

Ezekiel

September 1, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ezekiel 1:1-14

Session Outline

1. Introduction (Ezekiel 1:1-3)
2. Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-9)
3. Glory (Ezekiel 1:10-14)

Theological Theme

The Lord is patient, loving, and merciful. He revealed Himself to Ezekiel through a glorious vision to encourage the people God loved them and still had good plans for them.

Call to Action

God's glory and majesty is indescribable. Consider taking this week to focus on a praise and worship service.



Leader Guide

Ezekiel

Introduction

Nature is powerful and can be devastatingly destructive. Many have been exposed to the forces of nature beyond our control including hurricanes, tornados, or floods. The flood that took place in Nashville in 2010 lingers in many of our minds and when it rains heavily, some people get anxious due to their experiences over a decade ago.

When you go through a strong storm of some kind, one thing becomes perfectly clear. Humans have no control over what happens in nature. Although we watch the radar and try to predict what might happen, when high winds come, tornadic funnel cloud forms, or waters start to rise, we quickly realize our own lack of control and power. But God is the opposite. He used nature to reveal His presence and His glory throughout Scripture as a reminder that He is all powerful and glorious beyond our control.

- ❓ How do you respond when storms develop in your area? What is the strongest weather event you've experienced?
- ❓ How does the power and beauty in nature reveal the glory of God?

Session Summary

Though God's people were in exile, He encouraged them and reminded them of who He is so they would know He had plans for them regardless of their past faithlessness. The Lord reached out to them through a vision given to Ezekiel. The various images Ezekiel received and shared pointed the people to the Lord.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Even when His people sin and rebel and face the consequences of their choices, God still loves them. He used familiar images in Ezekiel's vision to communicate that He had not changed, and He still loved them enough to pursue them and offer a way out of their sin. The same is true for us. When we turn away from the Lord, He is waiting and willing to restore us, if we repent and turn back to Him.

1. Introduction (Ezekiel 1:1-3)

Ezekiel was one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon taken into captivity because of their rebellion against the Lord. Although they had received several warnings about the consequences of their disobedience, the Israelites persisted until God finally allowed them to suffer the punishment His prophets had foretold. Ezekiel was in the group taken captive by the Babylonians.

After about five years in exile, Ezekiel received a prophetic vision from the Lord. As a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, Ezekiel spoke to the Israelite exiles in Babylon while Daniel addressed those in the court of the King of Babylon and Jeremiah was tasked with speaking to the remnant of the Jews who remained in their homeland.

- ❓ What can we learn about God that He continued to have prophets speak to His people from Him in many different areas?

Ezekiel was a priest who had never gotten to serve the Lord in the temple in his homeland as he was taken captive in his youth. Ezekiel's initial prophecy came in like a whirlwind and was fueled by the Holy Spirit of the Lord. Though he had acted as a mediator for the exiles to the Lord, now he was tasked with being the representative of God to His people.

- ❓ What do these verses indicate about the message of Ezekiel that would follow? Why is this important?

Ezekiel's vision was clearly a recorded event that had significance and wasn't to be disregarded as a folk tale of any kind. Ezekiel included details about his ministry in Babylon and referenced the common practice of the Israelites to congregate at the river for their worship gatherings. He used language to specify that this vision was a word directly from the Lord.

Ezekiel's name means "strengthened by the Lord," and he received this word from the Lord directly. He was a special representative of God as the hand of the Lord was on him. What Ezekiel said and did was not dependent on his own power or initiative but on the power of the Lord. Ezekiel was used by God to give the people a glimpse of what was to come and help them understand why they were in exile, while also giving hope for the future.

- ❓ Application: What are common ways we hear from God today? Why is it important that we do?

The Creatures in the Storm

In 593 BC the Lord revealed His glory to Ezekiel through an elaborate vision. Ezekiel saw a storm cloud coming from the north. In the storm, four flaming winged creatures appeared. Each combined human and animal characteristics—much like some of the minor deities depicted in ancient Near Eastern art.

2. Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-9)

Ezekiel's vision began with him seeing "a whirlwind coming from the north" (v. 4). The Israelites often associated north with the judgment of God. Enemies had traveled from the north to overtake them and force them into exile. Hearing that the whirlwind was from the north would draw their attention to learn the rest of the vision.

Imagine being taken captive, knowing it was deserved judgment for your rebellion, and now came an additional word from God about what was coming. The people would be eager to gain a glimpse of what to expect. This was not a time for the people to ignore God's prophets but to raptly absorb everything God spoke through these men.

