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Bible Survey Lesson 47: The Book of Ezekiel, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Introducing the Book

The books of the prophets are separated into two main categories: the **pre-exilic** (before the fall of Jerusalem) and **post-exilic** (after the fall).

The five post-exilic prophecies are Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. All the other preceded the fall of Jerusalem and exile except for the end of Jeremiah which was written by the prophet virtually as the events occurred, and Lamentations which was his memorial to its fall.

This book has always been named for its author, Ezekiel. There are few challenges to chapter 1, verse 3, "*the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel . . .*" accept from those who cannot handle prophecy as being at all possible. The name, Ezekiel, means "strengthened by God," and he certainly needed to be strong for his prophetic ministry.

Ezekiel used prophecies, parables, signs, visions, and object lessons to dramatize his message from the Lord, and this causes many people to skip him as a study source because of the difficulties in interpreting his figurative and visionary prophecies. He is a popular character among Jews and Christians, but he is never mentioned in any other portion of Scripture, Old or New Testament, however the imagery in the book of Revelation is clearly parallel of his visions.

Happily for us, Ezekiel, though a very large book is easy to organize since it is almost entirely in chronological order, only regressing once in chapter 29.

The continuity and clarity of this book, as opposed to other prophetic books, have led many scholars to believe that Ezekiel may have written it late in his life and over a short period of time instead of piecemeal, as things happened.

Its main message is not hard to spot since the phrase; "***they shall know that I am the Lord***" is used, with slight variations, at least seventy times.

From first to last, Ezekiel expresses this one truth:

God is sovereign and will be known throughout the earth as Lord.

Introducing the Prophet

Most people's entire knowledge of Ezekiel is composed of his strange vision of a flaming chariot-throne, and its wheels with in wheel, which many today love to equate with flying saucers, and his experience in the valley of dry bones, which was immortalized in the famous spiritual, *Dem Bones*. "With de hip bone connected to de leg bone, de leg bone connected to de ankle bone, de anklebone connected to de foot bone. Now hear the word of de Lord!"

Ezekiel probably belonged to the upper classes in Judah because he was carried into captivity to Babylon in 597 B. C., when King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and captured the cream of young Jewish society.

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This group lived as share-croppers or settlers, rather than slaves (2 Kings 24). They were settled by the Chebar River, which was Nebuchadnezzar's royal canal, and were given land to farm and most had their own homes (Jer. 29). They were free to live and communicate outside, but not to leave.

In Babylonia he lived with his wife, in his own house (8:1), in Tel-abib (3:15), just north of Babylon. He was twenty-five when captured and exiled into Babylon and his call to prophesy came in about 592 B. C. at around age thirty (1:1). His ministry began in Babylon during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity and lasted 22 years until 570 B. C.

He, like his contemporary, Jeremiah, was a priest as well as a prophet and so he writes with knowledge and authority when he mentions the temple. He ministered to the exiles in Babylon while Jeremiah served the remnant left behind in Jerusalem.

He probably knew Daniel (they were the same age), but, at least he knew of his ministry as a prominent prophet, which he mentions in chapters 14 and 28. He seemed to know the great cities of the empire.

Ezekiel's ministry was difficult, as were the ministries of all the prophets. Even after the fall of Samaria and Judah, two deportations of their finest young men, decimation of Judah, sieges and the final destruction of Jerusalem, all accompanied by the Lord's ultimatums to shape up, they still did not confess and repent. *They were a "stiff-necked" people.*

Ezekiel not only taught by object lesson, he was an object lesson:

He secluded himself in his home, bound himself, was stricken mute (3)

He lay on his right side, then his left for 430 days (4)

He ate bread prepared in an unclean manner (4)

He shaved his head and beard (5)

He was not allowed to mourn for his wife when she died (24)

He lost his ability to speak again (24)

"Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord God." (24:24)

