

Ezekiel

Chapters 1-3

Ezekiel

Hebrew: **יְהֵזְקֵאל**, *yehesqē'el* "God strengthens"

Born 622 the year the Law was discovered under Josiah who'd been king for 18 years and reforming Judaism for 5.

1:1 He is the author of the book.

Skepticism from the early 1900's has been rejected by most modern thinkers because:

1. It has a balanced structure
2. It stays focused on the fall of Jerusalem & destruction of the temple throughout.
3. It has a uniform language and style.
4. It is chronological in presentation.
Dates appear at 1:1, 2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1 in a chronological sequence unusual for prophetic literature.¹
5. Ezekiel is written autobiographically rather than 3rd person singular.
6. Ezekiel's character is consistent throughout

1:2-3 He was a priest

A priest of the Zadok family (i.e. as a son of Buzi)

He was 30 years old...it was time for him to take on his priestly duties.

BUT he was never able to serve as a priest (1:2; 33:21)

Instead, God called him to be a prophet

His prophetic ministry began when he was 30 (i.e. 5th year of Jehoiachin's captivity; 593 BC)

His ministry persisted for 20 years (1:2; 29:17)

1:1-3 He was in exile amongst other exiles, including his king.

Larger context for Ezekiel (see Timeline)

Immediate context

Ezekiel went into captivity 597 BC (i.e. 2 Kings 24:14; 8th year of Nebuchadnezzar) along with Jehoiachin.

He was married and lived in his own home (8:1; 24:18)

His wife died 4 years after he was called as a prophet (34 yrs. old).

¹ Only Haggai and Zechariah are similar in this way.

He was resettled in Chebar (1:3) which was a royal canal of Nebuchadnezzar's (Ps.137:1)

The exiles were apparently allowed to settle, organize (8:1; 20:1), communicate with home (Jer.29) and have some freedom of movement (33:21).

Ezekiel is made mute (3:26f).

He can only speak when God reveals something, then he's mute again (24:26f).

When he hears that Jerusalem has fallen then he can speak again (33:21).

He was exiled in 598/97, so he's essentially mute for a decade.

Ezekiel's vision and commission.

1:4-28 The Glory of God

What did Ezekiel see?

Was this real or symbolic?

- Ezekiel never calls it symbolic
The vision is not interpreted symbolically
Symbolic visions are either fully or partly interpreted.

When they are not fully interpreted, they have a meaning that is fairly obvious (e.g. the dragon and the woman in Rev.12 {Rev.20:2})

Ezekiel does use lots of simile in his descriptions which might suggest that it's symbolic.

But, simile is used for reasons having nothing to do with symbolism.

In poetry to imbue known entities with emotional or aesthetic qualities but Ezekiel is not poetry.

In prose to describe something unknown to an audience (e.g. aurora; lilyanthus).

How else would anyone describe a real but entirely unfamiliar thing?

- Is the vision too bizarre to be taken literally?

- Is Ezekiel apocalyptic? (see Apocalyptic handout)
To say it is symbolic because it is apocalyptic after having defined it as apocalyptic because you've decided its symbolic is circular reasoning.

2:1-3:15 The Call of Ezekiel

2:1-2 Ezekiel strengthened (Ex.4:10-15; Jer.1:4-19)

God's spirit entered Ezekiel to empower him to serve (i.e. like us; c.f. Jn14-17)

2:3-5 Ezekiel called

This will be hard – This you must do

12x 'house of rebellion'

2:6-7 Ezekiel charged to be fearless

4x 'don't be afraid' (the most frequent command in the Bible)

Fidelity to God's commission is the measure of success for God's servants – not human responsiveness to our fidelity (1Cor.4:2; Mt.25:21,23).

2:8-3:3 Taking in the message

3:4-15 Ezekiel's awful job

3:16-27 Ezekiel is warned and reminded

What is the central message of Ezekiel?

Topics:

2/3 of the book concerns God's judgment.

- 50% (24/48 chapters) is about God's judgment of Judah.
- 17% (8/48 chapters) is about God's judgment of Judah's enemies

1/3 of the book focuses on redemption and restoration of Israel.

Repeted words & phrases:

God appears to Ezekiel several times in person and in visions.²

God's personal name comes up 434x in Ezekiel.

