

Ezekiel



Jim McGuiggan

Looking Into The Bible Series

The Book of Ezekiel

by

Jim McGuigan



Sunset Institute Press

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The Book of Ezekiel

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DEDICATION

For Billie Paine

Who continued to serve
while I *talked* of serving.
With genuine and abiding
affection.

FOREWORD

Well, here's a much needed revision and enlargement of my little "Ezekiel." I've laid this out much better as you can see at a glance. Since I've written a little book on Premillennialism (*The Kingdom of God and the Planet Earth*) I've dropped the discussion of millennialism from this volume. I've said quite a bit more about chapters 34-48 in this edition.

I really believe you will find the volume helpful. It is divided into preparatory remarks, outline and then comments. Each chapter is treated that way. So if you will be sure to read it in this order you'll get all the advantages (such as they are) of this book.

Ezekiel is by far the easiest of the major prophets. You'll (perhaps) be surprised at this since chapter one seems so confusing. It will do you good to get into a study of this book and you'll be pleased, when you're through, at how much you've gained. So, set thirty minutes each day aside for the study; get out your Bible and notepaper; ask God for help in your study and "get after it."

The best background for the study of Ezekiel is the book of Jeremiah. Become acquainted with the history of the times and much of what Ezekiel says is self-explanatory. So, major in the abundance of historical material in Jeremiah and the books of II Kings and II Chronicles.

Genuinely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. P. Fieger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

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Introductory Material

Introduction

Ezekiel: the Man

If I have understood 1:1 correctly, Ezekiel was 30 years old when God gave him his inaugural vision in calling him to be a prophet. That would mean he was 25 years old when taken captive in 597. He was one of ten thousand captives (2 Kings 24:14) who were dragged off into Babylon. These ten thousand God regarded as the “cream of the crop” (Jeremiah 24:1-10). The famous 10,000 Greeks under Cyrus the Younger had famous men in their ranks but none of them compared with this Ezekiel.

He was a married man (24:15-18) and a priest (1:3). All of his life he would have looked forward to the day when he would officiate as one of God’s holy priests. He’d have gotten himself ready, kept himself scrupulously clean (4:14) so that nothing would interfere with his fulfilling that vocation—but God had something else in mind.

He was a shameless lover of his people. God is “compelled” to convince him of the necessity of the judgement which will come on Jerusalem and the people of Israel (2:8; 3:15ff; 8:6,9,12,15,17; 14:23 and elsewhere). It has been suggested that he was rather hard—not at all like Jeremiah who wept so much over his people. This has been based on the fact that his wife is taken from him and he is able to go on prophesying without falling apart. I think this is a sad mistake. It looks to me like he was anything but hard (see 11:13). It appears to me he was devoted to his people and that he felt their pain so deeply in his soul that it might have been beyond tears. He must be told by God to get up and do his job as a watchman after he has been sitting for a solid week, overwhelmed and “sitting where they sat” (3:15).

When the elders come to him seeking some comfort in regard to the fate of the nation, he doesn’t want to speak of the evil that will befall them and so God warns him (14:90). He even permits him a

special trip (in vision) to Jerusalem so that Ezekiel will be strengthened to tell the truth to these holy looking elders (chapter 8-11).

Of his family connections we know nothing beyond the fact that he was a priest and a son of Buzi. His father must have been a faithful priest (probably) of the line of Zadok which had taken the place of the house of Abiathar (I Kings 2:26-27,35). The venerable man had a more illustrious son (Ezekiel) who would bring glory to the family of which so little is known.

There is no doubt about Ezekiel's devotion to duty. He had a tough message to carry. It was the more difficult because he respected his elders and loved his people. I believe it was Goethe who said that most people are able to oppose their enemies but that it takes a great man to oppose his friends. The young priest (now become prophet) is torn between the love he has for his wayward people and his awesome respect for God and his holiness. When God warns him of the impending death of his wife we find the prophet accepting it from the hand of God in such a way as to leave a lasting impression on anyone with feelings (24:15-27).

Ezekiel: the Times

The prophet was born in 622 B.C. Josiah was then on the throne and the little nation was doing fine. But when the prophet was a boy of 17 he would witness the approach of the triumphant Nebuchadnezzar who had just beaten the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, at Carchernish. Ezekiel would watch while Daniel and his three companions were carried off into Babylon.

Jeremiah was called to prophesy in 627/626 B.C., and as a growing lad Ezekiel must have heard with great anguish the words of the 'weeping prophet' concerning the coming judgment on the city and on the people. Later, in captivity, Ezekiel would hear of the letter sent to the captives by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:1ff) in which Jeremiah warns them that they are *not* coming home soon.

Ezekiel was called to prophesy to a people which had already seen two deportations (605 and 597) and would see a final destruction in 586. Some of the nation was too optimistic and

some of it was in utter despair. Some were broken with thoughts of God having deserted them and others who felt the Lord had deserted them decided to “eat, drink and be merry.” He is called to be a prophet to the fragments of a shattered nation. “They are the remnants of broken homes. They are people who have suffered. They have seen the fading of great hopes... Many have lost their *loved* ones. Some have lost their God. Ezekiel was sent, therefore, to a congregation acquainted with grief, to a people whose eyes were blinded with tears.” (Chappell, *Sermons on Old and New Testament Characters*, page 29).

While Jeremiah is crying and pleading with the Judeans to repent and turn to God to prevent destruction, Daniel is engrossed in his work as a statesman under Nebuchadnezzar and as a prophet to the heathen court in Babylon. Not one of this triumphant trio endorses the iniquity which is so rampant in the land of Judea. So bad is it, says Ezekiel, that if Daniel was joined by Job and Noah in the land of Judea, it would still sink under the weight of its terrible perversity (14:14,18,20,21ff).

