

There is a very peculiar prophetic book in the Bible that has been called one of the most “remarkable writings” in Scripture. It has also been called **one of the most unusual and strangest books in all of Scripture**. In fact, for this very reason, of all the prophetic books in Scripture, this book has probably been neglected the most—the book’s name is Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is a book of filled with some odd things. It is filled with “bizarre symbolism” and “strange visions.” Charles Dyer said to the average reader Ezekiel is “a perplexing maze of incoherent visions—a kaleidoscope of whirling wheels and dry bones that defy interpretation” (*Ezekiel*, p. 1225). It is a book that is written by, what one commentator said, “the wildest man in the Bible.” It is a book that is unusually colorful and very unpredictable.

Ezekiel is a man who was given some of the oddest assignments that God ever gave to one man.

- 1) God told Ezekiel to lock himself up in his house and bind himself with ropes (3:24-26);
- 2) God told him He would make him not be able to speak for many days, then later he could speak again (3:26/24:27);
- 3) God told him to lie bound on his right and left side for a total of 430 days, 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right side (4:4-8);
- 4) God told him to eat unclean bread baked over human dung (4:9, 12);
- 5) God told him to shave his head and beard and then weigh his hair and divide his hair (5:1);
- 6) God told him to pack some bags to go outside and dig a hole and crawl out with the bags (12:1-7);
- 7) God told him that his wife was going to die but he was not to mourn or cry (24:15-20);
God would destroy Israel, His unfaithful wife, and not shed any tears.

Now one must admit those are some strange assignments. Of course the key to understanding all of these assignments is found in **Ezekiel 24:24—Ezekiel was a physical sign of what God was doing to Israel and a sign of why He was doing it.**

In the next several weeks, we would like to take you on a journey through this very unique book.

To begin the book we would like to ask and answer a series of introductory questions.

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book?

We offer five reasons why we need to carefully study Ezekiel:

Reason #1 - Because Ezekiel is one of only 66 inspired books God has given to His people.

God has given only 66 inspired books to men and Ezekiel is one of those 66 books. Two key prophetic books are found back to back in our English Bibles. One is Ezekiel and the other is Daniel. Ezekiel and Daniel were contemporaries and Ezekiel was older than Daniel, but God used both to pen an inspired book.

Now of all of the O.T. books, many scholars think that Ezekiel is one of the worst preserved books, based on the fact that there aren’t a great number of manuscripts. One commentator said it is “among the worst preserved of the Old Testament” (Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, p. 3).

In fact, because of this many liberal scholars say that Ezekiel is really not inspired by God. Their big argument is that there are so many obscure statements and technical dates and measurements in the book and there is not enough manuscript evidence to determine if the text makes sense or is accurate.

But I love what Dr. Ralph Alexander out of Dallas Seminary said, if you don't have a lot of data to make some alteration, simply stick to what the text says. As he said, "the Hebrew text may be understood adequately as it stands" (*Ezekiel*, p. 746).

What we will certainly see is that Ezekiel certainly claims it is God's book. In fact, over and over again Ezekiel says this is what God says. The book starts out with God giving a vision to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is part of the Septuagint, which is the Greek Translation of the Hebrew O.T..

Furthermore, Ezekiel was part of the Dead Sea Scroll find. In fact, the oldest known text of Ezekiel comes out of Cave 4. Cave 4 has been called the "mother lode of manuscript fragments." In 1952 six manuscripts of Ezekiel were found in those Qumran caves and another one on the top of Masada.

One fragment was found in Cave 1, one from Cave 3, three were found in Cave 4 and one in Cave 11. It is obvious that the Jews viewed these manuscripts as inspired by God.

Clearly this is one of those rare inspired books of God that He has given to His people and we need to study it.

There is a serious warning given in the book of Ezekiel that has to do with people who claim to teach things inspired by God that really aren't. Apparently there were some women preacher/prophets who were claiming they were presenting inspired truth. God says I will eventually destroy them (Ezek. 13:17-23). Our job is to teach the inspired Word of God and Ezekiel is an inspired book of God.

Reason #2 - Because Ezekiel is the most neglected of all prophetic books in the Bible.

If you mention the name Ezekiel to most people they will probably tell you it is bread whose recipe is found in Ezekiel 4:9. Some say this is the healthiest bread you can eat. What most don't realize is that this bread was unclean bread designed to show how unclean Israel really was on the inside (Ezek. 4:14).

