

Ezekiel — The Exilic Watchman of God’s Glory

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

“They shall know that there hath been a prophet among them” (Ezek. 2:5)

I. Identity of Ezekiel

Name and Known Facts

- “Ezekiel” (Hebrew: יְחֶזְקֵאל, *Yechezqel*) means “God strengthens” or “God will strengthen.”
- He was “the son of Buzi” and “the priest” (Ezek. 1:3).
- He prophesied “among the captives by the river of Chebar” in Babylonian exile (1:1–3).
- His call came in the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity, approximately 593 BC.
- Ezekiel likely reached priestly age when he instead received prophetic visions in exile.

The Man

- Ezekiel was not a court prophet in Jerusalem, but a prophet among displaced Jews in Babylon.
- He carried priestly concerns: glory, holiness, uncleanness, sanctuary, abominations, sacrifice, land, and temple order.
- His own life became part of the message: silence, symbolic actions, public signs, and even the death of his wife (24:15–27).

II. Historical Setting

Exile Before Jerusalem’s Fall

- Ezekiel ministered after the 597 BC deportation but before and after Jerusalem’s fall in 586 BC.
- Compare the historical frame in 2 Kings 24–25, 2 Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 29, and Daniel 1.
- His ministry stands between deportation and destruction: the captives were already judged, but Jerusalem had not yet learned the lesson.
- Many exiles still hoped Jerusalem would survive and that their displacement would be brief.
- Ezekiel had to announce that Jerusalem’s fall was certain because the city and sanctuary were defiled.
- This corrects easy optimism: not every promise of quick return was from the LORD (Jer. 28–29).

Audience

- His first audience was the Jewish captives in Babylon, not Gentile pagans.
- They were physically removed from Jerusalem, yet still spiritually tied to its false hopes.
- The elders of Judah sat before him in exile (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1), showing an organized captive community.
- Ezekiel forced the exiles to see that distance from Jerusalem did not remove responsibility before God.

III. Nature of Ezekiel’s Ministry

Prophet of Visions

- Ezekiel saw the heavens opened and “visions of God” (1:1).
- He saw the glory of the LORD, Jerusalem’s defilement, the departure of glory, dry bones, Gog’s invasion, and the restored temple.
- His visions reveal God’s government, holiness, judgment, and future restoration.

Prophet of Signs

- Ezekiel acted out siege, famine, exile, trembling, judgment, and loss (chs. 4–5; 12; 24).
- In the tile sign, he portrayed Jerusalem under siege, bearing Israel’s and Judah’s iniquity before a model city (4:1–8).
- The tile sign compressed military siege, covenant guilt, and prophetic certainty into one visible act.
- It reminds the teacher not to soften Ezekiel into mere drama: the actions were strange because the rebellion was stubborn.
- These signs made denial difficult: the prophet’s body and home became a sermon.

- His strange actions fit his strange setting: a priest-prophet speaking to stubborn exiles about a doomed city.

Watchman

- Ezekiel was appointed a watchman to warn Israel (3:17–21; 33:1–9).
- The watchman’s task was not to make the people listen, but to faithfully deliver the warning.
- The watchman passages frame Ezekiel’s severity as mercy: warning gives Israel knowledge before judgment falls.
- This made Ezekiel responsible to speak and the hearers responsible to respond.

IV. Major Themes

“They Shall Know”

- The recognition formula appears repeatedly: “ye shall know that I am the LORD.”
- Ezekiel’s message is not merely punishment; judgment and restoration both make God known.
- The prophet himself becomes proof: “they shall know that there hath been a prophet among them” (2:5).

The Glory of the LORD

- Ezekiel begins with the overwhelming glory of God in Babylon, not Jerusalem (1:28).
- He sees the glory depart from the polluted temple (chs. 8–11).
- He later sees the glory return to a future temple (43:1–5).
- God’s glory is not trapped by geography, temple tradition, or national presumption.

Responsibility and Restoration

- Ezekiel exposes national guilt but also insists on personal responsibility (18:1–32).
- False security dies: Jerusalem, temple, princes, and prophets cannot save a rebellious people.
- Yet restoration is promised: one shepherd, a new heart, a new spirit, national resurrection, and future sanctuary (34; 36–37; 40–48).

V. The Man and His Message

Priest Without A Temple

- Ezekiel’s priestly calling was displaced by exile, but not wasted.
- He explained why the temple was judged and how holiness would be restored.
- His priestly vocabulary makes his prophecy architectural, ceremonial, and intensely holy.

Grief Under Command

- Ezekiel’s wife, “the desire of thine eyes,” died as a sign to Israel (24:16).
- He was commanded not to mourn normally, picturing the stunned silence after Jerusalem’s fall.
- The prophet did not merely announce loss; he bore it.

Hope After Ruin

- Ezekiel is severe because the people’s denial was severe.
- After Jerusalem falls, the message turns strongly toward restoration.
- Dry bones live, two sticks become one, Davidic shepherding is promised, and the LORD’s sanctuary is set among His people.

VI. Why Ezekiel Matters

Interpretive Value

- Ezekiel teaches that exile was not a political accident but divine judgment.
- He guards the holiness of God against sentimental religion.
- He proves that Israel’s national hope survives judgment.
- He gives some of Scripture’s strongest images of future restoration.
- His “wow” factor is the man himself: a priest in exile, seeing God’s glory, acting God’s signs, warning as watchman, and bearing witness until Israel knows the LORD.