Ezekiel: the Message

For our purposes, the book conveniently divides itself into four major sections.

1. *Chapters 1-24* tell us that Jerusalem must fall
2. *Chapters 25-32* tell us that foreign nations must fall
3. *Chapter 33* bridges 1-24 and chapter 34-48
4. *Chapters 44-48* tell us that Jerusalem (and its people) must be comforted.

Too many of the Jews are optimistic without reason. They refused to believe that Jerusalem would really go under (for, after all, God’s name had been placed there forever—II Chronicles 7:16); they refused to believe that the rulers on David’s throne would be completely overthrown (for God himself had promised as much—II Chronicles 7:18) and they refused to believe that the whole nation could be removed from off the land (for God had said that in Genesis 17:8).

Throughout the book (but especially chapters 1-24) we hear that the city and temple are to be destroyed; that there will be a

total national captivity and that the house of David was to be overturned. The people hadn't paid attention to the punitive clauses in the agreements they had with God. It was given to Ezekiel in Babylon (as it was given to Jeremiah in Judea) to convince the people of the totality of judgement. He must persuade them that such judgement is just. *He spends 24 chapters doing all that.*

The nations round about Israel had something to smile about – the fall of Judah. How they hated her (and used her when it was convenient). And how they despised the notion of the righteous Jews that Jehovah was the only true God. What now of the almightiness of Jehovah? What now of his caring for the people? Had he been all-powerful and a lover of his people, 586 B.C. would never have occurred. Ezekiel takes 8 chapters to tell them that their day is coming too—and at the hands of the Jehovah they despised. The God of the Jews had his strange way of working which involved pain for his people because of their sins. If he would not tolerate sin in his people, he'd tolerate it no more in foreigners who maligned his name. He would judge them. The foreigners would learn that this Jehovah is holy and is the universal deity. *Ezekiel spends chapters 25-32 on that matter*, I Peter 4:17-18 aptly sums up that section.

Chapter 33 carries the word: "The city is smitten!" The words of the prophet concerning judgement have all come true. The nation sinks into despair and God gives Ezekiel a message he must have enjoyed: "Jerusalem must be comforted!" The prophet spends 15 chapters telling that story. He will tell them of the government of the future; the land of the future; the enemies of the future and the worship of the future. (See the over-all outline.) That extended promise of (then) future glory eats up *chapters 34–48*.

There are several major themes which run throughout the book of Ezekiel. There is no doubt that the prophet stresses *the holiness of God* which will not permit him to dwell in a temple which has become the center of iniquity (see 8:6). There is great stress on *God's transcendent power*. He is most often spoken of as "Jehovah" but very often spoken of as "Lord Jehovah." *God's concern for the individual* is another obvious theme in the book as we can see from 9:4-6, 8: chapter 18:20:38 and 22:30. There's a very great emphasis too on *the sovereignty of God*. At least

seventy times (with only a little variation) we hear, “they shall know that I am Jehovah.” The proof of this sovereignty is shown both in judgement and in mercy (see, For example, 20:33, 18 and 34:29, 30). Then there is the stress on *the humanness of man* as opposed to the almightiness of God. We see this in the often iterated expression “son of man” as it is used of the prophet (I counted 90 occurrences).

Ezekiel: the Method of the Message

The arguments are still being made as to whether or not the prophet actually mimed out the things spoken of in the book (see chapter 4:1ff. for an example). Did he see himself do it in a vision (this is Fairbairn’s view)? Or did he actually carry them out (except where otherwise specified)? I think he actually did it, You draw your own conclusion—it doesn’t affect the message.

Whatever conclusion you draw, you will agree with me that the prophet has an unusual approach. From building forts to boiling caldrons; from weighing his shorn hair to eating his food with great quaking of the body: from acting out the part of a slow-trudging exile to a dervish with a whirling sword—the message moves along swiftly.

Ezekiel: The Biblical Background

If you really want to get a handle on the book of Ezekiel you must become acquainted with the historical events connected with it. II Kings 21-25 and II Chronicles 33-36 should be read carefully and often. This will give you a good grasp of things (though you will still be able to stand more information than these books are to give you).

Then there’s Jeremiah. It really makes a contribution towards our understanding of the historical setting. Get yourself well acquainted with the story from an eye-witness. Now Jeremiah’s prophecies are not written down in chronological order so let me list some of the chapters you’d really benefit from reading as a foundation for the study of Ezekiel. (I’ll give them in their chronological order with the dates supplied.)

Read them in this order:

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Date</i>
22	608-597
26	608-606
35	608-597
25	605
36	605
45	605
24	597-596
29	597
28	594
27	593
39	585, 586
21, 37, 38	587
32	587
33	587
34	587, 586
40-42	586-585

Here is a list of the Judean kings that are of interest to our study. The dates are those supplied by J. P. Free and Merrill Unger (see the bibliography). The dates followed in this book are those of Free.

	<i>Free</i>	<i>Unger</i>
Manasseh	687-642	687-642
Amon	642-640	642-640
Josiah	640-609	640-609
Jehoahaz	608	609
Jehoiakim	608-597	609-598
Jehoiachin	597	598
Zedekiah	597-586	598-587

Ezekiel: an Historical Sketch

You see he was only a twelve year old boy when he came to the throne, and twelve year old boys are easily corrupted by an evil environment. We are not absolving Manasseh, God didn't; but we are urging parents and leaders of little people to be careful how they raise them.

