

Introduction to Ezekiel

A theological introduction to the prophetic book, *Ezekiel*

This is not intended to be an exegetical biblical *commentary* on Ezekiel.
It will be an *inductive* study of the *text* in the form of an *introduction to the theology* and *narrative content* of the book.

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2025



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Preface

The purpose of this study is to introduce you to the theology of the prophetic book, *Ezekiel*.

This will not be a full outline study, but is intended to help you *know why* Ezekiel wrote the book, what God, YHWH, was doing by inspiring Ezekiel in Babylonian captivity to sit by the river, Chebar, in the Chaldees, Babylon, to *explain the history and theology leading up to Israel's exile and demise in Babylon and Persia*.

The message of Ezekiel is *complex, tragic, mystical, mysterious, stark and predominantly negative* on the surface, but *deeply theological*.

The book Ezekiel, loaded with mysterious images and signs, is obviously *strange and mystically weird* to the western mind.

The images and signs of the narrative will develop progressively as we add comments from a few scholarly commentaries and Bible dictionaries.

In the lessons we will add *study emphases, discussion comments, and questions* for each lesson.

Abstract

Israel and Judea had been warned by YHWH through several significant prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel to turn away from the *idolatry, sexual and other pagan related practices* of their neighboring nations. God had clearly prophesied his judgment and condemnation on all forms of paganism. Israel and Judah had refused to repent and return to trusting YHWH when opposing pagan powers, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia had marched on their capitals, Shechem and Jerusalem. In a sad commentary the prophet Isaiah and other prophets had been ignored, persecuted and killed.

In this “prophetic” book Ezekiel explains to Israel why they were in their worst political and theological situation. *The nation of Israel would never be restored! There is hope for Judah.*

The book Ezekiel is a “*post-prophetic, post-exilic*” explanation of why Israel and Judah were in their *sad and catastrophic situation of ruin and destruction*.

Ezekiel explained that although it seemed that *the glory of God, YHWH*, had departed the Temple, through faithful repentance *the glory of God, YHWH* could, or would return to redeem YHWH's people.

In the process, Israel and Judah and all of their *pagan oppressors* would be judged with “awful” destruction and total condemnation.

But there was hope for a future in which YHWH would be their God, *once again! If* Israel and Judah *repented and returned to faith in YHWH*.

In bizarre images and visions, e.g. *the four living creatures, eating a scroll, the boiling pot, a valley of dry bones*, visions of a new Temple, YHWH, through Ezekiel, predicts a *future* restoration, **but** *only through faithful repentance before the glory of God and repentance and rejection of all pagan practices*.

The *progress* of Ezekiel is not a *historical linear narrative*, but is *cyclical* as Ezekiel slowly unfolds his message and condemnation of Israel and the pagan nations.

Woven into the fabric of sin, judgment, and condemnation, there are threads of hope, redemption, and restoration.

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Lesson 1. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel

Background.

Without an understanding of the theological history of Israel, the confusing and frightening message of Ezekiel would have no meaning, so this introductory lesson “*primes the pump*” for the study of Ezekiel’s commentary.

As Israel’s “history” has been passed down through the centuries and recorded in their Sacred literature, the *Tanakh*, *Pentateuch*, or Genesis, the story of YHWH’s dealings with his human family begins with his creation of mankind, Adam and Eve, to whom YHWH gave *the freedom of choice* between *obedience*—life, *sin*—death, Genesis 1-3.

Adam and Eve, chose *freedom/sin*—death, and consequently were banished from YHWH’s “daily” presence.

Adam and Eve, “historically” and *theologically* were followed by Cane, and then their “developing” family of Noah, Ham, Shem, and Japheth, on whom YHWH poured out love and grace. After Noah, the descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth broke faith with YHWH, like their progenitive “ancestors,” the family of Noah chose independence from YHWH, and rejected faith and obedience. The result was that their rapidly emerging family, or descendants, turned away completely from YHWH; think the *Tower of Babel*, Gen 5 and 6, resulting in YHWH’s decision to “*clean up his creation*”!

In order to *begin again*, YHWH chose a person whom he recognized understood faith, *Abraham* of the *Ur of the Chaldees*. YHWH called Abraham and his immediate family, *Terah’s* “clan,” to go to a new place, Canaan, consequently known as the *Promised Land*, there to mature Abraham and him develop a coterie of obedient faith. This set in motion YHWH’s plan of redemption *based solely in an obedient faith and not in human works and efforts*. Acts 7:1-8; Eph 2:1-10; Gal 3:23-29.