- ❓ How would being in exile give the people an added level of desperation to hear from the Lord? How have difficult times tuned your ear to seek God more?

The whirlwind imagery described by Ezekiel would remind the people of God's presence from the Exodus period. These Israelites were raised hearing the stories from generations before when God led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness wandering. When they felt alone or isolated due to their circumstances, they likely reminded each other of the stories they grew up on and the promises of God that He would be with them.

Cloud by day and fire by night were the two main visuals the Lord used to guide the children of Israel and demonstrate His presence with them. Both these were included in Ezekiel's vision. The continual fire might be compared to Moses and the bush that burned yet wasn't consumed. The brightness in the vision emphasized the glory of the Lord—the main message of the book of Ezekiel.

- ❓ Why might it be important for the people to be reminded of God's past faithfulness to them and their ancestors? Why is it important for us to remember God's past faithfulness?


Along with the cloud and fire were four creatures. These are described in detail and later Ezekiel identified them as cherubim, but here only gave details of their appearances. The various characteristics Ezekiel saw in these incredible creatures point to the unique power and glory of God and all that surrounds Him. These beings had a sparkly, shiny appearance in the likeness of a human. When angels appear in Scripture, they are often described as having the appearance or likeness of a man.

- ❓ Application: How does this description serve to move you toward awe of God?


3. Glory (Ezekiel 1:10-14)

Ezekiel was specific in his descriptions and when words failed him, he would use phrases to make comparisons with more common images like “had the likeness of” or “was in appearance like” to enable the reader to form images in his or her mind.


Every detail of this vision is awe inspiring and was intended to remind that God is glorious and worthy of our praise despite any circumstances we may be facing. The specifics about the cherubim and how they moved with intention speak to the glory of God. Cherubim were typically associated with the presence of God and the sacred; the details of these creatures and this setting served to emphasize the greatness of God.

 How do you see God's glory in these further details of Ezekiel's vision?

The people who were told this vision likely recognizing how badly they had rebelled against the Lord and failed Him by their unfaithfulness. Yet, even as they faced the consequences of their rebellion, God reminded them through Ezekiel that He still loved them and wanted them to know Him for who He is. The Lord pursues the rebellious with His patient love.

 How does this reality apply to those who are seeking to follow the Lord today?




How often do we find ourselves in a similar situation? Maybe you have chosen to ignore the Lord and sinned against Him. Although Scripture instructs you how to live, you have chosen to go your own way and are now facing the consequences for that decision. It is easy when you are in exile like the Israelites or just feeling separated from God to believe the lie that you are too far gone for Him to care for you anymore. The enemy loves to tell God's people they are irredeemable because of their failure. Ezekiel reminds us that no matter what, the Lord loves you and wants you to know and trust Him. Just as God spoke words of redemption to the Israelites, He offers that same forgiveness to all who turn toward Him in repentance and faith.

 Application: Where do you feel like you've gone too far to be redeemed by God? How are you encouraged by today's study?

Conclusion

Due to their sinful choices and rebellious acts, the Israelites were taken into captivity to Babylon. Although the Lord brought this devastating judgment on the people, after about five years, he sent a prophetic vision to a priest named Ezekiel who was from the line of priests but was without a temple to serve in. The children of Israel would gather for worship on the riverbanks, and Ezekiel was serving and ministering to the people in this way.

God gave Ezekiel a glorious vision that Ezekiel meticulously shared through spoken and written word to give God's people past and present a glimpse of the glory of our Lord. God used Ezekiel to remind His people that He loved them and wanted them to know Him. Ezekiel referenced several images from Israel's past to describe the Lord and remind the people of His ongoing faithfulness to them. The Israelites were assured that the Lord was still exactly who He said and who they had always known Him to be.

-  Where do you need to be reminded of God's glory and ongoing faithfulness?
-  How can we encourage one another to remember these truths about God as a group?
-  How can you seek a gospel conversation with another by sharing about God's glory?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for who He is and for loving you despite your sin. Praise Him for His glory and for revealing Himself through His Word.

Memory Verse

The word of the Lord came directly to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar Canal. The Lord's hand was on him there. — Ezekiel 1:3

Additional Resources

- *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Ezekiel by Mark Rooker*
- *The NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel by Iain Duguid*
- *Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel by Landon Dowden*

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Ezekiel

Purpose

The message of the book revolves around a pivotal event in the history of Israel—the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Prior to the announcement of Jerusalem’s fall, Ezekiel’s message was characterized by judgment. In his scathing review of Israelite history, Ezekiel exposed the nation’s moral depravity and absence of spiritual concern (2:1–8; 8:7–18; 13:1–23; 17:1–21; 20:1–32). After the destruction of Jerusalem was complete and the nation was in exile, his message changed. He turned to a proclamation of hope, which is what the people then needed most. God would provide a new heart and a new spirit to enable the people to be faithful and avoid a future judgment (11:17–20; 36:26–28). The Lord would establish a new temple (chaps. 40–48) and a new way of worship for the people once they were restored.

