



INTRODUCTION

Where is God when you need him?

Is God really everything our leaders say he is?

Is God really everything The Book says he is?

How can I believe in and worship the 'One, true God' when the gods of the world in which I find myself seem so much more potent and powerful?

How can I trust that God really is in control when the circumstances of my life seem to shout the very opposite?

If any of those questions resonates with you, the book of Ezekiel is a must read. Questions very like those were on the lips of God's people in Exile, strangers in a strange land, far from home, the City and its Temple which housed the worship of the God they had been told was Lord of heaven and earth, lay in ruins ...

EZEKIEL IN THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT (see appendix 1 for more detail)

Old Testament Era	Designation	Historical Books	Character/ Events
1. Pre-history	CREATION	Genesis 1 – 11	Adam & Eve Noah & Flood Tower of Babel
2. 1950 – 1280 BC	PATRIARCHS	Genesis 12 – 50	Abraham Isaac Jacob Joseph
3. 1280 – 1240	EXODUS	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Moses Joshua
4. 1240 – 1200	CONQUEST	Joshua	Crossing Jordan Walls of Jericho Settlement of land
5. 1200 – 1020	JUDGES	Judges Ruth	Deborah Gideon Samson Ruth
6. 1020 – 587	KINGDOM *	1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles	Samuel Saul David [Goliath] Solomon

* 928 BC On the death of Solomon, the KINGDOM divided into

- Northern Kingdom (Israel), 20 kings from 928 to 722 BC (Samaria falls to Assyrians)

- Southern Kingdom (Judah), 21 kings from 928 to 587/6 BC (Jerusalem falls to Babylonians)

All the 'Wisdom' literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) written during this period.

The majority (11 of 16) of the 'writing' prophets were active between 850 & 597. Ezekiel and Daniel are the only prophets ministering during the Exile (as far as the Bible records). [Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi prophesy in the post-Exile period, 536 BC on] (more detail at Appendix 2)

The 'Golden Era' of Old Testament history, under David & Solomon, was made possible by the relative weakness of their neighbours, and the uneasy balance of power between Assyria (to the North) and Egypt (to the South).

All that changed at the turn of the 7th-Century BC.

- Assyrians defeated by Babylonians – battle of Nineveh, 612 BC
- Assyrians & Egyptians defeated by Babylonians – battle of Carchemish, 605 BC

Babylon became first THE Power in the North, then THE global SuperPower (imagine China defeating first Russia and then the USA).

In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took Judah's king, Jehoiachin, and 10,000 of his people captive to Babylon. Among them was a young priest named Ezekiel (a contemporary of Daniel & Jeremiah).

7. 597 – 538	EXILE		Daniel Ezekiel
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We learn this in our first reading: 2 Kings 24:8a, 10-15

8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months ... **10** At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, **11** and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. **12** Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. **13** As the Lord had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. **14** He carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans – a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left. **15** Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the prominent people of the land.

Jehoiachin was the penultimate king of Israel. He only receives one other mention, in 2 Kings 25:27-30, where we are told that after 37 years in Exile he was freed from prison and was made a life pensioner at the new king's table.

In the early 20th-Century, Robert Johann Koldewey, a German archaeologist famous for his in-depth excavation of the ancient city of Babylon in modern-day Iraq, discovered a vast quantity of cuneiform tablets and removed them to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. It wasn't until the 1930s that they were translated; when one was found to contain the food-ration provided to 'Jehoiachin, king of the land of Judah.' Once again, the bible proves historically reliable.

Jehoiachin's successor, a puppet-king called Zedekiah, foolishly rebelled against the king of Babylon, whose retaliation was swift and brutal. In 587 BC, he destroyed Jerusalem, executed many of its leaders, and carried off more of its citizens into captivity, leaving Judah to be swallowed into a Babylonian province.

EZEKIEL THE MAN

We know very little beyond what he himself tells us in the opening verses of his book: that he was a priest and the son of a priest (Buzi).

In 1:1-2, he tells us that he was in his thirtieth year when his visions began and he received his prophetic call, which he dates to 'the fifth day ... in the fourth month ... [in] ... the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin ...' (or as we would say: 31 July 593 BC). In other words, Ezekiel was in his mid-20s when taken captive in 597 BC.

He gives similarly precise dates for his visions throughout the book, which gives a clear chronology throughout – most unusual for a prophetic book.

The last dated vision is given as taking place in the 27th year of the Exile (29:17), taking him to the age of 52.

