

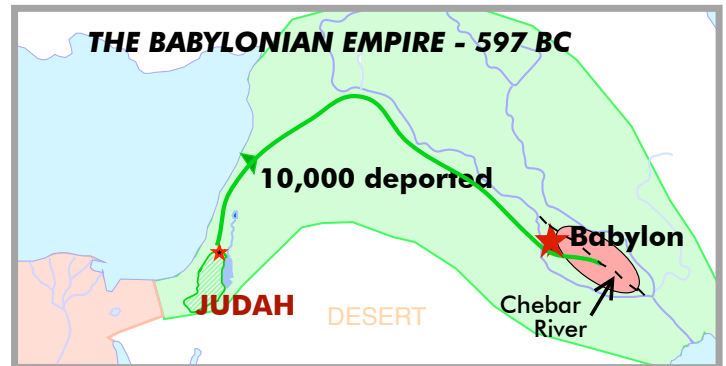
Before starting this lesson, read at least **Ezekiel, chapters 1-6, 8, 22, 26, 28, 35-37**. If possible read the whole book. You may find it helpful to read just the minimum chapters, go thru the lesson and then read the whole book. You will discover what works best for you.

The book of Ezekiel is written in the unique Jewish style of Revelation and parts of Daniel. It uses picture language to give most of its teaching. This lesson will explain some of those pictures.

Historically, the book takes place during the rise of the Babylonian empire. It covers some of the same time period as Jeremiah, but from a different perspective. According to 1:3, Ezekiel lives in Babylon, sometimes called Chaldea.

He was taken by Nebuchadnezzar in the 2nd exile along with the immediate royal family and 10,000 of the middle class people. Once they arrived in Babylonia, they formed their own communities along the Euphrates River, with Jewish economic, civil and religious programs. They were completely free to build their own homes, plant fields and start businesses. The only thing they could not do is return to their nation of Judah.

Ezekiel and his wife settle in a community about 50 miles south of Babylon, the capital. It is on the banks of a man-made canal used to irrigate the plain between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. The Bible refers to this canal as the Chebar or Kebar River. It is 120 miles long. Eleven years after their arrival, his wife dies (581 BC).



God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet. According to 2:3 God is sending him to the Israelites. At this point in Jewish history, the nation of Judah is also called Israel. The northern nation, that had been called Israel, has been off the map for over 100 years. It will never return as a group to be a separate nation. Never again will there be two nations. God wants to focus on the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and *David* – that it has not been destroyed. It is the line that continues the most important part of the Jewish people – it is the family line of Jesus.

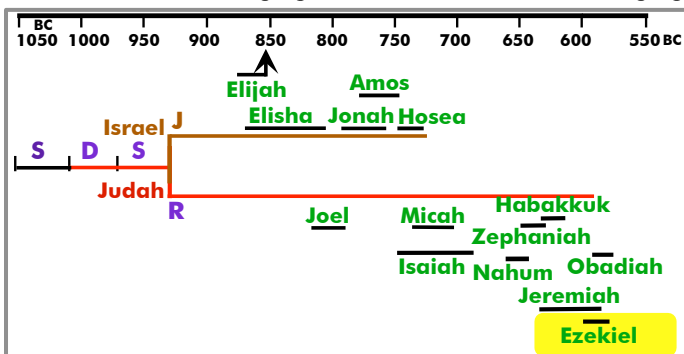
So when God tells Ezekiel to go to the Israelites, it means he is to be a prophet to those who are exiled with him in Babylon. Like with Jeremiah, God tells him it will not be easy.

And whether they listen or fail to listen - for they are rebellious house - they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, tho briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, tho they are a rebellious house. 2:5-6

This is picture language to say the exiles will be like thorns, briars and scorpions. Their words will be sharp, stinging and destructive. But God will give Ezekiel strength, so their words will not discourage or destroy him.

From the dates in the book, we know Ezekiel is a prophet in Babylon for at least 22 years, from 592 to 570 BC.

As we have studied the prophets, we have seen God sent 5 prophets to the northern nation of Israel



Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos and Hosea

In the southern nation of Judah, the first prophet was **Joel**. He was a contemporary of Elisha.

The next prophets were **Micah** and **Isaiah** – contemporaries of Hosea.

After them were a series of contemporary prophets.