One other personal note: A number of writers have had problems with the supernatural aspects of the prophets' ministries. It is hard for them to accept the foretelling of future events with uncanny accuracy. In Ezekiel's case, it is even harder for them, since he also does and sees strange things. He is abnormal, or some say insane. I appreciate the handling of this problem by John Taylor, in his introduction to the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary to Ezekiel*:

"It seems that those who take that view are trying too hard to reduce Ezekiel to a level of complete normality. Abnormality of some sort was an essential feature of the Old Testament prophet's charismatic ministry. He was uniquely aware of God, whether from a supernatural, visionary experience which constituted his call or from the inner consciousness of having a message from God implanted in his mind. He was a man for whom the miraculous held no surprises, especially

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when this was connected with the fulfillment of words he had spoken under divine constraint. If Ezekiel's extrasensory powers had operated over-frequently or been switched on to order, we could feel suspicious; but they give the impression of having been rare, memorable and concerned only with events of crucial importance."

Ezekiel's death is not mentioned, though Hebrew traditional writings report his murder by an evil Israelite prince whom he rebuked for idolatry in 560 B. C. His wife died in the year that the final siege of Jerusalem began.

Introducing the Times

Much of the history we studied for Jeremiah applies to Ezekiel also (see chart), so we will only review it briefly:

You will remember that the united-kingdom of Israel lasted for more than 110 years (1043-931 B. C.) with Saul, David and Solomon on the throne. Solomon's sons split the kingdom, north (Israel) and south (Judah) and that arrangement lasted over 200 years, until 721 B. C., when Assyria captured Israel and took many of their people into exile. About 135 years later the conquest of Judah began, culminating in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 586 B. C.

Let's list the immediate historic events leading up to Ezekiel:

1. In 626 B. C. the Assyrian Empire started to crumble from within.
2. In 625, Nabopolassar took the Babylonian throne and joined with the Medes, in 612 smashed Ninevah, Assyria's capital, and by 605 controlled the entire Assyrian Empire.
3. While Babylonian troops were busy in the north, Egypt moved to enlarge their territory, but met their "Waterloo" at Carchemesh. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, there were no Egyptian survivors of that epic battle (605 B. C.).
4. Also in 605, Nebuchadnezzar began a concerted campaign to capture Jerusalem. He took his first captives, including Daniel, his three friends, and a number of other young noblemen.
5. In 598-597, he again besieged Jerusalem, this time taking King Jehoiachin and 10,000 others captive, including the priest, Ezekiel.
6. In 586 B. C., Nebuchadnezzar and his army finally destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and deported the remaining able bodied people to Babylonia. (**The Babylon Captivity**)

Introducing the People

The people of Jerusalem, Judah were a stubborn and proud people. Even when they were confronted with their sinfulness, idolatry and apostasy, they thought of themselves as wonderful. special people. They seemed to be unable to look at themselves realistically.

1. They seemed to think that the deportation of some of their people had nothing to do with them. The exiled ones may have been evil and being punished, but the remaining ones were still in David's City, the chosen people. Surely God wasn't talking to them.

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2. They believed the false prophets who predicted that Babylon would never return, that Jerusalem could never be taken, that the true prophets had it wrong, and that God would never punish them.

3. Even the exiles, themselves, seemed to see Ezekiel and the other prophets as alarmists. They might mourn over the calamities of others and the plight of the City of Zion, but they still clung to their idols and immoral life-styles.

Obviously there was a need for a prophet among them like Ezekiel.

His job was to dislodge them from their fairy tale world of false hope, point out the lessons of past history, and call them to confession and repentance. All the while, showing them a future hope of a reunited people, a re-erected temple, a reorganized worship, and reestablished throne, and a regenerated nation.

Introducing the Lessons

1. The Holiness of God:

God is Holy, "set apart" from His creation. The vision of the Lord riding on His chariot-throne is glorious, mysterious, supernatural, and beyond understanding. See God thus portrayed and you fall down on your face in humility, awe, and worship. (Rabbis insist a person needed to be thirty before reading, "this is Holy ground, like the burning bush or Holy of Holies.")

