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Ezekiel Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg offers an overview of the book of Ezekiel, which is often considered the most difficult book in the Old Testament. Ezekiel, a priest during the Babylonian captivity, prophesied judgment for Jerusalem before its fall, as well as messages of comfort and restoration for the exiles. The book contains a wide range of literature, from narrative to prophetic oracles and apocalyptic visions. Gregg also warns Christians to be cautious in interpreting the visions regarding the restoration of the Jewish people and the possibility of animal sacrifices in a future temple.

Transcript

Today we're having an introduction and an overview of the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is, I've always said and always believed, the hardest book of the Old Testament. So it's a good book to have some head start on if you're going to read it.

Now I will say, I have to admit this, Ezekiel was the last book of the Old Testament that I actually succeeded in reading through. When I was young, I tried reading through it. I did get through all of it except some parts of Ezekiel.

And I have to admit some parts of Job. And that was largely because after you've read everything there is in them in the first half of the book, the other half seems to repeat all the same things. I had to say it was tedious for me.

Now I love the book of Job now and Ezekiel both. I was forced to learn those books because when I started a school in Oregon in 1983, it was my task to teach through all the books of the Bible. A few of them I hadn't even read through yet.

But I had a lot of resources and I had a pretty good general Bible knowledge to help me out. But it was a real challenge, especially Ezekiel and Zechariah. Some of these books have a lot of imagery, a lot of symbolism.

And I found it very difficult. But I will say this, having taught through Ezekiel probably 20 times now, it's much more familiar. And of course I've had occasion to learn a lot since the first time.

And so I know for one thing the parts of Ezekiel that were difficult for me. And I feel it's probably a safe assumption that similar things that were difficult to me when I was starting out would be difficult to most people reading the book. I do suggest that you, if you haven't read Ezekiel recently, that you do read it again, that you do read it soon after this because otherwise you'll forget.

I have handed out notes. This is 10 pages of notes. We're not going to cover everything in the 10 pages of notes.

Sorry. But you'll have the notes and you can study from them at home. And by the way, for those listening on Facebook, on the website Matthew713.com, many of my teaching notes are there.

A brother named Jeremy White has kindly set up that website and maintains it and some others help. My wife helps with it too. And I noticed that these notes are there, but they're not complete.

I think maybe the first five or six pages of these notes are there. So I mean, if you don't have a copy, everyone here probably has access to a copy. But if you don't have a copy, you can go to Matthew713.com and you can find at least half of the materials that we're looking at today.

But I'm not going to... We're going to get the other half up too. Anyway, so the notes have much more in them than we will hope to really cover. I made notes like this for the sake of teaching through the book, you know, not giving an overview in an evening.

But I mean, I teach in places where we have a week to teach through the book and that's what the usual pattern is. But we'll kind of scan through things in the notes and skip over what doesn't need to be covered in any kind of detail. About Ezekiel, the man, you certainly need to know the background of any prophet you're studying and the times he was living in.

He was captured in 597 BC by the Babylonians and taken into Babylon from Jerusalem. He was a priestly family. He was 25 at the time.

So he had not started his priestly duties. They normally start at age 30. And so Daniel, his contemporary, had been kidnapped from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar about eight years earlier.

In 605 BC, Daniel and his three friends were taken into Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had come and kind of pushed his way around in Jerusalem, but he hadn't done any serious damage. But he took with him, without much resistance, some of the more noble birth young men from the city and took them to Babylon to train them to be part of his court and part of his counseling staff and so forth.

But eight years later, he came back to Jerusalem and he took more captives, including Jehoiakim the king. And he took with him at that time Ezekiel and many others into Babylon. So Ezekiel got to Babylon about eight years after Daniel had gotten there.

And Daniel already was fairly prominent there. Ezekiel actually mentions Daniel. It's interesting because he mentions him alongside Noah and Job.

In one of his prophecies in chapter 14, God says, you know, even if Noah and Job and Daniel were in this city, they'd only save themselves. They wouldn't save anyone else there. I wouldn't spare the city.

Unlike, for example, what God told Abraham about Sodom. If I find ten righteous, I'll spare the whole city, even though there's only ten righteous. For their sake, I'll spare it.

He tells Ezekiel, Jerusalem so bad, even if Noah was there, even if Job was there, even if Daniel was there, I wouldn't spare the city. I'd just spare them. It's an amazing thing that a contemporary young man like Daniel living at that time, who probably wasn't much older than Ezekiel himself at age 25, that he already was in God's mind as prominent as a righteous and godly man as Noah and Job, who were very ancient, exceptionally godly.

And both of them exceeded their entire generation in godliness. And Daniel, thrown in that mix, means that by the time Ezekiel got to Babylon, Daniel already had quite a reputation. Daniel was already well-established as a man of God, had probably interpreted many of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and so forth, and had risen to prominence.

