

13. EZEKIEL

595 – 571 BC

Ezekiel's prophetic career started when he was about thirty years old while living in exile in Babylon five years after Nebuchadnezzar deported the first group of exiles. He prophesied for twenty years, during the time of Daniel's ministry at the royal court. The final thirteen chapters of Ezekiel have to do with end-time events.

Israel's restoration and regeneration (Ezek 11:17-20)

In these verses, the Lord promises to gather Israel from the countries where they are scattered and give them back the land of Israel. This prophecy has been fulfilled. Israel has returned in the last century and others continue to return to their promised land. The Lord also promised that after their return, he would give them one heart and a new spirit. The Lord has not yet put a new spirit within them; that will happen after the Messiah returns (Ezek 39:25-29, Joel 2:27-32, Zech 12:10). During the blessed Messianic period, Israel will be God's people on Earth and he will be their God.

The sprig of the cedar tree (Ezek 17:1-4, 22-24)

This passage is a parable. The cedar tree represents the Davidic dynasty and the initial sprig (King Jehoiachin) was broken off by the great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon) and taken off to a land of trade (Babylon) (Ezek 17:3-4) in 597 BC. Later, the Lord will take a tender sprig (equivalent to the 'branch' or 'root' of David) from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on the mountain height of Israel (Mount Zion), where it will produce branches and fruit and become a noble cedar. Under it will dwell every kind of bird (the nations) who will nest in it and find shelter in the shade of its branches. These words are used by Jesus in a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven when he

said a mustard seed would grow large enough for the birds to come and perch in its branches (Mt 13:32). The sprig is the Messiah and the noble cedar is his kingdom. All the trees of the forest (the nations) will come to know that the Lord God of Israel made it happen.

Israel's Regathering and Conversion (Ezek 20:39-44)

The Lord is disgusted with the idolatry of his people Israel and tells them to go and serve their idols. But *afterward*, they will surely obey him and no longer profane his holy name with their idols and sacrifices to them. For there in their land, when he gathers them from the countries where they have been scattered, all Israel will serve him on his holy mountain, and he will accept them as fragrant incense and will manifest his holiness through them in the sight of the nations. They will know that he is the Lord when he brings them back into the land of Israel, the land he had sworn with uplifted hand to give to their ancestors.

The whole world will see it. They will not be able to deny that God has shown himself to be God by regathering Israel, making them his people again, and giving them the promised inheritance in the land of Israel. All of them will be accepted and saved as Paul emphasized: Israel has experienced a partial hardening until the full number of the Gentiles has been grafted in. And so God will save *all* Israel (Rom 11:25).

The Messiah will shepherd Israel (Ezek 34:23-31)

Isaiah had already used the shepherd terminology in an apocalyptic context when he said:

Look, the Lord God comes with authority, he comes to rule with a strong arm. Look, his reward is with him and his recompense precedes him. He tends his flock like a shepherd and gathers the lambs in his arms. He carries them in his bosom and takes care of those who have young (Isa 40:10-11).

Whenever God is spoken of as coming into the world, it is the Messiah.

I will appoint one shepherd for them, my servant David. He will pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the Lord will be their God,

and my servant David will be their chief. I, the Lord have spoken” (Ezek 34:23-24).

The Davidic covenant is a divine promise that David’s dynasty would be perpetual. The Lord promised to establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:13). God has sworn by his holiness and I will not lie to David, he promised him that his dynasty will continue forever. His throne will endure before him like the sun, as permanent as the moon, the faithful witness in the sky (Ps 89:35-37).

David’s throne is not in heaven, it has been and always will be in God’s chosen city, Jerusalem. This was confirmed by the angel Gabriel when he told Mary her son would be great and called the Son of the Most High who would put him on his ancestor David’s throne as king of Jacob’s descendants forever (Lk 1:32-33).

Spiritualizing this passage portrays God as a liar. Ezekiel’s audience would have understood the passage as being about the Messiah and the nation of Israel, not about Jesus and the Church. The context must not be ignored. The Messiah would be a king who would live among them. There would be no more savage beasts; nature would be tamed (Isa 11:6, Rom 8:21). The ground would yield its crops, and the trees, their fruit. Israel would be secure in their land and would not be plundered by other nations. The Lord would be their God, they would all know him. The Lord would be with them because Israel is his chosen people. Their land would be renowned because of its crops and there would no longer be famine or reproach from the nations. God’s promises to Israel are eternal and irrevocable and include their land, their capital city, and their king.

