

Old Testament Survey

Ezekiel

The Meaning of Ezekiel

Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens." It is a book which describes the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent restoration of a remnant.

General Outline of Ezekiel

- I. The Prophet's Call and Commission - Ezekiel 1:1-3:27
- II. Prophecies against Judah prior to the fall of Jerusalem - Ezekiel 4:1-24:27
 - A. Messages of the fifth year (593-592 B.C.) - Ezekiel 4:1-7:27
 - B. Messages of the sixth year (592-591 B.C.) - Ezekiel 8:1-19:14
 1. Vision of Jerusalem's idolatry and punishment - Ezekiel 8:1-11:25
 2. Punishment necessary because of its universal corruption - Ezekiel 12:1-19:14
 - C. Messages of the seventh year (591-590 B.C.) - Ezekiel 20:1-23:49
 1. Israel's ingratitude since the Exodus; Nebuchadnezzar to turn towards Jerusalem; no more Davidic kings until Christ - Ezekiel 20:1-21:32
 2. A catalogue of the sins of adulterous Samaria and Judah - Ezekiel 22:1-23:49
 - D. Message of the ninth year (589-598 B.C.) - Ezekiel 24:1-27
- III. Prophecies against the heathen nations - Ezekiel 25:1-32:32
 - A. Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia - Ezekiel 25:1-17
 - B. Tyre and Sidon, symbols of crass materialism - Ezekiel 26:1-38:26
 - C. Egypt, the symbol of self-confident idolatry - Ezekiel 29:1-32:32
- IV. Prophecies of reconstruction and restoration after the fall - Ezekiel 33:1-48:35
 - A. Stages of preparation for the new kingdom - Ezekiel 33:1-39:29
 1. Responsibility of the prophet and people, warning and purgation - Ezekiel 33:1-33
 2. False shepherds will give way to the true Shepherd - Ezekiel 34:1-31
 3. The return and revival of captive Israel, after Edom's destruction - Ezekiel 35:1-37:28
 4. Destruction of the godless nations (Gog and others) of the last days - Ezekiel 38:1-39:29
 - B. The final kingdom and latter-day temple - Ezekiel 40:1-48:35
 1. Millennial temple - Ezekiel 40:1-43:27
 2. Millennial worship - Ezekiel 44:1-46:24
 3. Millennial land and the river of blessing - Ezekiel 47:1-48:35

Biography of Ezekiel

1. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, came from a priestly family. Apparently he was of a high enough rank to be taken into captivity in 597 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar with other high-ranking Israelites.
2. Ezekiel settled in Babylon near the Grand Canal. He was called to be a prophet in the fifth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin when Ezekiel was about 30 years old.
3. Ezekiel's wife died in 587 B.C. at which time he was forbidden to mourn by God as a picture to Israel.

4. Ezekiel became a famous prophet during the captivity of Judah, and was often called upon by the elders and others in captivity for advice. He prophesied until the twenty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity, or 570 B.C.
5. Ezekiel's prophetic ministry was marked by the way in which he personally acted out the prophecies given to him by God.

Objections to Ezekiel's Genuineness

1. Ezekiel was considered by nearly all critics to be genuine until 1924 in which Gustav Hoelscher posited the theory that little of Ezekiel was genuine (143 out of 1273 verses).
2. In 1930, C. C. Torrey popularized the view that no part of Ezekiel was from the sixth century. He believed the earliest part was written around 230 B.C. and written in Jerusalem instead of Babylon. A later redactor put finishing touches on the book giving it the appearance of having been written in Babylon.
3. G. A. Cooke who wrote the ICC Commentary still believed in the genuineness of Ezekiel assigning most of the book to the historical prophet.
4. Current liberal scholarship assigns the book to an unknown author in Palestine who wrote it after the exile and return.
5. There are several lines of thought in denying the book to the sixth century prophet:
 - a. The same prophet that foretold gloom and doom could not be the same prophet that foretold blessing.

What kind of argument is this? The Old Testament is full of prophets who foretold gloom on one hand and deliverance and blessing on the other.

