

Ezekiel 1-3 • Chapter Study

Chapter 1

¹ Now it came to pass in the 30th year, in the 4th month, on the 5th day of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the River Kebar, *that* the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. ² On the 5th day of the month, which *was* in the 5th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Kebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. And so we begin the exciting & oft times perplexing journey thru the Prophecy of Ezekiel.

It's July 31, 593 BC.

A 30 year old **Jewish priest** named Ezekiel is serving his people in exile in Babylon.

They live in a colony of several thousand Jews on a **canal** called the **Kebar**.

The canal diverted water from the Euphrates near Babylon, flowed to the SE & provided water to another important city named **Nippur**, then returned to the Euphrates. [Map]

When the Babylonians conquered the Jewish kingdom of Judah some time before, their ruler Nebuchadnezzar recognized their genius as administrators so he wanted to keep them close to Babylon where he could draw wise men from their ranks to serve in his court.

That's how we account for Daniel & his 3 friends in the opening of the Book of Daniel.

So the Jews settled along the Kebar canal in their own colony, close enough to the capital that Nebuchadnezzar could keep an eye on them.

Ezekiel was of the priestly line taken into exile & had just begun his ministry at the age of 30 when God added an additional duty to his work – that of a prophet.

We know the precise day because of the time stamp Ezekiel gives here.

It was the 5th day of the 4th month of the 5th year of the exile = July 31, 593 BC.

As we work our way thru the book, we'll see Ezekiel's prophecies follow a chronological pattern, more or less.

- The **1st** section is warnings about God's **judgment** on wicked Jerusalem.
- The **2nd** details God's **judgment of the nations**.
- Then the **last** section, given after Jerusalem was destroyed, are prophecies of Israel's **restoration**.

There are 52 oracles or prophetic messages here.

Each of them begins w/1 of 2 introductory phrases. Either -

1) "**The word of the Lord came to me,**" –or–

2) "**The hand of the Lord was upon me.**"

If the oracle begins "*The word of the Lord came to me*" it means the message was a verbal communication Ezekiel was to repeat to the people.

The majority of his prophecies are of this kind

But if it began "*The hand of the Lord is upon me,*" it was an **intense experience** that affected Ezekiel **physically**.

This is used to introduce all the great **visual oracles** where the prophet feels himself transported **inside** the vision itself.

Ezekiel prophesied for 22 years.

He was part of the exiles hauled from Jerusalem to Babylon.

You may remember from our study in Jeremiah most of the Jewish political & religious leaders & several guys claiming to be prophets, said the Babylonians would **not** defeat Jerusalem.

When they did & hauled off a group of exiles as hostages, these leaders & false prophets kept saying the Babylonians would be defeated & the hostages would return soon.

When that didn't happen, chaffing under their yoke as vassals, the Jewish leaders decided to **rebel**.

They forged an alliance w/Egypt, but the Egyptians betrayed them & the Babylonians under their King Nebuchadnezzar returned & leveled Jerusalem.

But before the destruction of the city, false prophets both in Jerusalem & among the Jewish exiles in Babylon told the exiles not to get too comfy because they'd soon be returning home.

The prophet Jeremiah told them **that wasn't the case**.

On the contrary to the foolish counsel of the false prophets, the exiles **ought** to settle down, raise families & start businesses, because it would be 70 years before they'd come back.

The best way to prepare for that return was by **prospering** in Babylon.

Ezekiel's job was to **warn** the exiles Jerusalem was doomed, despite what the false prophets said.

Then, after Jerusalem fell, to encourage them with messages of Israel's eventual restoration.

We might wonder how the Book of Ezekiel is relevant for us today.

Well – it was written to God's people in a time of great . . .

- Uncertainty about the future
- International upheavals
- Religious pluralism & deception
- Institutional corruption
- And Faith was in turmoil

Sounds like Ezekiel does have a LOT to say to us!

Notice that v. 3 ends with the introduction to one of the Visual Oracles of the prophet.

. . . and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

What follows is a vision of the glory of God that beggars interpretation.

The best we can do is draw out some brief insights.

To attempt an exhaustive explanation isn't wise because Ezekiel didn't give us a hint how we ought to interpret what he saw.

He simply **describes** what he saw.

⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness *was* all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

While tornados aren't common in the Middle East, whirlwinds are & if you've ever spent time in the desert, you know what they look like = mini-tornado.

Ezekiel sees a cloud not of darkness but of golden liquid light that looks like fire, swirling like a whirlwind.