So, Ezekiel's actually part of a community of captives. Now, the first six years of his ministry, he started the ministry when he was 30. So he was in Babylon for five years until he turned 30, and then God gave him his first vision, which is in chapter 1, a very confusing vision for most people.

And at that time, he would have, had he been in Jerusalem, he would have become a priest because he was a priestly family. And priests started working when they were 30. And now he was 30, and yet he was not in Jerusalem, so he couldn't be a priest.

The temple was not yet destroyed, but it was six years later. And so he never would serve as a priest. There's quite a few of the prophets who had priestly heritage.

Jeremiah, the prophet, was also of a priestly family, and he was called instead to a prophetic ministry rather than a priestly. Zechariah, the prophet, who wrote the book of Zechariah, he was a priest also. And so was another Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who is, Jesus mentioned him as the one who was martyred between the temple and the altar.

He was also a priest and a prophet. So was John the Baptist, by the way. John the Baptist obviously was a prophet and a priestly family.

So it was not too unusual for God to pull from the families that were already set apart as priests and raise up some of them to be prophets. Ezekiel was one. And so he missed out on being a priest, but he got to be a prophet.

And his ministry, like that of most prophets, was fairly costly to him. He is, one of the things that makes him memorable is that he had a lot of acted prophecies. Now Isaiah had one.

Isaiah went around naked for three years to represent the message that the Egyptians would go around naked with their buttocks uncovered, Ethiopians and the Egyptians, because of the Assyrians, you know, the Egyptians were the most powerful people in the world. And he was humiliated or whatever. That's a strange acted prophecy.

Some of these acted prophecies were a little embarrassing. Jeremiah acted out a prophecy about putting an ox shield over his neck and saying that Israel is going to come under, that Judah is going to come under the yoke of bondage in Babylon. Hosea had a rather costly acted prophecy.

He had to marry a woman who was going to cheat on him and leave him so that he might represent God and God's grief over the unfaithfulness of his wife, Israel. Well, Ezekiel had a lot, Ezekiel had more than any other prophet, probably more than the others all combined, acted prophecies. We'll talk about some of them.

But one of them was that he actually had a wife. Apparently, his wife was taken captive with him when he came into Babylon. But six years after he began his ministry, which was 11 years after he'd come to Babylon, his wife died.

She died on the very day that Jerusalem was besieged. Now, this was no surprise to Ezekiel because God told him that morning, your wife's going to die. Today's the day that Jerusalem's going to come under siege and your wife's going to die.

Jerusalem's my wife, God is saying, and you're going to represent me. You're going to lose your wife. I'm losing my wife.

And he said, the thing that was assigned, I mean, having your wife die isn't assigned in itself. I guess it is. But the thing that made it unusual was that he was told he couldn't mourn.

He was not allowed to mourn for her. And there's no explanation of why he was not. But since he represented God losing his wife, Jerusalem, perhaps he's saying God's not even going to shed a tear over this because they are so far gone.

They are so evil. They're going down and I'm not even going to weep it. And don't you weep over your wife either.

Now, of course, that'd be very hard for the prophet to do, but that's the kind of thing these prophets had to do. They had to live their prophecies. You know, we don't do those kind of active prophecy things.

None of us do. But there's a sense which we have to live our message too. You know, it needs to be that people should look at our lives and see what it is we believe, what it is we have to say.

What we're communicating is communicating not only with words, but with our behavior. The prophets, of course, had really bizarre behavior in some cases because their messages were very, well, special. And the reason for these very strange active prophecies, the one of him not weeping at his wife's death is not the strangest.

There's several stranger ones that he does. I think the reason these active prophecies are as strange as they are is because they're supposed to get attention. You know, people will listen if they think it's their idea.

If they're curious. People will listen to a preacher if they are curious to know what he's there for, what he's about. If you just go stand on a street corner and start preaching, probably most people just walk by and never pay any attention.

But if you start doing some kind of pantomime or you start playing an instrument and you sing well or you do something, get some friends out there and do a street drama, people will stop. They'll be curious. What's this? Why is he here? What's he doing? And then that's an opportunity to preach to people who they think it's their idea to hear you because they came out out of curiosity.

And I think that's the strategy that God had for these prophecies. Do this really weird thing and people will say, why are you doing that? Oh, I'm glad you asked. Here's what it's about.

And the weirder it is, first of all, the weirder it is, the more attention it gets and the more memorable it is. Things that aren't very strange slip our minds pretty fast. You see something really weird, you'll be telling stories about that for years.

It's weird things are memorable, weird things are attention getting. And I think that's probably why so many things that God told Ezekiel are just really weird, but they're not meaningless weird. They're weird, meaningful.

They actually do mean something. We'll talk about those active visions in a moment, active prophecies. All right.

