

The World as It Will Be Ezekiel

Ezekiel lived in Jerusalem during Babylon's first attack when they spared the city but kidnapped a first wave of Hebrews (2 Kings 24:8-17). He was among the prisoners taken to Babylon and his book begins five years after his deportation (593-571).

It's his 30th birthday and instead of being installed as a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem, he's sitting in a refugee camp by the Kebar river where he receives his first vision of six visions.

Picture One – Locate the Kebar in connection to Israel

Picture Two – A picture of the river

The visions, and the book, are structured around three themes:

- (1) Judgment on Israel (chapters 1–24);
- (2) Judgment on the nations (chapters 25–32); and
- (3) Future blessings for Israel and the world (chapters 33–48).

A vision is not a dream and occurs when someone is awake. This means all of your physical senses are involved like when Ezekiel eats the scroll in 3:2. In Isaiah 6, a seraph touched the prophet's mouth with a live coal.

First: The Vision

Ezekiel's vision is of a storm cloud and inside the cloud are flour winged creatures, because of the lightning, perhaps seraphim, with four distinct faces: human, eagle, lion and ox.

Ezekiel 1:1-4 - *In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. [a] 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 Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. ⁴ As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. [b] ⁵ And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.*

- Human beings, of course, are made in the image and likeness of God, reflecting His capacity for wisdom, dignity, and so forth (Gen. 1:26–28).
- Eagles are prized in God's Word for their speed and stateliness (Ps. 103:5; Jer. 48:40).
- The lion is known for its strength and courage (Judg. 14:5; Isa. 31:4),
- Oxen were found throughout the temple and the sacrificial system in which the presence of God was experienced (Num. 7; 1 Kings 7:23–37).

They may represent God's

- Omnipotence
- Wisdom
- Glory
- Service

The creatures are standing above four wheels and their outstretched wings are supporting a throne on which sits a human-like creature who spoke to him. It is a revelation of God, riding his battle chariot.

Ezekiel 1:26-28 - And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ²⁷And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. ²⁸Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

It is God, riding his royal chariot through the skies

"glory" = kavod = heavy meaning, significant

Exodus 24:17 - Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire

In fact, this is the most shocking thing about Ezekiel's vision: what is God's glory doing in Babylon? It is supposed to be above the ark of the covenant, in the holy of holies, in the temple in Jerusalem Israel. Yet God's glory is seen in a foreign, hostile nation.

Second: Judgement on Israel 1-11

Israel has broken its covenant with God. God has 'born no weight' with them. They have given significance to other

- a) 1-3 – Ezekiel is commissioned to accuse Israel of breaking God's covenant and God is not finished judging Judah

Another Babylonian attack is coming and Jerusalem, Judah, Israel, the Temple and people all face imminent destruction.

- b) 4-7 – Ezekiel engages in street object lessons

- He built a model of Jerusalem and staged an attack
- He shaved off all of his hair and then cut it to pieces with a sword
- He played the role of a scapegoat
- He lay on his side, tied up and ate food cooked over dung

The most discouraging part to Ezekiel is that God warned him that Israel would not listen to him.

c) 8-11 – The Temple Vision

God gives Ezekiel a vision of the Temple in Jerusalem. The elders have placed a large idol in the courtyard and are worshipping it. The women are worshipping another god named Tamuz.

10:18-22 - *Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. ¹⁹ While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. ²⁰ These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River, and I realized that they were cherubim. ²¹ Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings was what looked like human hands. ²² Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River. Each one went straight ahead.*

This is how God's glory appeared to Ezekiel in Babylon. Israel's sin has effectively banned God from the Temple and he has consigned it to destruction.

The point: The people have abandoned God and are suffering the consequences. But God hasn't abandoned the people. He has gone into exile with them.

More, God will return the people to the Promised Land and change their hearts –

11:17-20 - This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.' ¹⁸ "They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. ¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Chapter eleven is the **transition chapter** in the book and provides a key to the rest of the book

d) 12-24 – Judgement on Israel

15 – Israel is a burned, useless stick

16 – Israel is a rebellious wife

17 – A dangerous, captured lion

18 – Two promiscuous sisters

e) 14, 18 & 20 – Ezekiel is a lawyer

- Jerusalem's destruction is deserved
- God's goodness demands that he judge Judah
- Israel is at the point of no return and will go into exile

f) 25-32 – Judgement on the nations

- Philistia, Edom, Moab & Ammon
- Egypt and Tyre have viewed themselves as gods who define right and wrong
- God will use Babylon to judge them also

g) 33 – Judgement on Jerusalem

A vagabond meets Ezekiel in Babylon and informs him that the armies of Babylon have attacked Jerusalem and its citizens have been taken captive.

But just like the OT isn't the end of God's story, so Jerusalem's fall is not the end of God's story.

IMP: After this, God explains how what he has promised in chapter eleven, comes to pass

Third: Hope for Israel and the World. 34-48

The Babylonian captivity is the worst thing that has ever happened to Israel and it brings into question all of the promises God has ever made in the OT. If Israel is not in the Promised Land and if the Temple is destroyed, how will God fulfil his OT promises?