Jesus, the Messiah, said: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11). Peter calls Jesus the chief Shepherd who will reward his faithful servants with a crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Pet 5:4). Jesus told his Jewish disciples that he had other sheep that were not of this sheep pen (his Jewish fold). He would bring them also, and there would be one fold and one shepherd (Jn 10:16). Finally, John, in a vision of all the redeemed from every nation, said that the Lamb at the center of the throne would be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev 7:17).

Amillennialist Sam Storms (*Kingdom Come* p. 346-47) says that the perspective of many amillennials is fast giving way to one that takes more seriously the importance of the *Earth* in God's redemptive purpose. He prefers to think that a glorious earthly consummation of the kingdom rule of Christ is yet to occur in fulfillment of the OT promises. That is great news. But then he says that Gentiles do not have a separate inheritance distinct from that of believing Israelites. That is true when referring to OT saints and present-day Israelis who are entering the Church, they all come under the umbrella of the elect, the saints, the righteous and the servants of God. But this is not true of the whole nation of Israel that will be converted after the Messiah returns. Their conversion will be too late because they will have missed the resurrection. They will inherit the promised earthly blessings made to Israel as normal human beings on Earth, while the Church will rule the world in their resurrected state from the heavenly New Jerusalem in the sky.

God will put his Spirit in Israel and they will live in the land he gave their ancestors

I will take you out of the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all the impurities of your idols. 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. I will put my Spirit in you and cause you to follow my instructions and take care in keeping my laws. You will live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God (Ezek 36:22-28).

God will vindicate the holiness of his name; he will show himself to the godless nations to be the God of Israel, the Bible, and Christians. He will regather Israel from all the nations and *bring them into their own land*; the land he gave them as an eternal possession. He has been doing this over the past century. But there is more. He will cause them all as a nation to be thoroughly converted by putting a new spirit, his own Spirit, within them, and giving them a new heart. The ancient land of Israel will be restored and the ancient towns will be filled with people again. The Lord will do this so that both Israel and the nations

that surround them will understand that he is God. The nations that remain are the ungodly survivors of the Great Tribulation who will live on as subjects during the millennium (Zech 14:16).

Can these bones live? (Ezek 37:11-14, 15-28)

The vision of the valley of dry bones is a pictorial description of the conversion of Israel, a retelling of what was said in Ezekiel 36:22-38. The people of Israel are dead and their bones are scattered about. Then Ezekiel sees them reassemble with sinews, flesh, and skin, and the breath of life enters them. After being destroyed as a nation and separated from their land for nearly two thousand years, the Lord has taken Israel out of the nations where they had gone and brought them back into their own land. It is God who has done it because he promised to do it (Ezek 37:12, 20). Israel as a nation has already been revived. There is nothing here to indicate that this prophecy deals with the Church. It is a prophecy about the houses of Israel and Judah and their homecoming to the mountains of Israel. The Church age was not revealed to the OT prophets (Eph 3:4-6). The Messiah will be king over national Israel.

Vv. 11-14 are the Lord's clear interpretation of what this vision means and how it will occur. The dry bones represent the exiled house of Israel who feel like dead men with their Messianic hope lost. But no, God says he will open their graves, raise them up, and bring them into the land of Israel. It is there that he will put his Spirit in them, and they will come to know the Lord. This is not a prophecy about a literal resurrection. It is about Israel's restoration to their land and their regeneration, their spiritual salvation. When Jesus returns and they look on the Messiah whom their ancestors pierced, they will mourn over their past unbelief (Zech 12:10) and they will be born again (Ezek 37:14).

