

12. Ezekiel

I. Background and Context

- A. Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens," which appropriately summarizes the message of his book, one of "uncompromising judgment" against God's people followed by "restoration for God's sake, not Israel's... Israel's own welfare was bound up with its God"¹
- B. Ezekiel lived out his prophetic career among the community of exiles in Babylon. It was a confusing time for God's people, as Nebuchadnezzar exiled Judah's king Jehoiachin along with several thousand leading citizens (2 Kgs. 24.10-16), while setting up a puppet king in Jerusalem, Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah. His primary motive was to "restore God's glory before the people who had spurned it in view of the watching nations."²
- C. Though in exile unable to fulfill the responsibilities of a priest, Ezekiel symbolically combines the offices of prophet and priest. At the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel was thirty years old (1.1); he was fifty at the end of this period of exile (40.1). This puts him in the exact span of active service marked for priests in Numbers 4.1-3. As would be appropriate for a priest, the book of Ezekiel is deeply concerned with the holiness of God.
- D. Unlike other prophets, Ezekiel more meticulously dates his oracles. His first dated oracle comes in 593 B.C., five years after the first group of exiles was deported to Babylon. His last comes in 571 B.C.
- E. The book is organized into three sections. Chapters 1-24 forms the first chronological sequence of narrative events, from 593 B.C., when Ezekiel's ministry began, to 586 B.C., when Jerusalem fell. Chapters 25-32 forms its own sequence of foreign-nation oracles. Chapters 33-48 completes the chronological sequence of the first third, following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Refer to the timeline in the first lesson.)

II. Outline

- A. Inaugural Vision (1.1-3.27)
 1. Setting (1.1-3)
 2. Inaugural vision (1.4-3.15)
 - a) The throne of the Lord approaches (1.4-28)
 - b) The prophet commissioned (2.1-3.11)
 - c) The throne of the Lord withdraws (3.12-3)
 - d) The vision concludes (3.14-5)
 3. The watchman (3.16-21) [cf. 33.1-9]
 4. Inaugural vision reprise (3.22-27)
- B. Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (4.1-24.27)
 1. God against Jerusalem (4.1-5.17)
 - a) God against Jerusalem enacted (4.1-5.4)
 - b) God against Jerusalem explained (5.5-17)
 2. Oracles against the "land" (6.1-7.27)
 - a) Against the mountains of Israel (6.1-14)
 - b) Against the land of Israel (7.1-27)
 3. Ezekiel's temple vision (8.1-11.25)
 - a) Transportation and abominations (8.1-18)

¹ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1495.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 1495.

- b) Slaughter in Jerusalem (9.1-11)
 - c) The fire and the glory (10.1-22)
 - d) Punishment for civic authorities (11.1-13)
 - e) Promise of a new heart, spirit (11.14-21)
 - f) The glory of the Lord departs (11.22-5)
4. Anticipating exile (12.1-28)
 - a) Exile predicted (12.1-20)
 - b) Exile confirmed (12.21-8)
 5. False prophecy, true prophecy (13.1-14.11)
 - a) False prophets (13.1-23)
 - b) False inquirers (14.1-11)
 6. The consequences of infidelity (14.12-15.8)
 - a) Noah, Daniel, Job (14.12-23)
 - b) The useless vine (15.1-8)
 7. The faithless bride (16.1-63)
 - a) Jerusalem, the foundling bride (16.1-43)
 - b) Jerusalem and her sisters (16.44-58)
 - c) The everlasting covenant (16.59-63)
 8. The parable of the eagles and the vine (17.1-24)
 - a) The parable narrated (17.1-10)
 - b) The parable explained (17.11-8)
 - c) The parable interpreted (17.19-21)
 - d) A new parable (17.22-24)
 9. Moral responsibility (18.1-32)
 - a) The one who sins dies (18.1-4)
 - b) Three case studies (18.5-18)
 - c) Two objections (18.19-29)
 - d) Conclusion: repent! (18.30-32)
 10. Lament for the princes of Israel (19.1-14)
 - a) A lioness and her cubs (19.1-9)
 - b) A vine and its stem(s) (19.10-14)
 11. Learning from history (20.1-44)
 - a) Looking to the past (20.1-31)
 - b) Unthinkable idolatry (20.32)
 - c) Looking to the future (20.33-44)
 12. Fire and sword (20.45-21.32)
 - a) The parable of the fire (20.45-49)
 - b) The drawn sword (21.1-7)
 - c) The sharpened sword (21.8-17)
 - d) The sword of Nebuchadnezzar (21.18-29)
 - e) The sword sheathed and judged (21.30-32)
 13. A city defiled (22.1-31)
 - a) The bloody city (21.1-16)