Now, in his when his wife died, Jerusalem was under siege. And shortly after that, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The temple was burned down.

And this was the beginning of his of the second part of his ministry. The first part, when he began prophesying in chapter one until the time that the temple went down, which is 20 chapter 24, right in the middle of the book. The first half of the book, 24 chapters is prophesied in the first six years while Jerusalem is still standing.

In chapter 24, Jerusalem went down and the rest of the other 24 chapters in the book, they are after Jerusalem fell. And basically they contain a lot of comfort. Up until Jerusalem fell, his messages were severe calls to repentance because the city was in great danger of God's judgment and still trying to persuade them to change.

But after Jerusalem fell, there's no sense in that. He starts prophesying about the restoration, how God will restore his people from Babylon and send the Messiah eventually. And so that's kind of how his book, just right down the middle, it divides between the really severe prophecies of judgment and so forth.

On the one hand, before Jerusalem fell, and then the more comforting prophecies for the most part after that point. Now, he also was struck dumb, apparently supernaturally. It's not clear whether God was just telling him not to speak or if he was made incapable of speech.

Remember how Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, the angel said, this will be assigned to you. You'll be mute. You won't be able to speak until the child was born.

And then when John was born, his mouth was open. That apparently was supernatural. That is the dumbness and the release from it.

It's possible that that was so with Ezekiel also. He was not able to speak from about chapter three on until Jerusalem fell. And it wasn't until a messenger from Jerusalem got to Babylon six months later.

It took a long time for news to travel in those days. But six months after Jerusalem fell, a messenger got to Babylon and told the captives there that Jerusalem was fallen. And that's when Ezekiel's mouth was opened and he began his second time of prophecy.

Now, I said he was mute for the first six years, but not all the time. Only when he wasn't prophesied. He was able to prophesy.

But when he wasn't prophesying, he wasn't able to talk, apparently. I'm not sure how that made relations with the wife at home. You know, every time she has to give a prophecy or nothing, you know, but he was able to speak normally after she died.

But then there's no one to talk to. So, you know, what good is that? So actually, now, as I said, his ministry was 22 years long. He was contemporary with not only Daniel, but Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a little older, maybe as much as 20 years older. Jeremiah was an old man when Jerusalem fell. Ezekiel was only about 36 years old.

So Jeremiah is probably 20 or more years older than the prophet, but had been prophesying for something like 50 years. And so Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem when Ezekiel was a young man there. He was there for his first 25 years.

And so he would have had occasion as a young adult to hear Jeremiah and possibly to be influenced by him. Maybe Jeremiah was a fellow priest who'd become a prophet. Ezekiel, a young priest, becomes a prophet and no doubt was very influenced by Jeremiah.

Also, Daniel was influenced by Jeremiah in Daniel chapter 10 or 9. Daniel's reading the book of Jeremiah at the beginning of the chapter about the 70 year exile. So Jeremiah, who was living at this time in Jerusalem, was quite influential on both Daniel and Ezekiel, though both those men were no longer in Jerusalem, but were in Babylon among the exiles. And it wasn't until 586 BC, which was 11 years after Ezekiel went into captivity, that Jerusalem fell.

And then all the remainder of people in Jerusalem were carried into Babylon, with the exception of the most poor, insignificant dirt farmers and so forth. The Babylonians left them alone, but anyone who was anybody was taken into Babylon at that time. So Ezekiel went a little later than one group, Daniel's group, and he went a little earlier than the main group that came later.

And he was raised up to prophesy to the exiles there among whom he lived. The place he lived was a place called Tel-Abib, according to chapter 3, verse 15. And it was on the Kibar, he says the river Kibar, it's a canal, more like.

It's a man-made canal, but it's big enough to be called a river by some, I suppose. And it was out by the canal there where he actually saw his first vision in chapter 1, which was of God's throne chariot. Although some people think it's a sighting of a UFO, which we will talk about in a moment.

It was not a UFO. It's not unidentified. It's actually identified for us as the glory of the Lord.

So when people say, I think you saw a UFO. No, a UFO is by definition unidentified. This was identified as God.

Anyway, the book has a lot of interesting characteristics that are kind of unusual. There are several genres of literature in Ezekiel. There's narrative, where he's just telling a story.

There is prophetic oracles, where he's giving a thus saith the Lord kind of a sermon, where God is speaking directly through him to the people in an oracular fashion. There's

apocalyptic visions, such as you find in Zechariah and Daniel and the book of Revelation, for example, which are not that common among the prophets. Most of the prophets didn't have them.

He had several of them. He had four major visions. The first one is in chapter 1 through 3, and that vision is of God's chariot throne, or throne chariot, which I mentioned a moment ago, and we'll talk more about it in a moment.

