

Ezekiel

Ezekiel prophesies among the Jewish exiles in Babylon during the last days of Judah's decline and downfall. His ministry is in some ways like that of his older contemporary, Jeremiah. But while Jeremiah delivers a chilling message of destruction in Jerusalem, Ezekiel brings a warming message of reconstruction in Babylon. Jeremiah is a man of tears. Ezekiel is a man of visions. Ezekiel's visions stretch from horror to hope, and from condemnation to consolation. Through it all, mankind would see the glory of Israel's sovereign God, and "know that He is the Lord."

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel, a priest and a prophet, ministers during the darkest days of Judah's history: the seventy-year period of Babylonian captivity. Carried to Babylon before the final assault on Jerusalem, Ezekiel uses prophecies, parables, signs, and symbols to dramatize God's message to His exiled people. Though they are like dry bones in the sun, God will reassemble them and breathe life into the nation once again. Present judgment will be followed by future glory so that "you shall know that I am the Lord."

The Hebrew name *yehezke* means "God strengthens" or "strengthened by God." Ezekiel is indeed strengthened by God for the prophetic ministry to which he is called (3:8-9). The name occurs twice in this book and nowhere else in the Old Testament.

AUTHOR

Ezekiel the son of Buzi (1:3) had a wife who died as a sign to Judah when Nebuchadnezzar began his final siege on Jerusalem (24:16-24). Like Jeremiah, he was a priest who was called to be a prophet of the Lord. His prophetic ministry shows a priestly emphasis in his concern with the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and shekinah (the glory of God). Ezekiel was privileged to receive many visions of the power and plan of God, and he was careful and artistic in his written presentation.

DATE & SETTING

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in three stages.

- First, in 605 b.c., he overcame Jehoiakim and carried off key hostages including Daniel and his friends.
- Second, in 597 b.c., the rebellion of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin brought further punishment; and Nebuchadnezzar made Jerusalem submit a second time. He carried off ten thousand hostages including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel.
- Third, in 586 b.c., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city after a long siege and disrupted all of Judah.

If "thirtieth year" in chapter 1, verse 1, refers to Ezekiel's age, he was twenty-five years old when he was taken to Babylon and thirty years old when he received his prophetic commission (1:2-3). This means he was about seventeen when Daniel was deported in 605 b.c., so that Ezekiel and Daniel were about the same age. Both men were about twenty years younger than Jeremiah who was ministering in Jerusalem. According to this chronology, Ezekiel was born in 622 b.c. deported to Babylon in 597 b.c., prophesied from 592 b.c. to at least 570 b.c., and died about 560 b.c.

Thus, he overlapped the end of Jeremiah's ministry and the beginning of Daniel's ministry. By the time Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, Daniel was already well known; and he is mentioned three times in Ezekiel's prophecy (14:14, 20; 28:3). Ezekiel's Babylonian home was at Tel Abib, the principal colony of Jewish exiles along the river Chebar, Nebuchadnezzar's "Grand Canal" (1:1; 3:15, 23).