

Ezekiel - the Prophet of Hope

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Ezekiel is the only Old Testament prophet who was told that he would meet with success among his contemporaries. Some among the exiles would “hear” – they would respond to his preaching for repentance. (Ez2:3-4,7, 3:10-11,27)

Objectives of this Study: 1. **Who was Ezekiel?** - Get to know the man as much as possible – we will meet him one day ... 2. **What was his message to his contemporaries?** - Why did God send Ezekiel to the exiles in Babylon? - How does the work of Ezekiel fit into the Plan of God? 3. **What is the message from God through Ezekiel for us?** - What are the spiritual implications of God’s message through Ezekiel? - What can we learn from Ezekiel about the Plan of God yet to unfold? - Are there specific prophecies given to Ezekiel that are yet to be fulfilled?

The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: contains - the record of **God’s revelations** to Ezekiel; the **teaching of Ezekiel** to his contemporaries; a record of **Ezekiel’s interactions** with his contemporaries. The **focal point of the Book of Ezekiel is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC**. Ezekiel’s contemporaries, the last vestiges of the nation of Israel, believed that Jerusalem and the Temple of YHWH were inviolable. (Jr7:4,12-14, Gn17:8, Lv25:23, 2Sm7:16, 1Kg8:10-11)

The Structure of the Book of Ezekiel: Ezekiel carefully provides **explicit dates** for many of the events recorded in the book – more than a dozen stretching over 23 years **from 593BC to 571BC**. Over these years, Ezekiel presumably recorded material and assembled the book sometime after 571BC – there is no mention of an assistant, like Baruch (Jr36:4); or, of disciples, as Isaiah had (Is7:16). The book divides into **three major sections**: 1. The **Call / Commissioning** of Ezekiel; 2. Prophecies and events **prior to the fall of Jerusalem**; and 3. Prophecies and events **after the fall of Jerusalem**

Who Was Ezekiel? Nothing is known of Ezekiel’s early life – he is presumably 30 years old in 593BC. **He grew up as a priest and presumably was being prepared for active service** when he was taken to exile in 597BC at about age 25. (Ez1:1-3) The **ancient city of Nippur**, near the Chebar Canal, had been destroyed by Nabopolassar. Nebuchadnezzar repopulated the area. **Israelites were scattered all over the east** due to the many deportations that had previously occurred. Ezekiel only makes reference to his immediate group taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 597BC and placed near Nippur.

The Commissioning of Ezekiel: Ezekiel observed an overpowering theophany, then YHWH spoke to him. (Ez1:4-28) **Ezekiel was empowered by the Holy Spirit**. Ezekiel was told to **“speak my words to them”** saying “Thus says the Lord GOD” – some would hear and respond, some would not. In any case, Ezekiel was to continue, to stand up to them, “Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks”. At the end of the day, whether they did hear or whether they refused to hear, they would all **“know that a prophet has been among them”**. The ones among the exiles who heard the word, and responded to the calling of God, and repented, would go on to form the true remnant. The ones among the exiles who refused to hear would know that they had been exposed to a prophet of God – they had had a witness and their blood is on their own hands. (Ez2:1-7)

Eating the Scroll: with “words of lamentation and mourning and woe” is clearly **a metaphor for inculcating the message of God** – “feed your belly ” **so that the prophet can forcefully “speak to the house of Israel”**. (Ez2:8-10, 3:1-3) The Book of Ezekiel does NOT record that Ezekiel quibbled with God over his limitations as Moses (Ex4:10-17), Isaiah (Is6:5), and Jeremiah (Jr1:6) had done; however, **God may have detected some weakness**: “Be not rebellious”.

Details of the Task: The **majority of the exiles would NOT respond** – Ezekiel had to be hard as rock to stand up to them. Again, God may have detected a weakness in Ezekiel because he assures him **“Like emery harder than flint have I made your forehead”**. The explanation of the metaphor of eating the scroll is provided: “all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears”. God alludes to **the success of Jonah** “people of foreign speech ... would listen to you”, but the average Israelite was “stubborn”, and would not respond. (Ez3:4-11)

Attaining Understanding: Understandably, **Ezekiel is overwhelmed by the things he has seen and heard**: the theophany, the uplifting by the Holy Spirit, the commissioning by YHWH, the eating of the scroll, the warning of the hardness of the people, the challenge of reaching them, and now a voice as loud as an earthquake! No wonder Ezekiel required **“hand of the LORD being strong upon me”** to deal with the **“bitterness in the heat of my spirit”** as he **“sat there overwhelmed among them seven days”**. This was a “life changing” experience – during the “seven days” Ezekiel figured things out. (Ez3:12-15)

The presentation, “Ezekiel - the Prophet of Hope”, is available at: www.mikewhytebiblicalresearch.ca/presentations