The second one is the vision of the departure of the glory of God from the temple, which is in chapters 8 through 11. Now, the glory of God was seen departing from the temple in a vision. Ezekiel was in Babylon, 700 miles away.

He describes himself as being in the spirit, and the spirit of the Lord grabbed him by the hair of his head and carried him to Jerusalem. This is no doubt all a visionary experience, not literal movement. First of all, I don't know how long your hair would hold up on a 700-mile trip if it had been held by your hair.

But I think the way he describes the things in that vision, it seems clear that this is all happening in vision. Now, again, I don't think many of us have probably had visions such as the prophets had. Some of you may feel like you have, and maybe you have.

I haven't. And therefore, to understand prophetic visions requires just reading about them and trying to figure out what was going on there. But we do find in the Bible that visions and dreams are linked frequently.

Prophets are known to have visions and dreams. In fact, when Joel said that the spirit would be poured out in the last days, he said, that your sons and daughters will prophesy and your old men shall dream dreams and your young men will see visions. Visions and dreams are almost the same phenomenon, the difference being in one of them you're asleep, and the other one you're awake.

Now, I think that for those of us who have never had a vision, most of us have had dreams, though probably not prophetic ones. You might have had prophetic ones. I think I've had one or two or three, but most dreams, they're not prophetic.

Most dreams are just dreams. But we know what a dream is. A dream is where in your mind you're somewhere else than where you really are.

Where you really are is in your bed at home. But in your dream, you could be anywhere, with friends or with strangers or doing almost anything. There's a story in your head when you're dreaming.

Now, when God gave dreams like to Nebuchadnezzar and to Joseph and so forth, I'm sure that it was the same kind of thing, only God was directing the story in the head to make a prophetic message. Now, I believe a vision is probably the same kind of thing.

Maybe like a daydream.

But it's like people who have these visions in the Bible, you can hardly tell whether they're describing a dream or a vision because the only difference is one guy's awake and the other guy's asleep. But the same kind of information, the same kind of story, the same kind of phenomenon seems to be playing on in the head. God is revealing in their head them traveling, doing things, digging holes in the temple walls and going into the basement and seeing all kinds of stuff.

I mean, Ezekiel probably didn't really do all that stuff. He described it as happening in a vision. He was in the spirit, he said.

And that probably means that he didn't really transport to Jerusalem, but God in his vision carried him away to that location. And he saw things, and what he saw there was all the abominations that were being done in Jerusalem for which God was going to judge them. And the main movement in that vision in chapters 8 through 11 is that he first sees the glory of the Lord, probably the cloud.

And then later leaves the city, goes outside the east gate and goes and stands on the Mount of Olives to the east of the city. And that's how the vision ends. Now, the meaning of it is if God has left the city, then there's no one there to protect it against the Babylonian threat, which was already there.

The city, in fact, in real life at that time, I think was already under siege. If it was not, it had been in danger from Babylon for a long time, and everyone knew Babylon was the one who would take them down if anyone did. And for God to be in the temple, see Jeremiah, not Ezekiel, but Jeremiah in Jerusalem had to go and prophesy in the temple and rebuke the Jews because they were saying, the temple of the Lord is here in Jerusalem, we're invulnerable.

God is in the city. If God's in the city, the Babylonians can't take the city. God's house is right here.

And Jeremiah went to the house of the Lord there and he said, listen, did God spare Shiloh? That's where the tabernacle was. The Philistines took down the tabernacle. The Philistines conquered Shiloh and destroyed it and burned it to the ground.

Why would you think that the Babylonians couldn't do that to this temple? God isn't dwelling in temples made with hands. And if you don't have like an unconditional claim on God's favor, no matter what you do. See this vision in chapters 8 through 11 is a series of visions of all the evil, horrible things that people are doing, the priests, the leaders, everybody.

And then God says, okay, I'm leaving. And so the glory of God departs out the East gate and goes and stands on the Mount of Olives, which is another way of saying he's not in

the city anymore. The city is left to itself.

Let them defend themselves against the Babylonians if they will. God's not on their side anymore. He's outside the city.

Elvis has left the building. He's gone. And so likewise, by the way, Zechariah, who wrote his book, oh, a hundred years later or so, after the temple was rebuilt, because the Babylonian exile ended, Zerubbabel and others went back and rebuilt the temple.

And after the temple is rebuilt, Zechariah, I said a hundred years later, it wouldn't have been a hundred years later. It'd be probably more like 50, 60 years later. But Zechariah prophesied that the time would come again where Yahweh's feet would stand on the Mount of Olives, meaning he's going to leave the temple again and it's going to fall again.

And it would. The last prophecy in Zechariah chapter 14 is about, in my opinion, I'll give that caveat because almost everyone else you'll hear would disagree with it. But I believe that Zechariah 14 is about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans.

