

Prophets: EZEKIEL

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ezekiel takes its name from its author, a sixth-century B.C. prophet and priest whose name means “God strengthens.” At age thirty—the age priests began service—Ezekiel received his first visions from God while living among the exiles in Babylon (Ezek. 1:1–3). He had been taken from Judah in the second wave of deportations in 597 B.C., following Babylon’s conquest of Jerusalem. This placed him alongside fellow exiles, far from the ruined temple where he would’ve been expected to minister as a priest. Instead, God called him to a prophetic role during one of Israel’s darkest seasons, strengthening His people through visions, warnings, and promises.

Understanding Ezekiel requires remembering Israel’s story. After Solomon’s reign, the kingdom divided into north (Israel) and south (Judah). Both turned to idolatry, ignoring repeated calls to repent. The northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., and more than a century later Judah was conquered by Babylon in 586 B.C., fulfilling God’s warnings through earlier prophets (2 Kings 25). Ezekiel lived and prophesied among those who experienced this exile firsthand, helping them make sense of God’s judgment while also pointing them toward future hope.

The book itself spans about twenty years, from Ezekiel’s call at age thirty to his final visions at age fifty (Ezek. 40:1). It can be divided into three main sections: judgment on Judah (chs. 1–24), oracles against the nations (chs. 25–32) and promises of restoration (chs. 33–48). Throughout, Ezekiel employs vivid imagery, symbolic actions, and even dramatic performances to communicate God’s word—lying on his side, shaving his head, building models of siege works. These signs remind us that Ezekiel’s message is not only heard but seen, capturing the seriousness of sin and the certainty of God’s purposes.

Thematically, Ezekiel emphasizes that God’s holiness cannot coexist with sin (ch. 20), that each person is accountable to repent (ch. 18), and that worldly powers cannot thwart God’s supremacy (chs. 21; 38–39). Yet judgment is not the final word. God promises His people a new heart and Spirit (36:26–28), the restoration of His glory to the temple (chs. 10; 43), and a future Shepherd-King who will lead them (ch. 34). Ultimately, all of this points to Christ, who fulfills Ezekiel’s vision as the Good Shepherd (John 10), and the giver of the Spirit (Acts 2). In the refrain repeated more than seventy times, we hear the book’s purpose: “Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

At work, the gym, or school, what type of character are you known for? What kind of reputation have you built through your repeated actions? Maybe you have a reputation for keeping your word and delivering on promises. As a result, people trust you. What’s your reputation? When your kids, coworkers, spouse, or friends think about you, what might come to their minds?

Reputation is important, and in Ezekiel, God shows us how important His reputation is to Him. In Ezekiel’s time, God’s people had dragged His name through the mud for many years by living sinful, rebellious lives. As Holy and perfect, He could not allow His name to be sullied by their actions, nor would He prove false in His promises to deliver consequences if they continued their rebellion. God delivers justice for sin, and He also provides a path for hope and redemption. He had a plan to restore Israel and bring them back to Jerusalem for the sake of His Holy name, and

He had a larger plan for us all through His Son Jesus. His reputation? Just, merciful, faithful, and loving!

BOOK ORGANIZATION

EZEKIEL: You Will Know That I Am The Lord

Chapters 1-24: The Fate of Judah

Chapters 25-32: The Fate of Gentile Nations

Chapters 33-48: The Future Restoration of Israel

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel's visions point forward to Christ in profound ways. Two of the clearest connections are the promise of a Good Shepherd and the promise of a new heart and the Spirit.

1. The Good Shepherd

In Ezekiel 34:11–24, God speaks of Himself as a shepherd who will personally seek out His scattered sheep: *"I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak."* But He also promises to set over them "one shepherd, my servant David," pointing to a future Messianic king. Jesus picks up this very imagery in John 10 when He declares, *"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... I lay down my life for the sheep."* In Christ, the promise of God Himself shepherding His people—and providing a Davidic ruler—is perfectly fulfilled.

2. A New Heart and Spirit

Later, in Ezekiel 36:26–28, God promises His people a new heart and a new spirit: *"I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."* This reveals our need for transformation that only God can give. Centuries later, Jesus explains this truth to Nicodemus in John 3, teaching that we must be "born of water and the Spirit" in order to see the kingdom of God. Ezekiel's promise is fulfilled in Christ, who gives the Spirit to all who believe in Him, making them new and bringing them into eternal life with the Father.