Manasseh had a zeal as great as the prophets! He was as valiant for evil as they were for good. He sought out wickedness with the fervor of a lost boy in a crowd seeking his father. During his “reign of terror,” Moloch “ate” up more than his share of screaming children while religious lunatics looked on nodding with approval and believing that the generally peaceful reign under Manasseh was gained thereby. He mingled the screams of agony with groans of licentiousness in the “sacred brothels.” Babylonian, Assyrian, Canaanite and Ammonite deities all entered his circus of gods. Those who opposed him did not live long in their opposition and so violent was he that we hear God saying he “shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.” But this idolatry was not new—had not the wise and successful Solomon prospered “despite” (say they, “because of”) his pantheon of gods?

But those prophets, ugh, all they could preach was the rending of hearts, the following of justice, mercy, faithfulness and kindness. Ascetics, human sacrifice and immorality might satisfy Astarte, Baal and the rest; but what are these compared with the agony of conscience and the ripping of the soul under conviction of guilt and repentance? Ritualism, shock offerings and self-punishment have always had a compelling fascination for man and the “dreary” dedication to right living the contrary.

These were days not to be recalled without blushing. The dumb and mindless stars were worshiped as God and men gazed with pleasure on the altars and images to foreign deities within the very temple itself. Astrology, wizardry and soothsaying became prevalent and popular. “Too far,” cried God, “I will take no more. Judah shall go into captivity.”

Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years; and for most of that period he was a contented vassal of Assyria. Egypt, the great schemer, the great “Dragon-Do-Nothing” (Moffatt), was working throughout this period and perhaps the Judean listened too well. At any rate, the Assyrian took him captive to Babylon. His restoration was a result of his repentance; but as Baynes suggests, perhaps the Assyrian restored him that he might have a friendly face between himself and the now stabilized Psamtek. But what a repentance! Who cannot be encouraged at this about-face? Habit

is not omnipotent—rejoice in that! Only God is Lord; And what mercy! Who cannot be encouraged by the depths of such mercy and such a spectacle of forgiveness? Baynes' suggestion is favored by the fortification of Jerusalem by Manasseh and his placing of "valiant captains in all the fortified cities of Judah."

Back came Manasseh and out went the idols, out of the temple, out of the streets but not out of the hearts of the people and not out of the heart of his own son, Amon. Fathers and mothers, beware! The liberals reject the record of Manasseh's repentance and reform. We have heard their arguments, patiently and fairly, and reject them confidently.

News from the north was troubling Assyria. The restless Scythians were on the move. Egypt and Lydia were now independent. Persia had overrun Elam and was growing. Assyria, long "bleeding to death" by internal troubles and frequent wars to hold her empire together, would soon die: and a nation who knew only too well how to humiliate, torture, demoralize, rape and crush a nation, but in her insanity had no knowledge how to govern it, would pass away and leave only the sound of silence!

The reign of Amon is aptly called by one, a "sort of unimportant and miserable annex to that of his father." What did this young thug care of his father's later years? Back came the lately hampered idolatry and degradation as a flood with all its viciousness and bestiality saying again in tones of a trumpet that Judah had passed "Redemption Point."

Did the assassination of Amon point to a strong anti-Assyrian movement? Who can say. In any case, his murderers were executed and the eight year old Josiah was enthroned. At sixteen, he showed his love for God. At twenty, he began a purge of idolatry, a purge so intense in its ferocity that he dug up the bones of the idolatrous priests and burned them on their altars thus fulfilling I kings 13:1. He ripped down idols, defaced images and even burned (!) the chariots dedicated to the sun thus again showing the stupidity of idolatry. What grim irony there is here burning that which by its very nature should have been incombustible!

The finding of the Deuteronomic code during the repair of the temple of Solomon is a great shock to the king. He orders the Passover observance in accordance with the word of the Lord. (The finding of important documents in the foundations of buildings is not too rare. See Free, page 215f.)

The second phase of the purge gets under way, and the holy place of Molech is defiled thus declaring to these Judean idolaters that their god is Josiah's devil. The houses of the Sodomites, that were in the house of God, where the women wove tents for the Asherah," were destroyed and Josiah purged the land even as far north as Megiddo. All this time Assyria is too busy to pay any attention to Josiah.

The brilliant Assurbanipal, Assyrian king, died in 626 and the empire erupted. The neo-Babylonian kingdom was born under Nabopolassar in that very year. But a greater warrior than this was called to his work in the previous year, a boy prophet called Jeremiah from the little town of Anathoth, One established a mighty dynasty, the other truth! One battled for self-glory and the other sanctified war on behalf of God! The one battled for territory, the other for minds, one for cities the other for souls!

In 612, the abominable city, Nineveh, fell to the Median Cyaxares and Nabopolassar who led a coalition of nations. Down she fell with a resounding crash that echoed over all the world. And how the world loved it. The rapist city! The city which harried the earth, laughed at their gods and screamed her defiance into the faces on the heads hanging before them as they ate. Gone were her two hundred towers and impregnable walls. The Medes and their allies tore out her heart and ate it!

"Woe to Nineveh, City of Blood, full of lies crammed with plunder. Listen! Hear the crack of the whips as the chariots rush forward against her, wheels rumbling, horse's hoofs pounding, and chariots clattering as they bump wildly through the streets... The dead are lying in the streets—bodies, heaps of bodies everywhere. Men stumble over them, scramble to their feet, and fall again... I will cover you with filth and show the world how really vile you are. All who see you will shrink back in horror... Yet no one anywhere regrets your fate."

So reads Nahum's great 'At last', in the Living Bible. Egypt regretted her fate, however, though not for reasons beyond herself. She much preferred a weak and tottering Assyria as a buffer state between herself and these other rising powers (Bruce). With her help, Assyria was able to limp away to Haran but mortally smitten.