And the temple was destroyed twice by pagans. Both times, God had to leave the city before it could fall. Before the pagans could take it over, God had to leave and be not its protector.

So in Ezekiel's day, God was seen leaving the city, out the East Gate, standing on the Mount of Olives, meaning, okay, the city's going down to the Babylonians. Zechariah, who's living at the time when the temple now has been rebuilt and will remain standing until after the time of Jesus. But he prophesies there's a time coming, it's going to go down again.

I see God on the Mount of Olives again. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. And of course, a lot of people associate that with the second coming of Christ, but there's no mention of Christ in the passage.

I realize we've all been told that Jesus is going to come back and set his foot on the Mount of Olives. It's going to split in two and so forth. That's because people have taken Zechariah 14 as a passage about the second coming of Christ.

And yet, Christ's coming isn't mentioned in the passage. And instead, the destruction of Jerusalem is, right? The opening verses. The women will be ravaged, the city will be taken, and so forth.

So, Ezekiel and Zechariah both predict the destruction of the temple, but to different adversaries at different times. The first time was the Babylonians in 586 BC. The second time was, of course, in AD 70 by the Romans.

But that's what that vision is about. Within that second vision of chapters 8 through 11, there's a chapter 9. And one of the things he sees in that vision is six men with slaughter weapons in their hands and another man with an ink horn and a quill in his hand. And God tells the six men with slaughter weapons, well, he tells the man with the ink horn first, go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the forehead of all who sigh and cry over the abominations that are done in the city.

In other words, the faithful remnant who are not on board with all these sins that the city is doing, but they have no power to stop it. They're sighing and they're crying. They're on God's side about this, but they're powerless.

God says, go put a mark on their foreheads. And then once that's done, he says to the six men with slaughter weapons, you go through and wipe out everybody who doesn't have the mark on their forehead. Now that might sound like something from the New Testament.

And something from the New Testament is necessarily imagery borrowed from this passage of Ezekiel. That's in Revelation 7. And that is where God puts his seal on the foreheads of his remnant before he releases the judgments upon whoever Revelation is talking about. Now, my belief is it's not about Jerusalem.

My belief is that Revelation is about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. But like Ezekiel, John sees a vision of the righteous remnant in Jerusalem actually being marked on the forehead to be preserved from that judgment. So that's in Ezekiel 9 and it's part of the other vision that is about the abominations and the destruction coming, but which ends up in chapter 11 with God leaving the city.

Okay, the third vision that he had is the famous dry bones vision. Dem bones, dem bones. Dem dry bones.

That's about the ankle bone connected to the leg bone or whatever. And that's what this vision is, what that old Negro spiritual song is about. Ezekiel is out in a desert area in the vision.

He probably isn't really out in the desert. He's having a vision of a desert area with a bunch of dead human bones scattered about just randomly. And God says to him, prophesy to these bones.

And so he prophesies to the bones. I'm not sure what he says to them, but he prophesies to them. And they begin to rattle and shake and stand up and assemble into bodies, into skeletons initially.

And after their skeletons, their flesh comes on and skin and hair, but they're not alive. There's no breath in them, it says. It's like they've been totally assembled back into people again.

But although they're outwardly and physically assembled, they're not alive. There's no spirit in them. And so as a secondary move, Ezekiel is told, prophesy to the spirit.

Now some translations say to the wind. That's okay. Or breath, because the same word, ruach, in the Hebrew is all three of those.

The word ruach means spirit or wind or breath. So you kind of have to take your pick from the context of which, you know, when you have the word ruach, which is it? Well, these bodies had no breath in them or no spirit in them. So he prophesies to the breath or the spirit or the wind.

I think the King James says wind, if I'm not mistaken. And the spirit comes upon them and they come alive. A vast army.

Now, Ezekiel is given the interpretation of this vision. God said, these bones scattered in the wilderness, this is the whole house of Israel. They say our bones are dried and we have no hope.

Now this is because their city had been destroyed. They were 700 miles away in no position to go back. There's nothing to go back to.

They're captives in Babylon. There's nothing at home. If they could sneak away from Babylon and go back there, there's nothing there.

Just the burned out ruins of their city. And they say, we're done. We're hopeless.

There's no hope for us. We're just like dried bones. Now, God says, that's what they say.

But he says, I will surely take you out of your graves and assemble you and bring you back to the land. Now, this is a prophecy about the return of the exiles from Babylon. They are in Babylon without hope.

But God says, hey, you're not without hope. I'm going to reassemble you and bring you back. But the reason this vision had two parts, one which was the physical reassembly of the bodies and the other which is the spirit coming in, is because it's and I will send my spirit upon you.