They will be one nation, not divided into Judah and Israel as in the past. They will have one king over them, one shepherd – the Messiah. As to the Messianic temple, twice God says his *sanctuary* will be *among* them forever (verses 26-28). Verse 27 says that his *dwelling place* will be *over* them (עליהם). The Shekinah glory appeared over Israel in the wilderness and will appear again over Mount Zion during the millennium. The word 'forever' in the OT means as long as the

present heaven and earth exist; the Bible reveals nothing about what happens after that. During the millennium, the Messiah may not be physically visible, but his glory will be. Israel and the nations will worship him at his temple in Jerusalem, while the glory of God and the Lamb will also be seen in the New Jerusalem shining down on the earthly city of Jerusalem.

God incites Gog against Israel (Ezek 38:1-9)

Ezekiel prophesies against Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. These names are first encountered in Genesis 10:2 where Magog, Tubal, Meshech, and Gomer are named as sons of Noah's son *Japheth* (Europeans). These peoples settled in Europe and Asia Minor to the north of Israel. Gog and Magog would appear to be symbolic names that refer to eschatological enemies of Israel who come from afar. At a later time, after the millennium, Satan again deceives the nations, called Gog and Magog, and gathers them for battle (Rev 20:8). Coming from the far north, he is probably speaking of Russia and Turkic-speaking Islamic peoples from Turkey, Uzbekistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan.

In the latter days, when Israel has been regathered from among the nations, Gog will come from the north and invade them. The descendants of Japheth initially lived north of Israel and eventually occupied most of Europe. Gog is said to come from the uttermost parts of the north, which looking at a map, would unmistakably mean Russia, but he has many nations with him, including Iran, Sudan, and Libya, Islamic countries which are currently sworn enemies of Israel.

These armies are the 200 million troops that are released after the blowing of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-16), who are again referred to when an angel pours out the sixth bowl of wrath (Rev 16:12-16). They assemble for the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the battle of Armageddon. *All the nations of the earth* will gather against God's people Israel and his holy city Jerusalem (Zech 12:3), but God, in the person of the returning Messiah, will slay them (Ps 2:9, Zech 12:9). This is God's judgment and condemnation of the godless nations.

Ezekiel and other prophets make it clear that it is God who gathers the nations against Jerusalem to do battle (Ezek 38:4, Zech 14:2). God is

sovereign and he not only allows Gog to go against Israel to accomplish his purpose but speaking figuratively God “puts hooks in his jaws” and brings him out of his country with all his army, together with the other nations. The time has arrived for God to judge the nations according to his justice. The timing of the invasion of Gog and his allies in Ezekiel is “in future years” (38:8) or “in days to come” (38:16), terms that often express the end of days before the Messiah arrives.

Gog will invade Israel at a time and situation like we have in the world today. The Jews have been regathered from many peoples and the land has been restored from war. The scene is set! Israel was dispersed among the nations in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Lord’s temple. Their land became a continual waste for centuries but now, millions of Jews have returned to their land. Israel has become great and is numbered among the top 10 most powerful nations of the world.

Gog’s armies invade Israel (Ezek 38:10-23)

Gog is depicted as invading Israel because he has devised an evil scheme and believes he can benefit from the encounter. He will come from his place out of the uttermost parts of the north with many peoples with him. Jeremiah prophesies about this same event, saying:

Look! Disaster is spreading forth from nation to nation, a powerful storm is rising from the ends of the earth! At that time those slain by the Lord will be everywhere - from one end of the earth to the other. Their deaths will not be mourned, their bodies will not be gathered up or buried; they will be like animal dung lying on the ground (Jer 25:32-33).

Sheba (Yemen), Dedan (Saudi Arabia), and Tarshish and all its ‘young lions’ (Spain representing Western Europe) are nations with rapacious trading interests in the Middle East. They are concerned about this invasion from the North. Where is the world ruler, the Antichrist, in all this? Daniel 11:40-45 describes the same battle and says that news from the East and North will alarm him and he will go out in great fury to destroy many.

The wrath of God is aroused and there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. Fish, birds, animals, and reptiles, and all people on the face of the Earth will quake at God's presence, such is the extent and force of the earthquakes. Mountains will crumble, cliffs collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground. This cosmic upheaval is prophesied several times in Revelation 6:12, 11:19, 16:18.