Necho, successor to Psamtek, moves north toward the Euphrates to aid the Assyrian but finds his way blocked by the zealous young Judean. "Step aside," calls the Egyptian, "I have no quarrel with you. Jehovah has sent me on this errand." The Egyptian was not lying (II Chronicles 35:22) but Josiah would have none of it. "Save Assyria, the destroyer of my people, the carrier of a thousand virulent religious diseases?" The young man is adamant and dies! The nation is aghast and brokenhearted. And though across his reform one must write, "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE," Jeremiah remembers him as one thoroughly righteous! The wail of the nation for the dead king is long remembered.

The year of his death was 609 when Ezekiel was thirteen years old. The young man almost certainly heard a great deal about Jeremiah since they were both priests and the latter a prophet. Jeremiah was soon to become perhaps the most famous (infamous?) man in Judah. The writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel meet at so many points although neither verbally acknowledges the work of the other.

The writings of Jeremiah, taken with the inspired chronicles of the kings, give us the clearest insight into the nature of the times leading to 586 and oblivion! The people of Israel pass by Jehoiakim and placed Jehoahaz (Shallum) on the throne, but Necho will have none of it and in the same year carries Jehoahaz off into Egypt, the first Judean king to die in exile. Jehoakim (Eliakim) is put on the throne; the year is 609. Babylon is growing by leaps and bounds; Egypt is yet powerful and Judah is as grain crushed between two giant mills.

The Babylonian prince marched toward the west and Necho moved against him to defend his Syrian possessions. They met at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar paralyzed the Egyptians and ran them to the Egyptian border. Judah now belonged to the Chaldean

and numerous captives, among whom was Daniel, were taken to Babylon.

Judah had not passed over Jehoiakim for nothing. Temple treasures had been removed and Judah was under heavy tribute to Babylon but the vain Jehoiakim insisted upon building himself a luxurious royal house. This activity is judged by Jeremiah as an attempt to make himself appear a successful ruler (Jeremiah 22:13ff). In addition to building this expensive structure, he did it with forced labor as did the Pharaohs their tombs. Jehoiakim was a despicable character and had no respect whatever for the word of God as is proved by his cutting and burning of the prophecies of Jeremiah.

The foolish man rebelled against the Chaldean and died in the year 597 unmourned; and if we accept Jeremiah 22:19 literally, he was not even accorded a decent burial. It is sad that a father and son can be so different in this respect as were Josiah and Jehoiakim. See comments on 19:5-9.

Eliakim's son, Jehoiachin, succeeded him and reigned for only three months and "did that which was evil." He was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon and the throne passed to Mattaniah (Zedekiah), the uncle of the boy king. Although Jehoiachin was sent to Babylon, there is a question in the minds of many that Zedekiah was regarded by the Babylonians as a sort of regent for Jehoiachin. However that may be, God through Ezekiel still dated the years by the captivity of "king Jehoiachin." Ezekiel entered Babylon with Jehoiachin.

Of all the kings of Judah, perhaps Zedekiah is the most miserable and the one who, in spite of his great wickedness, cries out to us for pity in our assessment of him. There is no doubt at all that his greatest weakness was his weakness. He is so afraid he will do the wrong thing he doesn't know what to do. He will have Jeremiah imprisoned but will secretly send for him and ask him for advice. He will acknowledge the advice is sound but is afraid to act upon it and urges the prophet to lie about their conference that he (the king) might not fall into calamity. He went to Babylon and took an oath of allegiance but the pressure of the pro-Egypt group is too great for him to resist and so he rebels believing that

Hophra would be strong enough to deal with Babylon. The constant pleading of Jeremiah is of no avail.

It is important for us to keep several things in mind as we think on this period. False prophets were prophesying that those in captivity would be restored within two years (i.e. 592—Jeremiah 28:14). This all seemed reasonable to them since God had said, “And I will give unto thee, and thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.” To suggest a total captivity of the nation for two generations seemed to militate against the faithfulness of God. Of course, these false prophets paid no attention to passages such as Deuteronomy 28-30 or Joshua 23:14-16 where God made it clear that their continuance in the land depended upon their obedience.

In addition to the threat of seventy years of captivity, there was the threat of the violation and utter destruction of Jerusalem. But had not God himself said, “For now have I chosen and hallowed this house, that my name may be there forever; and my eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually.” II Chronicles 7:16. In light of this when Jeremiah prophesied of the desecration of the temple (chapter 26:1 ff), it was regarded as blasphemy and treason. Jeremiah would certainly have died had not his influential friends stepped in and quoted Micah (26:18ff). These false prophets ignored II Chronicles 7:13-14 which expressly states the conditions connected with having a perpetual abiding place for God among them.

And who could believe that there would be no descendant of David on the throne in Judah when God had sworn to David that he would never want for a king to sit upon his throne? When Jehoiachin made his exit, the false prophets spoke of his restoration by 592. In any case, they had Zedekiah who was of the line of David; and so if the worst came to the worst, they would still have a Davidic king ruling. This they thought was an unbeatable situation.

It is hard to understand the willful blindness of this class of people who worshiped every conceivable deity and yet “trusted” that Jehovah would keep his promises and deliver them from Babylon. Jeremiah, his heart breaking, had only one sermon to preach each time he spoke: it was “Violence and Destruction”

(20:8). Ezekiel is facing the same stupid optimism over in Babylon.