The story of Abraham, and YHWH’s instruction to Abraham to *sacrifice his only son, Isaac*, through whom YHWH promised atonement and redemption is a challenging account of “*fear and trembling*” faith.. YHWH set his plan off redemption in motion through Abraham, “*predestining*,” the events leading up to YHWH *giving his only son*, Jesus, John 3:16, as an *atonement sacrifice to readdress and redeem his creation through an obedient faith*.

The story of Jacob’s stubborn “*wrestling*” with an angel from YHWH, Gen 32:9-32, is so informative to the story covered in Ezekiel’s prophetic work that I am citing it below.

The events of the narrative of Israel’d loss of faith, idolatry, and sinfulness were alarmingly dramatic and striking building off Jacob’s name change, *Israel*, meaning one who *wrestled with YHWH*, predicted a change of faith growth in Jacob, and the *naming* of the nation *Israel*, that developed over the “*generations*” that followed!

Gen 32:9-32. “⁹ And Jacob said, “**O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who didst say to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’** ¹⁰ **I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.** ¹¹ **Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, the mothers with the children.** ¹² **But thou didst say, ‘I will do you good, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’**”

¹³ *So he lodged there that night ...*

²² **The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.** ²³ *He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise*

everything that he had. ²⁴ **And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.** ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." **But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."** ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ **Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."** ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "**For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.**" ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh on the sinew of the hip."

Twelve sons of Jacob/Israel

The Jacob/Israel narrative led over the next two generations, to 13 children, one a daughter, Dinah, and 12 sons, one, Benjamin, "*born out of place, not in Canaan.*"

1. Reuben – firstborn son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 29:32)
2. Simeon – second son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 29:33)
3. Levi – third son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 29:34)
4. Judah – fourth son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 29:35)
5. Dan – first son of Jacob with Bilhah, Rachel's servant (Genesis 30:5-6)
6. Naphtali – second son of Jacob with Bilhah (Genesis 30:7-8)
7. Gad – first son of Jacob with Zilpah, Leah's servant (Genesis 30:10-11)
8. Asher – second son of Jacob with Zilpah (Genesis 30:12-13)
9. Issachar – fifth son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 30:17-18)
10. Zebulun – sixth son of Jacob with Leah (Genesis 30:19-20)
11. Joseph – first son of Jacob with Rachel (Genesis 30:22-24)
12. Benjamin – second son of Jacob with Rachel (Genesis 35:16-18)

Reuben

Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob with his wife Leah. His birth is recorded in Genesis 29:32 – "And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, 'Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.'" The name Reuben means "See, a son!" in Hebrew, indicating Leah's hope that bearing a child for Jacob would win his love and affection.

Simeon

Simeon was the second son born to Jacob through Leah. Genesis 29:33 states – "She conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.' And she called his name Simeon." The name Simeon sounds like the Hebrew word for hearing, signifying that God heard Leah was unloved and gave her another son.

Levi

Levi was the third son of Leah and Jacob. His birth is recorded in Genesis 29:34 – "Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, 'Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.' Therefore his name was called Levi." Levi's name is derived from the Hebrew word meaning "attached," as Leah hoped having three sons for Jacob would mean he would become attached to her.

Judah

Judah was the fourth son born to Leah. Genesis 29:35 states – “And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘This time I will praise the Lord.’ Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.” The name Judah means “praise” in Hebrew, reflecting Leah’s praise to God for the birth of her fourth son.

Dan

After Leah had stopped bearing children for a time, Rachel became jealous that Leah had given Jacob four sons. So Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob as a concubine. Bilhah bore Jacob’s fifth son Dan, as recorded in Genesis 30:5-6 – “And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, ‘God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son.’ Therefore she called his name Dan.” Dan means “he judged” in Hebrew.

Naphtali

Soon after Dan, Bilhah bore a second son Naphtali for Jacob. Genesis 30:7-8 states – “And Bilhah Rachel’s servant conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, ‘With mighty wrestling I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.’ So she called his name Naphtali.” Naphtali means “my wrestling” in Hebrew, referring to Rachel’s competition with Leah to bear sons for Jacob.

Gad

After Bilhah bore two sons for Jacob, Leah gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob as another concubine. Zilpah bore Jacob’s seventh son Gad, as Genesis 30:10-11 records: “Then Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, ‘Good fortune has come!’ so she called his name Gad.” The name Gad means “fortune” in Hebrew.

