

BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Approximate date: 593-573 B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); 500s B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate); 500s-300s B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: hopeless Judah in exile

Author(s): Ezekiel (Right; some conservative-moderate); Ezekiel and/or additional editors (some conservative-moderate); Ezekiel and/or anonymous writers and editors (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): Land of Israel, Jerusalem, and/or Babylon (Right, conservative-moderate); Babylon and/or Land of Israel (Left)

Target audience and their location: Southern Kingdom Israelites at the beginning of the Babylonian exile (Right, some conservative-moderate, Left); Southern Kingdom Israelites during the Babylonian exile (some conservative-moderate, some Left); Southern Kingdom Israelites after the Babylonian exile (some Left)

People:

Jehoiachin, Ezekiel (son of Buzi), Jaazaniah son of Shaphan, Tammuz, Pelatiah son of Benaiah, Oholah and Oholibah, Kerethites, Nebuchadnezzar

People mentioned:

Noah, Daniel, Job, Babylonians, Canaanites, (an) Amorite, (a) Hittite, Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Sabeans, Abraham, David, Zadok

Places:

Kebar River, land of Babylon, Tel Abib, Jerusalem, Diblah, Lebanon, Egypt, Rabbah of the Ammonites, Chaldea, Pekod, Shoa, Koa, Moab, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, Kiriathaim, Edom, Teman, Dedan, Tyre, Senir, Bashan, Elishah, Sidon, Arvad, Gebal, Persia, Lydia, Put, Helech, Gammad, Tarshish, Greece, Tubal, Meshech, Beth Togarmah, Rhodes, Aram, Minnith, Damascus, Helbon, Zahar, Uzal, Kedar, Sheba, Raamah, Haran, Canneh, Eden, Asshur, Kilmad, Nile, Migdol, Aswan, Cush, Arabia, Libya, Memphis, Zoan, Thebes, Pelusium (Sin), Heliopolis, Bubastis, Tahpanhes, Assyria, Mount Seir, Gomer, En Gedi, En Eglaim, Great Sea, boundaries of restored Israel (47:15-21)

Places mentioned:

Samaria, Sodom

Key Themes:

Ezekiel has a vision of four living creatures and of God's glory / the Lord calls Ezekiel as a prophet to an obstinate and hardened Israel / the Lord emphasizes the severity of Ezekiel's calling to warn the people / the Lord has Ezekiel take specific physical actions that symbolize the siege of Jerusalem, and the ensuing consequences of Israel's sin / Ezekiel issues a prophecy against the mountains of Israel / Ezekiel declares how God will enact a thorough judgment against the Land of Israel by the most wicked of nations / Ezekiel is shown all of the idolatry and abominations committed in the Temple / those who commit idolatry will be killed / the glory of God departs from the Temple / the Lord declares judgment against the leaders of Israel because of rejecting His commandments / the Lord has Ezekiel pack up and leave, symbolizing the exile / the Lord condemns false prophets who give lying words of hope to the people and who ensnare them in sinful ways / the severity of practicing idolatry is emphasized / the Lord declares how the unfaithfulness of a nation against Him will not be tolerated, as the righteous will only be able to save themselves / Jerusalem is considered to be a worthless vine / Ezekiel uses diverse allegories to describe the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem / the Lord uses a story of two eagles and a vine to describe King

