

What Is Yet to Come

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WHAT IS YET TO COME

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INTRODUCTION TO *EZEKIEL*



In 622 BC, during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, the priests cleansing the temple found the book of the law. It had been ignored and eventually lost because of the idolatry of the preceding kings, priests, and people. According to the book of Deuteronomy, God told Israel that when the people had a king, he was to make a copy of the law and read it daily. Instead, nearly 800 years later, the Word of God was lost in the temple.

When young King Josiah learned about the book of the law, God's covenant with His people, and the nation's rightful response, he wept and tore his clothes in grief and anguish over Judah's awful sin. He knew God's wrath burned against the people's idolatry, and he determined to purge Judah of its idols, to change the culture of his day, and to lead the way in serving the Lord and keeping His commandments. He began a revival but didn't live to see it through, and the prophetess Hul-dah told Josiah that after his death God would bring judgment on Judah because they had forsaken Him. Idolatry was in their hearts despite the outward reforms of Josiah's reign.

God used Assyria to judge the northern kingdom—Israel, Judah's sister—removing its ten tribes from the promised land between 732 and 722 BC. Judah didn't learn from Israel's experience. Their idolatry continued, and they placed their trust in their military might, their political alliances, and their temple.

But Babylon was rising, replacing Assyria as the dominant power. Egypt tried to help Assyria against Babylon, and Josiah died in battle against Egypt. Egypt's Pharaoh deposed Josiah's son Jehoahaz after only three months' rule and placed another son, Eliakim, on the throne, changing his name to Jehoiakim and making Judah a puppet state.

But this was short-lived under the God who establishes kings and kingdoms. Babylon defeated Assyria and then pursued Egypt southward. When they came to Jerusalem in 605 BC, they made Jehoiakim *their* servant and took some young nobles captive, including Daniel and three friends we know as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Jehoiakim ruled until he died in 597 BC, and his son Jehoiachin took the throne.

The Babylonians returned to attack Jerusalem only three months into Jehoiachin's reign, taking him captive to Babylon with his wives, his mother, his officials, and a total of 10,000 people, including a young man named Ezekiel. As you'll see, Ezekiel is a priest who doesn't become 30 and thus eligible to serve in the temple until five years into his captivity in Babylon. In 586 BC, after the third siege of Jerusalem, the temple will be destroyed and not rebuilt for 70 years. Ezekiel may not serve as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem, but he will serve God as a prophet from Babylon, bringing God's message to the exiles—and to you and me.

In the appendix you'll find a chart called THE RULERS AND PROPHETS OF EZEKIEL'S TIME that will help you throughout your study of Ezekiel.

WATCHMAN ON THE WALL



Is trouble brewing? Is danger ahead—something on the horizon that could spell disaster? God called Ezekiel to sound an alarm, to warn of impending doom, to save those who would repent at his warning. God warned Ezekiel of the consequences if he didn't give the warning and if the people didn't heed it. What about you? What will you do?

DAY ONE

When studying the Bible, the best way to begin is with prayer. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned, so ask God to help you see and understand His truth through the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers. We can teach you effective Bible study skills, but they aren't substitutes for prayer.

Read the first three verses of Ezekiel 1. What kind of book is this? You probably noticed that Ezekiel saw visions and that the word of the Lord came to him. These features characterize prophecy, so we're embarking on a study of prophecy—God's message about the future through a chosen spokesman. Remember that the prophet is simply the messenger; the message itself is from God.

When does the message come? Mark the references to

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time with a distinctive color or a clock symbol. “The fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile” must be 593 BC because the king was taken captive to Babylon in 597 BC along with Ezekiel and 10,000 others. Ancient cultures didn’t begin their year in the winter, as we do, but in the spring, when new life begins, or in the fall, when the harvest is gathered. Refer to the chart called THE JEWISH CALENDAR in the appendix throughout your study.

Where is Ezekiel? The text says he is among the exiles by the river Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans. Chaldea is a region of Babylon. In the appendix, find the map called EXILES OF JUDAH TO BABYLON.

We’ve begun by asking the text some of the 5 W’s and an H. We know *when*, *where*, and to *whom* the message was given. We even know something about the author—he’s a priest. “The thirtieth year” most likely refers to his age—the year he would have been eligible to work in the temple as a priest according to Numbers 4:3.