- 34-37 - Hope for Israel
- 38-39 – Hope for the nations
- 40-48 – Hope for all creation

1. Hope for Israel. 34-37

a) A new David

34:1 - *The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel*

34:10 - *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.*

34:11-16 - *For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: **I myself** will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. **I will rescue** them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ **I will bring them out from the nations and gather them** from the countries, and **I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them** on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ **I will tend them** in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ **I myself will tend my sheep** and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ **I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured** and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. **I will shepherd the flock with justice.***

b) A New People

36:24-32 - *For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. ³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. ³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!***

Is this possible? Yes! God illustrates it in a valley of dry bones – **Chapter 37**

All of this recalls God first making humanity / dirt + divine breath = life. Humanity's only hope is for God to remake humanity; a new humanity.

There is hope, not only for Israel but for the rest of the world too!

2. Hope for the nations 38-39

Gog, an ancient kingdom of Gen 10, will ally with 7 nations to fight against God.

For Ezekiel, Gog is the new Pharaoh, the archetype of all human rebellion against God.

God uses an

- earthquake,
- fire and then
- strikes Gog down in the field where he remains unburied.

(This is Ezekiel's poetry to describe the ultimate defeat of evil in the world)

But God is not finished. He defeats evil so that he can.....

3. Hope for all creation. 40-48

Chapter 40 begins in the 25th year of Israel's 70-year of Babylonian exile.

One day God's presence will return to his temple and bring cosmic restoration throughout all creation.

- God takes "the hand of the Lord was on me and he took me there" (40:1)
- A 'bronze' man gave Ezekiel a tour of a new city with a new Temple that is far larger and grander than even Solomon's Temple (40-42).
- There is a new altar, new priests and a new system of worship.
- Finally, God's throne chariot returns to the Jerusalem and takes its rightful place in the Temple

Ezekiel 43:1-7 - Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, ² and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. ³ The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he^[a] came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. ⁴ The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. ⁵ Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ⁶ While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. ⁷ He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.

There is a lot of conjecture and controversy over the interpretation of these chapters.

PICTURE of Temple Mount: We have stood there, on the Mount of Olives and looked over onto the Temple Mount where God will one day re-establish his Temple.

- Literal (this is real blueprint for the physical future Temple in Jerusalem)
- Symbolic like the rest of Ezekiel's visions; of God's presence among his people in the Messianic Kingdom

Of note: Ezekiel never calls the city, 'Jerusalem.'

What is important about this vision of the Temple and **what we can agree on** is that a stream begins to flow out of the front door and becomes a raging river as it pours into the Dead Sea that transforms it into a living sea (ch 47-48). Of course, all of this imagery comes from the Garden of Eden in chapters 1-2.

Ezekiel's vision is not limited to Israel but cosmic in its redemption. The whole earth is recreated.

47:1-12 - Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ² Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. ³ Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. ⁴ Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. ⁵ Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. ⁶ And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸ And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. ⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹² And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

God's plan has always been larger than Adam and Eve, larger than Abraham and Sarah, larger than Israel. God's plan has always been to restore all creation and humanity back to life by his life-giving Presence.

The most important part is the last sentence in the book –

48:35b – *"And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There."*

T - Revelation 21:1-3 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place^[a] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,^[b] and God himself will be with them as their God.*

Revelation 21:22-26 - *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.*

Revelation 22:1-5 - *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

Conclusion:

If God can do that with a destroyed Jerusalem, he can do that with our world!

This is how the book of Ezekiel ends:

A new people living in a new world with God at its center. It is a world permeated with divine life: flourishing with God's love, justice, mercy, peace, and joy.

“Oh won't it be wonderful there?”

And that is where Christians will live and how Christians will live forever. So can you!

Note: Here is an excellent article on the religious and political significance of the Temple Mount.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-is-beneath-the-temple-mount-920764/>

Community Groups:

1 – How are you doing?

2 – How are you thriving?

3 – How are you suffering?

4 – What are your main concerns right now?

5 – How is your Bible reading?

- 6 – What is the historical context of the book of Ezekiel
- 7 – Why do you think God's throne is described as it is in Ezekiel's first vision?
- 8 – What does *kavod* (glory) mean and why is it significant?
- 9 – What is significant about God's glory leaving the Temple?
- 10 – What is significant about God's glory arriving in Babylon?
- 11 – How does God promise to change the people in 11:17-20 & 36:26-27?
- 12 – Why is it important for God to give us a new heart?
- 13 – God promises a new David, a new people and a new city. Who/what are these three things?
- 14 – What does it mean that God is changing the Dead Sea into a living sea?
- 15 - How does the vision of a new creation look like the Garden of Eden (47:1-12)?
- 16 – What is the name of the new city?
- 17 – How does Rev 21:1-3; 22-26; 22:1-5 correspond with Ezekiel's vision?
- 18 – What do you love most about the book of Ezekiel?