

## The Book of Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel recorded, “*Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah*” (Ezek. 11:10). God’s people had completely forgotten Him (Jer. 18:15; Ezek. 22:12) and had no knowledge of His word (Jer. 8:7). The prophet Isaiah said that God’s people were so spiritually sick that “*from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it*” (Isa. 1:6). The elders (Ezek. 8:11), priests (Ezek. 8:16), and civil rulers (i.e., princes) (Ezek. 11:1-2) walked in sin. The spiritual leaders of Judah had left off serving God. Judah’s priests had perverted God’s laws (Ezek. 22:26) and practiced idolatry (Ezek. 44:10). Judah’s prophets were greedy for riches (Ezek. 22:23-25). Judah allied itself with other nations in time of need rather than turning to God for help (II Kg. 18:19ff; Isa. 30:1-3; 31:1; Jer. 2:36-37; Lam. 4:17). The people as a whole were liars (Jer. 9:1-3), deceitful (Jer. 9:4-6), and rebellious (Jer. 6:16). Judah practiced perverted worship (Ezek. 23:38-39; 44:4-9) and defiled Jehovah’s holy sanctuary (Ezek. 5:11; 23:38).

The Lord warned Judah for 23 years through Jeremiah (Jer. 25:1-3), yet they ignored the prophet and said of God’s word, “*we will not walk therein*” (Jer. 6:16). Due to the people’s refusal to repent, God determined to punish them by using the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah spoke much regarding the people of the “North” (i.e., Babylon). Babylon would be God’s battle axe (Jer. 51:20) as He fought against Judah (Jer. 21:5). In the hands of God, Babylon was to be a golden cup whose contents were described as “*the wine of his wrath*” (Jer. 21:5). Babylon would be Jehovah’s servant to punish His rebellious people (Jer. 25:8-9; 51:20). Ezekiel referred to Babylon as God’s “*rod*” (Ezek. 7:10-11) and “*sword*” for punishing the erring in Judah (Ezek. 21:1, 19). God determined to have Jerusalem besieged (Ezek. 4:1-2; 6:12) and the inhabitants die by famine, sword, pestilence, and evil beasts (Ezek. 5:12; 6:11; 12:16; 14:21). Fathers would eat their own children to keep from starving in the siege (Ezek. 5:10), and the city would be burned with fire (Ezek. 10:1-2). Though so many would die gruesome deaths, a remnant would be allowed to survive (Ezek. 6:8; 11:13; 14:22ff).

During the year 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar (King of Babylon) invaded Judah, besieged the city of Jerusalem, and took many captive of whom was Ezekiel (II Kg. 24:10ff; Ezek. 1:1). Jeremiah had prophesied that such would occur and that the remnant would go into captivity for 70 years (cf. Jer. 25:11). Though God’s people would be captives in a foreign land for these years, God would not forget them (cf. Isa. 41:10). Five years after the captives were in Babylon, (592 BC), God appeared to Ezekiel at the river Chebar and called him to the office of prophet at the age of 30 (Ezek. 1:1).

The name “Ezekiel” means “God will strengthen” and seems to be fitting for his work of encouraging the captives of Babylon. Ezekiel was a priest (Ezek. 1:2) that was married (Ezek. 24:15-18). The prophet lived on the banks of the Chebar River at a city called Telabib (Ezek. 3:15). God assigned a special task to Ezekiel. The prophet was to act as a watchman unto the house of Israel (Ezek. 3:17; 33:7). Ezekiel was told to speak to the sinful house of Judah even though they would give him scary looks and speak harshly to him (Ezek. 2:6-7). Ezekiel was unlike Jeremiah in that he worked with those who were exiled to Babylon while Jeremiah worked directly with the rebellious people who remained in Judah. At times, Ezekiel expressed a great compassion for his brethren in Judah as he saw God’s awful judgments against them (Ezek. 9:7-11; 11:13). The captives, however, wavered between hating Ezekiel and loving him after hearing various words of condemnation and hope. God warned the

prophet not to be taken off guard by the people's swing of emotions (Ezek. 33:30-31). Though Ezekiel often spoke of Judah's punishment for her ungodliness, he also revealed a refreshing and bright future for those who would hold true to God's word. Ezekiel spoke of the coming of Jesus (Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:25), the everlasting covenant that would instruct men how to receive the forgiveness of sins (i.e., the law of Christ) (Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Heb. 13:20-21), and the future church (Ezek. 37:26-27).

Though Ezekiel had knowledge of God's promise to have His people return to Jerusalem from captivity (cf. Isa. 14:1-2), he apparently never lived to see it. At 536 BC, Cyrus allowed 50,000 captives to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1ff). Seventy eight years later (458 BC), Artaxerxes I allowed 1,800 people to return under the guidance of Ezra to reestablish worship to Jehovah (Ezra 8). At 444 BC, Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem that the walls of the city may be rebuilt (Neh. 2:1-8). The grand lesson of Ezekiel is that we learn of the goodness and the severity of God, and we, too, can confess that Jehovah, He is God.