The truth is very few know much of anything about what Ezekiel really means because most have never been through the book.

In preparing this study, I have discovered that very few preachers and teachers attempt to expound the entire book. There are bits and pieces of the book that are expounded, but you will be hard pressed to find expositors who tackle the entire book. John Calvin sensed the need to systematically study Ezekiel. In fact, this was the last book John Calvin tackled before he died. He made it through twenty chapters before he went home to be with the Lord.

In all my years of church life, I never was in a church that expounded this book in its entirety. In fact, other than a few passages that were sometimes taught, it was like this book was not even in the Bible. But this book contains 48 very powerful chapters. This is not some short little meditation designed to warm the heart, this is a very serious work that God gave to man that is designed to change lifestyles; change hearts and minds. **This book is designed to bring God's people into a right relationship with Him by using warnings and promises.**

I am convinced that one reason why this book is neglected is that unless one is able to compare and analyze various things from a book like Revelation, much in Ezekiel will be a maze. Since most do not understand Revelation, it stands to reason that most would not understand Ezekiel. H. A. Ironside said to the reverent student of the Word, "the book presents no real difficulties that may not be overcome by a careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture" (*Ezekiel*, p. xi).

Dr. H. A. Ironside cited Dr. Andrew Bonar, a great Bible expositor of Scotland, who told a story that we would like to borrow and modify. Just imagine going to heaven and meeting Ezekiel for the first time. Suppose you were to say to him, "Ezekiel it is nice to meet you. It is a wonderful privilege." Ezekiel would say, "I am pleased to meet you and I see you know my name." "How did you like the book I wrote?" Most would probably hang their head and say, "Well I never really seriously studied it." "I never thought it was that important. In fact, I wasn't even certain you wrote the book for us to understand."

There will probably be these kinds of scenes that will play out in heaven. But the truth is, Ezekiel was given to us by God. He inspired it by the power of His Spirit and He does not want this book neglected.

Reason #3 - Because Ezekiel is a major book of prophetic hope for Israel.

Ezekiel is the last major prophet in the O.T.. What that means is this is a major book of prophecy for Israel. Now the prophetic books of the O.T. may be divided into three time groups:

(Time Group #1) - Prophets who wrote before Israel was taken captive. (Is., Jer., Lam., Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)

(Time Group #2) - Prophets who wrote while Israel was captive. (Ezekiel, Daniel)

(Time Group #3) - Prophets who wrote after Israel was out of captivity. (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

Ezekiel is a prophetic book that was written while Israel was captive.

The prophetic O.T. books are categorized as either being a "major prophet" or "minor prophet" based on the amount of data in the writing. **Ezekiel is a major prophet.**

Ezekiel has been called the "father of apocalyptic." One of the critical themes of the book of Ezekiel is the "glory of the LORD."

The book **begins** by Ezekiel seeing the glory of the LORD (1:28). As the book develops the “glory of the LORD” **leaves** Israel (11:22-23). But as the book further develops, “the glory of the LORD” **returns** to Israel (43:2).

Right now Israel is not a nation that reflects the glory of the LORD. Ezekiel is a critical book because it teaches that glory is once again going to return to Israel. Israel needs to sink her teeth into Ezekiel; it is a book that can bring her great hope. She has a glorious future in store. God intends to do some wonderful things for Israel.

One of the great visions in Ezekiel is one found in chapter 37, the vision of dry bones. This vision is specifically designed to show that no matter how desolate Israel looks, one day God will bring her into her Promised Land and she will flourish and be blessed by Him (37:12-14). This is a great book for the nation Israel.

Reason #4 - Because Ezekiel is a book that warns that God will not let His people get away with rebellious sin.

Over and over again God has Ezekiel warn His people that He will permit horrible things to happen to them if they do not turn away from their sin and rebellion (i.e. Ezek. 6:1-5). Most of the bizarre things He has Ezekiel do are designed to communicate this very point (Ezek. 5:1-2). God does not put up with His people pursuing sin forever. He is gracious and patient, but if His people pursue that which is evil, He will chastise and punish His own. The hand of God that can bless His people is a hand that can also turn against His people.

Reason #5 - Because Ezekiel is a book that presents amazing grace.

