

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-24-12 PM NOTES  
EZEKIEL  
#28 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

A Short History of Israel from the Time of the Kings until the Babylonian Exile:

1043-931 BC – The United Kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon)

931 – 722 BC – The Northern Kingdom (Called Israel or Ephraim) with Its Capital of Samaria

722 BC – Assyria Captured the Northern Kingdom and Deported Most of the Population to Assyria

931 – 587 BC – The Southern Kingdom (Called Judah) with Its Capital of Jerusalem

606 BC – Babylon's First Deportation of Some Jewish Citizens to Babylon

597 BC – A Second Deportation to Babylon

586 BC – The Babylonians Destroy Jerusalem's Wall and Temple and Deport Most of the Population

- I. The Preparation of Ezekiel (Chapter 1-3)
  - A. The Fiery Whirlwind (1:1-4)
  - B. The Four Living Creatures (1:5-14)
  - C. The Wheels (1:15-21)
  - D. The Firmament (1:22-27)
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  - F. The Calling (2:1-3:27)
  
- II. The Condemnation of Judah (Chapter 4-24)
  - A. The Disobedient Nation (Chapter 4-7)
  
  - B. The Departed Glory (Chapter 8-11)
  
  - C. The Disciplined Nation (Chapter 12-24)

**Deuteronomy 28:15 (NKJV)** "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you."

**Deuteronomy 28:63-64 (NKJV)** "<sup>63</sup> And it shall be, *that* just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. <sup>64</sup> Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known--wood and stone."

### III. The Denunciation of the Gentile Nations (Chapter 25-32)

### IV. The Restoration of Israel (Chapter 33-48)

#### A. They Return to the Land (Chapter 33-36)

**Romans 11:25-27 (HCSB)** “<sup>25</sup> So that you will not be conceited, brothers, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery: a partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Liberator will come from Zion; He will turn away godlessness from Jacob. <sup>27</sup> And this will be My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

#### B. They Experience New Life and Unity (Chapter 37)

**Ephesians 2:1-7 (NKJV)** “<sup>1</sup> And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

#### C. They Will Be Protected From Their Enemies (Chapter 38-39)

#### D. They Will Worship the Lord (Chapter 40-48)

“These offerings are not efficacious [providing payment for sin], nor were the Old Testament sacrifices. They were all symbolic of death for sin. They do not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). They [the Old Testament sacrifices] were prospective [looking forward to the true payment at Calvary]; these will be retrospective [looking back to Calvary].”

- John MacArthur

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Let me give you a short history of the nation Israel so we can see exactly where the book of Ezekiel fits into that history. I will start with the time of the Kings after the time of the Judges. There was a united Israel under Kings Saul, David and Solomon from 1043 – 931 BC. Under Solomon’s son Rehoboam, there was a civil war and the nation split into the Northern Kingdom (sometimes called Ephraim which was the largest of the ten northern tribes) and the Southern Kingdom (most often called Judah which was the largest of the two tribes in the south). The Northern Kingdom had as its capital the city of Samaria, and it continued from 931 – 722 BC. All of kings in the Northern Kingdom were bad. Some were good military leaders, but they were bad in that they did not lead the nation to follow God and also they allowed idolatry to spread. In 722 BC the Assyrians captured Samaria and the Northern Kingdom and took most of the population back to Assyria and scattered them among the other nations that they had taken captive so that the nations would lose their national identity. For the few that were left in Samaria, the Assyrians brought in other conquered peoples to settle in Samaria so that even the Jews left behind would intermarry and lose their ethnic identity. The plan worked and in New Testament times these were the people known as the Samaritans who were part Jewish and part other ethnic groups that the Jews had intermarried with. Judah (the Southern Kingdom) had escaped being captured by Assyria through the providential deliverance of God and they continued as a nation after the Northern Kingdom was gone. The Kings in Judah were mixed: Some were godly; some were evil, and some were a mixture. As the years passed, Assyria faded in power until they were defeated by the Babylonians. Even with a few godly kings, Judah continued to decline in their loyalty to the one true God and to weaken in every area. In 606 BC Babylon came and deported a group of Jews back to Babylon. This first group was mostly of the royal family and other prominent people. Daniel was in this first group. A second group was deported to Babylon 9 years later in 597 BC. Ezekiel was in this second group. About 11 years later in 586 BC, Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and deported most of the rest of the people of Judah in Jerusalem, broke down the walls, pillaged the temple and then tore it to the ground. The Babylonians had a different philosophy than the Assyrians of dealing with people that they captured. The Babylonians allowed the captives to live together in clusters so that they would maintain their ethnic identity.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah (though he was about 20 years younger). While Jeremiah was prophesying to the people in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was prophesying to the people who were captive in Babylon. The Babylonian captivity was not the end of Israel. Did you ever have a child that continued to misbehave after many warnings? One of the ways of dealing with that is to put them in “time out”. The exile was sort of like a 70 year time out for Judah. God gave them time out from the throne, the temple, and the land. Over time they had begun to idolize these blessings. They especially idolized the temple and there was a belief that no matter how badly they disobeyed God, they were OK because they had the temple. The temple, the land promised to their ancestor Abraham, and the Davidic line of kings were all gracious gifts of God, but the people of Judah had so focused on the gifts that they forgot the giver. God set them aside from the land, the kingship, and the temple for 70 years so they could see that He was their blessing.

