

## Historical Background

Since Ezekiel began ministering in 593 B.C., when he was 30 years old, he would have been born about 623 B.C. and would have grown up in Judah during King Josiah's reforms (622–609 B.C.). The date of Jeremiah's birth was about 643 B.C., 20 years before Ezekiel's. Jeremiah began ministering in Judah about 627 B.C., so Ezekiel would have been familiar with him and his preaching.<sup>8</sup> There are some indications in this book that he was, though Ezekiel never referred to Jeremiah.

“Both of them seemed to be taking a lone stand for the truth, one in Jerusalem and the other in Babylon: they both insisted that the future of Israel lay with the exiles and not with those left behind in Jerusalem; .”<sup>9</sup>

Daniel went into captivity in 605 B.C. and was only a teenager then, so his birth year may have been close to 620 B.C. Ezekiel, then, may have been only a few years older than Daniel. Daniel's ministry continued for about 70 years, until about 536 B.C. (Dan. 10:1), much longer, apparently, than Ezekiel's.

Ezekiel went to Babylon as a captive during Nebuchadnezzar's second deportation of Jerusalemites, in 597 B.C., along with King Jehoiachin, his household, his officials, and many of the leading men of Judah (2 Kings 24:12–17). Ten thousand captives went to Babylon then with much confiscated treasure from the temple and the royal palaces. Nebuchadnezzar also took most of the craftsmen and smiths to Babylon, and only the poorest of the people remained in the land. The Babylonian king set Zedekiah up as his puppet in Jerusalem, but Jehoiachin remained the recognized king of Judah in Babylon.<sup>10</sup>

Ezekiel ministered among the Jewish exiles who had settled at Tel-abib (or Tel Aviv) beside the Chebar (or Kebar) River (3:15). One of Ezekiel's favorite words was *betok*, translated “among” or “in the midst.” He used it 116 times, more than all the other Old Testament books combined. It reveals the prophet's perspective of himself as someone living in the midst of a people with a ministry that would impact history for generations to come. The Chebar River was the “grand canal” (Aram. *naru kabaru*) that began at the Euphrates River north of Babylon, bypassed the city to the east, proceeded through the site of Nippur, and rejoined the Euphrates south of Babylon near Uruk (biblical Erech).

This site is where most of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia lived. Jews lived in three principle locations during Ezekiel's ministry: Egypt, Judah, and Babylon. Ezekiel evidently ministered among the Chebar community entirely; there is no evidence that he ever visited Jerusalem after the Babylonians took him captive.

Life among the Jewish exiles was not a physically difficult existence, certainly not like living in a concentration camp. The exiles enjoyed considerable freedom and even traveled within

Babylonia (cf. 33:21; Jer. 29). They were able to own their own homes, to pursue their own businesses and personal interests, and to organize their own communities. Babylon was infamous for its luxurious wealth and its excessive idolatry. Life became so comfortable in Babylon that, after Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland in 538 B.C., most of them chose to remain where they were.<sup>11</sup>

### **Purpose of Exile**

The Jews were in exile because they had proved unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant that their God had made with them. That covenant had warned the Israelites that, if they proved unfaithful, they could expect the divine discipline of their sovereign Lord who might even drive them from the land that He had given them (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The covenant also promised restoration to the land eventually. God promised not to cast His people off permanently no matter how far they departed from Him and His will.

“... his aim is to convince the people of their utter unworthiness of any consideration from God, in order to shame them into true repentance.”<sup>13</sup>

Ezekiel reminded the exiles of their covenant unfaithfulness and of the faithfulness, holiness, and glory of Yahweh, their God. The Lord would judge, cleanse, and ultimately bless His people so that they, and all people, might come to appreciate His uniqueness and greatness. The purpose of the Exile was to turn God’s people away from their sins and back to their Sovereign. The discipline that they experienced was an evidence of God’s love. When it was over, a glorious future lay in store for them. A righteous ruler would eventually lead them back to a radically renovated land where they would enjoy peace, prosperity, and renewed worship.