There is absolutely amazing grace seen in this book. Let me cite just one example. In Ezekiel 16, God graphically describes the fact that His people had prostituted themselves. It is graphic and almost pornographic (i.e. 16:25-34). But at the end of the chapter God says He intends to forgive all of it (16:63). Now that is amazing grace.

One thing that Ezekiel brings out that is critical to experiencing the amazing grace of God is that sinners must loathe their sin (**Ezekiel 6:9**). To experience God’s grace one must loathe his own sins and abominations. God offers amazing grace and forgiveness to sinners who have done evil things; but to experience that grace they must realize how evil and disgraceful that sin was in the sight of God. **God’s grace is able to save and cleanse the worst of sinners, but as Ezek. 43:11 says, one must first be totally ashamed of the sin before His grace will cleanse.**

QUESTION #2 – Who is Ezekiel?

All information we get about Ezekiel comes from within the book. Even though Ezekiel does not tell us much about himself, there are eight facts we may glean:

Fact #1 - His name Ezekiel means “God strengthens.”

Fact #2 - He writes from the river Chebar. 1:1a - a river canal in Babylon (Iraq) that ran inland 60 miles from Euphrates to provide irrigation. The canal called today Naru Kabari makes a southeast loop and joins both ends with the Euphrates river.

Fact #3 - He was an exile taken to Babylon about 597 B.C. 1:1b - he was taken captive when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem for the second time. There were three deportations: 1) 605 B.C. (II Chron. 36:5-8); 2) 597 B.C. (II Chron. 36:9-18); 3) 586 B.C. - Jerusalem destroyed (II Chron. 36:19-20).

Fact #4 - He was a priest. 1:3a Actually he will end up more of a prophet than a priest.

Fact #5 - He was the son of Buzi. 1:3b - Jewish tradition says Buzi was the son of Jeremiah.

Fact #6 - He owned his own house. 3:24; 8:1

Fact #7 - His house was located in a Babylonian city named Tel Aviv or Tel Abib. This city was located about 50 miles south of Babylon. 3:15

Fact #8 - He was married. 24:16, 18 - he had a good marriage and considered his wife to be “the desire of his eyes.”

Now Ezekiel lived at the same time as Jeremiah and Daniel and probably knew them both. In fact, he probably personally knew of Daniel in some capacity because he mentions him three times in his book (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3). Daniel had been taken in the first deportation and Ezekiel was taken in the second deportation. **Ezekiel was older than Daniel and younger than Jeremiah.**

They each had different ministries and different personalities.

- 1) Jeremiah was an emotional prophet, often called the weeping prophet, who prophesied to the remnant of Israel left in Jerusalem. He was much older than Ezekiel;
- 2) Daniel was a highly educated prophet who prophesied to political leaders who dominated Israel. He was younger than Ezekiel. He prophesied in Babylon.
- 3) Ezekiel was a non-emotional, systematic Biblical scholar and prophet who prophesied to Israel while in exile.

It is interesting that all of the men were very different and yet very similar. Jeremiah was characterized by his emotions, whereas Ezekiel is characterized by his “reason and reflection.” All men were interested in the Scriptures and were faithful and God used them to minister to different people in different places at the same time.

QUESTION #3 – Who wrote Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel. This is easily established:

- 1) The unanimous testimony of Biblical scholars say Ezekiel wrote Ezekiel “with his own hand.”
- 2) There is much in the book that is autobiographical. All of the information concerning Ezekiel’s life and ministry come from this book, which had to have been written by him. The pronouns I, me, my show up in almost every chapter of the book (2:1-10).
- 3) There is a chronological sequence to the events in the book and the author was involved in it. In fact, all of the prophecies are arranged chronologically.
- 4) The entire book contains a uniformity of language and style. There is “literary coherence.”

QUESTION #4 – When was Ezekiel written?

We not only know when Ezekiel was written, but we know the very dates of his prophecy. He dates almost every event in the book for us.