The prevailing theme of the Old Testament is the glory of God (that is the sub-title of this series). We see several things about the glory of God very clearly in the book of Ezekiel. For instance, we see the *appearance* of God’s glory to Ezekiel in chapter one in a vision he saw in conjunction with his call to the prophetic office. Later, we see the *departure* of God’s glory from the temple because of the sins of the people. In the last section of Ezekiel, we see the *return* of God’s glory as the nation is restored. We will

spend some time on each of those – the appearance, the departure, and the return of the glory of God to His people.

By way of introduction to the text, let me admit that there are some real interpretive challenges in Ezekiel. There is a lot of symbolism and at times it is difficult to determine if an account is symbolic or literal. Some of the visions Ezekiel experienced are on the surface a little strange seeming. One Old Testament scholar that is a little too liberal for me (W. F. Albright) described Ezekiel as “one of the greatest spiritual figures of all time, in spite of his tendency to psychic abnormality.” Not only did Ezekiel see strange visions, he was also told by God to do some strange seeming things. He gave object lessons to the people by lying motionless on his side for long periods of time (4:4 ff), by being bound up with ropes in his house so that he could not go out among the people (3:25); he is ordered not to mourn the death of his wife (24:16-17); he packs his belongings and digs through the city wall to illustrate the coming exile, and many other such things. These object lessons all had a purpose, but I would assume that his mental health was often called into question. This book was regarded so strange that Jewish rabbis would often not allow young men to read Ezekiel until they were 30 lest they become discouraged at the difficulty of understanding the Scriptures and give up trying. I don’t really think this book is that difficult.

#### I. The Preparation of Ezekiel (Chapter 1-3) [Read 1:1]

The year Ezekiel is speaking of is his own age. Priests began their ministry at age 30 and like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was called to be a priest and a prophet. It could be translated in “my” thirtieth year. He gives us a key to understanding the unusual vision he is going to describe by saying that it is a vision of God. Keep that in mind. It is not that God looks like this vision; it is that this vision tells us some things about God. I’m not going to get into the details of this vision (mainly because I don’t understand many of them). The old spiritual sung by African American people was taken from this vision: “Ezekiel saw a wheel, way up in the middle of the air; the big wheel ran by faith and the little wheel ran by the grace of God, a wheel in a wheel, away in the middle of the air”.

##### A. The Fiery Whirlwind (1:1-4) [Read 1:4]

The whirlwind symbolizes God’s judgment on Judah through Babylon. The coming judgment was God’s judgment. Jerusalem would be wiped out and the temple would be torn down completely.

##### B. The Four Living Creatures (1:5-14) [Read 1:5-14]

These four living creatures were almost certainly angels, probably Cherubim. They symbolize the glory and power of God. They could see all directions and move all directions without turning. The face of the lion symbolizes sovereignty and supremacy (“the king of beasts”); the man pictures intelligence, understanding and wisdom. The face of the ox is a symbol of servanthood and sacrifice. The face of the eagle represents power and deity soaring over all creation.

