

E Z E K I E L

—prophet to the exiles in Babylon, early sixth century. Name means “God will strengthen”

1. Date

Ezekiel dates his prophecies very frequently, as much or more than any other OT book. There are 14 chronological notices in Ezekiel:

1:1	30th year (of what?)
1:2	5th year of Jehoiachin’s captivity
8:1	6th “
20:1	7th
24:1	9th
26:1	11th
29:1	10th
29:17	27th
30:20	11th
31:1	11th
32:1	12th
32:17	12th
33:21	12th year of our captivity
40:1	25th “

Jehoiachin’s captivity started in 597 BC; thus these references would span the following:

5th year	=	593 BC
27th year	=	571 BC

Note that many of these prophecies were given during his 11th and 12th years of captivity. That would be 587-586 BC, just during and after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 33:21).

Ezekiel 1:1 poses a question: the 30th year of what?

It could be the 30th year of the Neo-Babylonian empire (about 596 BC, assuming its beginnings under Nabopolassar in 626 BC), the year after Jehoiachin was taken captive, two years before Ezekiel’s call related in chapter 1. Another possibility is that it is Ezekiel’s age at the time of his call (cf. Num. 4:3, and the lives of John the Baptist and of Jesus, Lk. 3:23).

The old critical view of C. C. Torrey, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy* (1930), is now generally discarded. Torrey and others denied that Nebuchadnezzar ever did destroy Jerusalem and Judah. That critical view is now discredited by archeology (cf. the Lachish Ostraka and the Babylonian Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar, mentioned above under Jeremiah). Actually, even many older critics acknowledged Ezekiel’s genuineness and unity (e.g., A. B. Davidson, S. R. Driver). There is now a general critical consensus that Ezekiel is genuine.

Ezekiel was contemporary with Jeremiah’s later years, and with Daniel’s earlier years. He mentions the holiness of Noah, Daniel, and Job (14:14, 20).

2. The prophet Ezekiel

family background

1:3, priest, son of Buzi (only place mentioned)

probably of Zadok's line, since he was taken captive from Jerusalem in 597, and since he favors Zadok (40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11)

personal life

taken to Babylon with Jehoiachin and the aristocracy in 597 BC (cf. 2 Kings 24:14-16); he dates his prophecies from that time

lived in Jewish colony called Tel-aviv ("hill of the spring"), by the River Chebar (כְּבַר *nahar*, probably a canal; 1:1, 3; 3:15)

had a house there, where he "held services" with people coming to hear his word from Yahweh (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:30-33). These were the elders of the commonwealth who represented the people by their waiting on the word of God from Ezekiel.

was married, but his wife died the day the siege began against Jerusalem in 588 BC (24:15-18; cf. vv. 1-2)

Ezekiel was a "Watchman" to warn of impending judgment and to proclaim hope of restoration.

his prophecies were in two phases:

(1) 5th - 12th years of his captivity

(2) 25th and 27th years of his captivity

(note the 13-year silence after Jerusalem was destroyed)

Ezekiel performed many symbolic acts and several times was in a prophetic trance (e.g., 3:15). Ralph Alexander (*EBC*, 742,745) says this literary revelation fits the VII-VI cent. milieu of the "Mesopotamian Dream-vision, ... a symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological." —p. 745

Cf. Daniel and Zechariah's visions

Twice he was carried in a vision back from exile to Jerusalem:

1. in 592 BC, to see the corruption of the temple (ch. 8-11)

2. in 573 BC, to describe the new temple (ch. 40-48)

(concerning this unusual behavior, see the notes on the prophetic call and state in the introduction)

3. Summary of Ezekiel

a. Summary Outline

—Ezekiel is logically developed and quite chronological

1) Prophecies against the Jews, ch. 1-24

(dated 593-588, until the siege)

2) Prophecies against the nations, ch. 25-32

—for those who sneered at Israel's demise and resisted God, there was ultimate judgment; cf. Gen. 12:3

(dated 588-586, time of the final siege and captivity)

(except 29:17-21, sixteen years later, 571 BC)