- b) The city of dross (22.17-22)
 - c) Systemic failure (22.23-31)
- 14. Two sisters (23.1-49)
 - a) The sisters and politics (23.1-35)
 - b) The sisters and religion (23.36-49)
- 15. Two losses (24.1-27)
 - a) Jerusalem, the bloody pot (24.1-14)
 - b) No mourning for Ezekiel's wife (24.15-24)
 - c) Fugitive news (24.25-7)
- C. Oracles against Foreign Nations (25.1-32.32)
 - 1. Against Judah's neighbors (25.1-17)
 - a) Against Ammon (25.1-7)
 - b) Against Moab (25.8-11)
 - c) Against Edom (25.12-4)
 - d) Against Philistia (25.15-7)
 - 2. Oracles against Tyre (26.1-28.19)
 - a) Against Tyre (26.1-21)
 - b) A lament against Tyre (27.1-36)
 - c) Against Tyre's king (28.1-19)
 - 3. Oracle against Sidon (28.20-23)
 - 4. Israel gathered in security (28.24-26)
 - 5. Oracles against Egypt (29.1-32.32)
 - a) Against Pharaoh (29.1-16)
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt (29.17-21)
 - c) Lament for Egypt (30.1-19)
 - d) The kings of Egypt and Babylon (30.20-6)
 - e) The fall of Pharaoh (31.1-18)
 - f) Lament over Pharaoh (32.1-16)
 - g) Egypt's descent to the pit (32.17-32)
- D. After the Fall of Jerusalem (33.1-39.29)
 - 1. Reminders (33.1-20)
 - a) The watchman (reprise) (33.1-9) [cf. 3.16-21]
 - b) Moral responsibility (reprise) (33.10-20) [cf. 18.21-29]
 - 2. The fall of Jerusalem (33.21-22)
 - 3. Culpability (33.23-33)
 - a) A word for the homelanders (33.23-29)
 - b) A word for the exiles (33.30-33)
 - 4. Shepherds and sheep (34.1-31)
 - a) Wicked shepherds and the good shepherd (34.1-16)
 - b) The flock: problems and prospects (34.17-31)
 - 5. The mountains of Edom and Israel (35.1-36.15)
 - a) Against Mount Seir (35.1-15)
 - b) The mountains of Israel restored (36.1-15)

6. Restoration for the sake of God's name (36.16-38)
 - a) State of impurity (36.16-21)
 - b) Divine intervention: a new spirit (36.22-32)
 - c) Land renewed (36.33-36)
 - d) Populace increased (36.37-38)
7. The vision of dry bones (37.1-14)
8. The houses of Israel and Judah (37.15-28)
9. Gog of Magog (38.1-39.29)
- E. Vision of Restoration (40.1-48.35)
 1. Vision of the new temple (40.1-42.20)
 - a) The vision begins (40.1-4)
 - b) The outer court and its gates (30.5-27)
 - c) The inner court, gates, and chambers (40.28-49)
 - d) The temple interior (41.1-26)
 - e) Chambers of the outer court (42.1-26)
 - f) Exterior measurements (42.15-20)
 2. The return of God's glory (43.1-5)
 3. Regulations for renewed Israel (43.6-46.18)
 - a) New people for new temple (43.6-12)
 - b) The altar regulations (43.13-27)
 - c) The prince's gate (44.1-3)
 - d) Temple access and rules for priests (44.4-31)
 - e) The temple districts (45.1-8)
 - f) Legal measurements (45.9-12)
 - g) Offerings and gatherings (45.13-46.15)
 - h) Rules for inheritance of the prince (46.16-18)
 4. The river flowing from the temple (46.19-47.12)
 - a) The temple kitchens (46.19-47.12)
 - b) The temple's river (47.1-12)
 5. Dividing the land: allotment and access (47.13-48.35)
 - a) The outer boundaries (47.13-23)
 - b) Territories of the northern tribes (48.1-7)
 - c) The central territories (48.8-22)
 - d) Territories of the southern tribes (48.23-29)
 - e) Access to the city (48.30-35)

III. Key Passages

A. The Watchman

1. In ch. 3.16-27, Ezekiel is ordained as God's watchman for Israel. He is given word from God's own mouth (vv. 17, 22) and filled with the Spirit (v. 24) for this task.
2. When comparing this passage (ch. 3.16-27, *before* the fall of Jerusalem) with its parallel passage (ch. 33.1-9, *after* the fall of Jerusalem), we can discern:
 - a) The task of God's prophet among his people is the same, both anticipating calamity and in the midst of calamity. The prophet is called to war God's people of the threat of

death (3.18) and the sword (33.2) and is morally accountable to God if he neglects his task (3.18, 33.6).

