

## INTERPRETING APOCALYPTIC: Ezekiel and His Strange Visions

### Author

The book was authored by the prophet Ezekiel, whose name means \_\_\_\_\_ . “God strengthened Ezekiel so he could deliver God’s tough word to a tough crowd” (John Day, p. 23).

### Date of Writing

Ezekiel began his ministry in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile or 593 B.C. His last dated prophecy was in \_\_\_\_\_ B.C.

### Historical Setting

Ezekiel, the son of a Zadokite priest, was deported to Babylon with king Jehoiachin and ten thousand other captives in \_\_\_\_\_ B.C. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of three captivities to Babylon. He lived in Babylonia among a colony of Jews at a place called Tel-abib, located \_\_\_\_\_ miles south of Babylon.

From 593 to 586 B.C. Ezekiel's ministry consisted primarily of preaching \_\_\_\_\_ against Judah. After the fall of Jerusalem, he ministered \_\_\_\_\_, predicting the future restoration of the nation with its temple.

### Purpose

The prophecy of Ezekiel was intended to show that Jerusalem's destruction was on account of the sins of the nation.

This discipline was designed to bring them to the knowledge that \_\_\_\_\_ (6:7,10,13). The prophecy also intended to comfort the exiles with God's promise of future restoration and blessing.

### Theme

The theme of Ezekiel is the destruction and future restoration of Jerusalem and the \_\_\_\_\_.

### Theology

Ezekiel makes a distinctive contribution to theology by emphasizing the \_\_\_\_\_ of Yahweh. The vision which introduces Ezekiel's call left him with an abiding sense of God's glory (1:28, 3:23, 8:4, 10:4, 11:22).

## Ezekiel

Ezekiel is called "Son of Man" 93 times.

Ezekiel is appointed a "watchman" for the house of Israel.

Ezekiel is commanded to "eat" the scroll" which contains God's message (3:1-4).

Ezekiel is given some unusual physical limitations (3:24-26):

### I. THE CALL AND COMMISSIONING OF EZEKIEL 1-3

#### A. The Setting of the Vision 1:1-3

1. Ezekiel was 30 yrs. old 1a
2. Ezekiel was among the exiles in Babylon 1b
3. Ezekiel's vision took place on Tammuz (June-July) 5, 593

Jehoiachin, Ezekiel and 10,000 Judeans were taken to Babylon in 597.  
The "fifth" year of captivity = 593.

4. Ezekiel was priest and prophet for the Lord 3

#### B. The Vision of Ezekiel 1:4-28

1. A storm cloud is approaching 4
2. Ezekiel saw four living creatures 5-14
3. Ezekiel saw four wheels 15-21
4. Ezekiel saw a great expanse over the creatures 22-25
5. Ezekiel then saw an enthroned divine Being 26-28

## C. The Interpretation of the Vision

Before reading on, what is your interpretation of Ezekiel's vision? Do you have some initial ideas or suggestions?

The mystical approach: The *Merkabah* – chariot of God

The lack of consensus:

### Understanding Apocalyptic Literature

What is apocalyptic literature?

The term, "apocalyptic," is derived from the Greek word, *apokalypsis* (Rev. 1:1) which means "uncovering" or "revelation."

Apocalyptic literature is "symbolic, visionary, prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological" ("Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968, p. 45).

So defined, apocalyptic literature in Scripture includes Ezekiel 1:1-28, 37:1-14, 40-48, Daniel 2,7,8, 10-12, Zechariah 1:7-6:8 and Revelation.

#### The Background

The literary form of Apocalyptic literature arose out of the Mesopotamian dream visions which frequently appear in ancient near eastern documents dating from the 7-6 centuries B.C.

#### The Major Elements

Apocalyptic or dream vision materials customarily include three major elements: (1) the description of the setting, (2) the record of the vision, and (3) the interpretation of the vision. See Rev. 1:1-20

#### The Interpretation

1. Normal, grammatical-historical interpretation should be followed.

2. Look for the interpretation provided by the interpreting angel or the explanation provided in the text (Zech. 1:9,13,14, 2:3, 4:1,5, 5:5,10, 6:4).
3. Do not add to the interpretation given by the divine interpreter.
4. Do not seek to interpret the minute details of the vision. The fact that the horse is "red" and the trees are "myrtle" (Zech. 1:8) does not appear to have any significance other than contributing to the reality and vividness of the vision.
5. The only exception to the latter two interpretive guidelines might be when one is confronted with a symbol which has revelatory significance on the basis of antecedent theology or analogy of Scripture.

When making such exceptions, caution and restraint must be diligently applied. Excess and speculation must be avoided.

Resources:

Alexander, Ralph H. "Hermeneutics of Apocalyptic Literature."

Baldwin, Joyce. Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary, pp. 46-59.

Russell, D. S. The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic (1964). Ward Gasque calls this "the most important recent study of the subject."

An Illustration of how Apocalyptic works: "Winken, Blynken, and Nod" by Eugene Field

Applying the principles to Ezekiel's Vision

1. Use normal, grammatical interpretation.
2. Look for the interpretation provided for us in the text.
3. Don't add to the interpretation of the divine interpreter.
4. Don't seek to interpret the minute details.
5. *We may be more accurate when we say less.* (Laney)

So now what is your interpretation of Ezekiel's vision?

What interpretation is found in this text?

How did God intend for Ezekiel to respond to this unusual vision?

How should we respond to Ezekiel's vision?

Another Example: Revelation 1

- I. The Description of the Setting (Rev. 1:1-11)
  - A. Date of the vision--"the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10)
  - B. Recipient of the vision--"John" (Rev. 1:10)
    - C. Place of the vision--"Patmos" (Rev. 1:9)
    - D. Noteworthy circumstances (Rev. 1:1-11)
- II. The Record of the Vision--"I saw" (Rev. 1:12-17)
- III. The Interpretation of the Vision (Rev. 1:18-20)

Christ Himself interprets the vision, identifying the significant elements.

Seven stars = angels (*aggeloi*) 20a

Seven lampstands = the seven congregations (*ekkllesiaon*) 20b

Are we tempted to add more to the interpretation?

Could be said. But are we confident that God intended more than what we are told in the interpretation?