2. The sinfulness of man:

One of a prophet's jobs was to take away any thought of a victim mentality. Prophets confronted, shamed, and horrified their audience by making them face up to their disobedience and idolatry. God is just! He is not unreasonable. They are sinful, rebellious and under a pure and righteous judgment.

3. The necessity of judgment:

After God's mercy, pleading, and longsuffering had proved ineffective, God issued warnings of a coming judgment. It was not wise to ignore those warnings, and yet the people did. Now the Lord must keep His word and do what is right. Only through judgment will His people confess, repent, and return to Him.

4. The responsibility of the individual:

Ezekiel held out the possibility of salvation for the faithful remnant again and again. In chapter 18 he takes special care to show that God treats every person as an individual. It is not heredity, environment, or circumstance, but each man's personal choice which determines his fate. There is no justification by works, but by heart commitment to the Lord.

5. The promise of restoration:

Repentance and salvation is a matter of the individual heart commitment, but God's desire is that it be enjoyed in community with other followers in a renewed kingdom. The dead bones can miraculously live again. The land can again be the center of the world, and the Messiah King will rule from the reestablished Throne of David.

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Importance of the Book

From the beginning to the end, Ezekiel makes a blazing statement:

GOD IS SOVEREIGN "THEY WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD"

God is sovereign in Israel. He is sovereign in Judah. He is sovereign in Assyria. He is sovereign in Babylon. He is sovereign everywhere!

God is sovereign among those who love Him. He is sovereign among those who hate Him. He is sovereign among those who obey Him. He is sovereign among those who ignore Him.

In the time of Ezekiel, in His sovereignty, the Lord purposed to have a people that would love Him, obey Him, follow Him, and glorify Him to the ends of the earth.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN "THEY WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD"

In the time of Valley Bible and in His sovereignty, the Lord purposed to have a people that would love him, obey Him, follow Him, and glorify Him to the ends of the earth.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN "THEY WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD"

We can fight His purposes as the nation of Israel did, or we can be a part of His great plan. With or without us:

GOD IS SOVEREIGN "THEY WILL KNOW THAT HE IS THE LORD"

Homework:

Read: Continue or re-read the Book of Ezekiel

Think: Does the evidence of evil around me drive me to obedience?

Apply: Live your life this week in the knowledge of the Lord's soon return.

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Bible Survey Lesson 48: The Book of Ezekiel, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Introduction

I would like to introduce our outline study of the Book of Ezekiel by quoting from a fine book titled *THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL, The Glory of the Lord*, by Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg, who was Dean and Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Talbot Theological Seminary.

"Jacob saw God at Peniel and his life was transformed from that hour. Moses went up to Mount Sinai and communed with God face to face and thereafter was marked for the rest of his life. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the sanctuary and his entire ministry was suffused with the beauty of holiness of the Lord. Paul saw the risen and glorified Redeemer on the Damascus road and was blinded from that day on to all the allurements of the world. John saw visions of the glorious unfolding of God's program for Christ, the church and all the redeemed, and as a result was unmoved by adverse circumstances that surrounded him. Ezekiel saw visions of the glory of the Lord God of Israel and his ministry never lost the impress of it"

The Book of Ezekiel is long and exciting and divides well into three sections:

First, the prophet addressed a word of warning to his own people before Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem.

Next, as the siege was in progress, he turned his warning to the seven enemy nations who surrounded them, and . . .

Last, he returned his emphasis to his own people, after the siege had been successful, and they were already in exile in Babylonia. This time the message was one of a coming comfort and a future hope.

Ezekiel is on hand to warn his fellow captives not to "dream the impossible dream" of Jerusalem being spared from destruction. The entire purpose of his early visions is to illustrate *the glory of the Lord departing from the city*, leaving it open to its enemies. Judah would have to pay for its rebellion, idolatry, and apostasy. His later prophecies, however, talk of a future restoration of God's people to the land, a new temple and a new worship.

