

Who was Ezekiel in the Bible?

Ezekiel, whose name means “strengthened by God,” grew up in Jerusalem, where he trained to be a priest in the temple. He was among the second group of captives taken to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin about 597 BC. While in Babylon Ezekiel became a prophet of God; he is the author of the Old Testament book that bears his name.

Ezekiel’s ministry began with condemnation and judgment of the nation Judah. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s prophecies speak of hope for the future. Ezekiel wanted to help the people learn from their failures. He announced impending judgment upon the nations that surrounded Judah and reestablished hope for the restoration of Israel. His vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) pictures new life being breathed into the nation. That prophecy will be ultimately fulfilled in the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

Ezekiel’s first vision was of God’s throne and included descriptions of four living creatures and whirling wheels. Ezekiel also had detailed visions of a new temple (Ezekiel 40–43), a restored Jerusalem (Ezekiel 48:30–35), the millennium (chapter 44), and the land in which God’s people will reside (Ezekiel 47:13–23). Israel and Judah will once again be restored to unity from the ends of the earth as God’s glory also returns and God dwells among His people. These beautiful visions of Ezekiel concern both the immediate and the long-term plans of God.

Ezekiel delivered God’s messages with straightforward language that everyone could understand, whether they listened or not (Ezekiel 2:7). Ezekiel himself was called to be a watchman, and God warned him that, if he did not faithfully warn of the punishment for not following God, he would be held accountable for the blood of those who died in their

sins (Ezekiel 33:8-9). He did not hesitate in his mission and steadfastly followed God's instructions. Ezekiel had a passionate view of judgment and hope, and he reflected God's own sorrow over the people's sins.

Ezekiel's sorrow was compounded by the death of his wife (Ezekiel 24)—an event that God forbade him to weep over. God used the death of Ezekiel's wife as a sign to the people of Judah. Just as the prophet lost his wife, the people of Judah would lose their temple. And, just as Ezekiel did not show outward signs of mourning, the Jews would be overwhelmed to the point of silence by the sorrow they felt.

The prophet Ezekiel experienced considerable opposition during his own lifetime, yet he doggedly expressed God's desire that the wicked not die but turn from their wicked ways and live. His periodic speechlessness during his early years was broken when God empowered him to speak, and his tongue was loosened to speak the longest passage of sustained hope in the Bible. The burning, chopping, and scattering of his hair represented the fall of Jerusalem and the bringing back of God's remnant (chapter 5). The hopeful words climax in the promise of everlasting possession of the land, an everlasting Davidic prince, an everlasting covenant, and an everlasting sanctuary in Israel (Ezekiel 11:16-21).

Ezekiel's visions leap far ahead to a time when Israel will face an invasion by a coalition of nations led by a country from the north. The nations threatening Israel will be utterly defeated by the direct intervention of the Lord (Ezekiel 38-39). This future victory demonstrates two things of note for the Jews in captivity: 1) their nation would be restored, and 2) after that final restoration, no enemy will ever successfully invade the Holy Land again. Ezekiel also sees the glory of the Lord return

to the temple in chapter 43—the same glory that had departed in chapter 10.

Ezekiel has shown all Christians that we are to be obedient to God's call on our lives. God told Ezekiel to groan with a broken heart and bitter grief for the coming judgment, and, through his dramatic book, Ezekiel tells us the same thing. Judgment is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign Lord. We, like Ezekiel, can warn others, and we can also share with them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.