##### C. The Wheels (1:15-21) [Read]

The wheels symbolize the omniscience of God. The eyes in the wheels symbolize that He sees all that is happening and knows all that was is and will be.

##### D. The Firmament (1:22-27) [Read]

The firmament is translated “expanse” in most other translations. The throne above the firmament speaks of His sovereignty and the accomplishment of His will even when we don’t see it. The complex movements may symbolize how precise and perfect is God’s providential working to carry out His own will in lives without taking away the freedom to choose in His creatures.

##### E. The Rainbow (1:28) [Read]

In the cloud was a rainbow that symbolizes God’s mercy and His covenant with His people.

See what this vision tells us about God. He is a God who judges, a God who is omnipotent, a God who is omniscient, a God whose providential workings are beyond our comprehension, and yet a God who is merciful and keeps His covenants.

I confess that I don’t understand all this “vision of God” symbolizes, but the message of Ezekiel is that God is not like us. He is holy and set apart. He cannot be fully explained. Keep in mind that these are not

scientific statements that Ezekiel is making. He uses phrases like “as” and “as if” and “like”. God is different from us and infinitely holy and unexplainable and not completely understandable.

#### F. The Calling (2:1-3:27)

In these verses we see God commissioning Ezekiel to his prophetic ministry among the people of Judah in their captivity [Read 2:1-5]. Have you noticed with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and now Ezekiel that God warns them that results will be sparse? Not many will listen, but they will know that they had a prophet among them. God explains to Ezekiel why the people will not hear him in 3:7 [Read].

### II. The Condemnation of Judah (Chapter 4-24)

In this section of the book, Ezekiel continues to give God’s message in a symbolic and dramatic way.

#### A. The Disobedient Nation (Chapter 4-7)

In chapter four, Ezekiel was commanded to make a clay replica of Jerusalem and dramatize how it would be besieged (4:1-3). Next, he was told by God to lay on his side (facing the north) for over a year to symbolize the times of judgment for Israel and Judah coming from Babylon in the north. Many other “symbolic sermons” were given by Ezekiel to show the judgment of Jerusalem. A summary of this section is Ezekiel 6:10 [Read].

#### B. The Departed Glory (Chapter 8-11)

God now takes the prophet in a vision to the temple in Jerusalem. In the temple Ezekiel saw gross idolatry, secret worship of idols, and even the priests worshipping the sun. Is it any wonder that God destroyed the temple and took the people captive? The glory of God would not and could not remain in such an atmosphere. The glory of God that was in the temple departed [Read 9:3; 10:18; 11:22-23]. With the glory of God departed, the temple was just a building. The glory of the Lord departed because God will not share His glory with another. The glory of God cannot co-exist with idols – idols of any kind.

#### C. The Disciplined Nation (Chapter 12-24)

In these chapters, Ezekiel summarizes how God was so patient with the sins of His people. God’s patience when it comes to sin has an end. God summarizes the sin of His people in 12:1-2 [Read]. In spite of the goodness of God, they acted like spiritual prostitutes in going after other gods [Read 16:15-19]. For many years before Ezekiel, God had warned His people that they would go into exile if they continued in idolatry. He said in **Deuteronomy 28:15 (NKJV)** "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you". **Deuteronomy 28:63-64 (NKJV)** “<sup>63</sup> And it shall be, *that* just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. <sup>64</sup> Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known--wood and stone.” Ezekiel’s message is that now the people of God must bear the consequences of turning away from Him like a wife who has turned away from her husband to go with other lovers. To illustrate what God had to say next, Ezekiel was told to do something that has to be the most painful thing he ever experienced [Read 24:15-24]. As Ezekiel lost “the desire of his eyes”, his wife, even so the people were going to lose “the desire of their eyes”, Jerusalem and the temple. There would be no time for the normal rituals of grief as they would be carried away captive to Babylon.