I. FALL OF JUDAH (Chapters 1-24)

(Prophecies before the siege of Jerusalem)

Ezekiel introduces himself to us as a visionary prophet in chapter 1, verse 1 when he says, *"Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."*

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These visions are largely what the book of Ezekiel is all about.

A. Judgment Decided (1-3)

In about 592 B. C. the Lord revealed His glory to Ezekiel through a complex and startling vision. The main purpose of this vision was to commission him for the job ahead, encouraging him to first understand and apply God's message to his own life, then give that message to his people.

1. Ezekiel's Call (1)

Ezekiel's call was certainly unique. He saw a storm cloud coming from the north. In the midst of the storm, four flaming, winged, living creatures appeared. Each was a combination of man and beast and bird. They had human form (5), four faces and wings (6), straight legs and hooves and gleaming bodies (7), four human hands (8), faces like a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle (10), all running to and fro amidst fire and lightening. They are cherubim (Ezekiel 10, Rev. 4) and always are related to the holiness of God.

With each creature was a large wheel, ". . .and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another." The rim of each was filled with eyes.

Above these creatures and wheels was, "something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads" (23).

Jews have called this "the chariot," others refer to it as the chariot-throne, a platform and a jeweled throne on which sat a human figure, glowing like fire and surrounded by glorious splendor. And Ezekiel said it was "*Such appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face . . .*" (28).

Is this a Theophony (visual representation of God), or is this Christ?

Welcome to the world of Ezekiel. Nine times in this first chapter the word "likeness" is used. This is because we can only picture these things in relation to human language and thought. We are severely limited in our capacity to deal with the supernatural things of God. As you can see, we have a problem here. We can't study this stuff in detail so bear with me as we, pardon the expression, fly through the Book of Ezekiel.

2. Ezekiel's Commission (2-3)

God only grants visions of His glory to a man for a purpose. He has a message for man, and a prophet without a vision is a false prophet. Ezekiel is his true prophet!

The Lord, by His Spirit, lifted Ezekiel up and commissioned him to go "*to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people, who have rebelled against me*" (v 3). He was instructed to proclaim the Lord's word without fear, regardless of the response; even in the face of danger.

His commissioning ceremony included a symbolic eating of a scroll containing the message of judgment. God promised to give him supernatural boldness, determination, and perseverance.

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After his commissioning he was led by the Spirit to Tel-abib, Babylonia where he sat in an awed silence for a week. He was officially appointed, ". . . a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, warn them from Me."

He was restricted to quarters, unable to speak, unless God sent him out with a specific message. This illustrated how hard the people's rebellion made communicating with their Lord.

B. Judgment Demonstrated (4-5)

Chapters 4 and 5 are composed of four object lessons that illustrated the destruction of Jerusalem and explained, once again, why.

1. What (4)

First, God had Ezekiel carve a picture of Jerusalem on a brick. Then he was to stage a miniature siege, in detail and place an iron plate between himself and the city, probably to represent a wall between God and his people.

Next, God had Ezekiel symbolically bear the punishment of Israel by lying on his left side for 390 days, then Judah lying on his right side for forty days, thus indicating the length of the punishment.

Third, Ezekiel made various types of bread, prepared in an unclean fashion, which he stored and ate during his lying around period. This represented the famine that was coming during the siege.

2. Why (5)

Last, the Lord had Ezekiel shave off all his hair from head and face and divide it into three equal parts. He was to burn one part, cut another with a sword, and throw the rest into the wind. This represented the three ways Judah would suffer: fire; sword; exile.

Meanwhile he hid a few hairs in a fold of his clothes to symbolize the tiny remnant that would survive the ordeal.

The remainder of the chapter reviews the wickedness which has caused this calamity to come.

C. Judgment Declared (6-7)

In contrast to 4 and 5, chapters 6 and 7 are prophetic sermons.