Asher

Soon after Gad’s birth, Zilpah bore a second son named Asher for Leah and Jacob. Genesis 30:12-13 states: “And Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, ‘Happy am I! For women have called me happy.’ So she called his name Asher.” The name Asher means “happy” in Hebrew.

Issachar

After a time, Leah was able to conceive again and bore a fifth son named Issachar. As Genesis 30:17-18 records: “And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, ‘God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband.’ So she called his name Issachar.” Issachar sounds like the Hebrew word meaning “wages.”

Zebulun

Leah’s sixth son with Jacob was named Zebulun. His birth is recorded in Genesis 30:19-20: “And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, ‘God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons.’ So she called his name Zebulun.” Zebulun probably means “honor” in Hebrew.

Joseph

Finally, Rachel was able to conceive and bore a son named Joseph, recorded in Genesis 30:22-24: “Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ And she called his name Joseph, saying, ‘May the Lord add to me another son!’” The name Joseph means “may he add” in Hebrew.

Benjamin

Many years later, Rachel conceived again and gave birth to Jacob's thirteenth and final child, a son named Benjamin. This is recorded in Genesis 35:16-18: "Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor... So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb." Benjamin means "son of my right hand" in Hebrew.

Unlike Rachel's first son, Joseph, Benjamin was born in Canaan according to biblical narrative.

Wikipedia

Lesson 2. A History of The Nation of Israel¹

The collapse of Israel's and Judah's faith and theological moral character

The theological and political history of Israel's and Judah's repeated *rejection of YHWH as the sovereign king of Israel, their repeated idolatry and sexual fornication and failed moral structure*, are described in great detail by Ezekiel in his prophetic book *Ezekiel*.

“The experiment with the opulence and power of the great eastern kingdoms had ended in disaster for Israel. King Solomon created the wealthiest and most powerful central government the Hebrews would ever see, but he did so at an impossibly high cost. Land was given away to pay for his extravagances and people were sent into forced labor into Tyre in the north. When Solomon died, between 926 and 922 BCE, the ten northern tribes refused to submit to his son, Rehoboam, and revolted.

From this point on, there would be two kingdoms of Hebrews: *in the north - Israel, and in the south - Judah*.

The Israelites formed their capital in the city of Samaria, and the Judaeans kept their capital in Jerusalem. These kingdoms remained separate states for over two hundred years.

The history of the both kingdoms is a litany of ineffective, disobedient, and corrupt kings. When the Hebrews had first asked for a king, in the book of Judges, they were told that only God was their king. When they approached Samuel the Prophet, he told them the desire for a king was an act of disobedience and that they would pay dearly if they established a monarchy. The history told in the Hebrew book, Kings, bears out Samuel's warning.

As history proved time and again in the region, tiny states never survived long. Located directly between the Mesopotamian kingdoms in the northeast and powerful Egypt in the southwest, the Hebrew Kingdoms were of the utmost commercial and military importance to all these warring powers. Being small was a liability.

The Conquest of Israel

In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered Israel. The Assyrians were aggressive and effective; the history of their dominance over the Middle East is a history of constant warfare. In order to assure that conquered territories would remain pacified, the Assyrians would force many of the native inhabitants to relocate to other parts of their empire. They almost always chose the upper and more powerful classes, for they had no reason to fear the general mass of a population. They would then send Assyrians to relocate in the conquered territory.

When they conquered Israel, they forced the ten tribes to scatter throughout their empire. For all practical purposes, you might consider this a proto-*Diaspora* ("diaspora"="scattering"), except that these Israelites disappear from history permanently; they are called "the ten lost tribes of Israel." Why this happened is difficult to assess. The Assyrians did not settle the Israelites in one place, but scattered them in small populations all over the Middle East. When the Babylonians later conquered Judah, they, too, relocate a massive amount of the population. However, they move that population to a *single* location so that the Jews can set up a separate community and still retain their religion and identity. The Israelites deported by the Assyrians, however, do not live in separate communities and soon drop their Yahweh religion and their Hebrew names and identities.

¹ The material in this lesson is copied from www.answerthebible.com. It is used with the permission of *Answer The Bible*.