Nebuchadnezzar taking away the nobles of Judah, and putting his own ruler in power / the Lord gives Ezekiel specific sins that will merit the death penalty upon a person / Ezekiel takes up a lament for Israel's princes / the Lord has Ezekiel recall the rebellious acts of Israel from the Exodus to the present / in spite of Israel's desire to be rebellious against the Lord, He will not allow it and He promises to restore Israel / God says that Babylon will be raised up as an instrument of His judgment / the Lord details some of the specific sins committed by Jerusalem against Him / the Lord vividly describes the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah as two sisters engaged in prostitution / God gives Ezekiel a description of a cooking pot with meat to describe the downfall of Judah and Jerusalem / Ezekiel's wife will die / the Ammonites will be judged because they rejoiced over the fall of Judah / God will inflict punishment upon Moab / God will inflict punishment upon Edom / God will inflict punishment upon the Philistines / God will inflict punishment upon Tyre, from thinking that it would prosper from Jerusalem's fall / a lament is issued for Tyre's fall, recalling all of those who traded with the city / a prophecy is issued against the king of Tyre / a prophecy is issued against Sidon / a prophecy is issued against Egypt / a lament is issued for Egypt / the downfall of Assyria, a cedar in Lebanon, is recalled because of what will encounter Egypt / a lament is issued for the Pharaoh of Egypt / the Lord explains to Ezekiel what his role is as a watchman / the Lord speaks against those who would try to retake the Land of Israel after it had fallen / the Lord speaks against the false shepherds of Israel / the Lord proclaims judgment against Mount Seir and Edom / Ezekiel speaks of how the mountains of Israel will once again be fruitful / the Lord says that He will restore His people to the Promised Land, giving them hearts of flesh by His Spirit / the Lord will resurrect the dry bones of Israel / the Lord will reunite Judah, Ephraim, and their associated companions, returning them to the Promised Land to be ruled by "David" / a prophecy is issued against Gog, who will be responsible for gathering an alliance against Israel, but will be defeated / the defeat of Gog will serve as a testimony of the Lord's faithfulness toward Israel / the Prophet Ezekiel is shown a vision of the new Temple, including both its dimensions and functions / the Prophet Ezekiel is told how the Land of Israel is to be divided in the new order / the Prophet Ezekiel is told how the appointed times will be observed in the new order / a river will flow from the Temple, turning the Dead Sea into a lake with fresh water / the division of the restored Land of Israel by tribe is detailed / the dimensions of the restored city of Jerusalem are given

Key Scriptures: Ezekiel 3:16-19; 6:8-10; 7:26-27; 12:15-16; 13:1-12; 14:4-5, 12-14; 18:21-23; 20:32-38; 22:6-13; 28:24-26; 33:1-6; 34:11-16; 36:24-29; 37:4-8, 15-28; 38:15-16; 39:9-10, 21-24; 43:6-11; 47:21-23; 48:35 / **Messages of Doom** (1:1-24:27); **Messages Against Foreign Nations** (25:1-32:32); **Messages of Hope** (33:1-48:35)

Theological Summary: The Book of Ezekiel (Heb. *Yechezkel*, יְחֶזְקֵאל) can be one of the most difficult to interpret among the prophetic texts of the Tanach. Ezekiel is one of the most involved Biblical books in regard to ancient history, as Ezekiel's prophecies are given against the backdrop of the Southern Kingdom's judgment and exile to Babylon. Ezekiel himself, from a priestly family (1:1), was an exile to Babylon taken there along with King Jehoiachin (cf. 2 Kings 24:8-17), and while in Babylon was commissioned to be a prophet (1:1-3). Ezekiel's prophetic ministry overlapped that of Jeremiah. Being from a priestly line, his prophecies included an emphasis on the Temple and its rituals (chs. 8-11; 40-48). Deeply entwined in Ezekiel's words are an innate knowledge, on his part, of the affairs of his contemporary world.¹ Ezekiel was a person who directly involved himself in the importance of his prophecies, sometimes speaking as though his audience is right there as is the case when he addresses God's judgment on foreign powers.² While in Babylon, Ezekiel had a large degree of freedom.

Many of Ezekiel's prophecies include stated dates as to when they are delivered, allowing interpreters to approximate the time that Ezekiel served as a prophet. Some commentators have devised elaborate charts attempting to calculate the exact dates that certain prophecies were delivered.³ Ezekiel prophesied both before

¹ Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *EXP*, 6:737-739; Lawrence Boadt, "Ezekiel, Book of," in *ABD*, 2:713-714.

² G.R. Beasley-Murray, "Ezekiel," in *NBCR*, 665.

³ Alexander, in *EXP*, 6:740-741; Boadt, "Ezekiel, Book of," in *ABD*, 2:713; Dillard and Longman, 315.

and after the exiles were taken to Babylon, over a period of about 25 years. The principal audience of Ezekiel was exilic.