The Chaldean begins his march. It is not clear to the Judeans that he is coming against Jerusalem for the false prophets are assuring them he is heading for Rabbah in Ammon. But it is not so; he turns at the “crossroads” toward Jerusalem; and after about eighteen months despite the Egyptian gesture, Jerusalem is razed to the ground. Zedekiah is captured trying to flee. His eyes are put out after he is forced to witness the slaying of his sons, and he is led off to Babylon where he dies.

The Edomites watched with approval the razing of the city and lent their voices in support crying, “Raze it, Raze it.” Jeremiah is treated exceptionally by Nebuchadnezzar and is offered complete freedom. Those not carried off into captivity were left in the hands of Gedaliah who is soon slain by Ishmael, the leader of a guerilla group. There were other Jews who fled south to Egypt when they saw the end was coming. When many of the Jews remaining in Palestine observed the attempt of Ishmael to establish an independent government, they were filled with fear and decided to make for Egypt. Jeremiah assures them if they stay the Chaldean would give them no trouble but that Egypt was to fall. Despite the fact that Jeremiah’s prophecies had been proven true, this remaining group reject his word and force Baruch and Jeremiah to accompany them to Egypt. It was at Tahpanhes in Egypt that Jeremiah delivers his last prophecy.

So, in the year 586, the word comes to Ezekiel, “the city is smitten.” From a state of undue optimism, the Jews switch to a deep feeling of gloom and despair. The first third of the book of Ezekiel is addressed to the period of optimism and the last third springs from the need to comfort the nation and to ensure them that there is yet glory in the future despite their gross iniquity.

OUTLINE

EZEKIEL: AN OUTLINE

This four point outline will help you keep a grasp of the overall thrust of the book:

1. Jerusalem must fall: chapters 1-24
2. Foreign nations must fall: chapters 25-32
3. The watchman and the smitten city: chapter 33
4. Jerusalem must be comforted: chapters 34-48

Here is a fuller outline which I think you will find useful (I think if an outline becomes too detailed it is no longer a help. Do you feel that way too?) *See the commentary for the verse divisions.*

I. *Ezekiel's Vision and Commission*: chapters 1-3

II. *Jerusalem Must fall*: chapters 4-24

1. The three-fold sign (chapter 4)
 - A. The city on the tile
 - B. The 430 days
 - C. The unclean food
2. The haircut and its significance (chapter 5)
3. Idolatry denounced and punishment promised (chapters 6-7)
4. The necessity and nature of the destruction of Jerusalem and its people (chapters 8-11)
5. Two signs and a warning (chapter 12)
 - A. The exodus
 - B. The trembling drinker
 - C. The swift judgement
6. False prophets denounced (chapter 13)
 - A. The men
 - B. The women
7. Inner idolatry (chapter 14)
8. The righteous nature of God's judgement (chapter 14)
9. The parable of the useless vine (chapter 15)
10. A resume of shameful history (chapter 16)

- A. Undeserved kindness
- B. Inexcusable infidelity
- C. Gracious reconciliation
- 11. The parable of the eagles (chapter 17)
 - A. The Babylonian eagle
 - B. The Egyptian eagle
 - C. The tender twig
- 12. Sour grapes—God and the individual (chapter 18))
- 13. The parables of the lions and rods (chapter 19)
 - A. The lions
 - B. The rods
- 14. An indictment on a shameful record (chapter 20)
- 15. The impartial sword of God (chapter 21)
- 16. Jerusalem the Corrupt (chapter 22)
- 17. The parable of Oholah and Oholibah (chapter 23)
- 18. The sign of the caldron (chapter 24)
- 19. The sign of Ezekiel's refusal to mourn (chapter 24).

III. *Foreign Nations must Fall*: chapters 25-32

- 1. Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia: chapter 25
- 2. Tyre: chapters 26-28
- 3. Sidon: chapter 28
- 4. Egypt: chapters 29-32

IV. *The Watchman and the Smitten City*: chapter 33

- 1. The watchman defended
- 2. The watchman's function
- 3. The fall of Jerusalem
- 4. The word of Ishmael and his followers
- 5. The revised estimate of the prophet

V. *Jerusalem must be Comforted*: chapters 34-48

- 1. The government of the future
- 2. The land of the future
- 3. The nation of the future
- 4. The security of the future
- 5. The temple and worship of the future

1

The War Wagon

Some Preparatory Remarks on Chapter 1

We'll learn from this chapter of the inaugural vision of the young prophet who thought he would have been a priest. We'll learn where he was and in what condition he was when God called him to his task.

We'll find that the inaugural vision is one which speaks not of mercy but of judgment and wrath. The form of the vision is that of a storm-cloud which envelopes a fiery chariot on which the King of kings sits enthroned.

You must not permit the details to discourage you entering the chapter because whether or not we can grasp all the details, the toenail thrust of the chapter is quite clear.

If what is said about this chapter and its meaning is true then we'd expect the prophet to receive a commission which involves the preaching of judgment to his own people and a denunciation of their crimes against the Lord. That's exactly what we find in the subsequent chapters.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER ONE

- I. *The Introduction:* verses 1-3
 - 1. The date of the vision: verse 1-2
 - 2. The place of the vision: verse 1
 - 3. The clarity of the vision: verse 3
 - 4. The recipient of the vision: verse 3
- II. *The Vision of the Cherubim:* verses 4-25
 - 1. The approaching storm cloud: verse 4
 - 2. The four living creatures: verses 5-25
 - A. General remarks on the nature of cherubim
 - B. The cherubim described: verses 5-25
- III. *The Vision of the Glory of God:* verses 26-28
 - 1. The throne on which he sits: verse 26
 - 2. The description of the King: verse 27
 - 3. The rainbow and the glory: verse 28
 - 4. The response of the prophet: verse 28
- IV. *Summary remarks*

Ezekiel's Vision and Commission: 1:1-3

VERSE 1: The "30th year" cannot be conclusively exegeted but without doubt the most acceptable view is that the 30th year is the 30th year of his life. That year would say a great deal to one with the priestly connections as Ezekiel had. See Numbers 4:3,23,30,39. Has any other epoch or event been dated by the year of one's life? Yes! The beginning of the flood is dated as Noah's 600th year (Genesis 7:6,11). and the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus is dated by his 30th year.