He was married but his wife died in the siege of Jerusalem (24:18)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK (see appendix 3 for more detail)

Chapters	1 – 3	The call of Ezekiel
	4 – 18	Prophecies against Jerusalem
	19 – 24	Prophecies against Israel
	25 – 32	Prophecies against surrounding nations
	33 – 39	Prophecies of restoration
	40 – 48	Vision of new temple, city and world

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF EZEKIEL'S MINISTRY

- Our God is majestic and awesome in power
- He longs to be in relationship with his people – 'they / you will be my people and I will be their / your God'

Ezekiel 1:1-5a

1 In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the River Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

2 On the fifth of the month – it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin – 3 the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the River Kebar in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was on him.

4 I looked, and I saw a violent storm coming out of the north – an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal, 5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures.

Note

- a violent storm coming out of the north (4): to Jeremiah, as to all Jews, that would have signaled the arrival of conquerors, either the Assyrians or the Babylonians
- but in fact, it is God's glory and presence, emphasizing his complete superiority
- the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God – a foretaste of the Lord's Prayer

The remainder of chapter 1 attempts to describe the indescribable ...

Ezekiel 1:22 – 2:2

22 Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault, sparkling like

crystal, and awesome. **23** Under the vault their wings were stretched out one towards the other, and each had two wings covering its body. **24** When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

25 Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings.

26 Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. **27** I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. **28** Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

1 He said to me, 'Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.' **2** As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

Note

- it's not the Babylonian king who arrives in the cloud, but the Lord of heaven and earth – the answer to the questions with which we began ...
- note the similarity to John's visions in Revelation chapters 1, 4 & 5
- this is the Lord's Prayer come to life ... 'on earth as in heaven ...'
- every call begins with encounter; and every encounter involves call; we respond to the 'Follow me' of Jesus

Questions

1. Have you encountered the Lord of heaven and earth?
2. Have you heard his call upon your life?

Paul Langham, March 2017

APPENDIX ONE: THE 9 ERAS OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (*dates approx.*)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Era • Date BC • Historical Books 	Characters / Events	Prophetic Books	Earth History (BC)
1. Creation <i>No Dating</i> Genesis 1 – 11	Adam & Eve Cain & Abel Noah Babel		7000 settlement Katal Huyuk, Anatolia 6500 farming begins 4500 Ur becomes permanent settlement 4000 potter's wheel developed 3800 writing developed 3500 wheel in use 3300 city states in Syria & Palestine 3100 cuneiform writing in Sumer 2700 Gilgamesh, king in Sumer
2. Patriarchs 1950 – 1280 Genesis 12 – 50	Abraham Isaac Jacob Joseph Captivity in Egypt		1800 Troy established as major city 1780 Hammurabi law code 1700 Minoans develop writing on Crete 1600 Aryans enter India 1332-1323 Tutankhamun
3. Exodus 1280 – 1240 Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Moses Plagues Passover Red Sea Sinai Law Rebellion Joshua		1301-1234 Rameses II Pharaoh in Egypt (the Pharaoh of the Exodus) 1280-1250 Egyptian building projects – Karnak, Thebes
4. Conquest 1240 – 1200 Joshua	Joshua Jericho Rahab		1200 Trojan Wars
5. Judges 1200 – 1020 Judges Ruth	Deborah Gideon Samson Ruth		1150 Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon defeats Elam – Susa sacked
6. Kingdom 1020 – 586 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles [Poetry (Wisdom) Books] Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon]	Samuel Saul David [Goliath] Solomon 966 1 st Temple built 928 Kingdom divides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Israel' (north: 20 kings) • 'Judah' (south: 21 kings) Elijah Elisha Naaman 722 'Israel' (N) falls	[850 – 597] to Israel (N) Hosea Amos to Judah (S) Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Joel Micah Habbakuk Zephaniah to other nations Jonah (Assyria) Nahum (Assyria)	771 China fragments into smaller states 760 Nubian kingdom of Cush 680 Ishtar Gate built Babylon 668 Assyria invades Egypt 660 Jimmu 1 st Japanese Emperor 605 Babylon conquers Egypt (battle of Carchemish)