But what’s the message and who is it for? And why did God give this message? These questions will frame our study of Ezekiel’s prophecy. We’ll find the answers by looking at key repeated words and phrases—things the author emphasizes by repetition. You’ll be marking many of these words and phrases throughout Ezekiel, so mark them on a three-by-five card the same way you’ll mark them in the text, and use this card as a bookmark. Doing this as you go from chapter to chapter will help you mark consistently and save time.

You’ve already seen two phrases in the first three verses that are keys in the book—“the word of the LORD came” and “the hand of the LORD came upon him.” You’ll see variants of these too. Underline or shade each in a distinctive color throughout the book and put them on your bookmark.

Now read through the rest of Ezekiel 1. What happens in this chapter? What did Ezekiel see? What are the key figures?

Read through the chapter again and mark *living beings* (*creatures*), *wheel(s)*, and the *one with the appearance of a man*. You don't need to add these to your bookmark because you won't see them throughout the book.

Take your time and drink in the scenery.



DAY TWO

If you're the type of person who enjoys pictures and likes to draw, see if you can sketch the characters in Ezekiel 1. Or perhaps you learn best by simply listing the features of each character. Choose your method and take your time. These are fantastic creatures, aren't they?

Now determine a theme for this chapter (what it's about) and record it on EZEKIEL AT A GLANCE in the appendix.



DAY THREE

Ezekiel 2 is only ten verses long, but it's important. The break between chapters 2 and 3 wasn't there in Ezekiel's day, so we're going to combine the chapters in our study today. Don't forget to begin your study time with prayer. (Remember, you have access to the Author, and He truly wants you to know, understand, and live by every word that comes from His mouth.) Then read through chapter 2 and focus on who is speaking to Ezekiel. From the context, determine whom the pronouns refer to. Also note what Ezekiel is called. Add this phrase to your bookmark and mark or color it distinctively. Also mark *listen*¹ and *rebellious*.

Now read through Ezekiel 3:1-11. Did you see whom the

message is for and how they're described? Make three lists in your notebook and record what you learn about the speaker, about Ezekiel, and about those he's sent to.

Now read Jeremiah 1:17-19 and Isaiah 6 and compare them with Ezekiel 2:6–3:11. What do you think about the prophet's task? Jeremiah and Ezekiel were contemporaries, and Isaiah prophesied before them both, so we can safely assume Ezekiel knew about God's call to Isaiah and Jeremiah and the difficulties they encountered.

List what you learned from marking *listen* and *rebellious*.

How do the difficulties these prophets faced challenge you with respect to the ministry God has given you as a member of the body of Christ?

Now determine the theme of Ezekiel 2 and record it on EZEKIEL AT A GLANCE in the appendix.

DAY FOUR

Let's pick up today where we left off yesterday in Ezekiel 3. We haven't asked you to mark references to *God* so far (sometimes there are just too many), but where you think they are significant, mark them. Some like to use a purple triangle shaded yellow for God the Father. You've already seen a couple of references to *the Spirit* so far, and now you'll see some more. You'll want to mark these in so you can come back later and list what you learn about the Spirit—what He does and how He operates.

Go back through Ezekiel 1:1-3 and 3:11 and mark the references to God.

Read Ezekiel 3:12-15, marking the key words from your bookmark. Note the location and the time phrase. As a general rule, we mark locations you can find on a map by double-underlining them in green.

What did you learn? Did you notice the reference to *the glory of the Lord*? This phrase appears early in the book and is worth marking. Go back to Ezekiel 1:28 and mark it there too.

 **DAY FIVE**

Today read Ezekiel 3:16-27 and mark the key words and phrases from your bookmark. Also mark *warn*, *wicked*, and *iniquity (sin)*, but don't add them to your bookmark.

List the watchman's responsibilities. What is he commanded to do and why? What are the consequences if he doesn't?

Read Genesis 9:5-6. How does this passage relate to Ezekiel 3?

Now read Acts 18:1-6 and 20:26-27. What do you think Paul was referring to in these passages? Do you see a connection with Ezekiel 3:17-21?

What two ways can men respond to the watchman's warning? What happens in each case? What happens to the watchman who does not warn a wicked man about his evil?

What does God tell Ezekiel to do in 3:22-27? Interrogate the text with the 5 W's and an H. Where does God command Ezekiel to go? What is Ezekiel to do? What does God tell him? What does Ezekiel see?