This 30th year is equivalent to the 5th year of the captivity of Jehoiachin which in turn is the year 592 B.C. Ezekiel is by the river Chebar (see Free or Unger) "among the captives." Notice he does not explicitly call himself a captive. Let us here maintain the distinction and say it is one thing to be a captive and another to be "among" them. The truth is, great men cannot be made captive. Their bodies may be chained but their souls can still bring forth praises to God as did Paul and Silas. They may be locked away in a den of hungry lions, but the real captive who spends a sleepless, joyless night is the war-lord who sent him there. They may have been bound hand and foot and cast into a fire by a vindictive tyrant, but the flames only bring them liberty while they eat the bonds and devour the ruler's lackeys. No dungeon is dark or deep enough, no island is barren or austere enough and no tossing ship is manned by enough of the emperor's military to make a captive of him whose heart and soul has been liberated, forever, by Him who made the iron, the earth, the flame and water. Before such people, "iron gates yield."

It was there, when among the captives, that "the heavens were opened." If we could only believe this would happen each time we were "among the captives", we would fervently pray, "God, bring on the oppressor!" Remarkable isn't it, that for the "emancipated," and the "pursuers of life and liberty" the heavens never open. They see blue skies, shining suns, beautiful sunrises and breathtaking sunsets but never an open heaven. The "open heavens" are for the free people of God who can do the impossible by seeing the invisible. These are for people such as Stephen in his

dying, for John in exile and Ezekiel at Chebar. May God grant you and me our share of Chebars!

Exile for the settled exiles was not really too bad, but it was not without its despair, pain and misery. The more pious the man and the more in love with the lovely Jerusalem the faster the tears would fall and the more bitter the soul when the taunts of the oppressor were leveled at him. "Sing songs of your homeland," they would cry: and the exiles would hang their harps by the willows having no heart to sing. It was at a time like this that Ezekiel "saw" something. Not hopelessness, not his own misery but "visions of God." Thank God for the men who can cause us to see the visions of God and raise us above our "prison complexes."

Remember that Ezekiel would have spent years being trained to minister to God as a priest, but now he would never so minister. Sad? Not as it turned out, for Ezekiel was destined for another kind of ministry. Bear this in mind, good brother or sister. Ezekiel, we are persuaded, did not live his life eyeing the mud and mire—he lifted his eyes and was rewarded, he saw "visions of God." Do thou likewise!

VERSE 3: "The word of Jehovah came." No apologies for the affirmation. No hesitancy or embarrassment. No begging leave to say such a thing. Ezekiel said, "God spoke to me!" What shall we say to that? That he is a lunatic or epileptic? If lunacy produces a man such as Ezekiel—God increase lunacy. If epilepsy brings forth a book such as this one—bring on the disorder.

The message Ezekiel brings brought him no ease or popularity. It was contrary to his wishes and, therefore, not a daydream. There is not an indication of morbidity in the book, so he cannot be accused of suffering from melancholia. The book is a perfect balance of realism and optimism (see the outline). No, the only way to successfully assail the affirmation of verse 3 is to prove there is no God; or God cannot speak; or God could not speak to Ezekiel. Unless one of these is established, there can be no successful negative! GOD SPOKE TO EZEKIEL.

The Cherubim:1:4-28

We tire of hearing that Ezekiel modeled his description on Assyrian or Babylonian figures or drawings. So, there are some similarities?! Cherubim are not new to Ezekiel. He had heard of them before. Since we hold that the concept of cherubim predated Ezekiel, we hesitate not to say the concept of cherubim pre-dated these Assyrian and Babylonian productions. In the annals of these nations, we continually find examples of pervasion of truths and revelations as well as history, so God prior to Moses revealed something of “cherubim” and the pagans produced their griffins and their sphinxes.

Before we enter into the details of the vision, we will set forth the overall meaning of it. This we do lest becoming bogged down in the dispute about details we miss all.

The vision is a vision of the glory of God, but it is the glory of God as manifested in his coming in just judgment!

The cherubim are the chariot of God, his battle wagon, his vehicle of righteous war! He sits enthroned on His chariot.

They are expressly called “the chariot” in I Chronicles 28:18 and in Psalm 18:10 as we hear of his riding upon a cherub. The reader is urged to read, right now, Psalm 18:7ff to get the feel of that passage. It is the cherubim who stand between the transgressors and the tree of life in Genesis 3:24. We find them woven into the veil which separates between the holy place and the holy of holies in Exodus 36:35 so that one could not enter into the presence of God without first passing them; and when this was done on that great day of atonement, it could only be accomplished at the expense of some innocent victim whose blood had to be shed.

We find them on the top of the ark of the covenant in Exodus 37:6ff looking downward, gazing as it were at the Law, the broken and mutilated law, contained in the box. Were it not for the intervening mercy seat, a mercy seat upon which the blood of the innocent was poured, they would have demanded that righteous judgment be wrought on all the transgressors and that God’s holiness be vindicated.

We find them in Revelation 4:6ff, the closest beings to the One who there sits enthroned. Their endless task is to declare the righteousness and unapproachableness of the King by perpetually saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy!”

