

The Church of the Servant King

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Prophecy Series

(Proph17A_Introduction to Ezekiel)

Baseline Ryrie Chronology		Revised Chronology (Prophecy Series to Date)	
9 th to 8 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Obadiah ✓ Joel ✓ Jonah ✓ Amos ✓ Hosea 		
		8 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jonah (mid 8th – Nineveh, Assyria) ✓ Amos (mid 8th – Israel) ✓ Hosea (mid 8th – Israel & Judah) ✓ Micah (mid 8th – Israel & Judah)
8 th to 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Isaiah ✓ Micah Nahum Zephaniah 	8 th to 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Isaiah (Judah)
		Late 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Joel (Judah) Nahum (between 663-612 B.C.) ✓ Zephaniah (sometime after 622 B.C.)
7 th to 6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jeremiah Habakkuk 	7 th to 6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jeremiah (from 627-582 B.C.) ✓ Obadiah (Edom) ✓ Habakkuk (between 606-604 B.C.)
6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezekiel Daniel Haggai Zechariah 	6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezekiel (593-571 B.C.) Daniel (586-516 B.C.) Haggai (ca 520 B.C.) Zechariah (520-519 B.C.)
5 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezra * Malachi Nehemiah * 	5 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezra (ca 450 B.C.) Malachi (450-430 B.C.) Nehemiah (ca 430 B.C.)

Author and Date – Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel were the only prophet-priests and all three prophesied during the exilic or post-exilic period. This may explain, at least in part, Ezekiel's emphasis upon the Temple, the glory of the Lord, the actions of Jerusalem's priests, and God's future temple.

Dating Ezekiel's ministry is fairly easy since he provides so many reference points. Basically, Ezekiel was evidently commissioned as a prophet and began his ministry on July 31, 593 B.C. and his prophetic activity spanned at least 22 years ending in 571 B.C. He evidently began his ministry at the age of 30 – the age he was qualified to enter the priesthood (Ezek 1.1). By the time of his last prophecy, he was 52 years of age.

Ezekiel wrote his book during the time of Judah's subjugation and captivity to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel lived with a group of captives near the Kebar River in Babylon. The exact site of the settlement is unknown, but the Kebar River has been identified with the Grand Canal which branched off of the Euphrates River near Uruk. Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel's message centered on Judah's forthcoming destruction. After Jerusalem's fall, his message centered upon Judah's future restoration.

Prophetic Passages in Ezekiel

After devoting the first 24 chapters to the judgment due Judah, Ezekiel spends a few chapters (25-32) focused upon God's judgment upon other nations. Then, in chapters 33-48, Ezekiel focuses upon the future blessings to Israel. We'll spend this lesson looking at some of the eschatological passages in these chapters.

Charles Dyer makes a great observation in the opening paragraph of his chapter on the book of Ezekiel in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*.

For the average reader of the Bible the Book of Ezekiel is mostly a perplexing maze of incoherent visions – a kaleidoscope of whirling wheels and dry bones that defy interpretation. This impression often causes readers to shy away from studying the book and to miss one of the great literary and spiritual portions of the Old Testament.¹

“False” Shepherds vs. The “True” Shepherd – Chapter 34

False Shepherds

In the first half of this chapter, the Lord, through Ezekiel, pronounces judgment upon the leaders of Israel because they had failed God and the people. God holds leaders to a higher degree of responsibility and this is as it should be. Note the charges against these leaders.

- √ These leaders were putting their own interest above those of the people (vv. 2-3). They viewed the flock as a source of wealth to be exploited instead of a trust to be protected.
- √ They ruled harshly instead of caringly (v. 4). Compare this description to Isaiah 61.1-3.
- √ They allowed the sheep (fellow Jews) to be scattered. Ezekiel mentions this three times in verses 5-6. The chief job of a shepherd was to prevent such a catastrophe, yet already the Assyrians and the Babylonians had taken Israel and Judah captive.

In verses 7-10, the connection between God's judgment upon Israel and Judah and the depravity and failure of the leadership is made.

Principle: The ills of a nation always have their root in the spiritual status of the nations' leaders – religious and political.

Principle: Theological liberalism leads to liberalism in every other sphere.

Principle: A spiritual decline in a nations' spiritual leadership becomes evident in liberal theology and liberal political and social policies.

Point of Distinction: Do not confuse a desire to preserve freedom with liberal theology, politics or social policy. For instance, just because one does not support legislation against certain sinful or immoral activities does not mean that one is necessarily a liberal. The principle of freedom is sometimes compromised by well meaning Christians who fail to make this distinction. The real question is whether the sinful or immoral activities are precluding another person or group from exercising their freedom.

Principle: Ultimately, liberalism always leads to loss of freedoms and even slavery.

¹ Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1225.

The false shepherds who were only interested in their own self-preservation did not seek out God's flock in order to care for them. The leaders took advantage of the people and desired to be served instead of serve.

Principle: True spiritual leadership will find themselves being taken for granted and put in a position to see their instruction and guidance disregarded or ignored.

Principle: True spiritual leaders are usually lonely and do not enjoy the fellowship of any but a select few – if any at all.

Principle: True spiritual leaders must be willing to plod and be obedient in spite of a lack of popularity.

True Shepherds & the Great Shepherd

In similar fashion to the other prophets we have studied, Ezekiel, through God the Holy Spirit's inspiration, uses imagery that has a dualistic characteristic to it. There is a more immediate historical aspect and a more distant eschatological aspect to the prophecy. After the Babylonian captivity, it was God, the Good Shepherd, Who desired to restore Israel and Judah to the Land, although this prophecy in verses 11-16 was never fulfilled at the end of the Babylonian captivity. At the end of the Tribulation, it will be God Who will restore Israel to the Land in fulfillment of all of His promises to them. (Compare verses 11-16 with John 10.1-30).

In exercising His judgment, God indicated that He would begin by judging between the individual sheep. Before the Messianic kingdom begins, God will sort out the righteous from the unrighteous (see Matt 25.31-46) and allow only the righteous into the Millennium. The character of the sheep is evidenced by their conduct. The wicked sheep are those that followed the conduct of the false shepherds. They oppressed the weaker sheep – illustrated by trampling the pasturelands and muddying the streams. The fatter more powerful sheep pushed aside the weakened sheep.

God will appoint a new shepherd – none other than David. Some interpret this to be a reference to David's ultimate descendant – Jesus, the Good shepherd (Jn 10.11-18). However, nothing in Ezekiel 34.23 demands that interpretation. In fact, it is very possible that Ezekiel was referring to David in resurrected body ruling and reigning, as Christ's agent, from a throne in earthly Jerusalem. David is referred to elsewhere in passages that look to the future restoration of Israel as we have seen on previous occasions (see Jer 30.9; Ezek 37.24-25; Hos 3.5). Ezekiel indicated that David would be the prince of the restored people (see 34.24; 37.25). This same prince will offer sin offerings during the millennial period (45.22; 46.4).

Peace is the result of God's care for His Own (vv. 25-31). No longer will the land and people be ravaged by wild beasts or attacked by other nations, both phases of the 5 Cycles of Discipline. Eventually, God's covenant of peace will involve the rebuilding of the Temple as a visible reminder of God's presence.