3) Prophecies of restoration, ch. 33-48

(dated 586 BC and 573 BC)

b. **Summary of Themes** (see Alexander in *Expositors...*, pp. 745,6 for a development of these five themes)

- 1) Nature of God
- 2) Purpose and nature of judgment
- 3) Individual responsibility
- 4) Ethical, moral, religious history of Israel
- 5) Nature of Israel's promised restoration

Dumbrell (*Faith of Israel*, 127) notes that the three great visions of Ezekiel (1-3, 8-11, 40-48, all of which are united by the phrase, "the hand of the Lord" was upon him) are all dominated by temple concerns that portray the divine kingship of Yaweh over Israel. Cf. 20:33 for an explicit statement.

Ezekiel 20:33 "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you.

c. **Literary summary**

Few OT books use as many literary forms as does Ezekiel: prose, poetry, dream visions, apocalyptic, drama, allegory, parables, proverbs, dirges, etc.

Outline of Ezekiel

1. Prophecies against the Jews, ch. 1-24

a. Ezekiel's call and commission, ch. 1-3

Christophany, 1:26

–God depicted as enthroned above, much as at Isaiah's call in Is. 6

–God is in the midst, yet over all creation, as depicted by the mobility from the wheels

vision of God recurs, 3:23; 8:4; 43:2,3 (cf. Rev. 1:15)

cherubim are generally related to the sanctuary as temple guardians

to be struck dumb, 3:26 (cf. 24:27; 33:22)

b. Object lessons of Jerusalem destroyed, ch. 4-5

from 1:2 = 593 BC

v. 5 593 + 390 years = 983 BC (days of David)

v. 6 593 + 40 years = 633 BC (days of Josiah)

ch. 4, lie on side; 9 oz. Daily ration of cakes defiled over buffalo chips

ch. 5, cut hair off: 2/3 of Jerusalem to be destroyed by fire and sword

c. Judgment against Judah prophesied, ch. 6-7

d. God forsakes his temple, ch. 8-11

8:1, 6th year = 592 BC

8:3, transported in spirit back to Jerusalem

ch. 8, abominations in the temple (vs. 10)

progressive departure of shekinah glory of God—8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:23

mark on the forehead—9:4,6 –provides protection from six destroying angels

cf. Rev. 7:2-3; 9:4 = 4 destroying angels

10:20, cherubim identified

Akkadian cognate means “adore, praise”

11:17-20, restoration and regeneration for the remnant

vv. 19-20 = New Covt

19 "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

e. More prophecies against the Jews, ch. 12-24

ch. 12, two symbolic acts

vv. 1-16, going out through the wall

v. 13, note Zedekiah prophecy; cf. Jer. 39:7 where the king is blinded

13 "I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there.

vv. 17-28, eating with trembling

ch. 13, against false prophets/prophetesses

male (v. 2)

female (v. 17)

13:10, “whited sepulchre” illustration of Jesus

10 "Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when *there is* no peace...

ch. 14, idolatry leads to ruin

vv. 14,20, heroes past and present

ch. 15-17, allegories

ch. 15, vine-tree: not much good except for the fire

ch. 16, wayward wife

restoration in vv. 60-63

ch. 17, two eagles

explanation in vv. 11-24

1) Nebz

2) Pharaoh Hophrah, the Jews' ally

ch. 18, appeal to repent, v. 32

God is not pleased with the death of the wicked, vv. 23, 31-32

31 "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

ch. 19, lion and vine allegories

v. 14, lamentation = “past glory and present distress”

ch. 20, Mosaic covenant to be enforced

v. 12, Sabbath = a covenant sign of separation to God in the midst of a profane world

12 "Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies them.

purgings in the wilderness (Babylon), v. 25

restored, vv. 41-44

ch. 21, Babylon to judge Judah and Ammon

v. 21, divination methods (cf. *ANEP* #394)

“song of the sword” (Freeman), vv. 19ff.

ch. 22, the dross to be burned away, v. 18

Len Pine’s key verse: 30 "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.

ch. 23, allegory of Oholah and Oholibah, v. 4ff.