Ezekiel, the prophet we are studying in this lesson, was a baby when **Zephaniah** finished his ministry. He knew **Habakkuk** as a child or youth. He was a contemporary with **Jeremiah, Obadiah** and **Daniel**.

Jewish tradition says Ezekiel was killed in Babylon by Jews who resented his message against idolatry.
In many ways the lives of **Ezekiel** and **Jeremiah** were similar.

Both were from the Levite priestly line and called as prophets to God's people - Jeremiah in Judah and Ezekiel in Babylon.
Both were promised God's encouragement and strength because the people would not listen.
Both were killed by Jews who resented their warnings against idolatry.

Ezekiel's **PURPOSE**, in the book, is **to reveal God**.

He wants the exiles to focus on 2 concepts about God - **God's glory** and **God's character**.
He does this with picture language and repeated phrases.

Over 200 times God is referred to as **Sovereign LORD** or **Lord GOD**, depending on your translation. 13:9

He uses this name to show God's **supremacy**; His **transcendence**.

To use terms of today, Ezekiel is showing that **God belongs on a pedestal**.

God is greater than anyone or anything else.

Sovereign – Hebrew, *Adonai* is from root word meaning, *sovereign, one who controls*

LORD – Hebrew, *Yahweh*

In contrast, more than 90 times, Ezekiel is called **son of man or son of dust**.

Ezekiel's humanity is contrasted with God's deity.

His mortality is contrasted with God's eternity.

Ezekiel could not show a greater difference than between the dust of man and the sovereignty of God.

Eighteen times Ezekiel writes about **God's glory**.

The Jews referred to it as the *Shechinah* glory. It was God's **visible** presence, seen in fire, cloud or bright light.

In chapter 1, God's visible presence appears in Babylon.

In chapters 4-24, it departs from Jerusalem.

In chapters 40-48, God's visible glory will return to Jerusalem sometime in the future.

Another phrase is used over 70 times. **Then they will know that I am the LORD**.

This phrase ties the book together.

OUTLINE

Others will know that **He is God**...

...by His judgment on Jerusalem chapters 1-24

...by His judgment on nations chapters 25-32

...by His restoration of the Jews chapters 33-48

Thinking Jewish is essential for this book.

A lot of the chapters are about Ezekiel's **visions**. To our western minds, they sound pretty far out. The word *vision* in today's English, has ideas connected with it, that were not a part of the Hebrew word. Our word, *dream*, would be more accurate.

Things that happen in our dreams are never meant to be literal – they are not possible in real life. Often they are symbols or pictures to help us better understand ourselves or a situation. In the Old Testament, God sometimes used dreams to reveal unknown truth to His prophets, so they could write it down to become revealed truth in Scripture.

Jewish thinking in the Old Testament had some unusual ideas about God.

Like us, they believed God was everywhere.

But unlike us, they believed God could only be *worshipped* in Jerusalem at the Temple. Their reasoning?

The Temple was where God lived – where His visible presence was. It was called the house of God.

To put it more simply, the Jews believed a holy God could only be worshipped inside the Holy Land.

The Jews also believed a Holy God could only answer prayer and use His people inside the Holy Land.

With this information, let's look at the life of Ezekiel.

His father had been a priest in the Jerusalem temple. Growing up, Ezekiel looked forward to the time he could begin his training and become a priest. It was his lifelong dream.

God's rules, given at the time of Moses, said he could start training at twenty-five. At thirty, he would be qualified to begin his ministry as priest. By his teens, he was already counting the years. By his early 20's, he could hardly wait. Then finally the time came - he was 25. His training could begin.

But just before he started, Nebuchadnezzar had come to Jerusalem with his army. Ezekiel had been part of the thousands that were exiled to Babylon.

As the book opens, Ezekiel is 30 years old. He has been in Babylon for the last five years. He is now the age when he would be qualified to begin his ministry as priest in the Jerusalem Temple. Instead, he is 600 miles away, with no training and no hope of ever returning to get the training. The very year when he thought his dreams would be fulfilled is now the year of broken dreams.

