

Chapter 31: Ezekiel

Key Terms

- Ezekiel: seventh-century prophet of Judah
- Great Synagogue: a council of scribes and other Hebrew leaders reputedly founded after the Babylonian exile to reorganize Jewish religious life and culture
- proto-apocalyptic: an OT prototype of apocalyptic literature that contains some of the elements and features of later intertestamental apocalyptic literature
- Babylonian Empire: major power in the ancient Near East ca. 612–539 BC
- covenant: the means by which God reveals himself to, initiates relationship with, and establishes his presence among humanity by entering into a mutually binding agreement with a person or people
- oracle: an authoritative prophetic speech

Key Ideas

- Yahweh's sovereignty over Israel and the nations.
- Dynamic relationship of the individual to the group.
- Mysterious interplay of individual responsibility and divine judgment.
- Babylonian exile as punishment for Judah's sin of idolatry.
- Yahweh's faithfulness to his covenant promises.
- Restoration of a New Israel under Davidic leadership.

Chapter Summary

Ezekiel is part of the Major Prophets. Its placement after Lamentation in the English Bible follows the practice of the Septuagint. The autobiographical style of Ezekiel, together with its internal uniformity and consistency, suggest that the book was written by the prophet himself. However, critical scholars argue that the book developed in at least four stages that are camouflaged by the cleverness of its editors. Ezekiel most likely ministered from Babylon, addressing his audience indirectly and becoming aware of the situation in Jerusalem through his ecstatic-transport visions. However, there is significant debate over where exactly he ministered.

Ezekiel's ministry stems from the political and religious policies of Manasseh, which brought the decree of disaster upon Jerusalem. The revival and reform under Josiah averted judgment, but only temporarily, and Jerusalem eventually fell to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel was among the exiles deported to Babylon.

Ezekiel's three-part message is essentially a theodicy; its three-part message corresponds to the three phases of Ezekiel's ministry among the Hebrews. Ezekiel first warns the people of impending judgment; after the destruction of the city, Ezekiel warns the surrounding nations of God's impending judgment for their sin; finally, Ezekiel inspires the captives with hope of future restoration and the coming of a messianic, Davidic king. Ezekiel's message centers on the sovereignty of God over both his people and the Gentile nations, as well as the responsibility of each individual generation for its own sin.

Thirteen of Ezekiel's messages are introduced with a date formula that enables readers to place his ministry on a timeline. Ezekiel's messages were delivered to the people first, and then later written down in the form in which we now have them. Since the oracles are not in chronological order, it is likely that Ezekiel himself composed the book. There are multiple literary features interwoven throughout the book. Interestingly, the literary structure helps to communicate Ezekiel's message that God is sovereign over all.

The address "Son of man" is used by God of Ezekiel approximately ninety times, emphasizing the divinity of the message, in contrast to the humanity of the recipient. The phrase also emphasizes the symbolic nature of Ezekiel's life, in that he served as an object lesson for the captive Israelites.