אֹהֶלָה *'oholah*, “her tent” = Israel of the North

אֹהֶל־בָּרָה *'oholibah*, “my tent (is) in her” = Judah. The tent = His tabernacle (temple)

ch. 24, the boiling caldron object lesson

v. 2, siege begins (588 BC, 9th year of captivity)

vv. 15-27, Ezekiel’s wife dies; “the desire of his eyes” v. 16

v. 27, Ezekiel’s temporary dumbness

three years minus five days, ends in 33:21-22

2. Prophecies against the nations, ch. 25-32 as fulfillment of God’s curse on the those who curse Abraham, Gen. 12:3

ch. 25, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia

Edom’s judgments also the subject of ch. 35

ch. 26 - 28:19, prophecies against Tyre which was supplying Nebz

26:1, eleventh year = 586 BC, after Jerusalem destroyed

ch. 26, prophecy against **Tyre**

vv. 4,5 Tyre scraped bare becomes a place to dry fish nets

4 'And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. 5 'It shall be a *place for spreading nets* in the midst of the sea,...

vv. 7-11 = “he,” (Nebz)
vv. 12,14 = “they” (Greeks of Alexander)

ch. 27, lament over Tyre

28:1-10, prophecy against the king of Tyre

28:11-19, lament over the king of Tyre

Note: The lamentation contrasts the glory of the former state (which is hyperbolic) with the ruin of the latter state (cf. the book of Lamentations, which does the same for the city of Jerusalem).

The context, along with the general biblical pattern, does not justify our referring this lamentation to Satan.

- ◆ The language is inflated, hyperbolic poetry under the image of the imminent fall of an allegedly perfect man
- ◆ The setting is an image of the garden of Eden. Two other times in his prophecy (36:35; 31:8:ff), Ezekiel uses this image, both times by way of comparison to contemporary issues (not as descriptive history of the garden)
- ◆ The language is deliberately ironic and shows God’s condescension to the vanity of the king. Note the “you say” statements (27:3; 28:2,9)
- ◆ Textual variants in the Hebrew and proper translation solve the apparent puzzle of Ezekiel’s flashback to times of prehistory.
 - ◆ 28:14: “You were with the anointed cherub” (Take “with” as a preposition instead of as definite object marker.) =>The king of Tyre was like Adam in perfection
 - ◆ 28:16: preferred reading in context is, “The covering cherub destroyed you” [Adam] This is supported by the LXX.

Should be אֶתְכֶם יִשְׁמַד “He [covering cherub] will destroy you”
Not אֶתְכֶם יִשְׁמַד “I”

28:20-24, Sidon

28:25-26, (kingdom blessings for Israel when other nations judged)

ch. 29-32, prophecies against Egypt

29:1, tenth year = 587 BC, year of Jerusalem’s destruction

29:2, Pharaoh Hophra (Jer. 44:30)

29:10-13, “forty-year captivity” of the Egyptians

29:17, twenty-seventh year = 571 BC (latest time recorded)

29:18-20, Egypt will be Nebuchadnezzar’s wages for conquering Tyre

Nebuchadnezzar invaded and re-subjugated Egypt in 568 BC

30:20; 31:1, eleventh year (586 BC, first and third months)

31:8-18, as Assyria, Egypt shall be destroyed

even though now Egypt should be more exalted “than all the trees of Eden”

32:1, 17, twelfth year = 585 BC (twelfth month, first day and fifteenth day)

ch. 32, Pharaoh’s companions in Sheol

3. Prophecies of restoration, ch. 33-39

33:1-8,9 - Ezekiel a watchman (cf. Acts 20:26-27)

33:10-20, appeal for individual repentance now that Jerusalem has fallen; in his earlier prophecies he had appealed to the representative leaders and nation as a whole to repent (see Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*)

33:21, twelfth year = 586 BC (tenth month)

33:21-22, Ezekiel’s dumbness removed (3:22-27; 24:25-27)