Two things are interesting about Ezekiel's use of YHWH:

1. God is practically the only one using it
Ezekiel is almost a monologue – God to the exiles.

² He refers to it as 'the glory of YHWH' (1:26f; 3:23f; 8:2f; 9:3;10:1f,18f; 11:22f; 43:2f; 44:4) a phrase which focuses on his physical manifestation as a being who emanates light (1Jn.1:5 God is light; 1 Tim.6:16 unapproachable light; Ja.1:17 father of lights). Glory in this sense is mentioned 15x in Ezekiel. In the Midrash, rabbi's refer to this physical manifestation of the presence of God as the *shekinah* (lit. presence).

It is as though God is reminding them that He is fully present, not only geographically (i.e. He is no local god) but also personally (i.e. even though they seem God-forsaken).

2. YHWH is most often found in two phrases:
...and then they will know that I am YHWH (67x)³
...says (or declares) YHWH Elohim (218x)
40% of the use of 'YHWH Elohim' in the Bible is in Ezekiel.⁴

When else have we seen a focus on the *shekinah* & the personal name of God?

Exodus 3:14

Exodus 33-34

Why might God be referring back to Exodus?

- They were in violation of the covenant of Moses

- God's attributes of justice and mercy were both at play in the prophecies

The central message of Ezekiel is → "*I AM* Glorious"⁵

God is motivated by his love. BUT, God is also motivated by his glory (1Sam.12:22; Isaiah 43::7; 48:8b,9,11; Ezekiel 36:22-32; Jn.14:13)

How should we respond to this kind of person? We should glorify Him!

Why glorify?

It's reasonable

It helps us get re-oriented to reality.

It's a significant basis for motivation in the Bible⁶

We cannot ignore God's motivation for salvation described in Jn 3:16 by reference to His motivation described in Isaiah 48 or *vice versa*.

³ This expression is only used 82x in the Bible – 9x in Exodus; 1x in Deuteronomy; 2x in 1Kings and 1x each in the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Joel.

⁴ 218/541 occurrences in the Bible; more than the Pentateuch (62x) and the rest of the prophets put together (Major 79x; Minor 38x) = 179x).

⁵ According to Taylor, rabbis would not allow students under the age of 30 to read Ezekiel 1-3 because of their unworthiness to appreciate God's holiness.

⁶ I Cor.10:31...all to the glory of God; 1 Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you

Both motivations are present...He saves to be honored and He saves because he loves.

(1Cor.10:31; 1Pet.4:11; Rev 1:6; 2Pet. 3:1; Eph. 3:21; Rev. 7:12; Rom.11:36)

Why don't we naturally glorify God? → self-glory

Bringing positive attention to ourselves

Avoiding negative attention from others

Bringing negative attention to others

1. Self-glory is hostile to God

1 John 2:15-17

Romans 1:23f

2. Self-glory keeps us from real glory

John 5:41-44

Romans 8:17

How do you glorify?

1. Grateful

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness. Psalm 115:1

2. Servant

Doing good = glorification

"...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Serving God's agenda = glorification

1 Peter 2:9-12

Romans 12:1

Jn.21:15-19 how Peter would glorify God in death

Jn.15:1-11 fruit bearing = glory giving

Homework assignment

Read Gen 12:1-3 (c.f. 15:1-21)

Deuteronomy 28

2 Samuel 7:4-16 (c.f. Ps.89:3-4,26-34 132:11-18)

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant

The Davidic Covenant

Read 2 Kings, chapters 22-25

Read Jeremiah 1:1-3; 2:1-13; 3:6-10; 4:3-18; chapter 7; 11:1-17; 22:30

Read Ezekiel, chapters 1-24; read a second time chapters 16 & 23.

Prepare answers for the following questions to turn in next week

1. What covenant(s) relate to Judah's impending judgment? How does it related? Provide some evidence for your conclusion (e.g. direct or indirect references to the covenant(s)).
2. What covenant(s) relate to having hope for the future? Why?
3. Why might God use such graphic imagery in Ezekiel 16 & 23?
4. Re-read Ezekiel 14:3-4. If an idol is a God substitute (Colossians 3:5), what might that mean about your own faithfulness to God?

Note: it should take around an hour to read the material and around the same amount of time to prepare your answers.

Take advantage of biblegateway.com: you can do word searches and limit the searches to books – like Ezekiel, Jeremiah, 2 Kings; etc.. It will quickly provide references you can use in your homework.