Ezekiel is very clearly named in the text as the one delivering the prophecies (1:3). Whether Ezekiel actually wrote down these prophecies, or had a scribe or a group surrounding him write them down, is another issue.⁴ Jewish tradition in the Talmud holds that the figures of the Great Synagogue composed the Book of Ezekiel in the early post-exilic period (b.*Bava Batra* 15a).⁵

The Book of Ezekiel is very autobiographical,⁶ and most conservatives lean toward some form of literary unity. Literary unity does not mean that Ezekiel could not have edited his own prophecies, or for that matter have had a disciple of his edit and compile them.⁷ “[T]he book of Ezekiel is not a collection of oracles strung together by an editor, but manifests all the signs of having a thorough plan behind its composition” (*ABD*).⁸ It is also not impossible that some additional editing of Ezekiel took place after the exile to add historical statements giving the book some context.⁹

Severe criticism of the Book of Ezekiel did not begin until the second quarter of the Twentieth Century,¹⁰ as liberal scholarship had actually held to some form of unity for the text.¹¹ Liberals who make note of Ezekiel’s priestly status will place significant importance on Ezekiel being influenced by the so-called Priestly materials or P source of the Pentateuch.¹² Liberals today generally argue that Ezekiel is an edited book, based on perceived inconsistencies in chronology, perhaps indicating multiple sources for its composition.¹³ Some of the first liberal positions regarding Ezekiel afforded no more than one-seventh of the Ezekiel material to Ezekiel himself.¹⁴ Most liberals have become more moderate in their criticism, holding that Ezekiel prophesied in multiple locations, Jerusalem and Babylon,¹⁵ a position also held by many conservatives.¹⁶

Past liberal scholarship thought that the Book of Ezekiel was a post-exilic work, perhaps composed as late as the Third Century B.C.E.¹⁷ C.C. Torrey perhaps held to the most extreme view: “the prophecy was a literary creation, and Ezekiel was not an historical individual” (Dillard and Longman).¹⁸ While other liberals considered Ezekiel historical, they nevertheless considered the Prophet himself to be a mentally disturbed individual.¹⁹

The Book of Ezekiel does contain some Aramaisms, which would be expected considering a likely Babylonian location for its composition.²⁰ Ezekiel does demonstrate some words that are difficult to translate into English, which may be on account of copyist errors.²¹ Conservatives such as Harrison feel “The text of Ezekiel has been poorly preserved, due partly to the fact that obscurities in the language, as well as technical expressions...led copyists into frequent error.”²² Some have noted that the Hebrew Masoretic Text of Ezekiel is corrupt in places, and needs to be amended by its Septuagint and Syriac translations.²³ There are other

⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 839.

⁵ “The Men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and the scroll of Esther” (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 823.

⁶ John F. Gates, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 336.

⁷ W.H. Brownlee and W.S. LaSor, “Ezekiel,” in *ISBE*, 2:258.

⁸ Boadt, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:719.

⁹ Brownlee and LaSor, “Ezekiel,” in *ISBE*, 2:258-259.

¹⁰ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 823-832; Alexander, in *EXP*, 6:739.

¹¹ Dillard and Longman, 316.

¹² Boadt, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:717.

¹³ C.G. Howie, “Ezekiel,” in *IDB*, 2:206-207; Boadt, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:715-716.

¹⁴ Beasley-Murray, in *NBCR*, 664; Brownlee and LaSor, “Ezekiel,” in *ISBE*, 2:251.

¹⁵ Beasley-Murray, in *NBCR*, 664.

¹⁶ Brownlee and LaSor, “Ezekiel,” in *ISBE*, 2:252.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:251.

¹⁸ Dillard and Longman, 317.

¹⁹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 849-852; Dillard and Longman, 319.

²⁰ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 847.

²¹ Boadt, “Ezekiel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:716.

²² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 854.

²³ Howie, “Ezekiel,” in *IDB*, 2:213; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 854-855; Dillard and Longman, 320.

conservatives who believe that Ezekiel in the MT as it stands is relatively intact, with no significant need to augment one's study with ancient sources.²⁴

Ezekiel's prophecies begin with him delivering some stern words of God's judgment against his fellow Jews regarding the fall of Jerusalem (chs. 1-24). Most believe that these prophecies were delivered while in Babylon, re-examining why the Jewish exiles were there, whereas a few think that some of these prophecies may have been first delivered in Jerusalem,²⁵ with the remainder of his prophecies being delivered while in Babylon. The circumstances of the exile were not easy for the Jews in Babylon. The exiles needed to live at peace with themselves in their new environment because God's punishment was not going to be shortened or lifted. Much of Ezekiel's prophecies are judgments levied against Ancient Israel's neighbors of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt (chs. 25-32). The remainder of Ezekiel's prophecies concern the restoration and revival of Israel and its prominence (chs. 33-48).