So there's two parts of this restoration. The first was getting Jews back from Babylon to Jerusalem and reassembling the city, building the temple, building houses, the nation arising as it were from the dead, from the grave. God reassembles what was a hopeless situation and makes a city functioning again.

But the Holy Spirit has not been given yet. When did that happen? That happened on the Day of Pentecost. The second part of Ezekiel's vision is when God sends his spirit upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many of the prophets spoke of it. Of course, Peter on the Day of Pentecost quoted Joel who spoke of it. Ezekiel speaks of it more than once.

Isaiah spoke of it frequently. The coming of the spirit. And I believe there's other places in the prophets that speak of this without the plain language that some others use.

But the point is that there'd be after the Babylonian exile, there'd be two stages of God's restoration of his people. One, the restoration of the nation back in their land again, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the temple and all that. And that happened.

When Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon, he gave permission to the Jews and to other captive peoples that the Babylonians had taken from their lands. He gave them all permission to go back to their lands and repopulate them again. And he specifically gave Zerubbabel, the governor of the Jews at the time, financial assistance and authorization to build the temple and all that.

And so about 50,000 Jews, probably a million taken into captivity, who knows how many, but about 50,000 came back, small remnant. And the city was rebuilt. The nation came back together, just like these dry bones assembling into bodies.

But they're like breathless. They're like the spirit has not come yet. And the prophets had said, the age of the spirit, they didn't use that term.

They didn't use the term age of the Messiah either. But they did talk about an age when the Messiah would reign. It's the time when the spirit would be poured out.

And that happened, of course, when Jesus, the Messiah came and the spirit was poured out at Pentecost. So there's the restoration of the exiles from Babylon was the first stage of God's restoration of his people. The second stage was when Jesus came, gathered the faithful remnant to himself and poured his spirit out on them on the day of Pentecost.

So that's the second part of the dry bones prophecy being fulfilled. Then there's a fourth vision he had, and that's a really long one. Chapters 40 through 48.

It's nine chapters long. It's like it's like almost a fifth of the book. Anyway, this temple has is one of the difficult passages to explain.

He sees a temple. A description is given of the temple in many chapters, many details. If you've ever read Exodus and seen all the details about the tabernacle, if you ever try to read through the Old Testament, you know, first you have to get through those genealogies in Genesis five and Genesis 10 and Genesis 11.

Once you get past there, you feel like it's pretty smooth saying the stories are interesting. You get into Exodus. It's really interesting.

The story of Moses stuff. You get to about chapter 20 of Exodus and then chapter 23

when he's given all those laws. Suddenly you've got the tabernacle and you've got like five chapters of tedious details.

Make the tabernacle this way. This has to be this size. This material has to be put position this way.

Very, very detailed stuff. And then after you've had about four or five chapters of that, before the end of the book of Exodus, there's another four or five chapters tell them how they made it. And it's all the same details.

You've got all these steps and make it this way. And then the next chapter and they made it this way. And they didn't just say they made it the way we talked about earlier in those earlier chapters.

They go through every detail again. It's the priests obviously really liked details like that to record them and so forth. And so also is he gives that kind of detail of the temple.

And frankly, it's a very difficult section to read all the way through just because it is tedious. But if you're going to read through the whole Bible, read through it. And the question is going to be in your mind.

What is this talking about? When is this temple? Where is this temple? Well, it's obviously assumed to be in Jerusalem. And most people assume that God is showing Ezekiel at a time when the temple was not existing because the temple had been burned down and was not yet rebuilt. God showed him this blueprint for a temple, which presumably is the blueprint for the temple that they'll build when they go back to the land.

He's already predicted they're going to go back to the land. So if they're going to rebuild the temple, maybe this is it. Now the problem with that, I mean, that is a simple explanation of this.

But when they did rebuild the temple in the days of Zerubbel, it wasn't like the one described there. The one described in chapters 40 through 47, especially in 48, also has some, is more about the distribution of the land, but especially, you know, 40 through 47. It's a lot more elaborate than the temple that Zerubbel built when they went back.

It's more like Solomon's temple, which is one of the wonders of the world. And the temple that Zerubbel built was just a functional unit. It wasn't really very elaborate, wasn't very ornate.

And when the Jews who came back from Babylon, who were old enough to remember Solomon's temple, they saw when they laid the foundations how small it was going to be compared to his, they wept. I mean, the older Jews just wept when they saw how inferior this new temple was going to be to the one that they'd lost. So why did Ezekiel describe

it as elaborately as a much greater temple than actually happened? Well, one way that this is understood, and I would say the way the majority of Bible teachers in America teach it because they're dispensationalists, is that this is a temple that will be functioning in the millennium.

They believe the temple will be rebuilt sometime maybe in the near future. The Antichrist will defile it by going into it, and that'll be in the tribulation period, they believe. And then Jesus will come back at the end of the tribulation, and he'll resume, he'll probably cleanse the temple like the Maccabees did, and then they'll resume animal sacrifices, which are described in these chapters of Ezekiel.