Light pulses from it.

⁵ Also from within it *came* the likeness of 4 living creatures. And this *was* their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.

That is, the **body** was humanoid.

As Ezekiel goes on to describe them, they have a close similarity to the 4 living creatures John describes in Revelation that surround God's throne.

While Ezekiel doesn't name them here, in Ch. 10, he calls them **cherubim**.

⁶ Each 1 had 4 faces, and each 1 had 4 wings. ⁷ Their legs *were* straight, and the soles of their feet *were* like the soles of calves' feet.

Not sure if that means they had hooves or that they had massive, solid footwear.

They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. ⁸ The hands of a man *were* under their wings on their 4 sides; and each of the 4 had faces and wings. ⁹ Their wings touched 1 another.

They completed a circle.

Were they facing in or out? **Yes**; both, it seems. // They could w/4 faces & 4 wings.

The creatures did not turn when they went, but each 1 went straight forward.

Because of their unity & bearing 4 faces & wings, **every** direction for them was straight ahead.

¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the 4 had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the 4 had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.

A man's, lion's, ox's, & eagle's face was on each & all.

We find the same description of the **Cherubim** in Rev. 4.

These were the creatures **represented** inside of the Holy of holies in the tabernacle.

They're the figures on the top of the mercy seat of the ark of covenant.

Moses' instructions were that their wings were to touch – just as Ezekiel describes here.

¹¹ Thus *were* their faces. Their wings stretched upward; 2 *wings* of each 1 touched 1 another, and 2 covered their bodies. ¹² And each 1 went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

Where ever the Spirit of God went, they went.

There was instantaneous compliance to the Lord in where they went.

¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. They glowed, not with the dullness of coals that have gone to ash but like a torch waved back and forth, so the flame is bright.

Flashing from the golden cast of their light shot blue bolts of electricity.

This was something the ancient world was familiar with.

Because they spent so much time outdoors, they well knew the piercing blue & achingly bright light of the lightning bolt.

Two things stood out for the people of the ancient world as marks of God's presence; ***lightning & earthquakes.***

This entire image is God's way of saying, "I'm here."

¹⁴ And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning. ¹⁵ Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel *was* on the earth beside each living creature with its 4 faces. ¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their workings *was* like the color of beryl, and all 4 had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings *was*, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. ¹⁷ When they moved, they went toward any 1 of 4 directions; they did not turn aside when they went. ¹⁸ As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims *were* full of eyes, all around the 4 of them. ¹⁹ When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. ²⁰ Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, *because* there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures *was* in the wheels. ²¹ When those went, *these* went; when those stood, *these* stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures *was* in the wheels.

Okay, here's what's going on. Let me describe it. ***Can't!***

The best image we can draw from this is that these wheels are spiritually connected to each of the 4 living creatures.

They're composed of 2 intersecting wheels that glow w/a brilliant yellowish-green light.

They connected to the living creatures' ***mobility.***

Since ***eyes*** are idiomatic of ***awareness.*** we're to understand these wheels as being connected to the omniscience of God, just as the creatures are.

Let's read a little more than see if we can sort out what all this is.

²² The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures *was* like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads. ²³ And under the firmament their wings *spread out* straight, 1 toward another. Each 1 had 2 which covered 1 side, and each 1 had 2 which covered the other side of the body. ²⁴ When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings. ²⁵ A voice came from above the firmament that *was* over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings. ²⁶ And above the firmament over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne *was* a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.

Commentators are universal in their agreement what's being described here is a kind of ***spiritual chariot.***

There's a platform like crystal over the cherubim who along with the wheels form the chariot's wheels.

Above the crystal platform is God's throne.

The repetition of the word “likeness” here is the prophet’s way of saying what he saw is difficult to describe.

He saw something *like* a throne, *like* a sapphire, *like* a man. But it was more!

How do you describe something for which human language possesses no words?

Just as Ezekiel does here.

But **what’s the point** if all his description does is **confuse** us?

While there is a certain amount of confusion, it’s due to our longing to SEE what he saw.

We read this & say, “That sounds amazing! I wish I could see that.”

THAT’S the point here. That’s what this description aims to do

Describe the glory of God in such a way that it makes us yearn to behold it.

Now Ezekiel begins to describe the **person** who sat on the throne.

²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around.

Again – we need to be careful not to say, “It looked just like this.”

But it seems what Ezekiel is saying is that the light that emanated from the person he saw moved – like a fire does.