33:23-33, false hopes of remaining Jews in Palestine and in Babylonia

ch. 34,4, false shepherds (civic rulers) to be replaced by the true shepherd; vv. 23-28,31

cf. Jer. 23

shepherd, symbol of king, national leader

vv. 11-31, long passage of future kingdom; basis of John 10

ch. 35, prophecy against Edom

inserted, indicative of supremacy of Israel in the kingdom

cf. ch. 25

ch. 36, kingdom promises

vv. 8-15, kingdom blessings on the mountains

PURPOSE vv. 16-23, kingdom blessings for the glory of God only

v. 23 "And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.

vv. 24-38, kingdom blessings on the people

regeneration; cf. 11:19-20; Jer. 31:33; sprinkling is associated with regeneration

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

The Spirit of God will then be given universally rather than solely for God's leaders and servants.

vv. 29-35, restoration and removal of the curse; return to Eden, v. 35

28 "Then you shall dwell in the *land* that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 35 "So they will say, "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden;...

ch. 37, kingdom figures

vv. 1-14, valley of dry bones

Is this a reference 1) to the political reconstitution of the nation, or 2) to the physical resurrection of its members. The latter interpretation is preferred due to the preceding context of spiritual regeneration and the following context of the messianic kingdom.

note personal resurrection in vv. 12-14 following contextually the promise of personal regeneration in ch. 36

vv. 15-28, lesson of the two sticks

David the king, vv. 24-25

24 " David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 "Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where

your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David *shall be* their prince forever.

the temple, vv. 26-28

26 "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. 27 "My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 28 "The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." ' ' "

ch. 38-39, the war with Gog and Magog

Probably at the end of the millennium instead of Armageddon (Rev. 20:8)

- 1) Chpts. 33-37 are preparation for blessing in the land
- 2) 38:11,12,14 describe "unwalled cities"
- 3) Fire from heaven; Ez. 38:22 cf. Rev. 20:9

gog, the ruler

magog, the land of Gog (today's Armenia)

normally identified as the land between Cappadocia and Media; Josephus *Antiquities* 1:6:1 identifies it with the Scythians (cf. Col. 3:11)

38:8-12, to attack Israel after peaceful settlement

agrees with the time after the initial establishment of the kingdom

39:4, 17, feast for the birds

39:26, 29, Israel saved; the Spirit of God on them

cf. Rev. 19:17-18, 21, for the birds

cf. Rev. 20:7-10, for Gog and Magog

4. The new theocratic order, ch. 40-48 — all seen as under the conditional Mosaic economy.

40:1, twenty-fifth year = 573 BC (late in Ezekiel's career)

a. Dimensions and furniture of the theoretical Temple, ch. 40 - 43:17

See drawing by T. Witton Davis (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:704)

The temple discussion comes at the end of Ezekiel even as the tabernacle narrative comes at the end of Exodus after the nation's redemption from bondage.

The size, shape, and arrangement of Ezekiel's temple is unlike any Jewish temple built so far, and is different from the instructions in the rest of the OT. As a symbol of the presence of God, it goes back past Solomon's temple to a heavenly pattern more like the tabernacle in the wilderness (Dumbrell, 139).

1. The pattern for this temple, as well as for the original tabernacle, comes from heaven.
2. The vision of this temple finishes a message of deliverance, even as the picture of the tabernacle finishes the deliverance message of Exodus.

43:2-5, the shekinah glory of God returns to the temple

cf. its departure in ch. 8-11

43:7, 9,11, "conditional nature of the theoretical temple promise: note "IF" clauses

11 "And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple

It seems best to understand this temple and the ritual described to be given in the Mosaic economy, with the promise of its fulfillment based on obedience by the nation in the time of Ezekiel. Since the returning captives did not keep the law of the Lord as required (cf. Malachi), this temple was not given to them.

After the coming of Christ and his complete sacrifice, this promissory temple and its sacrificial system have been rendered obsolete.

Rev. 21:22 notes that New Heavens and New Earth there will be no need of a temple.

b. Temple priesthood and ritual, 43:18 - ch. 46

the entire Mosaic economy seems implied

(1) all the OT sacrifices:

sin offerings, 43:19

trespass offerings, 46:20

burnt offerings, 43:18

fellowship offerings, 43:27

grain offerings, 44:29

drink offerings, 45:17

daily sacrifices, 46:13-15

These sacrifices are all for reconciliation (45:17); but contrast Hebrews 10:18.

