing to listen won't.

Ezekiel begins his prophetic message by acting it out under the Lord's direction. While in his house, Ezekiel is to create a representation of Jerusalem on a brick. Then he's to set up a model of the coming Jerusalem siege, complete with a siege wall, ramps, military camp, and battering rams. Finally, Ezekiel is to take a metal plate and place it between himself and the siege model. He will besiege the siege (4:3) as a sign that Yehovah is the one behind Babylon's attack and will no longer look upon His people with favor. (The Jerusalem siege would last two years.) After Ezekiel completes his model, Yehovah tells him to lay on his left side for 390 days as a sign of bearing their punishment. Yes, a little

over a year! After those days, Ezekiel is to turn and lay on his right side for an additional 40 days, "a day for each year." What's the reason for the specific numbers? Hard to say. Some see it as reminiscent of Israel's years of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12:40). Additionally, Yehovah adds a new diet to dramatize His word to the exiles and those still in Jerusalem (4:9-13). The food was a siege diet, and cooking it over human excrement (yuck!) would show how extreme conditions would get back in Jerusalem. As a priest, though, Ezekiel pleaded with His Lord not to make him cook his meal in that disgusting way so he wouldn't defile his priestly status, and Yehovah relents (4:15). The point is, the Jerusalemites will suffer greatly with the coming Babylonian siege.

INSIGHT

The Watchman Warning is something to which we can and should be sensitive. When Jesus brings someone unsaved across our path, let's be "ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Why? Because salvation is a matter of life and death, and it's more than just physical life. It's eternal life or death. Let's not take on condemnation if we've failed in the past or will in the future to share the reason for the hope within us. Confess it and move on. God won't send us to hell if we stumble. However, God's warning to Ezekiel is a powerful responsibility. We must live our lives "out loud" as a declaration of all the Lord has done for us and be ready to back up our lives with words. Who knows? We may be the person God has chosen to help another find salvation. Go forth!

August 30 : Scriptures Ezekiel 5-7

SUMMARY

In chapter 5, Ezekiel continues with his prophetic dramatization. The cutting and division of his hair represent the various consequences coming to the Judahites in Jerusalem: Shaving his head and hair means defeat. A third will die by the plague, a third will die by the sword, and another will be exiled (5:12). God set Israel in the center of the nations (5:5) because He wanted His people to be a "light unto the nations," God's revelation of himself through His people's actions, words, and teachings. But they've failed to live up to God's commission. They haven't even lived up to the low standards of the nation around them (5:7). Therefore, Yehovah says He's going to send covenant judgments against Jerusalem and its inhabitants (5:10). They failed to regard Yehovah as their God. Still, when He's finished with His judgments, they'll know (5:13). Israel will become a disgrace and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations around them, and the nations will see what Israel's God does when His covenant partners betray Him.

I want to point out that we'll see a lot of language in Ezekiel that pertains to priests, such as "holy, holiness, defile, presence," etc. This language comes from Ezekiel's priestly lineage and training.

In chapter 6, Yehovah has Ezekiel prophesy against the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys of His nation, Israel, that sits at the center of the world. Why would God speak against Israel's landscape? Because Israel had built their idolatrous worship sites on high and low lands. To worship a heavenly being, one must get as high as possible to interact with that being. Thus, many "high places" are connected with idolatry. Conversely, God's Temple is on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It's a high place, too, but the only one Yehovah sanctions as His official worship center (at the time). Low places have streams and rivers flossing through them. Flowing water is extremely important to Israel. Israel's God is connected to rain. He said He would give it abundantly and at the correct times for His covenant partner's (the people of Israel's) benefit. But when Israel found water coming reliably from the ground, it led to idolatry because "why trust God for rain when we can take it for granted from the ground." Thus, a God-given preventative was removed, and His people chased after the Canaanite fertility gods.

So, Yehovah will destroy all the idolatrous sites when the Babylonians wash through the land three times. The idolatrous Israelites will die at their idol altars as a sign their "gods" are unable to help them, and it will serve as a declaration of God's wrath against His people. The nations will understand this message, too.

However, as usual, Yehovah promises a remnant to be spared and sent into exile among the nations (6:8), as Ezekiel can testify. Another theme that Ezekiel uses in his prophetic messages: idolatry as a form of “adultery.” Be prepared. He gets pretty graphic at times. Seriously graphic. This is just a light sample: “Then your survivors will remember me among the nations where they are taken captive, how *I was crushed by their promiscuous hearts that turned away from me and by their eyes that lusted after their idols*” (6:9). To conclude chapter 6, Yehovah has Ezekiel lament for Jerusalem’s downfall. The people’s bodies will lie on the ground in front of their idolatrous altars, fitting [unishment for the spiritual adulterers.

Chapter 7 is a little confusing. Ezekiel uses End Time language and speaks of the nations, but is that the correct understanding? The Hebrew term for “the end has come” (*qetz*) is also used in Genesis 6:13. According to my Study Bible (that I needed to use to figure this out...), “the end has come does not refer to the end of the latter days but the end of great tribulation (not *the Great Tribulation* – author). Just as in the days of Noah’s flood (Genesis 6), the sins of the people had reached such a point that it was time for the land to be wiped clean of them.” Thus, chapter 7, although seemingly written about the whole earth, is about Jerusalem, Israel, and the surrounding nations about their detestable and idolatrous ways (7:3). The Lord will act without pity or mercy (7:4).