Author

There is sufficient reason for maintaining that the prophet Ezekiel composed the book of Ezekiel in Babylon. The work demonstrates such homogeneity and literary coherence that it is reasonable to conclude that all editorial work was carried out by a single person, the prophet himself.

The inclusion of historical dates at the beginning of many of the oracles and prophecies in Ezekiel is another important unifying factor. The book is one of the most chronologically ordered books of the Bible. Thirteen times a passage is introduced by an indication of time. The common point of orientation for the dates given in Ezekiel is the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah in 598/597 BC.

The occurrence of visions throughout the book (chaps. 1; 8–11; 40–48) is another strong argument in favor of its overall unity. Finally, stylistic features throughout the book strengthen the unity argument.

Setting

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was among the approximately ten thousand citizens of Judah deported to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in 598/597 BC (2Kg 24:10–17). His prophetic call came to him five years later (the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile), in 593 BC. He received his call at the age of thirty (1:1), the year he should have begun his duties as a priest (Nm 4:3). The last dated oracle in the book occurs in the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin (29:17), thus indicating that Ezekiel’s ministry lasted twenty-two or twenty-three years. The prophet lived during one of the greatest crises in Israel’s history—the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, plus the exile of Judah’s leading citizens to Babylon.

Special Features

The book of Ezekiel contains the divinely inspired prophecies of the prophet of the same name. These prophecies consist of oracles in the first person, giving the reader a sense of access to Ezekiel’s private memoirs. Written primarily to the exiles in Babylon, the prophecies equally emphasize judgment of sins and the promise of hope and restoration.

Extended Commentary

Ezekiel 1:1-14

1:1 The Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew OT, connects this date—in the thirtieth year—with Josiah’s reforms in 621 BC, but it is not easy to see any connection between the events in Josiah’s reign and the time of this prophecy (2Kg 22:8–13). A rabbinic tradition understands the number as a reference to the Year of Jubilee. The editorial explanation (Ezk 1:2–3) takes “the thirtieth year” as equivalent to the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile. Thirty was the age at which priests qualified for induction into their office (Nm 4:30). Just as Ezekiel was thirty and saw heaven open at the banks of a river, Jesus was thirty when he saw heaven open at his baptism in the Jordan River (Mt 3:16; Lk 3:21–23).

Ezekiel was among the ten thousand soldiers and nobility who had been sent into exile along with the king (2Kg 24:14–16) in 597 BC. The Chebar, a river in Babylonia where the Jewish exiles settled, was the site of Ezekiel’s visions (vv. 1, 3; 3:15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3). The Hebrew *nehar kevar* corresponds to Akkadian *nar kabari/u* “the Kabaru Canal,” a body of water mentioned twice in Akkadian documents from the Babylonian city of Nippur in the fifth century BC. In the land of exile, God tore the heavens open and invited Ezekiel to see his glory, which was the grounding of both Israel’s judgment and hope. The only other reference in the OT to the opening of the heavens occurs in Gn 7:11, although Is 64:1 speaks of the Lord rending the heavens. In the NT, the heavens were opened at Christ’s baptism (Mt 3:16). Stephen saw the heavens open and was given supernatural perception of heavenly realities (Ac 7:56). Similar cases of the heavens opening are found in Rv 4:1; 19:11.

There are important similarities between the visions given to Isaiah and Ezekiel. Both prophets saw heavenly winged creatures serving God. Both underwent symbolic preparation for the prophetic ministry—Isaiah’s lips were cleansed by fire; Ezekiel ate the scroll. Both men were commissioned to go to a people who would not respond to the prophetic messages.

While Ezekiel was physically present with the exiles throughout his vision, he was so overwhelmed that he was oblivious to his surroundings. The initiative for Ezekiel’s vision and prophecies lay solely with God, as was so with all true prophets.

1:2 The date given in v. 1 is anchored in v. 2 by the time of King Jehoiachin’s exile. In fact, all the dates in Ezekiel are figured in relation to this. Jehoiachin reigned only three months and ten days (2Kg 24:8; 2Ch 36:9). His removal and deportation provided the reference point for Ezekiel’s prophecies. A king’s accession to the throne was the normal time-marker by which prophecies were dated (2Kg 25:27; Jr 52:31). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, the date of Jehoiachin’s captivity was April 22, 597 BC.