Every man's sword will be against his comrade, as also prophesied by Zechariah. "On that day, the Lord will strike them with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another" (Zech 14:13). God will shower Gog and his vast army with torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur. Cf. the description in Rev 16:21: Huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people from the sky. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The day of judgment for the nations (Ezek 39:1-20)

Ezekiel 39 reiterates what has been said in chapter 38 with some additional information which shows that Israel will be living on Earth for years after this battle and that God will make himself known among them. Ezekiel prophesied that Gog would fall on the mountains of Israel with all the soldiers and nations that accompanied him. They would be given to birds of prey of every sort and to wild animals to be devoured. Cf. Rev 19:17-18: I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried out loudly to the birds who were flying high in the sky saying, Come, gather together for the banquet that God has prepared for you, and feed on the flesh of kings, generals, and strong men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, whether free or slaves, great or small. This is no imaginary battle. Israel will bury the bodies for seven months in the valley of the travelers, east of the Dead Sea. And they will collect the weapons and burn them for seven years. Isaiah 34:1-4 is a prophecy about the same event.

It is not only the armies of the nations in Israel who are destroyed. All the people on the face of the Earth will tremble at God's presence (Ezek 38:20). Cf. the opening of the sixth seal (Rev 6:12-17) and the blowing of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-19). After the seventh bowl is poured out (Rev 16:17-21), there will be a great earthquake throughout the world and the cities of the nations will fall.

Israel's conversion follows Armageddon (Ezek 39:21-29)

What is Israel's future destiny? When surrounded by armies from all over the world, the Lord will literally descend from heaven and save them. He reassures them that he will look after them. From that day forward the people of Israel will learn that he is the Lord their God. He will restore their fortunes and have compassion on *all* the people of Israel. I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any of them behind. I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel (vv. 28-29). This is the time of their conversion. When Jesus returns, he will resurrect the Church and they will meet him in the air to live forever with God and the Lamb in New Jerusalem. At the renewal of all things, there will be two redeemed people, the Church in the heavenly realm and Israel on Earth, with the former ruling the latter (Mt 19:28).

God will set his glory among the nations by showing the world that he is the God of Israel and Christians and that Jerusalem is his holy city. The Lord will return to the temple (Ezek 43:4) and his glory will be seen in the sky above Israel (Isa 60:1-3). The survivors of the nations will come to realize that Israel was oppressed for many centuries because of their disobedience and that God turned his back on them during that time. But God is jealous of his holy name; he will soon show the world that he is not dead; he is the powerful and faithful God of his people.

The OT prophets give ample evidence that Israel, as a nation, will be completely restored and converted as the Messiah pours out his Spirit upon them (Isa 32:15, Jer 31:31-34, Ezek 36:25-26, 39:22-29, Joel 2:28-29, Zech 12:10-13:1).

The Messiah returns to the temple (Ezek 43:1-7a)

Ezekiel 37 described the restoration of Israel to the promised land after their long absence in exile. God will make a covenant of peace with them, settle them in their land, multiply them, and set his sanctuary in their midst forever (Ezek 37:26-27). When the nations see God's temple in Israel's midst, they will recognize that the Lord has set Israel apart. Chs. 40-42 are a vision of a new Messianic era temple and ch. 43 is a vision of the return of God's glory to the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel had already had a vision of the glory of the Lord leaving the Solomonic temple (Ezek 10:18-22, 11:23) because of Israel's sin. Now

he sees the glory of the Lord coming from the East in a massive visual and auditory display, the Second Coming. The sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters and the Earth shone with his glory. The return of God's glory to the temple is a case of metonymy. The glory of God indicates God's presence, and more specifically, the presence of the Messiah, Jesus.

What do we know about Jesus' return to earth? How visible is it? How is it described? Paul said he will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire, taking revenge on those who do not know God and who refused to believe the gospel (2 Thess 1:7-8). Luke said the Son of Man will come like lightning flashing and shining from one end of the sky to the other (Lk 17:24). John saw a vision of a rider on a white horse administering justice and waging war righteously (Rev 19:11). It is not a peaceful return. First there is salvation through resurrection and rapture for the Church, then there is salvation for Israel from the nations who wage war against them, then there is the slaughter of the armies who dare to rebel against God and his people.

