

Ezekiel (October 26)

Reading Ezekiel

The workman's trowel slathers mortar across the face of a mud brick. The trowel clinks and scrapes the excess from the brick's edges. Brick by brick, the workman slowly raises the walls of a new home. When he pauses for a drink, he stares westward, away from the village. Babylon's horizon appears as flat as a brick. He thinks of Judah's distant hills, the walls of stone his family raised there. Then he remembers how the walls toppled, the beams burned, and the people fled. He wonders if they will ever be restored.

From the plains of Babylon, the priest Ezekiel looked back upon the defeat of Judah and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. He explained to the exiled Judeans that God's glory had departed from them because they had abandoned him. But the Lord also showed Ezekiel a new day when his glory would return and the kingdom would become an everlasting blessing to the nations.

Author and Date

What is known of Ezekiel is derived solely from the book that bears his name. He was among the Jews exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC, and there among the exiles he received his call to become a prophet. He was married, lived in a house of his own, and, along with his fellow exiles, had a relatively free existence. More than any other prophet he was directed to involve himself personally in the divine word by acting it out in prophetic symbolism.

Since the book of Ezekiel contains more dates than any other Old Testament prophetic book, its prophecies can be dated with considerable precision. Having received his call in July, 593 BC, Ezekiel was active for 22 years, with his last dated oracle being received in April, 571. His period of activity coincides with Israel's darkest hour, preceding the 586 destruction of the temple by 7 years and following it by 15.

Themes

The Old Testament in general and the prophets in particular presuppose and teach God's control of all creation, of people and nations and the course of history. And nowhere in the bible are God's initiative and control expressed more clearly and pervasively than in the book of Ezekiel. From the first chapter, which graphically describes the overwhelming invasion of the divine presence into Ezekiel's world, to the last phrase of Ezekiel's vision, the book sounds and echoes God's direction of events in heaven and on earth.

God's total power is evident in his mobility. He is not limited to the temple in Jerusalem. He can respond to his people's sin by leaving his sanctuary in Israel, and he can graciously condescend to visit his exiled children in Babylon. As God's spokesman, Ezekiel's "son of man" status testifies to the exalted God he was commissioned to serve.

Blessings for Readers

Despite the challenges in understanding and applying the book of Ezekiel, one may give thanks to God for this remarkable prophecy. Ezekiel provides important insights on the doctrine of repentance, the promise of salvation God revealed in the new covenant, a prophecy of holy baptism, and God's goal for a united and holy people among whom his glory would dwell. Ezekiel beautifully describes the coming of God's Messiah, the Prince of David who will shepherd God's people.

As you read Ezekiel's condemnations of Israel, Judah, and the nations, look also for these bright and glorious beams of hope that stream from God's heavenly throne and promise new life. The Lord – our shepherd and holy refuge – will grant you greater appreciation for his patience and a vision of heavenly bliss.