

## The Half Hour That Changes the World

**Ezekiel**

**Book 26**

### Basic Question behind the book:

*Can things be fixed between us and God when we've not listened to him and it's all ended in a mess?*

### Summary of book:

The Book of Ezekiel comes in two main parts: The first part speaks a variety of warnings, communicated by a plethora of means, that God's judgment is about to fall. They thought they were untouchable because they were God's people, living in God's city, with God's temple at hand. Surely no one could touch them. But God had different ideas. He was displeased with their behaviour, the casual way they treated him and one another, and he wasn't going to put up with it for much longer. The second part of the book comes after the hammer has fallen and they are deported into exile in Babylon. The message now changes to one of hope, promising restoration and a whole new beginning.

It is literally a 'fantastic' book, moving from the sublime to the ridiculous (just like in our lives!) and is really bizarre to say the least. It has been described as 'Modern Art before its time'. It contains all kinds of abstract images of God, portrayed in all kinds of weird ways. For example in chapter 1 we have wheels within wheels, covered in eyes which speaks to the all-seeing nature of God. In chapter 37 we have a Dali-like surreal graveyard in which dry dusty bones start dancing around, symbolising the ability of God to bring new life to that which appears well and truly dead. There is also street theatre in chapter 4 when for over a year Ezekiel lies out on the ground on his side, depicting dramatically the siege of Jerusalem, and thus enacting his own message. Through Ezekiel we can see that God can communicate, and longs to make himself known, and will try all manner of ways to do it. He will get his message across. He will grab our attention. As one writer puts it, "Our God is a chatty God!"

The Book of Ezekiel is memorable for many reasons, not least those great symbols and metaphors that he uses: the new temple with an ever-deepening river flowing from it; the valley of dry bones; the shepherds and the shepherd; watchmen on the wall; and many more beside.

### Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To announce God's judgment on Judah before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Also, to foretell the eventual salvation and restoration of God's people while they are in exile.

Author: The book is ascribed to Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, a Zadokite priest in the Jerusalem temple and a prophet to the southern kingdom both before and after the deportations under the Babylonians.

Recipients: The people of Judah pre-exile and the Jews in exile in Babylon.

Dating: The book itself is probably to be dated after Ezekiel's life when his followers would have brought his material together to be preserved. Two points of reference around which we can work out dating are the first deportation from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 BC and the second in 587 BC.

Setting: Ezekiel was a young contemporary of Jeremiah. The latter ministered mainly in Jerusalem while the former ministered mainly among the exiles.

### Other Reflections:

Ezekiel's opening has at its heart a human figure. Many have seen in this a pre-incarnate vision of Christ. Key themes include: the holiness and awesomeness of God; individual responsibility; leadership; corporate accountability; sin; and restoration.

The book begs the question: How do you know God? Is it just through cerebral knowledge and acquisition of facts for doctrinal purposes? Or, like Ezekiel, do we come to know God through metaphors, symbolism, and other pictures.

### Key verse:

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (36:26)*