

Ezekiel

1. Introduction – Ezekiel ministered as a prophet in exile in Babylon. He warned the people of God’s impending judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. Using symbolic actions as well as language, he showed that God would destroy Jerusalem. The exile would continue for many years. However, God would judge the nations around Judah and ultimately restore a refined remnant of the people to the land and rebuild Jerusalem and a more glorious temple.
2. Author and date – While a few critical scholars have predictably raised questions about the authorship and date of the book, their arguments are unconvincing. The book is clearly attributed to Ezekiel. In fact, other than the prophetic call in 1:1-3, the entire book is written from the first person perspective. Ezekiel is the only prophetic OT book to be written entirely in the first person. The book is full of historical markers. In addition, it bears a strong literary unity that testifies to the fact that it was produced by a single author. The historical coverage of the book can generally be specified down to the day, since records both from the Bible and other documents allow us to correlate these events accurately with our own calendar. The book covers a date range of 593-573 B.C. Presumably, the book would’ve been in process of being written during this time and finalized shortly thereafter.
3. Historical background – Ezekiel was about one year old when King Josiah discovered the law books in the temple in the process of reform. He was probably among those who hoped that the decline of Assyria would mean peace and freedom for Judah. However, this was not to be. Josiah was killed in a battle with Neco of Egypt. His son Jehoahaz became king, but Neco immediately deposed him and made his brother Eliakim king, renaming him Jehoiakim. After Babylon defeated Egypt, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin was left to face the Babylonian armies. He was dethroned and taken captive in 597, along with many of the higher class, including Ezekiel. Ezekiel conducted his prophetic ministry from Babylon, first warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and then offering hope after his prophecy was fulfilled in 586.
4. Structure:
 - a. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1-24)
 - b. Oracles against foreign nations (25-32)
 - c. The watchman warns of destruction (33)
 - d. Blessing for Judah (34-39)
 - e. Blessings for Jerusalem and a new form of temple (40-48)
5. Themes:
 - a. New Jerusalem – The NT refers to Ezekiel (without once mentioning the name!) directly or indirectly at least 65 times. Forty-eight of those references occur in Revelation. John builds on Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple and shows us that in the new heavens and new earth the heavenly city will come to earth and God’s dwelling place will be with men. Other NT writers pick up on the implications of the temple prophecy and depict the church as the temple, the building in which God manifests his special presence.
 - b. Life-giving water – Ezekiel saw a trickle of water flowing from the temple that became a mighty river of life-giving, fresh water (48:1-12). Jesus alludes to this and proclaims himself to be the source of this life-giving water to all who ask.
 - c. Individual responsibility – The people had adopted a proverb that “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” By this they were disclaiming any responsibility for the judgment that was about to fall. While the impending judgment was due in part to the guilt of their fathers, Ezekiel rebukes their unwillingness to face their own sin and places the responsibility for their judgment on their unwillingness to repent and turn to the Lord wholeheartedly.
 - d. Holiness and mercy – God would demonstrate his justice and holiness by judging the people but exercise great mercy in restoring a remnant to the land in a more glorious manifestation of grace.

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.