Fire gives off light –right? But it’s not the light of a light bulb, or the sun or reflected light of the moon which is a steady, static glow.

The light of a fire moves; and that’s probably what Ezekiel means here.

It was super bright, but it moved – because it was **alive**.

²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw *it*, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

If you’ve ever seen a rainbow up close when the light is super bright – it’s **literally dazzling**.

It’s like the light is **alive**!

This isn’t the flat rainbow drawing of a 6 year old made w/crayon on a piece of paper.

This is pure light in all its glorious glory – & it all comes from God.

Chapter 2

¹ And He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.”

God calls Ezekiel by this title ‘son of man’ some 90 times. It’s a reminder of his **mortality**.

² Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. Now God commissions the prophet to his task.

³ And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. ⁴ For *they are* impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ Ezekiel wasn’t to speak **his** opinions or views. He was to repeat what God said.

⁵ As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.

This is exactly what happens in his career as a prophet.

At first the people ignored him. But it didn’t take long before they realized he was legit & a real prophet. So they began listening to him; even coming to him for counsel.

Sadly, more often than not, after hearing what he had to say, they rejected his counsel & message.

⁶ “And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns *are* with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house. ⁷ You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they *are* rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

Ezekiel was to make faithfulness to God his ambition, not acceptance by man.

So while he spoke God’s message to them, if anger crawled across their faces, or disdain & scorn, he wasn’t to alter or edit God’s Word.

⁹ Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book *was* in it. ¹⁰ Then He spread it before me; and *there was* writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it *were* lamentations and mourning and woe.

This is an example of a bad place to start a ch.

Chapter 3

¹ Moreover He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” ²

So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. ³ And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.” So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. Since that’s my text for Sunday, we’ll leave it till then.

⁴ Then He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ⁵ For you *are* not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, *but* to the house of Israel, ⁶ not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; **[and it’s My message you’ll be speaking]** for all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hard-hearted. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Just as the people he spoke to were ***stubborn in rejecting*** God’s Word, so Ezekiel would be ***stubbornly devoted*** to it.

⁹ Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house.”

What God says here is important for all of us.

God says He’ll ***make*** Ezekiel a rock – then calls Ezekiel to ***be*** that rock!

He says He’ll ***assist*** Ezekiel & ***harden his resolve***.

But Ezekiel must ***make*** that resolve. It must be ***his choice*** to trust God and not be afraid.

That last night Jesus was with the disciples, He promised them the HS who’d come and assist them.

It would be by the power of the Spirit that they’d live the life & accomplish the mission He assigned them.

But for the Spirit to come, they had to trust Him & make decide to live for the Lord & His purposes.

Picture a small child barely able to walk, ***being carried*** on her father’s shoulders.

She can go anywhere because he’s big & strong.

On her own, she staggers a few halting steps then plops down.

But on dad’s shoulders, it’s like she’s flying!

All she needs to do to fly on those broad shoulders is ***yield to him*** when he offers to give her a ride.

All she needs to do is trust him, take her seat, and enjoy the ride.

In Isa 40:31 says

Those who wait on the Lord / shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

God’s called us to an amazing journey but He doesn’t point us down the path & say, “Take off!”

He says, “Climb aboard.” All we need do is yield & trust.

¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: “Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear, or whether they refuse.”

So there’s Ezekiel’s commission as a prophet.

He was to faithfully repeat the message God gave him, not editing or altering it based on how they responded.

But before Ezekiel told the people what God told him, he was to “take it to heart.”

He wasn’t to be a heartless messenger who simply repeated verbatim what he heard.

He was to repeat not only the Words but the TONE in which he heard God speak.

For the warnings and words God told Ezekiel were filled with love, compassion, & yearning.

God wanted the people to repent.

There's pathos in what God said. There were tears in his eyes as He announced the judgments that were coming.

So Ezekiel was to communicate the **same** pathos & emotion.

He wasn't to turn God's **plea** they'd repent into a **curse against** them.

I fear there are some preachers today who make that error.

God **calls & wants** sinners to repent & does **warn if they don't** judgment will fall.

But it seems there are some preachers who've turned God's invitation to forgiveness into a club to bash those among the lost who's sins they find specially disgusting.

Fred Phelps, pastor of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas has incited his entire congregation to show up at funerals for soldiers killed in Iraq & Afghanistan with placards & signs saying God hates homosexuals & that the death of soldiers in battle is His judgment.

Even though the # of protestors is small, a couple dozen, the press makes it look like many more.