1. Cause (6)

This chapter makes it crystal clear that the cause of the coming disaster is judgment for grievous sin, including vile idol worship.

2. Character (7)

The nation's arrogance and violence demanded immediate punishment and the coming judgment would be severe, thorough, and inescapable. Plague and famine, sword and stone, terror and mourning, plunder and desecration would engulf the land and no one could stop it.

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D. Judgment Demanded (8-11)

These prophecies came in the form of visions.

1. Degradation (8)

While sitting in his house with some of the exiled elders of Judah, Ezekiel was transported in a vision to Jerusalem. There he found an idol at the north gate of the inner court. Entering the inner court through a hole in the wall, he found seventy elders of the land offering incense to unclean animals and each one worshipping his own private idol thinking this was hidden from the Lord.

Outside women were worshipping Tammuz, a Mesopotamian fertility god, and back inside twenty-five men were bowing to the sun. God's reaction was, ". . . *I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them.*"

2. Destruction (9-11)

These tragic chapters describe the gradual departure of the glory of the Lord from the polluted temple and the wicked city. The slaying of the people, the burning of the city, and the death of the wicked princes precedes that scene.

The flaming chariot-throne, with its attendant cherubim comes down above the temple, and the glory of the Lord mounts and departs from the temple and from the people.

E. Judgment Decreed (12-19)

This group of object lessons and sermons speaks to the causes and certainty of the coming judgment and exile.

1. Leaders (12-14)

Ezekiel, following the Lord's instructions, packs his bags and crawls through a hole in his wall, pretending to sneak away. This illustrates the fate of King Zedekiah when he escapes Jerusalem but is captured and blinded. (12:1-16)

Next he shook violently while he ate to depict the people in anxiety and despair as the Babylonians sweep through Judah. (12:17-20)

The third lesson was based on a Judean proverb, "*The days are long and every vision fails*" (v 22). This proverb reflects the unbelief of the people and the scorning of their prophets. They figured these warnings were just more old crazy prophet's talk, or that they did not pertain to their age. WRONG! The Lord's answer was, "*Whatever word I speak will be performed.*" (12:21-28)

Chapters 13 and 14 zero in on the leaders and condemn them for leading the people astray. The first message is against the false prophets who are spreading consolation instead of warning. The second is to the idolatrous elders who continue to lead the people into evil practices of false worship.

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2. Laymen (15-19)

Ezekiel now uses four parables to emphasize the responsibility of the individual in Jerusalem, Judah.

Jerusalem is likened to a wild vine. It is of no value for fruit (sour), building material (not straight or strong), nor firewood (fast burning).

He has tried it by fire, now he will allow it to be consumed. (15)

Jerusalem is likened to an adulterous woman. In her youth God rescued her from being a cast off child. She grew into a beautiful young woman. The Lord entered into a marriage covenant with her, made her a queen. Intoxicated by riches and fame, she went whoring after other gods and now she must be punished. God's hope for her, however, is still restoration. (16)

Jerusalem is likened to a branch. This parable is, in fact, a riddle. (v 2) We don't have time to go into this in detail, but it has to do with the scenario that includes Babylon, Egypt, and Jerusalem.

The bottom line seems to be that the Lord will replant the previously destroyed branch, Jerusalem, which will again thrive under a future king. (17)

Again the people were spouting a proverb to justify their sinning. *"The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge."* This meant they blamed their parents for their trouble. (18) **"Nothing new under the sun."** Each man is responsible for his deeds.

Jerusalem is likened to a lion cub. The mother raises her cubs to be big and strong, and they were, but they, unlike their mother, are unwise and get captured, and caged. (19)

F. Judgment Deserved (20-24)

When some of the elders in exile came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord, God refused to answer, but had **the prophet review the nation's history.**

1. Review (20:1-44)

Again the Lord reviews Israel's history of sin, disobedience and idolatry, ending with a promise of future restoration.