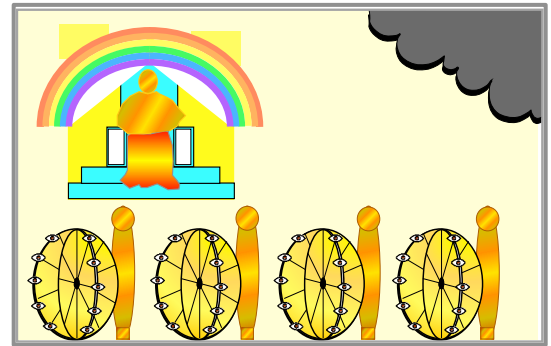
Discouraged and with a heavy heart he goes to the river bank. It was where Jews went to pray when there was no established place of worship. Ezekiel has so many questions and doubts.

God, why did You let this happen? I wanted to be a priest and lead others in worship. But now, that will never be possible. You can never use me. Why am I here in exile, while priests who have rejected You are still in Jerusalem? My life no longer has meaning or purpose.

In the midst of all these thoughts, Ezekiel has his first dream from God. Now remember, dreams are picture language. They are not to be taken literally.

According to chapter 1, he sees a windstorm, a cloud with lightning and a bright light. In that light are 4 angels called *living creatures*. There is a wheel beside each of them. Each wheel has 2 parts. One wheel is placed inside and at right angles with the other, so it can go forward or backward in any direction. The rims around the wheels have eyes in them.

Above these 4 angels and wheels, is a clear sky and a throne. On the throne, is a form of a person, but he can only be described in terms of fire and brightness. Above the throne and person is a rainbow.



This is picture language. Being Jewish, Ezekiel knows immediately – this is a picture of God. Each picture reveals a different parts of His character.

The **storm and lightning** is a picture of God's **power**.

The **angels**, called *cherubim*, represent God's **presence**, His **deity** and **glory**.

The **wheels** going in any direction show God is **omnipresent**. He is not limited to 1 location; He is everywhere.

The **eyes** on the wheels speak of His **omniscience** - He sees and knows everything.

The **fire** - God's **holiness**, **purity**, and **glory**.

The **rainbow** is a symbol of His **mercy** and **faithfulness** - His **love** and **grace**.

Thru this dream, God is saying,

Ezekiel, you think I am far away in Jerusalem and you are all alone. But I am not limited to My temple in Jerusalem. I am also here in Babylon. You can worship Me here. And I want to use you here – You cannot be priest, since the animal sacrifices and ceremonies can only be done in Jerusalem at the Temple. I am changing your ministry, to use you as prophet. I want you to give My message to the exiles around you.

What is so amazing is that in this dream Ezekiel gets to see God's visible presence - the Shechinah glory that was above the ark in the Most Holy Place of the Jerusalem Temple. If he had served as priest in the Temple all his life, he would never have seen that glory, because the regular priests could not go into that inner room.

Only the high priest was allowed to enter on the Day of Atonement - Yom Kippur. And then, only once a year. The high priest was the only one who ever saw God's visible presence, the Shechinah glory.

But now, when Ezekiel is at his lowest point – when he is sure his life has no purpose, he experiences more of God in Babylon than he ever would have in Jerusalem. Once he sees God in His glory and greatness, Ezekiel's whole perspective changes. His life is never the same. He spends the next 22 years revealing God to his people. He knows, if they could get a greater concept of God, **their** lives could change.

Ezekiel and the exiles live in Babylon.

In chapters 1-24, he tells them **what is going on in Jerusalem**. He does this for 2 reasons.

The first is to **correct what their false prophets in Babylon are saying**.

Four years earlier, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. He told the exiles to buy land, build homes and raise crops because they would be there for 70 years. False prophets are now saying, *Things are improving in Jerusalem. Within 2 years we will be going back and be a nation once again.*

The exiles do not know whom to believe - Jeremiah, the prophet in Jerusalem, or the prophets there in Babylon. Thru dreams, God shows Ezekiel what is happening in Jerusalem. He can say with certainty, *things are getting worse, not better. Listen to Jeremiah – he is God’s true prophet.*

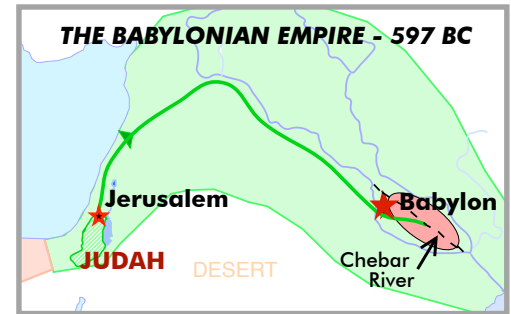
The second reason for giving details of Jerusalem is to **correct what the wicked Jews in Jerusalem are saying.**

In letters to the exiles, the Jews have said,

God let us stay because of our goodness. God sent all of you into exile because you were so sinful. And now you are really in trouble. Without the Temple, there is no way you can worship God or pray. God cannot hear you.