- 1) His call to ministry was the month 4, day 5, in year 5 of Jehoiakin - 593 B.C. (1:1-3:15)
- 2) He is appointed watchman in month 4, day 12, year 5 in 593 B.C. (3:16-7:27)
- 3) He has his temple vision in month 6, day 5, year 6 in 592 B.C. (8:1-19:14)
- 4) He give his review of Israel's history in month 5, day 10, year 7 in 591 B.C. (20:1-23:49)
- 5) He sees the siege of Jerusalem in month 10, day 10, year 9 in 588 B.C. (24:1-25:17)
- 6) He gives his message against Tyre on day 1, year 11 in 587-6 B.C. (26:1-28:26)
- 7) He gives his message against Egypt on day 12, year 10 in 587 B.C. (29:1-16)
- 8) He predicts Babylon will be rewarded with Egypt in month 1, day 1, year 27 in 571 B.C. (29:17-30:19)
- 9) He dates his message against Pharaoh in month 1, day 7, year 11 - 587 B.C. (30:20-26)
- 10) He dates his message against Pharaoh in month 3, day 1, year 11 - 587 B.C. (31:1-18)
- 11) He dates his lament over Pharaoh in month 12, day 1, year 12 - 585 B.C. (32:1-16)
- 12) He announces Egypt's death on day 15, year 12 - 585 B.C. (32:17-33:20)
- 13) He announces Jerusalem's destruction in month 10, day 5, year 12-585 B.C. (33:21-39:29)
- 14) He predicts the future temple and blessing in month 1, day 10, year 25-573 B.C. (40-48).

We know that Ezekiel was called to his prophetic ministry in the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (1:2) which was 593/2 B.C..

So if Ezekiel is called to ministry in 593 B.C. and he writes his last vision in 573 B.C., we conclude that the book of Ezekiel was in its completed form by around 570 B.C..

QUESTION #5 – What is the theme of the book?

There are several key phrases that show up in Ezekiel.

There is a phrase that occurs more than 60 times in the book—"Then they will know that I AM THE LORD." The judgments of God against His people and the restoration of His people are both designed to enable His people to know Him. His heart breaks when His people sin (Ezek. 6:9); but His heart rejoices when His people turn from sin and turn to Him. This is the God His people need to know.

Another key phrase that dominates the book of Ezekiel is the phrase "son of man." This phrase is used over 90 times in the book. This phrase was one that God used for Ezekiel. Now we know from Daniel that this phrase is used for the Ancient of Days who will one day rule the world. In other words, it refers to Jesus Christ who will one day rule the world as the God/man.

The reason why this term is used of Ezekiel is not simply to show his humanity, but to show his Divine prophetic mission and ministry. He is on a Divine assignment, but he is also still human.

He is prophesying about One who will one day come to take over the world and establish Israel as the nation of God. But before that happens, Israel will go through some horrible things because as a nation she is a “rebellious house.” Israel’s rebellion was so abominable that God literally took away His glory from the Temple (8:1-11:25).

Now the basic theme of Ezekiel is that there will come a time when all Israel and all the world will know God. After a horrific time of judgment against the world and Israel, Jesus Christ will return to establish His kingdom.

At that time the nations of the world, who mistreated Israel, will be punished and Israel will be fully and completely restored as the nation of God. However, before this happens, Israel will suffer some terrible things because of her rejection and rebellion.

Six amazing, wonderful themes pertaining to Israel that are amazing in view of all the evil she has done:

- 1) God will regather Israel (11:16-17a; 20:41; 34:11-13a, 16; 36:24a; 37:21a).
- 2) God will bring Israel back to her land and cleanse it (11:17b-18; 20:42; 34:13b-15; 36:24b; 37:21b).
- 3) God will give Israel a new heart and new spirit (11:19-20; 16:62; 34:30-31; 36:25-28; 37:23-24).
- 4) God will restore the Davidic dynasty (34:23-24; 37:22-25).
- 5) God will bless Israel with prosperity and security in her land (34:25-29; 36:29-30; 37:26; 38:1-39:29).
- 6) God will Himself live in Israel and there will be new Temple worship. (27:26b-28; 40:1-48:35).

God has permitted His people to be dominated by other powers as a judgment because of her rebellion against Him; but there will come a day when He will regather Israel and give her a new heart, a new status and a new Temple and a wonderful relationship with God will be fully restored forever.

Israel sure gives the rest of us hope. Because if we will loathe and be ashamed of our depraved sins, we can experience the full blessings of God. That will be the story of Israel.

QUESTION #6 – What is the outline of the book of Ezekiel?

Part #1 - God will judge and punish Israel. **Ezekiel 1-24**

Part #2 - God will judge and punish the Gentile nations. **Ezekiel 25-32**

Part #3 - God will restore and bless Israel. **Ezekiel 33-48**

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