2. Reformation (20:45-24:27)

When the Lord looked for a man to stand in the gap, He found no one and so there would be judgment by fire and sword. (20 and 21)

To illustrate the nation's unfaithfulness, the Lord used an allegory in which Samaria (capital of Israel) and Jerusalem Oholah and Oholibah. They were prostitutes from their youth in Egypt. Later they lusted after Assyria, and, even after

Oholah was killed by her own lover and her children were taken captive. Oholibah still lusted for Assyria and then Babylonia like a nymphomaniac, until she too was destroyed. (23)

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This parable depicted a vile Jerusalem (a pot), crusted with deposits (blood and idolatry), filled with meat and bones (people), boiling over a fire (the siege). The contents would be removed (taken captive), and the pot would stay on the fire until its filth burned away. (24)

Ezekiel's wife died suddenly and the Lord did not allow him to mourn publicly for her. He could only groan inside. He explained this as a lesson for them to follow when Jerusalem fell (25).

When Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel was not only allowed to speak openly, but he became the prime encourager of the survivors.

II. FOES OF JUDAH (Chapters 25-31)

(Prophecies during the siege of Jerusalem)

These chapters contain prophecies against nations who had dealings with Israel. Seven nations are singled out running from northeast to southwest. These prophecies should not be considered as an expression of God's pandering to the pride, jealousy or revenge of Israel. Actually they declare the fact that God rules over all nations in absolute justice.

A. Ammon , Moab, Edom, Philistia (25)

These four nations seemed to be judged because they rejoiced in the fall of Jerusalem: **Ammon** was attacked by Babylon and marauding tribes who plundered and reduced Rabbah, its crown city, to pasture land. **Moab's** northern border was opened to invasion when the "people of the east" (v 10) conquered their fortified cities. **Edom**, was punished by Israel later after displaying a special vengeance toward Judah. And **Philistia** had opposed God's people for virtually their whole history, and God finally repaid them.

B. Tyre (26:1-28:19)

The coverage of the downfall of Tyre is substantial. It was a prominent trade center on the Mediterranean coast, wealthy and strongly fortified. It experienced the rage of many nations and Nebuchadnezzar besieged and conquered it, but it was not until Alexander the Great that it was laid to waste and reduced to a heap of rubble, never to be rebuilt.

C. Sidon (28:20-26)

Sidon was destroyed as much by plague and natural disaster as by sword.

D. Egypt (29-32)

The retributive judgment on Egypt was widespread.

1. *"The Lord opposes Pharaoh"* (29:3), devastates the land and scatters the Egyptians for over forty years. It never returned to its former glory. (29:1-16)

2. When Nebuchadnezzar left Tyre with little spoil, the Lord gave him Egypt from which he plundered immense treasure. (17-21)

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3. The Day of the Lord visited Egypt. God Himself, using Neb. as His sword, destroyed Egypt, their allies, dried up the Nile, and brought every major city under foreign rule. (30)

4. The Lord challenged Egypt to learn from the history of Assyria, which was like a mighty cedar, but, because of its pride it fell to Babylon, under the direction of God Himself. (31)

5. The Lord revealed to Ezekiel a future lament which would be sung over the fallen Pharaoh and slaughtered armies. (32)

III. FUTURE OF JUDAH (Chapters 33-48)

(Prophecies after the siege of Jerusalem)

Shortly before the fall of Jerusalem, the Lord renewed Ezekiel's commission as the nation's spiritual watchman. A watchman's primary responsibility was to warn his people of approaching danger. He was not responsible for those who failed to listen and be prepared.

Ezekiel had just that one responsibility. He was to warn the wicked and the sloppy of impending doom and call them to repentance. The response was not his problem.

A. Nation's Troubles Removed (33-36)

Even though the nation was weighed down with sin, it was God's desire that they turn from their evil ways and live joyously.

1. Leaders (33-34)

The first part of this section is addressed primarily to the leaders.

