**Introduction to Ezekiel:**

**The Prophet, The Book, The Mystery**

**Ezekiel 1:1-3**  In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), 3 the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.

Who?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ When? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Where? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Historical Background:**

From “Enter the Bible” – www.enterthebible.org

The prophet Ezekiel was raised in a priestly family in Jerusalem and educated to become a priest himself. This was not to be. He was taken with other high-ranking Judeans at the first siege of Jerusalem (597 B.C.E.) by Nebuchadnezzar II (ruler of Babylon, 605-562 B.C.E.). Ezekiel went into the servile oppression of exile, working in a small village (Tel-abib, near Nippur) by the river Chebar (3:15). There, in his thirtieth year (593 B.C.E.), he received a powerful vision from the Lord and a call to be a prophet. Between this first exile and the final fall of Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.E.) many Israelites hoped to throw off the yoke of Babylon, often looking to Egypt for help. Ezekiel's prophecies against Jerusalem and some other nations take place in this context. In the end, Jerusalem falls completely to Babylonian forces. Some of the other prophecies against the nations and the visions or prophecies of future restoration of the land and the temple date from after the fall of Jerusalem. The background to the book is exilic, taking place before the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Persian rule (starting 538 B.C.E.). The book may have been edited and put to writing during the later, postexilic period.

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The book of Ezekiel begins in Exile. The river Chebar is in Babylon. Exile for some begins in 597BC – Ezekiel has been there 4 years – Written/Prophesied starting in 593 BC… Until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (approximately: 7 years)

Chebar Canal was part of an intricate system of canals that carried water from the Euphrates River throughout the city of Tel Abib. The “Tel” (mound) in Tel Abib suggest that the Babylonians placed the deportees in an area once inhabited, but subsequently destroyed. If this is the case, the many of the exiles would have spent their time rebuilding the ruins.

**Read: 2 Kings 24:10-17**

What Historical elements do we learn from this passage?

Which characters overlap?

**Read: Psalm 137:1-9**

What feelings are exhibited in this Psalm?

**Read: Jeremiah 29:1-28**

What do you learn from this passage?

How long will the time of exile continue?

**Ezekiel is Critical of Yahwistic Theology:**

4 Pillars of divine promise on which the people rested their faith: (NIB pg. 1083)

1. The belief that they were Yahweh’s chosen people, enjoying the blessings of their covenant relationship with Yahweh forged at Sinai centuries earlier.
   1. Derived a sense of confidence that God would ensure their welfare and protect them.
2. The belief that Yahweh granted land to Israel’s ancestors and that they were inheritors of that land grant.
   1. Believed Yahweh would fight to protect their land and ensure they kept it.
3. The belief that the Davidic Dynasty would reign in Jerusalem in perpetuity.
4. The belief that the Temple of God would grant safety since Yahweh would not permit the city in which God’s temple stood to be destroyed.

“Ezekiel offered his fellow exiles no hope that their homeland might survive Babylonian aggression. To the contrary, he insisted that Yahweh was bringing about its downfall. The divine warrior was warring against “his” own people.” (1084)

**Ezekiel believed:**

1. God is God of the Nations (not just Israel). God controls other nations including Babylon for God’s purposes.
2. God’s purposes included the destruction of Judah (Southern kingdom whose capital was Jerusalem)
3. God’s Punishments are just. This is a response to Israel’s long history of sin.

“The God we witness through Ezekiel’s words is consumed by wrath, bent on violence, and hungry for vengeance.” (NIB pg.1085)

1. God will bring about Restoration. In chapters 33-48 Ezekiel insists that the people’s present plight dishonors Yahweh’s reputation among the nations.

**Structure of the Book: 3 Sections - 4 Visions**

Section 1: Chapters 1-24 are primarily signs and oracles against Judah and Jerusalem.

Section 2: Chapters 25-32 contain most of Ezekiel’s oracles against for nations and rulers.

Section 3: Chapters 33-48 contain oracles concerning Israel’s future restoration.

VISIONS

1. In 1:1-3:15 Ezekiel witnesses a vision in which the “glory of the Lord” comes to him over Babylonia in storm cloud and blazing light and he is commissioned as Yahweh’s prophet.
2. In 8:1-11:24, Ezekiel is transported by the spirit to the Temple in Jerusalem, where he sees the abominations committed there and witnesses Yahweh’s glory abandoning the city to its fate.
3. In 37:1-14, Ezekiel is again transported by the spirit, this time to “the valley”, which is filled with heaps of disconnected bones. Before his eyes, the bones are rejoined, bound by sinews, refleshed, covered with skin, and animated by the spirit.
4. In Chapters 40-48, the hand of Yahweh brings Ezekiel to a “very high mountain,” where he tours Yahweh’s new temple and witnesses God’s glory enter it.