1:3 The name Ezekiel means “may God strengthen or toughen.” The other person in the OT known as Ezekiel was also a priest from the Levitical line (1Ch 24:16). Since foreign lands were considered unclean (Ezk 4:13; Am 7:17), it is not surprising that Israelite exiles would seek communion with God close to running water (Lv 14:5, 50; 15:13; Nm 19:17; see Ac 16:13). In Ezekiel the name Chaldeans is interchanged with “Babylonians” (12:13; 23:15, 23). God’s hand is a manifestation of his power (Ex 9:3; Dt 2:15; 1Sm 5:9; Is 41:20). The power of the Spirit of God on the prophets enabled them to communicate divine truth.

1:4 The approach of God is described as an atmospheric storm. Storms and clouds were often associated with appearances of God (Jb 38:1; Pss 18:7–15; 29:3–9; 104:3; Is 29:6). The phrase fire flashing back and forth occurs elsewhere only in Ex 9:24 in the account of the plague of hail. The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud led the Hebrews

in the wilderness (Ex 13:17–22). God’s appearance on Mount Sinai was characterized by lightning, smoke, and fire (Ex 19:16–18). God is characterized elsewhere as a consuming fire (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:28–29). The storm arrives from the north, the same direction from which the Babylonian army will come to invade and destroy Judah.

1:5 The prominence of the number four in Ezekiel’s vision (four living creatures) is related to the ancient custom of envisioning earth in four parts (cp. “four corners of the earth” in Is 11:12) or four directions (“north and south, east and west” in Gn 13:14). Ezekiel’s use of four symbolizes the divine capacity to control the entire world. From Ezk 10 we know that the four creatures were cherubim (10:5, 20). Cherubim were embroidered on the curtain of the tabernacle (Ex 26:31). They were placed on top of the ark of the covenant in the most holy place, where the tablets of covenant were kept (Ex 25:18–22). They were enforcers of divine judgment. When Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden of Eden, cherubim were appointed to prohibit their entry back into the garden (Gn 3:24). Elsewhere God is said to be he who “is enthroned between the cherubim” (1Sm 4:4; 2Sm 6:2; Ps 99:1).

1:6 In the description of the living creatures, the gender of the creatures vacillates. Out of forty-five descriptions, only twelve take the grammatically proper feminine plural, while the others are all masculine plural. In many ways the vision defies the capacity of human speech to provide description. Words cannot do justice to the vision of God. While we can know true things about God, he is ultimately beyond our full comprehension.

1:7–8 The straight legs means they were unjointed.

1:9 The outspread wings of the cherub in the most holy place “touched” one another (1Kg 6:27); the verb used here occurs in Ex 26:3 and elsewhere for the interlinking of cloth strips that made up the curtains of the desert tabernacle. Whatever direction the four living creatures wished to take was straight ahead for one of the four. Thus, all directions were “straight ahead.”

1:10 The lion was considered the fiercest of beasts (Nm 23:24; 24:9; Jdg 14:18; 2Sm 1:23; 17:10), while the eagle was the most magnificent of birds (Dt 28:49; 2Sm 1:23; Jb 39:27; Jr 48:40; Lm 4:19). The ox was the most valued of domestic animals (Jb 21:10; Pr 14:4; cp. Ex 21:36). Humans were given dominion over all the creatures God made (Gn 1:28; Ps 8:6–7).

1:11 Each creature had one pair of wings raised upward, touching the wing tips of the adjacent creature. This feature is identical to the cherubim over the ark of the covenant in the most holy place. The cherub in the most holy place also functioned as a symbolic footstool for the invisible throne of God (Ex 25:18–22; 1Sm 4:4; 2Sm 6:2; 2Kg 19:15; Ps 80:1; 99:1).

1:12 The chariot was directed by the Spirit, “the vitalizing principle of life that comes from God himself” (Daniel Block).

1:13 The fiery character of the living creatures (blazing coals of fire) is reminiscent of the seraphim of Is 6 who were also fiery winged creatures. Fire will figure in the punishment of Jerusalem in Ezk 10:2 (Ps 50:3; 97:3).

1:14 In Nah 2:4, the chariots appear “like torches; they dart back and forth like lightning.” Matthew 24:27 depicts lightning going from one part of the world to the other.¹

References

1. Mark F. Rooker, “Ezekiel,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1248–1249.