Jesus said that immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun would be darkened, the moon would not reflect its light, the stars would fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies would be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the peoples of the land will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory (Mt 24:30 cf. Zech 12:10-12). Israel will look on him, the one their ancestors pierced, and they will mourn for him. The constant response of unbelievers to God's judgments at that time is that they curse him (Rev 9:20, 16:21). It may be that the only Israel will see the Messiah clearly, as he descends to the Mount of Olives about one kilometer east of Jerusalem (Zech 14:4). From there he will enter Jerusalem through the east gate (Ezek 43:4) and his glory will be seen in the temple there. We are not told anywhere in the Bible that Jesus will be seen physically by people on Earth after this. He will dwell in New Jerusalem with the resurrected redeemed and they will see his face (Rev 22:4), but those on Earth will only see the light of his glory.

Jesus spoke to Ezekiel from the temple saying: "Son of man, this is the place for my throne and the soles of my feet. I will live here among Israel forever (Ezek 43:7).

The symbolic nature of New Jerusalem indicates that it is in a different realm to the Earth. It is heaven come down to earth. “Look! God’s abode is now with humans and he will live with them” (Rev 21:3). Father, Son, angels and the resurrected righteous are the inhabitants of this city, and its glory will be visible to the nations who come to worship at Jerusalem. Earthly Jerusalem and heavenly Jerusalem will be intimately connected but in different dimensions. The Messiah will live among the Israelites on Earth forever (Ezek 43:7) and at the same time he lives with the saints in New Jerusalem in the sky above. They will see his face and reign with him forever in the Messianic kingdom that Jesus called the Kingdom of God (Rev 22:3).

After Ezekiel’s vision of the Lord’s return to the temple, he went back to the East Gate and saw that it was closed. The Lord told him the gate must remain closed and never be used again because he, the Lord God of Israel had entered by it (Ezek 44:2). The present East Gate in the Jerusalem wall was blocked up in 1541 AD by Suleiman the Magnificent, but the Lord’s prohibition of its use relates to the millennial temple which Israel will build after the Messiah’s return (Ezek 43:11). The earthquake that splits the Mount of Olives at the Lord’s return will change the topology of the surrounding area. All the land from Geba in the north to Rimmon in the south will become a vast plain with Jerusalem elevated on the south side of a very high mountain in its original position (Zech 14:10) with the temple on the top (Ezek 40:2, 5, 43:12).

The River of Life (Ezek 47:1-12)

Ezekiel’s vision of the millennial temple is earthly. He doesn’t mention Jerusalem but uses the directions North, South, East, and West, and he mentions the Arabah (the Jordan Valley) and the Great Sea (the Mediterranean). He saw water issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the East, the direction in which the temple faced. The water was flowing from the south side of the threshold and south of the altar. As he walked by the water for a few kilometers, the water became a stream and then a river deep enough to swim in. Many trees lined the riverbanks as it flowed to the Dead Sea. The saltwater of the Dead Sea became fresh and many kinds of fish swarmed in it and fishermen fished there. Swamps and marshes remained salty.

The Garden of Eden had a river, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. New Jerusalem also has a river of life-giving water flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ensuring the inhabitants a wonderful quality of life that is eternal. But the leaves of the Tree of Life growing on the riverbanks of the heavenly city are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2). In New Jerusalem there is no sickness, but the inhabitants will bring healing to the nations living on Earth.

The river of life is symbolic of a regenerating life from God. The righteous have already experienced it and will continue to experience it to a greater degree in their resurrected bodies in the paradisaical New Jerusalem.

Ezekiel sees this transformation spreading from the temple in Jerusalem to the surrounding areas. There are many prophecies about the land of Israel blossoming during the Messianic era, and as the word of God goes forth from Jerusalem, this blessing will spread all over the world. Jesus called it the palingenesea, a Greek word meaning 'rebirth' or 'regeneration.' The river of life is symbolic of the divine power that will restore the whole of creation as the nations respond to the Lord's teaching. Paul said,

I consider that our present sufferings cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed to/in us. For the creation eagerly waits for God's children to be revealed. ... The creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and experience the liberty that accompanies the glorious state of God's children (Rom 8:18-21).