Son of man, your brothers - your brothers who are your blood relatives and the whole house of Israel, all the Jews living around you, are those of whom the people of Jerusalem have said, they are far away from the Lord. This land was given to us as OUR possession. 11:15

The exiles feel hopeless and helpless. Ezekiel tells them, *This is not true. The Jews in Jerusalem are not holy. In fact, their disobedience is so bad, that God’s visible presence is leaving both the temple and city. But God’s presence is with us in Babylon. I saw it with my own eyes. If you want to pray and worship God, you can be sure God will hear you - even without the Temple.*



Other evil Jews in Jerusalem have been bragging in their letters - they had created places God cannot see. So they can do anything they want and get away with it. The exiles feel betrayed. How could God be fair to see their sin and send them into exile and be blind to the actions of the Jews still in Jerusalem?

Ezekiel assures the exiles God is fully aware of what is going on. As proof, he tells them what God showed him in dreams about Jerusalem.

God then brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord and there at the entrance to the temple, between the porch and the altar were about 25 men with the backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east; they were bowing down to the sun in the east. 8:16

To get the full significance, we need to remember the priests always entered the inside courtyard of the Temple, on the eastern side. They faced west to see the altar on which the animal sacrifices were offered. They faced west to see the Temple itself with the two rooms, called the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

The 25 men in verse 16 are the 24 levite priests on duty plus the high priest. But instead of facing west to offer the morning sacrifice and worship God, they are literally turning their backs on God and facing east to worship the rising sun. The spiritual leaders of God’s people have rejected God.

This is the sin God sees in the **temple** area - by Jewish leaders. But this is not the only sin.

There is sin throughout all Jerusalem.

This is what the sovereign Lord says, O city that brings on herself doom by shedding blood in her midst and defiles herself by making idols. 22:3

In you, the city of Jerusalem, they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the widow. 22:7

In you one man commits a detestable offense with his neighbor’s wife, another shamefully defiles his daughter-in-law, another violates his sister, his own father’s daughter. 22:11

Murder, idolatry, inhumanity, and immorality. God sees the sin in Jerusalem.

As Ezekiel describes the actions of the Jews in Jerusalem, the attitude of the exiles changes from despair to pride.

They respond, *Wow, look how bad they are and how good we are. We would never do that!* So Ezekiel begins to tell them the sin that God sees in their lives

Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of Me at all? 14:3

The sin of the exile leaders is not worship of physical idols, but worship of self. God calls it, *idols in their hearts*. The leaders had first asked the false prophets if certain things were right or wrong. Now they have come to Ezekiel to hear what he has to say.

By their actions they are saying, *we will listen to both sides. But in the end, we will decide what is right and wrong - what we can and cannot do. We are going to set the boundaries.*

Their **pride** and **self will** is idolatry of self. God says, *why should I even let them inquire of Me? They have no intention of obeying.*

God tells Ezekiel, *My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.* 33:31-32

The people say they love to hear Ezekiel's teaching. But what they love is to be entertained. They enjoy his eloquence, his delivery and picture language. However, they have no intention of obeying or even learning **how** to obey. They are guilty of **self will, arrogance** and **hypocrisy**.

God's people in Jerusalem have **obvious, outward** sin. God's people in Babylon, have **secret, inward** sin. God sees both. He has been fair in sending the one group into exile. He will be fair when He sends the others into exile and allows the city and Temple to be destroyed.

The exiles cannot believe God would ever let that happen. They respond in one of 3 ways.

Some of the exiles quote a Jewish proverb,

*The days go by and every dream comes to nothing, meaning, that will **never** happen.* 12:22

Others are saying,

Oh, his dreams will come true, but certainly not in our lifetime.

The visions he sees are for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future. 12:27

A 3rd group says,

This will happen and in our lifetime, but it is not fair. God is punishing us as individuals for the evil of our leaders over the last 100 years. 18:1, 25, 29

In previous chapters, Ezekiel had made it clear it was because of their leaders' actions that God would send them into exile and destroy the city and Temple. The people said that was unfair. Why should God punish them for what their leaders did.