Ungodly leadership and pride have reached fruition (7:10) along with violence. God will wipe them clean from the land. When judgment comes, the people of Judah will be unable to respond (7:14). The survivors will run for the hills, and silver and gold will not help them on the day of their judgment (7:16, 19). God gave great gifts to His people (silver and gold), but they used God’s blessings to make idols. Therefore, the Lord will make those idols into something filthy for them. The Hebrew word for “filthy” is *niddah*, related to the woman’s menstrual cycle and the impurity that also comes from touching a corpse. The Lord will give these precious metal objects to Judah’s enemies. At the end of the day, after all this great tribulation and tragedy has wiped the land clean of those who pollute it, Judah will finally realize Yehovah is the One True God.

INSIGHT

Sometimes, the Lord has to use deeply tragic events to shock us into spiritual consciousness. It could come from a relationship break-up, a financial implosion, or an unexpected death. Not every terrible event is a judgment from God. But neither should we assume we can go our way, presuming on God’s grace. His patience has limits. If we won’t listen to His still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12), we’ll get the divine bullhorn.

August 31 : Scriptures Ezekiel 8-10

SUMMARY

In today's reading, Yehovah takes Ezekiel on a trip to Jerusalem through a vision. God shows the prophet what's happening secretly while the first set of deportees sits in Babylon. This event occurred about 14 months after the first vision, where he saw God's throne. I have to say that this section has been one of my most memorable sections in Ezekiel – when God's glory departs the Temple.

Ezekiel has completed God's home detention (it lasted 430 days – 14 lunar months). A supernatural being appears, grabs the prophet by his hair, and the Spirit takes him in a vision to Jerusalem. Ezekiel finds himself standing at the north gate of the Temple, where an offensive idol statue had been set up. Ezekiel sees God's glory as he had in chapter 1 on the plain near the Chebar Canal. As I read this, I think of the "spirits of Christmas past, present, and future," taking Scrooge through time to show him the significant events of his life.

What's happening? Yehovah shows Ezekiel the disgusting and defiling idolatry that's taking place in God's house that's so repulsive (as idolatry is to God) "that I must depart from my sanctuary" (8:6). First, God points out the idol statue *that's in full view of the public*. Next, God tells Ezekiel to dig through the wall to find a door that opens into a room where Israel's elders worship pagan gods *in the Temple* (8:10-13). They've usurped God's palace, so to speak, and are committing spiritual adultery with other "lovers." This act would be like a spouse secretly bringing their lovers (plural) to their marital home for sex while their other spouse was at work. Outrageous! After that, Yehovah shows Ezekiel the women mourning Tammuz at the north gate entrance. I'll let my Study Bible explain this ritual. "Waiting for Tammuz was a Babylonian ritual marking the death and descent into the underworld of the Sumerian god Dumuzi. The mythological course of death and return for Dumuzi (Tammuz) was thought to be parallel to the natural rhythm of nature" (HCSB commentary). It was a ritual to ensure the fertility of the land.

The final and most enraging act of idolatrous worship took place in the Temple's inner court, where the Bronze Altar and Bronze Laver sat. Twenty-five Judahite men bowed to the east in sun worship with their backs to Yehovah *whose presence still inhabited the Temple's Holy of Holies!* This is stunning! How dare they turn their backs on the Living God to worship what the Living God's hands had made. I'm surprised God's glory didn't shoot fire out from the Temple and consume them. As icing on the cake, Yehovah says they're not only idolators, but they "fill the land with violence and repeatedly anger me" (8:17). So, the Lord will drop the hammer. "Therefore I will respond with wrath. I will

not show pity or spare them. Though they call loudly in my hearing, I will not listen to them" (8:18).

In chapter 9, Yehovah calls for supernatural "executioners of the city," signifying His coming wrath through the Babylonian army again. They arrive along with another man with a writing tablet. They stand by the Bronze Altar, awaiting instructions. Now here's where it gets more interesting. *God's glory lifts from the Ark of the Covenant (the cherubs where it had been) in the Holy of Holies and moves to the threshold of the Temple (9:3)*. From there, Yehovah calls to the supernatural man-with-the-writing-tablet to mark all the people in Jerusalem who are faithful to the Lord and are disgusted by the rampant and unrestrained idolatry. They are marked for safety via exile. After the writer is sent out, Yehovah calls for the executioners to begin killing the unmarked people. Does this really happen? No. A prophetic picture shows Ezekiel (sitting in Babylon) that faithful people will be preserved while the rest will be killed under God's judgment.

Chapter 10 continues with Yehovah's glory at the Temple's inner court threshold, between the outer court and the Holy place, and His divine throne (with cherub accompanying it) nearby. God tells the supernatural writer to reach between the cherubim under His throne, grab coals, and throw them over the city as a sign of His impending doom. As the man in linen scatters the coals, God's glory moves from the threshold to His throne over the cherubim (10:18). Once "on His throne," Yehovah's glory moves east to the Eastern Gate of the Temple.

INSIGHT

The supernatural "man in linen with the writing tablet" was instructed to put a mark on the foreheads of the faithful people in Jerusalem. In the ancient Hebrew of the day, the word for "mark" is the letter *tav*. Its early Hebrew form looks like a "+." In middle Hebrew, it looks like an "x." Amazingly, the Israelites that were spared from death during the Egyptian Exodus had their houses marked with the *Passover Lamb's blood*, and God's faithful people in Ezekiel's day were marked with *the sign of the cross*.

Coincidence? I think not.