A major theme seen in the Book of Ezekiel is God's sovereignty over the affairs of history. God reveals Himself through His direct interjection into human events, and uses various powers to accomplish His tasks. God is able to respond to His people without Jerusalem standing, and can respond to their needs while in exile. Ezekiel follows a basic pattern of delivering his prophecies, pronouncing (1) judgment against Israel, (2) judgment against the world, and (3) consolation of Israel. Ezekiel balances words of judgment with the promise of restoration. In chs. 8-11 Ezekiel prophesies the destruction of Solomon's Temple, but promises a restored and renewed temple in chs. 40-48. "The Lord has determined, for the sake of the divine reputation in the world, to restore and to transform Israel so that all might come to recognize the Lord as the only God" (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*).²⁶

There is a great amount of debate among interpreters as to how much or how little of Ezekiel is futuristic.²⁷ It is very safe to say that much of Ezekiel uses bizarre imagery,²⁸ which is widely given a great deal of significance in the Jewish mystical tradition,²⁹ particularly as it concerns God's throne (ch. 1). Many Jewish interpreters today tend to see Ezekiel's Messianic Age as fulfilled somewhat in the return of the exiles and the reconstruction of Jerusalem. The Book of Ezekiel certainly does give a reader a picture of the transition that took place before and after the exile.³⁰

Christian interpreters tend to see much future fulfillment ahead to be accomplished via the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah. In this framework, however, it is easy to see that too many prophecy teachers make things out of Ezekiel that are not implied by the original context of various passages,³¹ mostly to force current events to fit some kind of sensational teaching. Likewise, there is a great deal of Christian variance on how to interpret Ezekiel's Temple vision (chs. 40-48), with some opting for a literal fulfillment and others for a symbolic fulfillment.³²

The Book of Revelation in the Apostolic Scriptures is profoundly affected by the imagery and words of Ezekiel.³³ The concepts of the holy city of New Jerusalem and the redeemed Earth are seen significantly in Ezekiel.³⁴ Some have even suggested some continuity between Ezekiel and themes seen in the Gospel of John.³⁵

It does need to be noted that while Ezekiel was accepted into the Jewish canon of Scripture, "It was only after certain safeguards had been established" (*IDB*),³⁶ so as to avoid some gross misinterpretation.³⁷ Some

²⁴ Alexander, in *EXP*, 6:746.

²⁵ Gates, "Ezekiel, Book of," in *NIDB*, 336.

²⁶ Gordon Matties, "Ezekiel," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1153.

²⁷ Brownlee and LaSor, "Ezekiel," in *ISBE*, 2:262-263.

²⁸ Marvin A. Sweeney, "Ezekiel," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1042.

²⁹ Brownlee and LaSor, "Ezekiel," in *ISBE*, 2:260; Sweeney, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1043.

³⁰ Howie, "Ezekiel," in *IDB*, 2:211.

³¹ Dillard and Longman, 322.

³² *Ibid.*, 323.

³³ Beasley-Murray, in *NBCR*, 665; Dillard and Longman, 326.

³⁴ Howie, "Ezekiel," in *IDB*, 2:211.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:212.

³⁶ Howie, "Ezekiel," in *IDB*, 2:212; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 823.

Messianic examiners have attempted to study Ezekiel in detail, mostly as it concerns Ezekiel's emphasis on Israel's restoration. It is certainly good that Messianics today see the importance to examine the prophecies of Israel's restoration. However, most Messianic examination of Ezekiel is often devoid of any historical setting for his prophecies, and could likewise be too influenced by mystical Jewish views. These are certainly things to remedy in the future as a more comprehensive view of Ezekiel emerges.

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³⁷ Brownlee and LaSor, "Ezekiel," in *ISBE*, 2:260.