The Samaritans

One other consequence of the Assyrian invasion of Israel involved the settling of Israel by Assyrians. This group settled in the capital of Israel, Samaria, and they took with them Assyrian gods and cultic practices. But the people of the Middle East were above everything else highly superstitious. Even the Hebrews didn't necessarily deny the existence or power of other peoples' gods—just in case. Conquering peoples constantly feared that the local gods would wreak vengeance on them. Therefore, they would adopt the local god or gods into their religion and cultic practices.

Within a short time, the Assyrians in Samaria were worshipping Yahweh as well as their own gods; within a couple centuries, they would be worshipping Yahweh exclusively. Thus was formed the only major schism in the Yahweh religion: the schism between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans, who were Assyrian and therefore non-Hebrew, adopted almost all of the Hebrew Torah and cultic practices; unlike the Jews, however, they believed that they could sacrifice to God outside of the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews frowned on the Samaritans, denying that a non-Hebrew had any right to be included among the chosen people and angered that the Samaritans would dare to sacrifice to Yahweh outside of Jerusalem. The Samaritan schism played a major role in the rhetoric of Jesus of Nazareth; and there are still Samaritans alive today around the city of Samaria.

The Conquest of Judah

“Certainly, the conquest of Israel scared the people and monarchs of Judah. They barely escaped the Assyrian menace, but Judah would be conquered by the Chaldeans about a century later. In 701, the Assyrian Sennacherib would gain territory from Judah, and the Jews would have suffered the same fate as the Israelites. But by 625 BC, the Babylonians, under Nabopolassar, would reassert control over Mesopotamia, and the Jewish king Josiah aggressively sought to extend his territory in the power vacuum that resulted. But Judah soon fell victim to the power struggles between Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians. When Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, became king, the king of Egypt, Necho (put into power by the Assyrians), rushed into Judah and deposed him, and Judah became a tribute state of Egypt. When the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC, then Judah became a tribute state to Babylon. But when the Babylonians suffered a defeat in 601 BC, the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, defected to the Egyptians. So the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, raised an expedition to punish Judah in 597 BC. The new king of Judah, Jehoiachin, handed the city of Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, who then appointed a new king over Judah, Zedekiah. In line with Mesopotamian practice, Nebuchadnezzar deported around 10,000 Jews to his capital in Babylon; all the deportees were drawn from professionals, the wealthy, and craftsmen. Ordinary people were allowed to stay in Judah. This deportation was the beginning of the Exile.

The story should have ended there. However, Zedekiah defected from the Babylonians one more time. Nebuchadnezzar responded with another expedition in 588 and conquered Jerusalem in 586. Nebuchadnezzar caught Zedekiah and forced him to watch the murder of his sons; then he blinded him and deported him to Babylon. Again, Nebuchadnezzar deported the prominent citizens, but the number was far smaller than in 597: somewhere between 832 and 1577 people were deported.

The Hebrew kingdom, started with such promise and glory by David, was now at an end. It would never appear again, except for a brief time in the second century BC, and to the Jews forced to relocate and the Jews left to scratch out a living in their once proud kingdom, it seemed as if no Jewish nation would ever exist again. It also seemed as if the special bond that Yahweh

had promised to the Hebrews, the covenant that the Hebrews would serve a special place in history, had been broken and forgotten by their god. This period of confusion and despair, a community together but homeless in the streets of Babylon, makes up one of the most significant historical periods in Jewish history: the Exile.”

The northern *Kingdom of Israel* was *destroyed and conquered* ca 720 BCE by the *Babylonian Empire* under *Nebuchadnezzar* of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

The *Kingdom of Judah* remained intact during this time, until it became a vassal client state of the *Neo-Babylonian Empire* and then the *Neo-Assyrian Empire*.

The *Neo-Assyrian Empire* (912-612 BCE) was the final stage of the Assyrian Empire, stretching throughout Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt, Anatolia, and into parts of Persia and Arabia. Beginning with the reign of Adad Nirari II (912-891 BCE), the Neo-Assyrian kings made great territorial expansions to forge the greatest empire in the world up to that time.”²

The Assyrians fielded the most effective fighting force in the world and were the first to be armed with iron weapons, whose tactics in battle made them invincible.

However, the developing *Jewish revolts against the Babylonians* led to the *destruction of Judah* in 586 BCE, under the rule of Babylonian king *Nebuchadnezzar II*.

According to the biblical account, the armies of *Nebuchadnezzar II* besieged Jerusalem between 589–586 BCE, which led to the *destruction of Solomon's Temple* and the exile of the Jews in Judah to Babylon; this event was also recorded in the *Babylonian Chronicles*.

