



## Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel contains the various visions and prophecies of the prophet Ezekiel written to the people of Judah after the first wave of exiles had been taken to Babylon (i.e. after 597 bc) until after the second wave of exiles had been taken away and the Temple destroyed (i.e. around 571 bc). The book contains a range of visions and prophecies, some to our modern mind odd and hard to understand; others hard-hitting and moving. In short, the message of Ezekiel is 'you think it is bad now? It is going to get worse before it gets better'.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** 3 ¾ hours  
**Short of time?** Just read 1.1-2.10; 10.1-22; 14.1-23



### Genre

Prophecy



### Anything tricky?

Ezekiel's visions often feel surreal and hard to get your head around. It can be helpful to remember that they are visions, so you should try to see them in your mind's eye.



### Inspiring quotes

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

*(Ezekiel 1.1)*

<sup>26</sup> A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

*(Ezekiel 36.26-27a)*

I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.

*(Ezekiel 37.14)*



## About the Author

The book is ascribed to Ezekiel. Although he may not have written the visions and prophecies down in the form we now have them, they are very likely to be traced back to him.

### *What do we know about him?*

Ezekiel is described as a priest and it is clear, in this book, that he also became a prophet due to the visions he had from God. In 1.1-2 he claims

that the visions began in the 30th year, since that cannot refer to a King's reign at this point it probably means that he was 30 when he began to be a prophet. The visions, he says, came to him on the banks of the river Chebar in Babylon. This means that he was in the first wave of exiles that were taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 597 bc., suggesting that he was someone of importance in the land as the most important were taken into exile in this first wave.



## About the times

The start of the exile (597-587 bc) was a time of devastation and loss. It took place over a number of years and was the result of various rebellions. Judah had been in the Babylonian empire since 612 bc but at the start of the sixth century attempted to rebel against them and withhold their taxes. The response of the Babylonians was swift and harsh. It began with the first wave of exile in which the people in the highest echelons of society (including the King) were taken from Judah to live in Babylon in captivity (597 bc), but then continued ten years later after another rebellion with more people being taken into exile and the Temple being destroyed.

### *What were people feeling?*

As far as we can tell from Ezekiel, the people in exile though devastated by what had happened, recovered quite quickly arguing that at least the worst had happened now. Ezekiel's message was harsh and depressing – the worst is yet to come. Even though the exile had begun the exiles had still not internalized the message of their need to return to God.

### *Other books set around this time*

Jeremiah, Lamentations, Isaiah



## What kind of Book is it?

Prophecy. Ezekiel contains a very particular kind of prophecy – visions as well as words. Many of the prophets do have visions in their writing (e.g. Isaiah and Jeremiah also have visions), however what makes Ezekiel unusual is the balance of visions – his prophecies are mostly visions with a few verbal prophecies, rather than the other way around.



### How is it structured?

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 1.1-3.27   | Introduction and call of Ezekiel                |
| 4.1-24.27  | The doom that is coming on Judah and Jerusalem  |
| 25.1-32.32 | The doom that is coming on other nations too    |
| 33.1-39.29 | A range of prophecies about the people in exile |
| 40.1-48.35 | Hope for the future.                            |



## Look out for...

Ezekiel has many episodes of what are often called 'one-man dramas', look out for these and see what you think about their effectiveness.

Look out for the visions of all kinds in the book. Notice that sometimes they involve Ezekiel seeing himself back in Judah (and no longer in Babylon). There are a wide range of visions from the surreal to the mundane, look out for the different kinds.

Although the book is gloomy there are strands of hope, look out for these as you read.

### Extra note

One of the oddest messages of hope in the book is connected to the vision of God's chariot (in chapters 1, 10 and 11). The effect of the message in these chapters was that God had left the Temple (and hence his people). The message of hope that this brought was that it meant that when the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, God was not destroyed as he had already left – and therefore could also return. It is an odd message of hope but an important one – God has not been destroyed he has abandoned you (but will return).



## What could this mean for me?

Ezekiel's peculiar brand of encouragement is the encouragement of people not to shy away from how awful the situation really was. The implication is that people were rapidly saying 'it's not that bad'. Reflect on whether there is anything for us to learn today about engaging in the world by being clear sighted about how terrible a state we are in.



## Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did you think the book was about?
- What did you think of Ezekiel's visions? Did they enhance or detract from what he was saying?
- Ezekiel's peculiar message of hope is one that relies on people recognizing quite how bad things really were before looking to the future. Is there anything in this do you think?
- The cherubim in Ezekiel (see chapter 10) look dramatically different from our popular mental image of cherubs (e.g. chubby toddlers), how do you think we got from one to the other?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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