Heb. 10:16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."
18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

(2) the OT holy days:

Sabbaths, 44:24
new moons, 45:17
Passover, 45:21
all feasts, 44:24; 45:17
jubilee, 46:17

(3) continuation of circumcision, 44:9

(4) OT cleanliness laws for priests:

hair, 44:20
wine, 44:21
marriage, 44:22
dead bodies, 44:25
unclean food, 44:31; not true under New covenant economy, Acts 10, 15

(5) priests to live from the sacrifices, 44:28-30

(6) “the prince,” a Jew, lives as a redeemed, but sinful man:

needs sin offerings, etc., 45:17, 22-25

is subject to laws, 46:18

has sons, 46:16-18

Three main theories about Ezekiel’s temple and ritual

(1) Literal millennial temple and ritual

see Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the OT Prophets*, 308-24

This is the standard dispensational understanding. The future millennium is viewed as primarily a Jewish dispensation, with the sacrifices being more of a memorial. This view has the advantage of a more literal understanding of these chapters.

The disadvantages are requiring a strong Jewish-Christian distinction, requiring the restoration of a system the Bible itself says is no longer relevant (Heb. 10:1 they were a “shadow of things to come” that have now come), and ignoring the conditional nature of the promise.

(2) Figurative language describing spiritual truth

see Edmund P. Clowney, "The Final Temple," *Studying the NT Today*, 97-132

Some see partial fulfillment in the temples of Zerubbabel and Herod, but still interpret much of this section in a "spiritualizing" manner. This view has the advantage of recognizing the end of the sacrificial system with the NT dispensation, and the undesirability of returning to the OT ceremonial law. It has the disadvantage of resorting to a method of interpretation which is subjective and often arbitrary.

(3) Literal language describing conditional theocratic promises

see G. N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, prop. 172, vol. 3, pp. 83-91

This has the advantages of recognizing the literal nature of the prophecy, including the nature of the prince described and the total Mosaic system, of recognizing the conditional nature of the prophecy (43:6-11), of recognizing the passing away of the Mosaic economy in both the present and future ages (cf. Rev. 21:22), and of recognizing the unity of the OT and NT believers in the church.

Peters calls this approach, "**Hypocatastasis**." Promises of a potentially future time are portrayed in terms that are understandable to present experience. Compare the language of Heb. 13:15 and I Peter 2:5,9.

Heb. 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Its primary disadvantage seems to be the small emphasis given to the conditional element in Ezekiel, and the lack of conditional statements in other prophetic portions which predict the Mosaic system as operable in the kingdom age (e.g., Isa. 2:2; Zech. 14:16-19; Jer. 33:16-18).

(4) Perhaps describes the first half of the seven year tribulation before Antichrist breaks covenant with the Jews?

c. Arrangement of the Holy Land, ch. 47-48

47:1-12, the water flowing from the temple

cf. Rev. 22:1-2, flowing from the throne of God

47:13 - 48:29, tribal divisions of the land

see *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map #166

the outside borders of the land correspond to Num. 34:1-5

Ezekiel here divides the tribes into twelve, with Ephraim and Manasseh as separate tribes. To keep the number at twelve, Levi is left out of the number, with a special territory allotted, along with that of the Zadokites (48:8-22; 45:1-8).

40:30-35, twelve tribes on the gates of the wall

Here the tribes are apportioned differently. Ephraim and Manasseh are counted as one tribe, Joseph; and Levi is included, to make twelve.

cf. names on gates in Rev. 21:12-13

Note:

The similarities between the descriptions in Ezekiel 47-48 and Revelation 21-22 seem to point to a similar fulfillment. Especially noteworthy are the similarities of the wall and the river in the new Jerusalem.

What is not found in the kingdom picture in Revelation are the animal sacrifices and Mosaic ceremonial elements.

*The future kingdom will contain all the promised OT blessings, but will not include the sacrificial and ceremonial elements which are now fulfilled in Christ and have passed away.