The exilic period saw the development of the Israelite religion *in a monotheistic form worshipping only YHWH*.

The Babylonian exile ended with the fall of Babylon to the *Achaemenid Persian Empire* ca. 538 BCE.

Subsequently, the Achaemenid, Persian king, *Cyrus the Great*, issued a proclamation known as the *Edict of Cyrus*, which *authorized and encouraged exiled Jews to return to Judah*.

Cyrus' proclamation began the exiles' return to Zion, inaugurating the formative period in which a more distinctive Jewish identity developed in the Persian Jewish province of Yehud.

During this time, *Nebuchadnezzar* destroyed *Solomon's Temple* which was replaced by the *Second Temple*, 516 BCE. It was then remodeled by *Herod* in 37 BCE. *Herod's Temple* marked the beginning of the *Second Temple era* covered by the New Testament Gospels.

² “The Hebrews: A Learning Module from Washington State University.

Lesson 3. Ezekiel, the Prophet Priest

The Book *Ezekiel*

The “prophecy” of the book of *Ezekiel* is a *post exilic lament* over Israel’s exile in Babylon, a “prophetic” explanation for their exile, and a future promise of restoration to Jerusalem and a *Second Temple* era.

Ezekiel, the Person in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

“**Ezekiel** was a Priest and prophet during Israel’s Babylonian exile. He was a descendant of the influential priestly family of Zadok (Ez 1:3).

He was probably reared in Jerusalem and was familiar with the temple ritual, though whether he served as a priest there is not known. All that is known of his personal life is obtained from the OT Book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was married (24:16–18) and lived at *Telabib* in *Babylonia* (3:15), in his own house (3:24; 8:1).

Most of the Judean captives had settled by the *Chebar canal* (1:3), which went from Babylon by Nippur to Erech.

The elders of Israel there sought out Ezekiel for counsel (8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

In the fifth year of the exile, when Ezekiel was between 25 and 30 years old, he received God’s call to the prophetic office (1:1–3:11).

His wife died suddenly during the exile, but he was forbidden to mourn for her in public (24:16–18).

Her sudden death was meant to convey a striking and solemn warning of what would occur in the captives’ homeland (24:15–27).

The time of Ezekiel’s ministry was unusual in many ways. *It was a period of great prophetic activity*. With the prophets *Jeremiah* and *Daniel*, Ezekiel spoke to the nation’s needs at the time of the Babylonian captivity.

It was an era of upheaval and uprooting for the southern kingdom of Judah, and *a time of persistent apostasy, idolatry, and general disobedience to the Mosaic law*.

It was also a period of international conflict and shifting power balances throughout the Middle East.

Ezekiel’s ministry seems to have extended from 592 bc to at least the 27th year of the exile (29:17), and falls into two main periods.

During the first period (592–587 bc) his messages were *repeated warnings, in prose discourse and symbolic acts*, intended to lead the exiles to repentance and faith in God.

During the second period (586–570 bc) after Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, *the prophet comforted the exiles and encouraged them to look to the future in hope* (chs 33–48).

There were 13 years in which no prophetic utterances were delivered, namely 585 bc (32:1, 17; 33:21) to 572 bc (40:1).

Ezekiel learned of the fall of Jerusalem while in Babylon (33:21, 22).

The burden of Ezekiel’s message was that Judah was ripe for judgment. His preparation for speaking God’s message is given in the picture of *his eating the written prophecies* (2:8–3:3). At first the messages were not accepted, but later his prophecies were vindicated as they began to come true and as the nation was purged of its idolatry.

Ezekiel has been called “the father of Judaism” because of his supposed influence on Israel’s later worship.

His greatest contribution to postexilic Jewish worship consisted in *establishing the basis of the synagogue*.

He stressed the teaching of personal immortality, resurrection, and the ritual law, a unique feature among the prophets.

Ezekiel carried out his messages with vivid and dramatic acts of symbolism (e.g., 4:1–8; 5:1–17). His *style* has been characterized as *heavy and repetitious, but it was designed with the themes of apostasy and subsequent judgment in view*.

The place and circumstances of Ezekiel's death are unknown, *Ezekiel is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT*.

Symbolic Acts

Ezekiel didn't just speak prophecy—he acted it out in bizarre ways, guided by the Spirit of the Lord, YHWH

Lying on his side for 390 days, then switching sides for 40 more, *symbolizing Israel and Judah's punishment*.