- b. The writer of Ezekiel betrays a Palestinian viewpoint, hardly the perspective of one living in Babylon.

One, there is no proof that Ezekiel did his prophetic performances in the view of Jerusalemites, but in fact he did them in the presence of Jews living in exile with him. In fact, many Jerusalemites would have been taken into captivity with Ezekiel, and it is in their presence that he enacted his prophecies.

- c. It is alleged that the author gives an eyewitness account of events in Jerusalem prior to its fall which would point to someone living in Jerusalem and not Babylon.

Two answers can be given to this objections. One, Ezekiel did live in Jerusalem during its last years and as such would be intimate with many events. Secondly, if one holds to a supernaturalistic view of Scripture, then the divine revelations received by Ezekiel (for example, the vision of the departing glory of God) pose no problem.

Ezekiel and the Priestly Code

1. The Wellhausen school postulated that Ezekiel laid the foundation for the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26), the P document that underlies Leviticus. Ezekiel was seen to be contradictory with the priestly code, especially when comparing Ezekiel 40-48 with Leviticus. In answer to this, the following points are offered:

- a. The temple as seen in Ezekiel 40-48 refers to the Millennial temple, and not to a temple which should exist in Ezekiel's time. In fact, some Jewish rabbis questioned the canonicity of Ezekiel over this issue.
 - b. The post-exilic origin of Ezekiel does not furnish a good explanation for the divergence of Ezekiel 40-48 with Leviticus. Ezekiel differs as much from D and H as it does from P. For example, Ezekiel omits any reference to tithes, the feast of Pentecost, and other issues found in Leviticus.
 - c. The dimensions of the temple in Ezekiel 40-48 differ from both the Tabernacle and Solomon's temple. If this points (the fact that Ezekiel is different than the Levitical and the Solomonic temple dimensions) to an earlier authorship for Ezekiel compared to the priestly code, then Ezekiel must predate Solomon's temple as well.
 - d. Ezekiel's apportionment of the land as found in Ezekiel 40-48 must refer to a future apportionment and not one near to Ezekiel's time.
2. The line of reasoning which wants to make Ezekiel predate the Holiness Code and the P document rests upon faulty reasoning. It is a house of cards which cannot stand.

The Fulfillment of Ezekiel 40-48

1. Ezekiel 40-48 picture a temple and a land markedly different than that of Ezekiel's time and in fact different than any other time in Israel's history. If the predictions regarding Tyre and Sidon earlier on will be fulfilled literally, then how should we look at Ezekiel 40-48?
2. Two major lines of reasoning regarding these chapters exist:
 - a. The predictions are spiritually fulfilled in the New Testament Church.
 - 1). This viewpoint is widely held by many Orthodox scholars.
 - 2). The blood-sacrifices mentioned in Ezekiel 40-48 cannot fit very well into a post-Calvary economy. Additionally, Hebrews 9-10 makes it very clear that Christ's sacrifice was a once-for-all sacrifice thus eliminating the need for animal sacrifices.

However, if the sacrifices serve as memorials, then this is no problem at all!
 - 3). Nevertheless, there are major problems with this viewpoint. The passage here in Ezekiel is very specific, leaving the reader the distinct impression that these predictions are to be fulfilled literally. Additionally, it is difficult to fit the preciseness of these predictions alongside Revelation 21-22 in which we are explicitly told that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem. Equating the river mentions in Ezekiel 47:1 with the one in Revelation 22:1 is problematic as well, one flows out from under the temple, and the other flows out from under the throne of God.
 - 4). Those who do hold that the New Testament church is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's Temple are hesitant to say that the Church is what Ezekiel had in mind here.
 - b. The predictions should be taken literally and in fact point to a future, Millennial temple.

- 1). There is nothing in these predictions to lead one to see them figuratively. They are way too literal.
- 2). The clear and literal interpretation of Scripture leads one to understand that there is coming a future Millennium in which God's promises to Israel will be literally fulfilled.