So Ezekiel uses chapter 18 to explain about God's fairness.

God works with nations on the basis of the **leaders'** choices.

Therefore the people will go into exile

But God also works with individuals, based on **their** choices.

So once they are in exile, everything that happens to them will be the result of their own choice. In the past, they as individuals had been defiant. If they continue to be defiant, they will die prematurely for their own rebellion. But if they repent and obey God, they as individuals can experience God's blessings, even in exile.

Chapters 1-24 - Ezekiel tells the exiles about **God's judgment on Jerusalem**.

Chapters 25-32 - he tells them about **God's judgment on the surrounding nations**.

It includes Amon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Egypt and the city states of Tyre and Sidon. What Ezekiel says about Edom in chapter 35, is the same as what Obadiah said in his book.

Chapter 26 is about **Tyre** - a city state along the Mediterranean seacoast - northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Like the other books of the prophets, Ezekiel's predictions have double meaning.

Some of the verses describe the attack of **Nebuchadnezzar**.

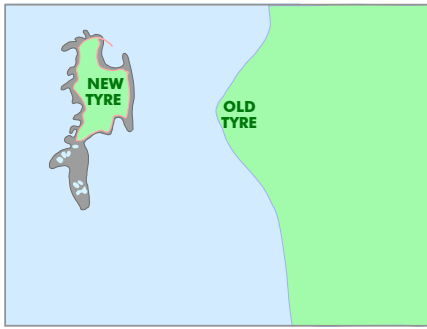
Other verses refer to **Alexander the Great**, some 200 years later.

Let's look at an example of each.

Chapter 26:7-8.

For this is what the sovereign Lord says; from the north I am going to bring against Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; king of kings, with horses and chariots; with horsemen and a great army. He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you; build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you...





Verse 11 *The hoofs of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword and your strong pillars, leaders, will fall to the ground.*

The siege started in 585 BC and lasted over a 13 year period, 585-573. During that time, some of the people moved to an island one-half mile west of the seacoast. They built another city on the island with a secure wall. They took the treasures of the city to the island city.

Altho Nebuchadnezzar finally conquered and destroyed their city on the mainland, he never made any attempt to conquer the island. The people called their island, New Tyre. After Nebuchadnezzar left and enough time passed, the people felt secure and rebuilt on the mainland. However they also kept their island city.

Over 200 years go by. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great comes with his Greek armies and takes control of the coastline. He decides not only to conquer the people on the mainland of Tyre, but also to take the treasure on the island - in New Tyre. This is described in 26:4



They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock.

Verse 12 *They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea.*

Alexander the Great used the stone, wood and dust from old Tyre to build a solid walkway one-half mile out to the island in order to conquer New Tyre. He destroyed both the old and new cities. Because he had scraped the soil from the mainland, there was only exposed rock. In verse 14, God says,

I will make you a bare rock and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord.

After Alexander the Great, Tyre was rebuilt. Today there is a modern town known as Sur or Tyre, BUT, it is located on the north part of the peninsula. There is also a small fishing village. At the original site of old Tyre on the mainland, fishermen dry their nets on the bare rock. The place where old Tyre used to be has never been rebuilt. God thru Ezekiel told about it and over the last 2500 years it has happened as God said. The historical and geographical predictions that have been fulfilled are some of the greatest proof that Scripture is the Word of the Lord. It is God's Word!

Chapter 28 continues talking about Tyre and its king. During this time in history, their king is worshipped as a god. This idea came from Satan. So these verses not only talk about the king but also Satan's influence on the king. In addition, verses 12-17 are giving details about Satan himself and his beginning.

Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, you were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you;....verse 14 You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Thru your widespread trade you were filled with violence and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mountain of God and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. 28:12-17

According to verse 12, these verses are talking about the king of Tyre. But typical of the prophets' writing style, there is double or dual meaning. The verses are not just talking about a king, but also about an angel. When we combine these verses with Isaiah 14, we believe they are telling us about the origin of Satan and of sin.

He began as a perfect angel – as one of the cherubim. His name was Lucifer, meaning *the one who bears light*. He was head over all the other angels and known for his beauty and wisdom. But then in pride, he chose to rebel against God. He wanted to be God. This made him God's adversary. It became his name - *Satan* - a word which means *adversary*. As a result, God expelled him from heaven.

