

We are not clones. Even though we who know Christ are equal in terms of our position, we are different in so many ways, in our giftedness, our interests, our functions in the body of Christ, and so on.

The prophets in Israel had some things in common, but they were quite different. As men they were different. Their messages, although emphasizing similar God-centered themes, were different in terms of emphasis, form, and even rhetoric. As you read them, you note they sound different, for although God spoke through these men, He used their temperaments, their vocabularies, their social settings, and more.

This evening we come to the prophet who began his book with this staggering announcement, “In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”

What a stunning announcement! *I saw visions of God*. Now there’s someone I want to hear from, this prophet who saw visions of God! His name is Ezekiel...

Discuss: What do you know about Ezekiel?

Who wrote the book?

--Ezekiel

Discuss: What do we learn about Ezekiel from chapter one? Ezekiel ben Buzi:

1:1 among the exiles in Babylon

1:3 came from a priestly family

1:3 the hand of the LORD was on him

1:4-28 had an impressive vision of the glory of God (see v 28)

Ezekiel grew up in Israel, probably in Jerusalem, and was taken into exile in 597 B.C. (see 33:21; 2 Kgs 24:11-16). He was probably 25 years old, for five years later, at age 30, he was called to be a prophet (see LHB, 461).

He was happily married (24:16), and the sudden death of his wife, announced to him ahead of time by the LORD, was used as a sign to Israel. He lived in his own house in exile, at Tel Abib on the Great Canal (3:15).

Ezekiel's "bizarre" behavior:

L.H.B. (462): "Because of recorded visions, his strange behavior in acting out certain prophecies, the record of being transported from Babylon to Jerusalem and back, and other details, Ezekiel has been called ecstatic, visionary, neurotic, psychotic, and schizophrenic. Indeed, his behavior was 'abnormal'--but what is 'normal' with regard to a prophet on whom the Spirit of God has fallen?"

Good question! What is "normal"? The world calls just about anything connected with the supernatural "abnormal." Be careful of being influenced by "studies" and "data" and "scientific research" produced by those who do not fear God. To survey 1,000 sinful people and call any conclusions "normal" (such as 950 exhibit anger towards God when they lose a loved one) is misleading. There have been only three "normal" people on this planet. Who were they? Jesus, Adam and Eve (before sin). Everyone else is *abnormal*, in other words, not as the Creator intended.

When was the book written?

--6th century B.C.

--the events mentioned in the book occurred during the first part of the exile (593-571 B.C.) [note: 13 dates are given in the book (see chart)]

--the book was written after 572 and before 536 B.C.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah were contemporaries, ministering to the Jews during the period of the Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel living in Babylon and Jeremiah living in Israel. Jeremiah corresponded with the Jews in captivity (Jer 29), and Ezekiel corresponded with the people back in the land.

There was a certain amount of freedom available, even religious freedom in Babylon. The synagogue develops in Babylon. The Jews begin to substitute the study of Torah for offering sacrifices. Judaism begins to take the shape we find when Jesus came. Jehoiachin, though taken captive, was taken to Babylon and then released, and even treated as a king by the Babylonians.

Discuss: Why were the Israelites treated so well by the Babylonians?

Probably, it was Daniel's influence. Daniel was taken in 606 B.C., and was highly regarded in Babylon (similar to Joseph in Egypt). He was a politician. His influence enabled the Israelites to get the best in the land.

Discuss: What kind of implications does this offer us in the way we as Christians relate with the world?

Why was the book written?

The message of the book is to show that the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity were necessary measures for God to use to correct His disobedient people and deliver them from apostasy.

The prophets held differing, yet complimentary views of the Jews' apostasy:

Isaiah -- they committed social injustices

Jeremiah -- they broke the covenant

Ezekiel -- they were guilty of temple violations and cultic activities

Note: Of the major prophets, historically, Ezekiel is the best book for sequence chronology. His book follows basically exact chronological order. Ezekiel probably put his book together at one sitting. Not so with Isaiah and Jeremiah, who used a piecemeal compilation and used revision.

What is the outline of the book?

I. Judgment on Israel (1-24)

**List of sins

II. Oracles against Foreign nations (25-32)

III. Israel Regathered (33-39)

IV. Detailed Plan of Restoration (40-48)

A. Land Restored

B. Temple Rebuilt

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Ezekiel shows us that when God judged the Jews by sending them to Babylon, He wasn't finished with them yet.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. *God knows and is concerned about what's happening in this world.*

Discuss: What was the purpose of these oracles against the Gentile nations?

The oracles probably were not written to be given to the nations themselves. They were used within Israel. (e.g. though Nahum wrote against Nineveh, he probably did not go to Nineveh to deliver his message; it was intended for Israel's hearing).

Observation: The prophets knew the world in which they lived. They knew what was going on around the world. They didn't preach in a vacuum. They were bothered by the social injustices they saw around the world. They were broadminded. They had a global perspective. We can learn from them in this realm.

How so?

The prophet was the mouthpiece of God. He spoke for God. His prophecies included declarative statements against pagan nations so that the Israelites would know what God thought of them, so they would know that God controls the whole world, and that all people are bound by His Law. He wanted them to know that He judges all nations for violence, that He holds all men responsible for morality (even those who have never heard His special revelation; His common revelation speaks clearly--Rom 1-2).

My friend, if God holds unbelieving nations responsible on the basis of natural revelation, what about us who have His special revelation?!

2. *Ezekiel teaches us about the glory of God.*

The concept appears 50+ times in the book. It begins in chapter 1...

Q: What image does God use to represent His glory (1:15, 28)? A wheel

Q: Where was Ezekiel when he saw this wheel (1:3)? In Babylon

Q: Why is that significant? The glory of God was not restricted to Jerusalem, but was exhibited by the LORD even in Babylon! It said to the Jews, God has not forsaken His people! His glory is in Babylon, even outside the Promised Land.

Ezekiel is a transitional book that prepares us for the New Testament concept of God's glory. Where is God's glory revealed ultimately, acc. to John 1:14? In Jesus Christ. Where is God's glory today under the New Covenant? Wherever Jesus Christ is!

Note: In Ezekiel 10, we see the glory of God abandon the temple. It was the reversal of what happened when Solomon dedicated the temple.

Q: Where did His glory go? See: 10:4, 18, 19

Q: What did Ezekiel prophesy would happen in the future, acc. to 43:1-2? His glory will return

Q: What's the final message of the book? 48:35 "The LORD is there."

3. *We can use a variety of means to communicate God's truth.*

Ezekiel used symbolic acts (drama) in his preaching (from Leon Rowland):

3:24-26 Acts dumb >> Israel is so rebellious that God will not speak

4:4-8 Lays on his side >> Symbolizes 430 years of apostasy

4:12-15 Cook food over dung >> This defiled Ezekiel as a priest, but it portrayed the humiliation that would come

5:1ff Used sword to cut his beard >> Ibid.

12:1-3 Takes luggage and pretends like he's escaping, even though everyone is watching >> Portrays no hope of escape for Israel

24:16-24 His wife dies, but he's not permitted to cry >> Ezekiel represents God who is losing His wife.

Implication -- The prophet is involved in his ministry. It was not just a "job" to him. He acts out his message. Preaching is God's truth through human personality (Phillips Brooks).

4. *God holds the individual responsible.*

See: Chapter 18

You can't blame the community for your situation. You must accept personal responsibility.