The results is that many Americans think that's the position & belief of Evangelical Christians like you and I.

Would Jesus line up w/protestors from Westboro Baptist Church? Of course not!

In fact, He got docked **by** the Fred Phelps of His day **for hanging out** w/sinners the likes of tax-collectors & women w/a shady rep.

It was Jesus love for them that won them and saw them repent & turn to God.

Westboro Baptist isn't winning ANYONE to the faith because they're angry denunciation of sinners and tearless announcement of judgment totally misrepresents the heart of God.

Ezekiel was to take God's Word into his heart, before it ever left his mouth.

We ought to do the same.

¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" ¹³ I also *heard* the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched 1 another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. That spiritual chariot bearing God began to move.

As it did, the cherubim & wheels made a great noise. / Ezekiel was carried along with it.

Why he was bitter & angry is unclear.

It may be because he knew the vision of glory was coming to an end.

Or it may be because he knew the people he was about to begin speaking to wouldn't listen.

Whatever his emotional state – it was **calmed** by the hand of God on him.

¹⁵ Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them 7 days.

This is where the modern city of Tel Aviv in Israel gets its name.

It's the name of the Jewish colony in exile in Babylon.

Ezekiel began his calling as a prophet by simply sitting among the exiles, saying nothing.

His experience of the glory of God was so unnerving it took him a week of quiet meditation to recover.

And as he sat & observed the people around him, the heart of God began to beat in him.

For all their foolish rebellion, they were lost & God **loved** them.

This is something I think we'd be well served to do as the people of God—to find some place where there are lots of people and just sit & watch.

I need to do this and have found it so helpful.

I sit most of my time in my office studying the Bible, reading books by Christians; articles & editorials.

I get amped to share the truth & glean some great ways to do so.

Then I read newsletters & reports about how foolish laws are passed & God's Word & ways are being systematically removed from the public square.

I get angry, worked up – ready to blast away at the stupidity of the world.

But when I go to sit quietly at the mall, a park, the beach, & just watch people – the anger & indignation dissolves to be replaced by a love & longing for the lost to come to Jesus.

We must be careful to not let the world just be a mass of faceless, nameless sinners rightly doomed to hell.

It's good to see the faces and hear the names & FEEL the heart of God that they NOT go to hell.

¹⁶ Now it came to pass at the end of 7 days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: ¹⁸ When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. ²⁰ “Again, when a righteous *man* turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. ²¹ Nevertheless if you warn the righteous *man* that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.”

Just as a city watchman stood atop the wall looking out for enemies, so Ezekiel was a moral & spiritual watchman for the Jewish exiles.

He was called to warn & wave them off from sin.

If he failed to warn them, then when judgment came, Ezekiel would be held responsible.

But if he warned & the people ignored the warning, their guilt was their own.

This is yet another lesson for us as those who've been entrusted with the Gospel.

It's Good News precisely because it's a message of salvation from sin & the judgment sin earns.

This is something the modern presentation of the Gospel often leaves out; that God is holy and will judge sin.

Salvation is important precisely because w/o it, we end in hell!

Let me use this illustration [The parachute]

- This plane is going down 1 day; no one knows when.
- Do you have your chute on?
- At the same time we declare the goodness & love of God & how following Jesus leads to a rich, full life, we need to **warn** people that the only other alternative is a life of sin that leads to hell.

²² Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, “Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you.” ²³ So I arose and went out into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. ²⁴ Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet, and spoke with me and said to me: “Go, shut yourself inside your house. ²⁵ And you, O son of man, surely they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them. ²⁶ I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be 1 to rebuke them, for they *are* a rebellious house. ²⁷ But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they *are* a rebellious house. After another renewing vision of God's glory, a hard word comes to the prophet.

He's to go home and shut himself up in solitude.

Wait – didn't God just tell him to be sure to warn the people?

Yes, but that warning fell on deaf ears.

Even worse, official word went out that Ezekiel was not to be heeded.

His warnings were rejected.

So God told him to go home, shut his door & remain in seclusion until He called him forth once more.

That in itself is a mark of God's judgment – when He stops speaking to people.

God's Spirit will draw & convict us.

But if we rebel and resist, He'll back off.

What a dangerous place to be – when God's spirit no longer strives with us.

The day came when Ezekiel once more stepped out of his house and at God's bidding opened his mouth to proclaim the Word of the Lord.

If it's been a while since you sensed the Lord speaking to you, could it be because you balked, resisted His leading?