### III. The Denunciation of the Gentile nations (Chapter 25-32)

In these chapters, God also proclaims judgments on seven other nations (similar to what we saw in Jeremiah). I want to only focus on one of those nations – Tyre. As Ezekiel focuses on the human rulers of Tyre, he then moves to the spiritual forces behind them that motivate and empower them. Ezekiel speaks of the “prince of Tyre” and then moves to the spiritual power behind him that he addresses as “the King of Tyre”. Many Bible scholars believe that it is Satan himself the Ezekiel is addressing [Read 28:1-2; 11-13a; 14-19]. When this passage is coupled with Isaiah 14:12-17, we get a basis for the doctrine of Satan. He was a high if not the highest ranking angel who became filled with pride and desired equality with

God and rebelled and a third of the other angels followed him. These original rebels are the devil and his demons that oppose God and God's people until the time comes for God to put them in a special place He has prepared for them called Hell or the lake of fire.

#### IV. The Restoration of Israel (Chapter 33-48)

One of the patterns that you will find in most all of the books of the prophets is that God denounces their sins in very blunt and harsh words. They are told of coming judgment if they do not repent, but most of the books of the prophets end with hope. God is not through with Israel. Ezekiel is no exception to this common pattern. The book ends with a positive note of hope.

##### A. They return to the Land (Chapter 33-36)

Before Ezekiel gets to the promise of hope he reminds them of the cause for Jerusalem's fall [Read 33:25-26; 28-29]. We find the message of restoration in 36:18-24 [Read]. This passage shows God's motivation in restoring His people. It is not because they deserve it; it is for His Name's sake. His name includes all that He is. To say "for My Name's sake" is virtually the same thing as saying "for my glory". All that God does, He does for His glory. Why did God save us? It was for His glory, for Him Name's sake! Why did God ...? The answer is always "for His glory". Why did God restore Israel to their land after 70 years in captivity and even more fully in 1948? It was for His glory. Why will there be a mass turning of the Jews to the Lord in the last day? It will be for His Name's sake. Look how this coming salvation is described in Ezekiel 36:25-28. I believe that the ultimate fulfillment of that waits for a time that is yet future. It is described in **Romans 11:25-27 (HCSB)** "<sup>25</sup> So that you will not be conceited, brothers, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery: a partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Liberator will come from Zion; He will turn away godlessness from Jacob. <sup>27</sup> And this will be My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

##### B. They Experience New Life and Unity (Chapter 37)

This is perhaps the most recognized passage in Ezekiel. While God is specifically speaking of the spiritual restoration of Israel, this is a beautiful picture of what God does in salvation [Read 37:1]. We were dead in trespasses and sins. Spiritually we were as totally unable to do any thing about our condition as dried out bones are unable to do anything in the physical realm. A messenger of God speaks the message (symbolizing the Gospel) and look what happens [Read 37:5-10]. What a picture of the new birth and the truth of **Ephesians 2:1-7 (NKJV)** "<sup>1</sup> And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

##### C. They Will be Protected from Their Enemies (Chapter 38-39)

I believe the final fulfillment of this prophesy is yet future at the last great attack on Israel.

##### D. They Will Worship the Lord (Chapter 40-48)

My approach to the end times is Premillennial and I believe that these passages refer primarily to the Millennium when Christ sets up His physical kingdom and rules for 1000 years. The Temple is rebuilt and the glory of God returns [read 43:2, 5]. In 43:18-27 we are told that offerings will be given on the altar. They are not given as a payment for sin, but as a memorial for the sin price that is already paid. John MacArthur summarizes it this way: "These offerings are not efficacious [providing payment for sin], nor were the Old Testament sacrifices. They were all symbolic of death for sin. They do not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). They [the Old Testament sacrifices] were prospective [looking forward to the true

payment at Calvary]; these will be retrospective [looking back to Calvary]”. [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, Page 939].

#### CONCLUSION

As with most all of these books, there are so many important passages that we left out. Learn this from Ezekiel: God communicates His message to a rebellious world through the life of His messenger, not just through what that messenger says. As with Ezekiel, our whole life is to reflect God’s Word. Learn to line up your life, your purposes, your desires, your goal, and your ambitions with God’s motive in all that He does – that He might be glorified. Glory to God! (3279)