- b) Neglecting to heed the word of God's prophet incurs guilt upon the individual (3.19-20, 33.4-5).
 - c) There was nothing faulty with God's provision before the trial came, and therefore there is no problem with reinstating his provision after the trial came. He cannot be held accountable for our condition. Recall that Jonah's commission before the fish was exactly the same as his commission after the fish (cf. Jon. 1.1-3, 3.1-3).
3. There is one difference for which we must account between the two passages.
 - a) Before the fall of Jerusalem, God tells Ezekiel that should "the righteous person" heed his warning, "he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered the soul" (3.21).
 - b) In contrast, after the fall of Jerusalem, God speaks only of the one who "does not take warning" (33.4). Such a person's blood "shall be upon himself" (33.5). God has acted against Israel justly.
 4. These passages connect soundly with a warning of moral responsibility and the penalty of sin found in ch. 18 and 33.10-20.

B. Sin and Salvation

1. The Soul That Sins Must Die (Ez. 16.1-43, 18, 20, cf. 33.10-20)
 - a) Chapter 16 shows the arc of redemptive history through a faithless bride analogy, similar to one found in Hosea 2.
 - (1) Our original, sinful condition is described (16.1-7).
 - (2) God's boundless grace and mercy is bestowed upon an undeserving subject (16.8-14, Hos. 2.8).
 - (3) Our backsliding is described (16.15-34, Hos. 2.2-7).
 - (4) The consequences of our backsliding includes the exposing of our sin (16.35-58, Hos. 2.9-13).
 - (5) Yet, God remains faithful through his steadfast, covenant love (16.59-63, Hos. 2.14-23).
 - b) Perhaps no one else in Scripture are the consequences for sin so clearly established as in Ezekiel chapter 18.
 - (1) The righteous man shall live (18.5-9).
 - (2) The sinner shall surely die (18.10-13).
 - (3) Even the wicked person who turns away from his sin shall live (18.21-24).
 - (4) Therefore, the judgment against Israel is clear (18.30-32).
 - c) That God has been patient and longsuffering of Israel's rebellion is clearly established in chapter 20.
 - (1) God chose Israel and commanded them to put away their idols (20.1-7).
 - (2) Despite Israel's rebellion against God (20.8a), God withheld his righteous judgment upon them, not once (20.8b-9), not twice (20.13b-14), but three times (20.21b-22).
2. Salvation, therefore, must be divine (Ez. 16.59-62, Ez. 36.22-38, Ez. 37, Ez. 39.25-29)
 - a) It requires our heart of stone to be transplanted with a heart of flesh (36.26).

- b) It requires God’s Spirit to be put within us (36.27).
- c) It requires cleansing of our iniquities (36.33).
- d) It is as miraculous and supernatural as making dry bones come to life (37.1-6).

C. The Destruction and Restoration of Jerusalem

The Destruction of Jerusalem (chs. 8-11)	The Restoration of Jerusalem (chs. 40-48)
Abominations were being committed in the temple (8.5-6).	Holy offerings are placed in the temple (42.13).
The elders have forsaken God and instead turned to engravings of animals in the dark (8.7-13).	Engravings of abominable creatures are replaced with those of cherubim, lions, and human faces (41.18-20).
Women were weeping (8.14-15).	Feasts are celebrated (45.21-25; 46.1-18).
The people have neglected the temple and have turned to worship the sun (8.16-18).	The glory of the Lord rises from the east (43.1-2).
Judgment against idolaters is exercised (9).	The uncircumcised are barred from entering the temple (44.4-14) and the holy are allowed to enter (45.1-6).
The city of Jerusalem is destroyed (10.1-8).	The gate would remain shut, only for the Lord to enter by it (44.1-14). God has had enough of the princes of Israel, and a portion is set aside for THE prince of Israel (45.7-12).
The glory of the Lord departed the temple, reversing what happened when Solomon completed the temple (10.9-22, cf. 2 Chr. 7.1-3).	The glory of the Lord fills the temple (43.1-12). A river flows from the temple (47.1-12).
Judgment against false counselors is exercised (11.1-13).	Priests faithfully complete their holy duties (42.14; 44.15-31).

1. Whether literal or symbolic, “[a]lmost all interpreters agree that Ezekiel 40-48 is one of the most difficult passages in the entire Bible.”³ Therefore, rather than trying to discern what exactly is going on in the vision, think on what the passage emphasizes: God’s presence, its preparation, realization, rules, effects, and access.

“And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD is there.”

Ezekiel 48.35

³ *ESV Study Bible*, 1564.