Animal sacrifices, Levitical priests, all the stuff from the Old Testament temple cultus is described there. And so dispensationalists, who as far as I know are the only people who believe this way, they feel this temple is a millennial temple. When Jesus has come back and he's living on earth among us, that we're going to be offering animal sacrifices again.

We're going to go to the temple in Jerusalem and there's going to be Levitical priests there serving and we're going to bring our lambs and bulls and watch them slaughtered before our face, and in fact we may have to do it ourselves. But that seems to fly in the face of an awful lot of things in the New Testament, like the sacrifices of animals are not relevant anymore. And even the Old Testament said God didn't like them.

In Psalm 40 it says in verse 6, sacrifice and offerings you did not desire. In Psalm 51 David said you did not desire burnt offerings or else I would have brought them. The sacrifices of a God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

Even the Old Testament says that God never really liked sacrifices. They were necessary before Christ came to teach and to foreshadow Christ so that people would understand the idea of an innocent victim taking the sins of a guilty party and dying in his place. That's what Jesus did and the ritual of doing this with animals, which are clearly innocent, taking the sin of the worshiper and being dead, that was the teaching device God used to basically educate Israel about the whole concept of atonement.

But now that Jesus has come and everyone who's going to be with him when he comes back, we already know that. That's why we're there. We're Christians.

We already know about Jesus and the atonement. Why would he reestablish a system that he never liked in the beginning? Now I'll tell you what the answer usually given is by dispensationalists. They don't all give it because they know it's a very inadequate one, but they don't have a much better one.

And that is that, well, you know the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament look forward to the crucifixion of Christ. The millennial sacrifices of the same sort will look back as a

memorial. The ones in the Old Testament foreshadowed, they look forward to Christ's sacrifice.

The ones in the Old Testament will look back at Christ's sacrifice. It'll be a way of remembering it. I said it's not a good answer.

One reason it's not a good answer is because we already have such a memorial. Jesus set it up himself. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you remember the Lord's death until he comes.

I mean, you don't need to set up a temple and animal sacrifice and all that in order to have a memorial service for Jesus. Memory Church does that regularly. They've done it for 2,000 years.

So, I mean, this is difficult. If it's not the temple that Zerubbabel built, which is what you would expect it to be, because the vision is given while the temple is not there, there is a promise the temple will be there. There will be a rebuilt temple.

And it hasn't been built yet. And he describes the temple. So the natural assumption, okay, he's describing the temple that we're going to build when we go back from Babylon.

But it doesn't. So dispensations say, well, the prophecy has to be fulfilled to the letter. So it hasn't.

Therefore, it will have to be in the millennium. Now there are some people who spiritualize the whole thing. And they say, well, you know how the tabernacle in the Old Testament, it was had spiritual associations.

God said, make sure you make everything according to the pattern that I showed you in the mouth. There's this spiritual prototype, and it represents all kinds of spiritual things. That's what the writer of Hebrews says.

Now, by the way, if you've never studied the tabernacle, I won't have time to go into that. But suffice it to say, anyone who spends time studying the tabernacle finds out that there's an awful lot in the New Testament that kind of connects spiritual realities of the new covenant with the rituals and structures of the tabernacle. Now, many people say, well, that's what God intended with this description of the temple, too.

Although it would never be actually built, the description of it is as good as the description of the tabernacle for representing spiritual truths. And so some just spiritualize all things, and God never intended for this particular temple to be built. My answer and my solution to the problem is a little different than all three of those.

I don't spiritualize it, although I think, I do think that whether the temple was built or not,

it would have been intended to represent spiritual things, just like the tabernacle did. But I think it was really potentially one that could have been built. If you look at Ezekiel 43, Ezekiel 43 is in the midst of this temple vision.

It started in chapter 40 and goes on through 48. So this is right in the midst of that vision. In Ezekiel 43, 10 and 11, God says, Son of man, which he calls Ezekiel about 90 times in the book, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities.

And let them measure the pattern. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangements and the rest. You see what he said? If they are ashamed, if they've learned their lesson, I sent them into Babylon because of their wicked deeds.

Did they learn their lesson this time? If they did, if they are repentant, if they are ashamed, then show them this pattern. The implication is if the nation in exile wholesale just repented, say, oh my, we brought this on ourselves. How terrible.

Forgive us, God. We want to go back and get a new start and do it right this time. If they had been fully repentant and ashamed of their sins, this is the temple they would have had.

This is the temple that could have been. But you know, how did it turn out after all? When Cyrus gave the decree that any Jew in Babylon who wanted to leave could go back, 50,000 were interested. The rest were comfortable in Babylon.