In chapters 9-11 we find them closely involved in the judgment that is rendered on the people and on the city of Jerusalem. It is from between the wheels of the cherubim that the coals come with which to burn Jerusalem. And here in chapter one we are clearly taught that the cherubim are the chariot throne of the Judge himself.

Before we look at specific verses let me suggest to you what the verses as a whole tell us about the Cherubim. At times the details become a bit difficult to follow so if you’ll keep the overall picture in your mind it will help you.

1. The Cherubim group together to give a chariot looking appearance.
2. Each cherub has an over-all human shape.
3. They each have four wings.
4. They have legs like a man except that the legs don’t end in feet like a human. The feet are like those of an animal (say, an ox or bull).
5. Each cherub has four faces—human, lion, eagle and bull.
6. Under each wing the cherub has a human hand.
7. Somewhere close to the feet are four wheels (one for each face). The wheels have the appearance of being inside each other.
8. This gives the impression of rims on the wheels and the rims are full of eyes.
9. Each cherub reaches toward his fellow cherub with two of his wings. This would produce the enclosed box-like shape of a chariot. The other two wings are used to cover the body.
10. Above the cherubim there is a space and then a throne on which the Judge himself sits.
11. The cherub do not move in different directions simultaneously (like a star-burst) but each one is able to

move in any of four directions. They are also able to move on the earth or above it.

12. When the chariot is at rest the wings are let clown.

VERSE 4: Picture tornado weather—the rolling motion of clouds as they boil and turn and you are seeing what Ezekiel saw. Picture the lightning flashes of a terrible electric storm with fire flashing everywhere. Every now and then the clouds seem to open up and you get to look inside what now appears to be a furnace. This is what Ezekiel saw coming racing at him from out of the north. Clouds and lightning are often associated with judgement in the prophetic scriptures (see a concordance on this matter).

Why out of *the north*? Is it because Israel's enemies usually came at them out of the north (Egypt excepted)? Perhaps. Because pagans believed the north to be the home of the gods and Jehovah wished the prophet to know he controlled the north (as Ellison suggests)? Maybe. In chapter 8:3, 5 and 14 we learn that a constant stream of filth pours out of the northern gate of Jerusalem and perhaps we are being told that this stream of filth is what has caused this response from God—the filth pours out toward the north and the response of Jehovah comes back from that direction. Check those verses.

VERSE 5-28: We enter here into the details of the vision of the cherubim. The reader must not think that the description literally portrays any creature in existence, in heaven or on earth. The description of the cherubim varies some in chapters 1 and 10 making it clear that these exalted beings are presented to us in a non-literal fashion.

VERSES 5, 11, 23: Picture four beings each the general shape of a man but having four faces instead of simply front and back. These beings stand in something of a square or a rectangle. They stretch two of their four wings toward each other thus forming an enclosed square. The other two wings cover their bodies.

VERSES 15, 16-18: Beside (close to) and under (10:2) the cherubim are wheels, four of them for each creature. The wheels are within each other thus creating the appearance of rims. They are capable of going in any direction, something like the swivel

wheels we know on grocery vehicles in a supermarket. The rims are full of eyes which gives them a dreadful appearance.

VERSES 19-21: The wheels moved at the dictate of the living creatures. If the creatures rose, so did the wheels. If the creatures stayed, so did the wheels for the wheels are totally under the control of the creatures.

VERSES 22-27: Above the heads of the four beings was a platform (firmament) on which sat a throne. On the throne sat one who was aflame from his loins upward and aflame from his loins downward. This division is a literary device used for emphasis. Why not simply say, "He was aflame?" the dividing and the description of each part speaks of thoroughness of examination and thus description.

VERSES 27-28: Round about this flame-being on the throne was a brightness which reminded Ezekiel of the rainbow.

VERSES 13-14: Throughout the vision, running up and down, on and in the midst of the living creatures is fire and light. Let the reader observe, by simply reading without studying, the dominance of these elements in the vision. These, as we have already stated, are invariably connected with judgment, remedial or not.

Those comments give us some over-all picture of the creatures so let's move in a little closer and see if we can get some more detail. Some of the remarks are suggested based on (I think) the suggestion of the facts themselves and some others have less foundation than that.

VERSES 7-8. The legs of the creatures didn't join to feet like we have. They were "straight feet." The legs ended in "hoof-type" feet and they had the appearance of burnished brass (copper). This brass hoofs element stresses destructive power. In Micah 4:13 Israel is assured that God would make her "hoofs brass" that she might trample her enemies. Take a look at Deuteronomy 25:4.

The hands under the wings are later used to reach in and take out coals which were to be poured out on the city of Jerusalem (10:7). So there's at least one function of those hands. "Hands" may also be used to stress the servanthood of these awesome creatures.

VERSE 9: The creatures reach toward one another with two of their wings. This would give us the chariot enclosure. We're told too that the creatures didn't turn when they went on their mission—they went "straight forward." This stresses *the purpose* in their going. Have you ever seen someone going through a large store, hands in pocket and looking all around? He walks a few yards in one direction and then a few in another direction. What does that tell you? Of course—he has no plan or he is not sure of where he is going. But have you ever seen someone going through a large store with a determined stride, with his eyes fixed on some given point? Either that fellow knows where he is going or he thinks he knows where he is going. The cherubim didn't loiter and neither did they meander—they knew exactly where they were going and what they were going for. The thought is contained in the phrase: Where the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together.

VERSE 10: The four faces represent creaturehood. They are the highest creatures to be sure, but they're creatures just the same. They're not God they are his high and holy servants and instruments. Their creature nature is stressed in elements of creation with which man is familiar.