Together, these promises remind us that Ezekiel was not just speaking to exiles in Babylon—he was pointing ahead to the gospel. In Jesus we find the Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep and the Savior who makes us new by His Spirit.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN STUDYING THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

OBSERVATION

Literary Devices to Look for:

- Repetition: A key phrase repeated over 70 times is *"Then they will know that I am the LORD"* (e.g., Ezek. 6:7, 11:10, 36:23). This refrain highlights God's reputation and ultimate purpose in judgment and restoration.
- Symbolic Actions: Ezekiel often acted out prophetic messages (Ezek. 4–5, 12:1–7). These "sign-acts" illustrate God's word through vivid drama—lying on his side, shaving his head, packing baggage like an exile.
- Visionary Imagery: Apocalyptic-style visions (Ezek. 1, 10, 37, 40–48) use rich symbols—living creatures, wheels within wheels, dry bones, a new temple. These often point to deeper theological truths beyond literal description.

- Allegory & Metaphor: Ezekiel frequently uses allegories (e.g., the two eagles and the vine in ch. 17, the sisters Oholah and Oholibah in ch. 23) to describe Israel's unfaithfulness and God's dealings with His people.
- Chiasmus/Parallelism: Several oracles use mirrored structures to spotlight God's central point (e.g., Ezek. 18 emphasizes individual responsibility framed by God's justice).

INTERPRETATION

- Literary Context: Ezekiel is a prophetic book mixing narrative, poetry, vision, and enacted symbols. Its genre is prophecy with apocalyptic elements, emphasizing God's holiness, justice, and restoration. The repeated refrain "that they may know that I am the LORD" is the theological thread tying together judgment and hope.
- Narrative Context: Ezekiel, both prophet and priest, ministers among the exiles in Babylon (Ezek. 1:1–3). He speaks to a displaced people who have lost their land, temple, and king. The message combines rebuke for rebellion, comfort for the repentant, and visions of God's future restoration.
- Historical Context: Ezekiel's ministry spans from 593–571 B.C. (Ezek. 1:2; 40:1). He prophesies during Judah's exile after Babylon's conquest (586 B.C.). While Jeremiah prophesies back in Jerusalem and Daniel serves in the royal court, Ezekiel ministers among everyday exiles. His visions interpret the crisis of exile and point toward God's future covenant promises.
- Cultural Context: In exile, God's people lived under Babylonian power and pressure. Temples, idols, and foreign gods were everywhere. Ezekiel's oracles highlight Israel's temptation to compromise, while also assuring them that Yahweh—not Babylon's gods—reigns supreme over nations and history.

APPLICATION

- Resist the Urge to Rush: Ezekiel's visions can feel overwhelming, but don't skip quickly past them. Sit with the imagery, and ask: "What does this reveal about God's holiness, His glory, and His desire for His people?"
- Read in Light of Christ: Ezekiel points to Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Ezek. 34 → John 10), the giver of the Spirit and new hearts (Ezek. 36 → John 3; Acts 2), and the true temple where God's glory dwells (Ezek. 40–48 → John 2:19–21; Rev. 21–22). How does seeing Christ in Ezekiel change the way you read the visions of restoration?
- Is There a Command to Obey? God calls His people to repent and turn from sin (Ezek. 18). What sins might God be calling you to turn from so you may walk in newness of life?
- Is There a Sin to Repent From? The exiles were guilty of idolatry, injustice, and profaning God's name (Ezek. 20, 22). In what ways are you tempted to compromise or dishonor God's name before others?
- Is There a Promise to Cling To? God promises a new heart, a new Spirit, and restoration for His people (Ezek. 36:26–28; 37:14). How does this promise give you hope in seasons of weakness or failure?
- Is There an Example to Follow (or Avoid)? Ezekiel himself models faithful obedience in a hostile culture, speaking hard truths at personal cost (Ezek. 2–3). How can you, like Ezekiel, live with bold obedience even when it's unpopular?

PRAYER

- Pray for Repentance: Ask God to reveal areas of idolatry or compromise in your heart (Ezek. 18:30–32). Pray for the grace to turn from sin and live.
- Pray for Renewal: Thank God for the promise of a new heart and Spirit (Ezek. 36:26–27). Pray for the Spirit to soften your heart and empower your obedience.
- Pray for God's Glory: Pray that your life would honor God's holy name (Ezek. 36:22–23), so others may know that He alone is the Lord.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

“Origen, in his first homily on the book of Ezekiel, sees in the Lord Christ, the new Ezekiel... If He descended to our land... and was called ‘the Son of Man,’ as Ezekiel was called ‘Son of man;’ He will truly set us free of captivity, to experience ‘God’s strength’ through His cross.¹” – Origen, 185-253

“Referring to Ezekiel 20:25 (“statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live”), Augustine writes that he does not intend to destroy the law, as some heretical groups did—but rather sees the coming of Christ as fulfilling the law.²” – Augustine of Hippo, 354-430