First Ezekiel's commission was renewed and his office as a true prophet was confirmed by the fulfillment of his predictions to the letter as

Jerusalem fell. He now spoke and the elders listened. (33)

Next, the leaders, compared to shepherds, who had not cared properly for their sheep causing them to scatter, would be removed and the Lord Himself would become The Shepherd.

He would re-gather them to pasture in Israel, reestablish justice, and raise up a new leader on the Throne of David under a covenant of peace. (34)

2. Followers (35-36)

The prophetic emphasis now moves from leaders to people.

First, God will judge those nations that have the destruction of Israel as their goal. (Nothing has changed!) For instance, Edom, who participated and gloried in the destruction of Jerusalem, will now taste the same fate themselves. (35)

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Next, God will restore His people to the land, with bumper crops and thriving cities. He will also cleanse their sins, create in them a heart of loyalty and worship, and vindicate Himself before the world, as the sovereign Lord. (36)

B. Nation's Tribes Re-gathered (37-39)

Ezekiel's famous vision of dry bones clearly indicates that the rebirth of Israel is supernatural.

1. Resurrection (37)

In this vision, Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry, disconnected bones. Suddenly the bones began to come together; tendons and flesh tying them together. As if that was not enough, the breath of life enters into these corpses, and a great multitude of vibrant, living, breathing people stood in the valley.

The lesson is clear. God will miraculously deliver his people, resuscitated and reunited, from the grave of exile, place His Spirit among them, and bring them to new life in the promised land.

He will provide the Messiah, a new covenant, and will again dwell among them.

2. Retribution (38-39)

These chapters describe the future invasion of Israel by nations again bent on destroying the Jewish race. Attempts to clearly identify these nations are legion. My thought is that they are the armies included in the final universal conspiracies seen in Isa. 29, Joel 2 and 3, Zech. 12 and 14, and Rev. 20, which seems to happen at the end of the tribulation, before Christ is visually manifested to the world.

It is obvious that the invasion will take place after Israel is restored to their land, as is taught clearly in these chapters. The Lord will intervene powerfully, and supernaturally deliver His people. An earthquake and a hail and sulfur storm will bring a great slaughter and it will take seven months just to bury the dead.

C. Nation's Temple Rebuilt (40-46)

This section is a glorious vision of a restored Israel.

1. New Temple (40-43)

These four chapters present a detailed picture of the new temple, with God in residence.

2. New Worship (44-46)

These chapters give the future rulers and priests instructions and regulations, plans for building the altar, new restrictions on the priestly line, and detailed instruction on offerings and feasts.

D. Nation's Title Restored (47-48)

Chapter 47 begins with a beautiful picture of a restored land. There is a river flowing from the temple, through the desert, running deeper and deeper until it runs into the newly purified "Dead

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Sea." It will be filled with fish and its banks will be lined with fishermen and fantastic fruit trees, a living symbol of God's blessing and renewal.

1. Boundary (47)

The book of Ezekiel concludes with a detailed description of the Promised Land. Its boundaries are important because, finally, the nation of Israel has the entire covenant land, that the Lord promised Abraham.

The holy city is a perfect square in the center of the new land, and has twelve gates, named for the twelve tribes. The city is named "Yahwah-Shammah," which means "*the Lord is there.*"

2. Division (48)

Finally each tribe is "at home" in their God-given portion of land.

Reading these last chapters we can see that Israel has not yet returned to their land as God intended. It is easy to see why God-following Jews are still praying for this great and final land.

Lesson

1. God has a plan for Israel and will do whatever it takes to bring it to pass. God also has a plan for his church and is just as committed to have His body, pure and spotless, righteous and holy, in His heavenly kingdom.
2. God is, unbelievably, a God of second chances, not willing to put up with sin and disobedience, but willing to accept the truly repentant.
3. Like Ezekiel, we are "watchmen" responsible for warning our neighbors, believers and unbelievers alike, of sin's consequences.

Homework:

Read: The Book of Daniel

Think: What are the character traits I can learn from Daniel?

Apply: Live this week as if it were the week of Jesus' return.