Cooking food over dung to *represent the defilement of exile*.

Cutting and burning his hair, scattering it to the wind as *a metaphor of Jerusalem's fate*.

Packing his bags and digging through a wall, *mimicking the exile of the people*.

Some major symbolic acts

Ezek. 4:1–17. “*And you, O son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and portray upon it a city, even Jerusalem;* ² *and put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it round about.* ³ *And take an iron plate, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.*

⁴ *“Then lie upon your left side, and I will lay the punishment of the house of Israel upon you; for the number of the days that you lie upon it, you shall bear their punishment.* ⁵ *For I assign to you a number of days, three hundred and ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment; so long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel.* ⁶ *And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, a day for each year.* ⁷ *And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared; and you shall prophesy against the city.* ⁸ *And, behold, I will put cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.*

⁹ *“And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt, and put them into a single vessel, and make bread of them. During the number of days that you lie upon your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it.* ¹⁰ *And the food which you eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day; once a day you shall eat it.* ¹¹ *And water you shall drink by measure, the sixth part of a hin; once a day you shall drink.* ¹² *And you shall eat it as a barley cake, baking it in their sight on human dung.”* ¹³ *And the Lord said, “Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread unclean, among the nations whither I will drive them.”* ¹⁴ *Then I said, “Ah Lord GOD! behold, I have never defiled myself; from my youth up till now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has foul flesh come into my mouth.”* ¹⁵ *Then he said to me, “See, I will let you have cow's dung instead of human dung, on which you may prepare your bread.”* ¹⁶ *Moreover he said to me, “Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness; and they shall drink*

water by measure and in dismay. ¹⁷ ***I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and waste away under their punishment.***

Ezek 5:1–17. “*And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword; use it as a barber’s razor and pass it over your head and your beard; then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair.* ² *A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed; and a third part you shall take and strike with the sword round about the city; and a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.* ³ *And you shall take from these a small number, and bind them in the skirts of your robe.* ⁴ *And of these again you shall take some, and cast them into the fire, and burn them in the fire; from there a fire will come forth into all the house of Israel.* ⁵ ***Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries round about her.*** ⁶ ***And she has wickedly rebelled against my ordinances more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries round about her, by rejecting my ordinances and not walking in my statutes.*** ⁷ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are round about you, and have not walked in my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are round about you;* ⁸ *therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you; and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations.* ⁹ ***And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again.*** ¹⁰ ***Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of you, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds.*** ¹¹ ***Wherefore, as I live, says the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will cut you down; my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.*** ¹² *A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in the midst of you; a third part shall fall by the sword round about you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them.*

¹³ ***“Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury upon them.*** ¹⁴ *Moreover I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations round about you and in the sight of all that pass by.* ¹⁵ *You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations round about you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious chastisements—I, the Lord, have spoken—when I loose against you my deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will loose to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you, and break your staff of bread.* ¹⁷ ***I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children; pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword upon you. I, the Lord, have spoken.***”

Symbolic Visions

Four Living Creatures. Ezek 1:1-28

The four living creatures symbolize a “wagon” with *strange wheels within wheels* that can travel in any direction at the same time. The scene symbolizes the glory of the Lord, YHWH who is omnipresent. The four living creatures will later in Ezekiel depart the Temple and Jerusalem toward the east!

Ezek 1:4-14. “*As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze.* ⁵ ***And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.***

*And this was their appearance: they had the form of men, ⁶ but **each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.** ⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹ their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went. ¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. ¹¹ Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. ¹² And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. ¹³ In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. ¹⁴ **And the living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.**"*

Ezek 37:1-10. Valley of Dry Bones. *"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." ⁴ Again he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."*

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host."

Lesson 4. Ezekiel's Literary and Narrative Style

Overview

Ezek 1:1-24: 27 are *Prophecies of Doom—Judgments on Judah* for her idolatry and loss of faith in YHWH.

Ezek 25:1-32:32 are *prophecies of Doom and Judgments on the nations* for their pride and insults of Jerusalem as the seat of God's presence.

Ezek 33:1-39:29 offers *hope for restored Israel*—Judah if it will return to faith in YHWH.

Ezek 40:1-48:35 *describes the glory of the restored eschatological kingdom.*

Themes in Ezekiel speak hyperbolic dramatic enactments

Hyperbolic is an adjective that can describe something that resembles or pertains to a hyperbole. *It can also mean something that is exaggerated or uses hyperbole for emphasis or dramatic action.*

Ezek 1:1-24: 27 are *Prophecies of Doom—Judgments on Judah* for her idolatry and loss of faith in YHWH.