	701 Sennacherib attacks Jerusalem (S) 622 Josiah's reforms 597/587-6 Jerusalem falls	Obadiah (Edom)	
7. Exile 597 – 538 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles Daniel	Daniel Jeremiah Ezekiel	from Babylon Ezekiel Daniel In Jerusalem Jeremiah	563-483 Buddha 551-479 Confucius
8. Return 538 – 400 Ezra Nehemiah Esther	539-8 Cyrus allows Jews to return 520-515 2 nd Temple built 450 Ezra returns with 2 nd wave of Exiles 425 Nehemiah to Jerusalem Zerubbabel Esther	to Jerusalem Haggai Zechariah Malachi	539 Cyrus II king of Persia conquers Mesopotamia & Babylon for Medes & Persians 490 Battle of Marathon 486-465 Xerxes 1 & Queen Esther of Persia 480/479 Greeks defeat Persia
9. Silence 400 – 0 None [Apocrypha]	Political groups Maccabees Zealots Religious groups Pharisees Sadducees Jewish governance Sanhedrin (ruling board made up of 'conservatives' from both Pharisees & Sadducees) Jewish hope Longing for 'Messiah'		333 Alexander the Great conquers Persia 326 Alexander conquers India 323 Alexander dies – Empire divides into 4 256 Rome invades N Africa 221 Great Wall of China begun 210 China's 'Terracotta Army' 200 Antiochus III conquers Palestine 168-165 Maccabean Wars 63 Rome conquers Palestine 43 Julius Caesar assassinated 37-4 Herod the Great rules Judea 31 BC–AD 14 Emperor Augustus

APPENDIX TWO: DISTRIBUTION OF THE 17 PROPHETIC BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

PRE-EXILE (850 – 597 BC)		DURING EXILE (597 – 536 BC)	POST-EXILE (536 on)
<i>To Israel</i>	<i>To Judah</i>	<i>From Babylon</i>	<i>To Jerusalem</i>
Hosea	Isaiah	Ezekiel	Haggai
Amos	Jeremiah	Daniel	Zechariah
	Lamentations (by Jeremiah)		Malachi
<i>To Assyria</i>	Joel		
Jonah	Micah		
Nahum	Habbakuk		
	Zephaniah		
<i>To Edom</i>			
Obadiah			

APPENDIX 3: THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL (sermon passages highlighted in red)

1 – 3	The call of Ezekiel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1-28 / first vision, God's glory • 2:1 – 3:3 / the call to be a prophet • 3:4-27 / the call to be a watchman
4 – 18	Prophecies against Jerusalem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4:1-17 / siege of Jerusalem enacted prophetically 1 • 5:1-17 / judgment against Jerusalem enacted prophetically • 6:1 – 7:27 / woes and denunciations against Jerusalem • 8:1-18 / vision of idolatry in the temple • 9:1-11 / vision of the destruction of those involved in idolatry • 10:1-22 / vision of the Lord's glory leaving the temple • 11:1-15 / woe against spiritual leaders • 11:16-25 / promise of restoration • 12:1-28 / siege of Jerusalem enacted prophetically 2 • 13:1-23 / woes against false prophets • 14:1-23 / teaching on how judgement works – 1: inevitability • 15:1-8 / Jerusalem as a fruitless vine • 16:1-63 / allegory of Jerusalem and her sisters as unfaithful women • 17:1-24 / allegory of two eagles and a vine: the inevitability of exile • 18:1-32 / teaching on how judgement works – 2: personal responsibility
19 – 24	Prophecies against Israel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19:1-14 / lament for the princes of Israel • 20:1-29 / historical survey of Israel's unfaithfulness • 20:30-49 / judgement and restoration • 21:1-32 / Babylon as God's sword against Israel • 22:1-31 / sins of Israel listed • 23:1-49 / allegory of Jerusalem and Samaria as prostitutes • 24:1-14 / allegory of the cooking pot: a woe against Jerusalem • 24:15-27 / death of Ezekiel's wife: a sign of the death of Jerusalem
25 – 32	Prophecies against surrounding nations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25:1-17 / oracles against Ammon, Edom and Philistia • 26:1 – 28:19 / oracle and lament against Tyre and its king • 29:1 – 32:32 / oracle and lament against Egypt and its king
33 – 39	Prophecies of restoration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33:1-20 / teaching on how judgement works – 3: repentance and renouncing • 33:21-33 / teaching on the fall of Jerusalem ignored • 34:1-31 / true and false shepherds: the Lord as true shepherd • 35:1-15 / woe and denunciation against Edom • 36:1-38 / promise of the restoration of the land and people's hearts • 37:1-14 / vision of the valley of dry bones: the restoration of the people • 37:15-28 / vision of the two sticks: reunification of the people • 38:1 – 39:29 / woe and apocalyptic vision of destruction of God and Magog
40 – 48	Vision of new temple, city and world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40:1 – 42:20 / vision of the new temple in detail • 43:1-27 / vision of the Lord's glory returning to the temple • 44:1-31 / consecration of the priests and Levites • 45:1-25 / facts and figures about the new city and its feasts • 46:1-24 / responsibilities of the new prince • 47:1-12 / a river of life fills the land • 47:13 – 48:35 / the land is allocated to its people