<b>Ezekiel’s Dated Prophecies</b>			
<b>Groups of Dated Messages</b>	<b>Passages</b>	<b>Ezekiel’s Calendar Month/Day/Year</b>	<b>Modern Calendar Month/Day/Year</b>
First	1:1–3:15	4/5/5	July 31, 593
Second	3:16–7:27	4/12/5	Aug. 7, 593
Third	8:1–19:14	6/5/6	Sept. 17, 592
Fourth	20:1–23:49	5/10/7	Aug. 14, 591

Fifth	24:1–25:17	10/10/9	Jan. 15, 588
Sixth	26:1–28:26	?/1/11	? 1, 587 or 586
Seventh	29:1–16	10/12/10	Jan. 5, 587
Eighth	29:17– 30:19	1/1/27	Apr. 26, 571
Ninth	30:20–26	1/7/11	Apr. 29, 587
Tenth	31:1–18	3/1/11	June 21, 587
Eleventh	32:1–16	12/1/12	Mar. 3, 585
Twelfth	32:17– 33:20	?/15/12	? (Mar.) 17, 585
Thirteenth	33:21– 39:29	10/5/12	Jan. 9, 585
Fourteenth	40:1–48:35	1/10/25	Apr. 28 (or Oct. 22), 5

### Outline Of Ezekiel

- I. Ezekiel's calling and commission chs. 1–3
  - A. The vision of God's glory ch. 1
    1. The setting of the vision 1:1–3
    2. The vision proper 1:4–28
  - B. The Lord's charge to Ezekiel chs. 2–3
    1. The recipients of Ezekiel's ministry 2:1–5
    2. The encouragement in Ezekiel's ministry 2:6–7
    3. The nature of Ezekiel's ministry 2:8–3:11
    4. The conclusion of the vision 3:12–15
    5. Ezekiel's role in Israel 3:16–21
    6. Ezekiel's muteness 3:22–27
- II. Oracles of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem for sin chs. 4–24
  - A. Ezekiel's initial warnings chs. 4–7
    1. Dramatizations of the siege of Jerusalem chs. 4–5
    2. The judgment coming on Judah chs. 6–7
  - B. The vision of the departure of Yahweh's glory chs. 8–11

1. The idolatry of the house of Israel ch. 8
2. The coming slaughter of the wicked Jerusalemites ch. 9
3. The departure of God's glory from the temple ch. 10
4. The condemnation of Jerusalem's leaders ch. 11
- C. Yahweh's reply to the invalid hopes of the Israelites chs. 12–19
  1. The dramatic tragedy of exile 12:1–20
  2. The present judgment as evidence of divine faithfulness 12:21–28
  3. The condemnation of contemporary false prophets ch. 13
  4. The effect of false prophets on Israel's leaders 14:1–11
  5. The need of personal righteousness for deliverance 14:12–23
  6. The unprofitable vine of Jerusalem ch. 15
  7. Jerusalem's history as a prostitute ch. 16
  8. The riddle and parable of the two eagles ch. 17
  9. The importance of individual righteousness ch. 18
  10. A lament for the kings of Israel ch. 19
- D. Israel's defective leadership chs. 20–23
  1. The history of Israel's rebellion and Yahweh's grace 20:1–44
  2. Judgment on Judah's contemporary leaders 20:45–21:32
  3. The idolatrous rulers of Judah ch. 22
  4. The parable of the two sisters ch. 23
- E. The execution of Jerusalem's judgment ch. 24
  1. The parable of the cooking pot 24:1–14
  2. Signs to the exiles 24:15–27
- III. Oracles against foreign nations chs. 25–32
  - A. Oracles against Judah's closest neighbors ch. 25
    1. Judgment on Ammon 25:1–7
    2. Judgment on Moab 25:8–11
    3. Judgment on Edom 25:12–14
    4. Judgment on Philistia 25:15–17
  - B. Judgment on Tyre 26:1–28:19
    1. Judgment by Babylonia and other enemies ch. 26
    2. A funeral dirge over Tyre ch. 27
    3. A judgment speech against the ruler of Tyre 28:1–10
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  - D. Israel's restoration from among the nations 28:25–26
  - E. Judgment on Egypt chs. 29–32
    1. An introductory prophecy of judgment on Egypt 29:1–16
    2. The consummation of Egypt's judgment 29:17–21
    3. The destruction of Egypt and her allies 30:1–19
    4. Pharaoh's broken arms 30:20–26
    5. Egypt's fall compared to Assyria's fall ch. 31
    6. A funeral dirge for Egypt 32:1–16
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IV. Future blessings for Israel chs. 33–48

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1. An exhortation to heed the watchman 33:1–9
2. An exhortation to turn from evil 33:10–20

B. Restoration to the Promised Land 33:21–39:29

1. Israel and the Promised Land 33:21–33
2. False and true shepherds ch. 34
3. Preparation of the Promised Land 35:1–36:15
4. Restoration to the Promised Land 36:16–37:14
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6. Future invasion of the Promised Land chs. 38–39

C. Ezekiel’s vision of the return of God’s glory chs. 40–48

1. The setting of the vision of the return of God’s glory 40:1–4
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3. The return of God’s glory to the temple 43:1–12
4. Temple ordinances 43:13–46:24
5. Topographical aspects of the Millennium chs. 47–48

Constable, Tom. 2003. *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software.