

EZEKIEL

Interpretive Key: The book of Ezekiel contains lots of visions. Ezekiel is attempting to use human words to describe apocalyptic visions of things humans have never seen. Therefore, naturally, they are hard to explain and hard for readers to understand. But that is okay. Just behold how transcendent our God is. Ezekiel also contains lots of oracles (a pronouncement from God through a prophet). Most oracles are initiated by Ezekiel saying “The word of the Lord came to me” (over 50x), and concluded by him saying “they shall know that I am the Lord (over 50x). Pay attention to when the oracles begin and end, and note that most of them will use imagery, poetry, and illustrations to communicate a message of judgement or a message of blessing.

Timeline: Ezekiel was among the first group of Jews that were captured and exiled to Babylon (around 598 B.C.). The siege and final destruction of Jerusalem officially culminated in 586 B.C. Ezekiel 1:1 picks up 5 years after he had been exiled (around 593 B.C) with Ezekiel in an Israelite refugee camp in Babylon. Ezekiel’s life would have overlapped with Jeremiah, and he clearly is aware of Jeremiah’s writings. But there is no evidence that they ever met.

Key Themes: The Holiness and Supremacy of God: Ezekiel writes to counter the popular assumption of the day that military victory was directly related to the strength of a nation’s gods. Thus Ezekiel shows that Israel is defeated and exiled, not because their God is weak, but rather because He is holy and punishing His people for their sin. Ezekiel defends the holiness, supremacy and reputation of God who is God over all peoples, nations, and idols.

Judgement of God’s people and the Nations: Chapters 12-24 uses poems, illustrations, and metaphors to communicate the depth of Israel’s sin. They have broken the covenant, they deserve the judgement they are getting, and the nations are God’s instrument of judgement. Then in chapters 25-32 the focus shifts to the judgement that is coming to the nations. God is not just the God of Israel; He is the God of all creation. Everyone will have to give an account to Him.

Hope for Restoration: Despite Israel’s sin, covenant infidelity, and exile, God’s mercy and faithfulness never end. After exile Israel has hope for a new heart that can actually obey the Lord (36). Even though the nation of Israel is dead, both physically and spiritually, the Spirit of God will breathe life into their dry bones and recreate a new people (37, which is reminiscent of Genesis 2 and foreshadows how one is born again (John 3)). And the temple will be rebuilt and the glory of the Lord will return! But this time, the glory will not stay in the temple. God’s glory will cover the earth and He will make all things new for all nations to enjoy a new eden (40-48).

HOSEA

Timeline: Hosea lived in the northern kingdom about 200 years after they broke off from Judah (930 B.C). He prophesied while Jeroboam II reigned, right before the Assyrians conquered them in 722 B.C. The book covers about 25 years.

Main Theme: Spiritual Adultery and the Lord's Compassion: Gomer's serial adultery against Hosea represents Israel's spiritual adultery against God. And Hosea's faithfulness to Gomer represents God's faithfulness to Israel. Even though Israel has broken the covenant, and even though exile is coming, God is promising a new exodus from slavery to sin through the seed of David in order to fulfill His promises to Abraham.

Structure: 1-3 covers Hosea's marriage to Gomer. In 4-11 Hosea accuses and warns Israel of breaking the covenant and the judgement that is coming. His main accusation is that Israel does not know their God. If they did they would not whore after other gods. In 12-13 Hosea gives a history lesson of Israel's unfaithfulness. And in 14 he concludes that there is still reason to hope because of God's promises to Abraham and to David.

JOEL

Timeline: Scholars do not know when Joel was written. But since he does not mention a king it is assumed that he wrote after the exile.

Key Themes: The Day of the Lord: Joel meditates on how God has punished evil and saved his people in the past (think Exodus), and this gives him hope that he will do this again in the future.

Repentance: The Day of the Lord is only good news to those who repent. So a major message of Joel's book is this: Repent! For the Day of the Lord is coming.

The Presence of the Lord: The Day of the Lord will be awful for those who do not repent. But for those who do it will bring restoration, mainly in the form of the Lord pouring out His Spirit.

AMOS

Timeline: Amos was a shepherd in the northern kingdom. His ministry overlapped with Hosea's.

Key Theme: The Justice of the Lord: Israel was very prosperous under the reign of Jeroboam II. Their prosperity led them to assume that the Lord was blessing them and that the Day of the Lord that the prophets kept talking about would only bring punishment on the surrounding wicked nations. Amos shows up to burst their bubble. He calls attention to their rampant idolatry and extortion of the poor. Amos calls out Israel's injustice and points them to the justice of the Lord.

Structure: 1-2 God is going to judge wicked nations, especially Israel. 3-6 Amos recalls the Abrahamic covenant and explains how if they really knew God it would change the way they treat people. 7-9 Judgement is coming, but there is still hope because of God's promise to David.