The man's face ensures that we don't get the impression of bestiality. The over-all form of the cherubim is human (verse 5) and not bestial. There is nothing irrational or savage connected with the cherubim. And yet, the bestial aspect does speak of destructive power. The lion and the eagle are both supreme predators in their respective arenas.

The ox seems a little out of place until we realize that the word may be rendered (and indeed is rendered in the modern version) as "bull." The bull fits this context which is one of power. If you stay with ox you'll think of them serving God as oxen serve men. The bull is the most powerful of the domestic animals and was worshiped in ancient times as the symbol of power and virility.

VERSES 11-14: The covering of the body with two wings suggests modesty in the presence of the Lord. We learn that there is a *spirit* which impels the living creature and again we are being told that these beings are not mindless and irrational. Fire envelopes

them and in this we are being reminded that they are involved in judgment and purging.

They move with the speed of lightning and their visitation was easily seen by the watching (discerning) eye. Take a close look at Luke 17:23-24 and Matthew 24:26-28.

VERSES 15-16: Each living creature had four wheels assigned to him. It isn't easy from the text to determine whether or not each wheel was situated on one of the four sides of the cherub. The NIV suggests that the wheels "intersected" each other (that's hard to envisage). I lean to the view that all four wheels were inside each other, that is, that one wheel circled another which encircled another which encircled the other (like an archery target). This has its difficulties but it is easier to envisage.

The rims of the wheels were full of eyes which stress the all-seeing ability of the cherubim. We find in 10:12 that the eyes extend to the whole form of the cherubim. Do you remember when you thought your mother or father had "eyes in the back of the head"? It meant they missed nothing. The cherubim miss nothing. *Shouldn't this sober the ungodly and assure the saint?*

VERSE 17: When they wanted (the wheels or the cherubim?) they went in *their* four directions. The cherubim were equipped to go in any of the four directions of the compass. The wheels did too. We're given the picture of a flashing and terrible chariot which speeds without deviation in any direction it needs to go. Is ungodliness in the south? God's war-wagon heads that way. North, east or west makes no difference to this fearsome instrument of wrath.

Were not supposed to conclude (I'm sure) that they went in all four directions at once (at the same time) like a star burst. We are being told of the universality of the commission of the cherubim to carry out judgment on the impenitent. The wheels stress the chariot nature of the whole vision and the Lord goes to pains to let us know that the wheels are under the control of the spirit of the cherubim (see verse 21c).

VERSES 19-21: The chariot doesn't trundle indiscriminately over everyone and everything. There is a rational principle guiding the movement of that war-wagon. The spirits of the cherubim dictate

where and when and how the chariot form moves. When judgment falls from the cherubim it is no accident, no blind fate!

This chariot moves not only on the *earth* but off it. If the majesty and holiness of God had been offended, whether in heaven or on earth, the cherubim are there to carry out swift justice. No angelic beings or earthly armies are exempt. Verses 19-21 stress this.

VERSE 22: High above the heads of the cherubim is a throne. There is a space (firmament) between the throne and the heads of the cherubim which had the appearance of crystal. This separates the rider from the chariot itself and it doubtless signifies what “separation” always stresses, holiness. This rider is incredibly holy!

VERSES 23-25: We are now pointed to the wings. Mighty wings the sound of which was like thunder or the booming voice which scared Moses and Israel at Sinai. These wings (two of them from each cherub) enclosed the “chariot” area and stood between the enthroned One and those outside. When the chariot wasn’t in motion these wings were not outstretched. Verse 25 implies that the rider determined when the chariot goes or stays.

VERSES 26-28: Now we look at the throne and the occupant. Exalted above all there is a throne which looked something like a sapphire stone and on it sat a flame, The rider is said to be fire from his waist down and fire from his waist up, Why weren’t we told simply that he was all flame? It’s for emphasis. To break a thing down into constituent parts and examine it is a mark of thoroughness. We are being told in an emphatic manner that the rider is burning fire. This is not stressing the graciousness of God. The whole vision here is one of justice and judgment, Our God is a consuming fire, said the Hebrew writer. Daniel views God in chapter 7 as sitting on a throne of fire at the time he renders judgement on the fourth beast.

VERSE 28 gives us the only element of mercy in the whole vision—the rainbow. There it is! In the midst of this picture of terror we are given the reminder that there is a merciful side of God. The rainbow spoke of the mercy of God and his covenant-keeping mercy. It was given this significance in the days of Noah.

Ezekiel specifically tells us that what he is seeing is the glory of the Lord God. So there's no doubt that Eric Von Daniken fans will find no joy here. It wasn't a space-ship Ezekiel saw. (I'll tell you frankly, I can't understand this mentality which would get a space-ship out of Ezekiel 1.)

The prophet's response is an appropriate one—he falls flat on his face. I suspect you and I would too. It won't hurt to remark here that sometimes it is necessary for God to bring us to our knees before we can become upright.

So, in all of this Ezekiel has seen the glory of the Lord, the king of Israel. What we must not miss is this, Ezekiel didn't see the Babylonian boss so enthroned. Despite part of his people being in captivity and the fact that Jerusalem would soon be razed to the ground with the resultant death of thousands, Jehovah is still reigning. When John in Revelation 4 sees the throne that rules the world, it isn't in Rome—it's in heaven! God grant us the vision to see that the world isn't ruled from Moscow, Peking or from Washington!

We are being prepared too for the message that is to be given to and preached by Ezekiel. Jerusalem *is* to go under; judgement *is* ahead for the whole nation and the throne of David *is* about to be overthrown. All this is implied in the approach of this fiery war-wagon which is enveloped in this horrific storm cloud. God isn't coming on a social visit nor is he interested in speaking to Ezekiel of mercy. Judgment is in view!