¹“In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as **I was among the exiles by the river Chebar**, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. ²On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), ³the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, **in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar**; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

⁴*As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, Assyria and Babylon, in a great cloud, with brightness round about it, will descend with fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. ⁵And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.”* Obviously, this vision is not future historical, for Israel and Judah are already in captivity in Babylon. *The purpose of this vision is to explain the reason for the captivity and the departure of the glory of the Lord, YHWH.*

This text opens *the striking vision of the glory of the Lord, YHWH, departing the Temple and Jerusalem on the wings of four living creatures!*

It sets the scene for the major theological point in Ezekiel, *because of Israel's and Judah's apostasy and fornication, spiritual and physical, YHWH will not protect them. They are in Babylonian captivity, exile, because they departed YHWH. Now the glory of the Lord, his presence, will depart from them.*

In this pericope we see and emphasis on YHWH' righteousness. *The righteous who trust in God will not be judged by their neighbors, or their families. Sin, for the righteous will live because of their faith.*

In this text righteousness is described as living faithfully to God and his covenants.

Ezek 18:19-22. “Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is lawful and right, and **has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live.** ²⁰ **The soul that sins shall die.** The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father; nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; **the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.**

²¹ “But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²² None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; **for the righteousness which he has done he shall live.”**

Ezek 25:1-32:32 are prophecies of Doom and Judgments on the nations for their pride and insults of Jerusalem as the seat of God's presence

YHWH will not only judge Israel and Judah, but will also judge, and pronounce the doom of Israel's and Judah's sin, their pagan neighbors, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and Tyre, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, *for their haughty attitude toward YHWH's sanctuaries, the Temple and Jerusalem.*

Ezek 25:1 *"The word of the Lord came to me: ² 'Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites, and prophesy against them. ³ Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, 'Aha!' over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when it went into exile; ⁴ therefore I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. ⁵ I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the cities of the Ammonites a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁶ For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within you against the land of Israel, ⁷ therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord."*

Ezek 33:1-39:29 offers hope for restored Israel—Judah if it will return to faith in YHWH.

In all this devastation of the Temple and Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity, *there is still hope for Judah*, if they repent and return to their faith in YHWH.

In this pericope we see *the glimmering of the grace of YHWH for those who live by faith in a relationship with God*, and not in a relationship with sin.

Ezek 33:1. *"¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² 'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman; ³ and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people; ⁴ then if any one who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. ⁵ He heard the sound of the trumpet, and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. ⁶ But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.*

⁷ 'So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

¹⁰ 'And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?' ¹¹ Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you

die, O house of Israel? ¹² And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness; and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. ¹³ Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; **but in the iniquity that he has committed he shall die.** ¹⁴ Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' **yet if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, ¹⁵ if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.** ¹⁶ None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right, he shall surely live."

Ezek 40:1-48:35 describes the glory of the restored Messianic eschatological, kingdom

This text introduces a figure, a man, who *has significant influence and power*. This figure appears in several similar prophetic context, Dan 7, Zech 6, Rev 1, as a person with royal position in YHWH's system, either as a person of high rank or *possibly a messianic figure*. The arguments that this man may be a visionary revelation of a *messiah* are reasonable in light of New Testament use of Old Testament *midrashic* prophetic references.

A previous mention of *a man* was introduced at Ezek 8:1ff who *introduced Ezekiel to the glory of the Lord*. He certainly was a person of importance within the range of an *angelic messianic* figure who was *associated with the glory of God*. We should not read more into this reference other than this man was possibly *an angelic person, or a messianic type figure*.

Ezek 40:1. "¹ In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was conquered, on that very day, the hand of the Lord was upon me, ² and **brought me in the visions of God into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city opposite me.** ³ When he brought me there, behold, **there was a man**, whose appearance was like bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring reed in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. ⁴ And **the man said to me**, "Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, **for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you; declare all that you see to the house of Israel.**"

In this, a major positive section of Ezekiel's mission YHWH demonstrates his *great love and grace* for his people. However, YHWH and Ezekiel have clearly demonstrated that great love and grace do not exclude responsibility for sin, apostasy, and rebellion against YHWH's will. But YHWH still loves his people but ***in that love he will chastise and punish disobedience.***

In this remarkable section of Ezekiel the return of YHWH is described in explicit detail. *YHWH's glory and presence will return to a restored Temple, and rebuild Jerusalem.*

The Temple with all its chambers will be restored in greater glory; the rules of the sanctuary will be restored; the land will be redistributed; the Sabbath and sacrifices are described, and a river of life will flow out if the restored Temple. Note that in the eschatological Christian system Jesus, the Messiah, is the Temple and the Holy Spirit is the river of life who flows out from Jesus!