In chapters 33-48, Ezekiel tells the exiles about **God's restoration of the Jews**

Over a long period of time, God will bring about specific events that involve the Jews as a people and nation. They will lead to the return of Jesus to set up His kingdom.

Thru picture language, Ezekiel says God will put the nation of Israel back on the map. This happened in May, 1948.

Then He will physically bring back the **Jews** to the land.

Today there are Jews from over 160 nations who have returned to live in the land of Israel. Every year, more and more Jews are returning. God reveals this to Ezekiel in the dream of the dry bones coming together, with flesh and skin forming over them. It was a picture of the Jews' **physical** return to the land.

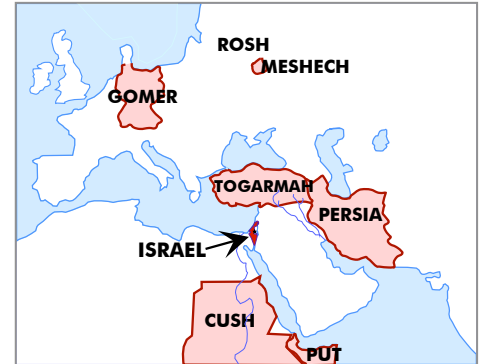
But the bones needed to have life or breath put into them.

This is a picture of the Jews' **spiritual** restoration, when as a *nation*, they put their faith in Jesus, their Messiah. As yet this has not happened.

One of the ways God will begin the **spiritual** restoration is thru a war.

According to Ezekiel 38 and 39, sometime in the future, Israel will be attacked by enemies called Gog, Magog and her allies. Using today's names and concepts, a leader of Russia will head up an army of Muslim soldiers from Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Armenia and Germany. He will use their desire of Jihad to accomplish his purpose of taking control of Israel's land.

But as soon as the army begins their attack, God will miraculously intervene and destroy them. It will be so absolutely amazing and unbelievable, that according to 38:23 and 39:22, other nations as well as Israel will know and recognize that the LORD is God. This will be one of the first, in a series of events that eventually brings the Jews to national conversion.



After Israel's national repentance and conversion, she will ask Jesus to return and set up His kingdom. It is this request that brings about His return to this earth.

Since the Jews would have questions about this kingdom, Ezekiel describes the future temple and what life will be like. The information is based on what God shows him in other dreams. These are chapters 40-48.

According to the New Testament, we also will have a part in this kingdom. We will experience the answer to our prayer, *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it already is being done in heaven.*

In this book, Ezekiel wants the exiles to focus on 2 concepts about God

God's glory and **God's character.**

God's glory (visible presence) leaves Jerusalem because of the **Jews'** disobedience. (The Shechinah glory) 1 - 24

God's glory (visible presence) will return because of **God's** mercy. 40 - 48

The book of Ezekiel is very Jewish but there are lessons for our lives as well.

The decisions of local, national and world leaders today affect our lives. Many times there are consequences that we have to suffer. If as individuals, we choose to obey, God will bring blessing into our lives. This does not mean or guarantee we will be rich and comfortable, free from suffering. What it does mean is that God will give us what we need at the moment. Always remember, God's greatest blessings for the Church, the Body of Christ, today are not physical. They are spiritual blessings – His strength, His wisdom, grace and comfort. We will have an awareness of His presence.

A second lesson is from Ezekiel's personal life and his ruined plans.

All of us start out in life with dreams and goals. As they are fulfilled, we develop new dreams and plans for our later years – our *golden years*, as they are called. But often, when we least expect it, something happens to shatter our dreams. It may be a death, a broken relationship, a divorce, a loss of health or finances.

If we have been obeying God, it does not make sense. Obedience is supposed to bring blessing.

If we have been involved in ministry, it is even more devastating if we lose our ministry. We can feel useless, without purpose or meaning in life.

The first thing God wants us to do is turn our focus on Him - to have a greater concept of His greatness, His power, goodness, love and grace. He wants us to know that even if we do not sense His presence, He **is** with us in our situation. Like Ezekiel, it is possible for us to experience even more of God in the place where He puts us now, that we ever did in the past. Because of who God is, He can take all our disappointments, losses and failures and from them bring new opportunities, new blessings and new ministry.

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise Psa. 145:3. **Praise Him for His surpassing greatness.** Psa. 150:2.