Think about these things and then record the theme of Ezekiel 3 on EZEKIEL AT A GLANCE.

 **DAY SIX**

Let's spend today thinking about application. It's not enough for us to observe and understand the message God gave Ezekiel; we need to apply these truths today to our lives.

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In fact, you can enhance your study by identifying lessons for life and recording them in a notebook, a journal, or the margin of your Bible.

So let's review Ezekiel 1. Ezekiel was a priest who didn't get to serve in the temple. How did he handle that? How did he respond to God's call on his life when it was different from what Moses' law said about the priesthood? What lesson can you learn for your life?

How serious is Ezekiel's calling, and how difficult will his mission be? Do you take God's call on your life as seriously?

When people reject God's Word—truth you've shared with them to help them avoid disaster—whom do they *ultimately* reject? How might this encourage you to persevere?

Do you see a parallel between the responsibilities of the watchman on the wall and evangelism today? If so, how does this motivate you to share the gospel?

Remember, all Christians are called to make disciples. Read Matthew 28:19-20 and meditate on it. Think about these things and go to the Father for strength to persevere in tough times. Ask Him to show you how to proceed in the environments He's placed you in.

DAY SEVEN



Store in your heart: Ezekiel 3:17

Read and discuss: Ezekiel 1-3

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

❖ Discuss the setting of Ezekiel 1-3. Who is king of Judah, and what is the historical context?

- ❖ Discuss the vision. Focus on what is clear. If you have unanswered questions, note them for further study and discussion in later lessons.
- ❖ Discuss the concept of the watchman on the wall as it applies to your life.
- ❖ What did you learn about the Lord's call on Ezekiel that you can apply to your life?
- ❖ What did you learn about speaking God's message?

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

God called Ezekiel to be a watchman on the wall for the sake of His people. In ancient times such watchmen were guards or lookouts whose primary duty was keeping watch for and on anyone approaching their city. Usually they merely reported what they saw, and other authorities decided what to do. For example, in 2 Samuel 18:24-27, a watchman on the roof of a gate reports what he sees to King David. And even the ruling king can't guarantee what's going to happen: according to Psalm 127:1, "Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain."

Ezekiel didn't stand watch on the physical wall of a physical city, but he performed the same duties. He watched for danger and reported it to God's people in exile. The danger is specific—when God declares that the wicked will die because of their iniquity, the watchman must warn the people.

God says that if the wicked turn from their wicked ways, they will live. But if Ezekiel fails to warn the wicked and they die in their sins, Ezekiel will be held guilty for their deaths. Although he does not personally kill them, his failure to warn them of the danger of persisting in wickedness is the same as killing them. Genesis 9:5-6 establishes the principle that God requires the life of those who kill a man, so this charge to

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Ezekiel is not a new idea. It's rooted in the fact that man's life is sacred because God created him in His own image.

The charge is also rooted in the holiness of God and the holiness of God's people as His reflection—they are to be holy as He is holy. Thus, when God's people are wicked, they give unbelievers an incorrect vision of God. God's covenant people are to worship Him, and worship is a matter of how they live. Our lives demonstrate our worship of God.

So Ezekiel's mission as watchman was serious—a life-and-death matter. The consequence for shirking his duty was also serious—he would be guilty of the death of those who died in their sins because he didn't warn them. But there was a flip side to this consequence that was equally important. If Ezekiel warned the wicked and they ignored him and died in their sins, he was free of guilt for their death.

This is important to us because we're watchmen. The parallel is evangelism, or sharing the gospel with the lost. In the book of Romans, Paul says all sinned in Adam, and the wages of sin is death. The free gift of God is eternal life. So how is sharing this message parallel to Ezekiel's duty as watchman? If there's a danger associated with rejecting the gospel and we don't share it, we're guilty. So far as *our* guilt is concerned, it doesn't matter how people respond. That's not the watchman's responsibility. If they don't listen to us, we're free from guilt if they die in their sins.

Should our message extend beyond preaching the gospel to the lost? After all, God's charge to Ezekiel included warning the righteous ones who turn from their righteousness. Do God's people sometimes fall into sin? What is our responsibility to them? They too need to be warned and turned back from their evil way. They risk loss of reward, and the watchman bears guilt for not warning them to turn back to righteous living.

What does Ezekiel's example mean for you? Are you a watchman? Should you be? What is God telling you?