Lesson 5. Ezekiel's Prophetic Predictions

Key thoughts by chapter analysis

Ezek 1:1-24:27. Divine Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

Read the above text carefully

God pronounces severe judgment on Judah for their loss of faith, idolatry, and lasciviousness.

Ezekiel recounts god's prophesy and the doom of Jerusalem in dramatic visions and terms. YHWH's Spirit departs from the Temple and Jerusalem—a sign of YHWH's abandonment of corrupt and idolatrous Israel.

The glory of the Lord [implying his holiness and purity] exits the temple and Jerusalem.

Ezek 1-9 The Doom, Judgment, and Destruction of Jerusalem

Ezek 1. Four Living Creatures and “wheels”

Living creatures are cherubim, Ezek 10

See CoPilot description, mysterious, symbolic, not human,

Ezek 10 is theologically loaded, mystical, metaphorical, and symbolic.

Ezekiel explains why Jerusalem and the Temple are deserted and Judah is in Babylon.

Ezek 10 depicts *the cherubim, symbolic of God's gory and holiness, flying away from the Temple!* Symbolically, God is departing the Temple and Jerusalem

“The motif of the gradual departure of the glory of Yahweh from the city gathers speed throughout these chapters. This is described as a physical rising up and departure of the cherubim eastwards.

Ezek 11. The departure of the glory of the Lord

However, this literal departure of the glory of the Lord, YHWH, takes on a *metaphorical* dimension since there are unanswered questions at the end of Ezek 11. *Where, if anywhere, does the glory of YHWH go from and where is its last observed location – on the mountain east of Jerusalem?*

And will the glory of the Lord ever come back to the Temple and Jerusalem? There is a suspense about the future which is not answered fully until much later in the book.

The *immediate focus*, however, is the role of the glory with its own undercarriage and suspension in the final judgment on the city ... *As the slaughter continues and the fire takes hold, Ezekiel watches the glory of Yahweh make its next movement towards departure. The glory of the Lord moves from over the threshold of the temple (18) across the courts to the waiting cherubim chariot, all wings and wheels ready for a short taxi to the eastern gate of the temple complex (19) for final take-off.*

The glory of the Lord cannot continue to dwell in the city that God is handing over to the fires of judgment. Finally, the glory-chariot moves again. This time (11:22–23) it lifts off from within the city and makes its exit as far as the mountain east of it – later known as the Mount of Olives”³

Ezek 12, 13, etc.

³ Wright, Christopher, *The Message of Ezekiel*, p. 119, 120.

Ezek 25:1-32:32. Prophecies against the Nations

Read the Ezek text carefully

God judges the nations Amon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt for *their pride and insults to Jerusalem, his holy city.*

Babylon will be YHWH's instrument of judgment and destruction of Israel.

Ezek 33:1-39:29. Prophecies of Israel Restored

Egypt and their Pharaohs are *condemned and lamented.*

The people of Israel are to be dispersed in exile, *never to return to their homeland.*

Ezekiel as a prophet-watchman is described.

There is a promise of a good shepherd, a restored homeland, and the defeat of the enemy.

The *valley of dry bones restored to life*, and *the union of two sticks*, are *promises of redemption* for Judah/Israel.

Gog and Magog, euphemisms for the enemies of YHWH's people, are assembled and defeated. This is a *precursor* of Rev 20:7, 8 in a *midrashic prophesy* of the defeat of all of God's enemies.

The righteous, by their faith, will be gathered and restored.

Ezek 40:1-48:35. Israel, Jerusalem, and the Restored New Temple

Read the Ezek text carefully

YHWH and the *four living creatures* as a symbol of YHWH's holiness and righteousness return to the New Temple.

The symbols of holiness, and other symbols, are carved into the wooden panels of the Temple. Jerusalem, the New Temple, and a restored Priesthood are described. This is indicative of a restored relationship with YHWH, and the restoration of Jerusalem and the new era, the *Second Temple era*, which are described by the New Testament Gospels, or Rabbinic Judaism.