They had their farms, they had their families, their kids, their grandkids had been born there, their neighborhoods. They were comfy. What do they need a temple for? What do they need God for? And I'm not saying they forgot God altogether because the book of Esther is about some of the Jews who did stay in Persia after that point.

And some of them, like Esther and Mordecai, were godly Jews. Even Daniel stayed in Babylon when he could have gone. So some godly Jews, either because they're too old or because of other circumstances, were not able to go back.

But for the most part, it is a reproach to the Israelites in Babylon that so few of them had any interest in going back to restore the holy city and the house of God and restore the worship of God in the temple and so forth. And I think God was very unimpressed with them. I think that God said, OK, this is the temple you could have had if you'd really had a better response.

But since we got this little niggling response, I'll give you a little niggling temple. You're going to get a temple. I said you would, but it's not going to be this one now because this is conditional.

If they are ashamed, then this is what I'm going to give them. So this is the temple that never will be. Even if they had this temple, it would have come to an end after Jesus died.

Because there's no need for a temple after Jesus died. There's no need for animal sacrifices after Jesus died. Even this temple would have become obsolete because it has animal sacrifices, Levitical priests.

Jesus came at the right hand of God. He's now the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. And that's forever, and that replaces the Aaronic priesthood.

So you're not going to have Levitical priests sometime in the future after Jesus has become the high priest after the order of Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 7 tells us that's replaced forever, the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus' sacrifice replaces forever all the animal sacrifices.

There's not going to be another system like that again in a millennium or any other time, and could never be a legitimate one. Now a lot of Christians say the Jews right now, they're planning to rebuild the temple. I think they are, some of them.

Will they do it? They might. It is not predicted. The assumption is that this temple vision predicts it.

And if it predicts it, then Christians are on board with it. Now you have to realize that there are some churches so excited about the Jews in Jerusalem building a temple again, that they're sending money to them for the project. Some very large and rich churches are sending big, big bucks over to Israel to go to the temple people, the temple committee or whatever that's wanting to build the temple.

We're helping to finance building a pagan building. Yes, it is pagan. That's why it was destroyed in 70 AD.

God had left the temple, and he has not returned. He's not coming back to that temple. He's not going to come back and have animal sacrifices there again.

If the Jews build their temple, start offering animal sacrifices, they're doing this to God. They're doing that to Jesus. They're saying, you thought you could take our temple away because we didn't accept Jesus.

We're going to have it back anyway, and we're going to ignore Jesus and go back to our animal sacrifices instead. Frankly, the Muslim religion gives Jesus more honor than the Jewish religion does today. The Muslims think Jesus was the greatest prophet ever.

Most Jews don't think that highly of him. But you see, that we would build a temple for the Jews, we might as well build a mosque. Why should Christian money be used for

things that aren't Christian? The reason many Christians are into it is because if it happens, that means Jesus is coming soon.

If Jesus is going to come soon, he can come soon without our financing pagan buildings. We could maybe use that money to send missionaries and win people to Christ somewhere. Why support a different religion when ours still has needs? It's such a distraction.

The devil has so distracted the American church. And largely because of misinterpretations, in my opinion, of these prophecies. This temple vision is the primary basis for any Christian believing that there's going to be a future temple in Jerusalem.

And there's going to be animal sacrifices and all priesthood stuff again. And yet they're assuming that, and it doesn't say it. It doesn't actually ever say this temple is going to be built.

It says if they are ashamed, show them the plans. That's a very different thing than making a prediction that it will be built. It's the temple that might have been.

But even if it had been, it would be done now. 2,000 years ago it would become obsolete. But in Ezekiel's day it would have served for another 500 years.

So anyway, that's that vision. Now I skipped over without comment the first vision, which is in chapter 1 through 3, which is his, the wheel within a wheel and the eyes and all that stuff. And I'm not going to go into detail about this, but he's by the river Kibar and he sees, he hears a loud sound and he sees this strange phenomenon.

He describes it and rather than reading the description, which is very tedious and very repetitious. I mean, for example, the word, the appearance, I think that word is in there nine times in that chapter. And the likeness I think is in there 14 times.

He keeps talking about the appearance of the likeness of the, this is like the appearance of the likeness of this and like the appearance of the likeness of that. I mean, I'm not going to say he can't write like that, but it makes it awfully hard to read it. But that's okay.

It's worth getting the information. What is the information? He describes a platform of really kind of a, kind of a four wheeled cart. Apparently a square platform on the platform.

There's a chair, a throne, and somebody is on the throne whose description strongly suggests it's God. In fact, we're told it is God. He's told this is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

Now, what's interesting here is that there's these wheels that are described in some

detail. And there are wheels that could not really mechanically really exist. This is a non-physical reality.

This is a spiritual vision he's having. But these wheels, he says there's a wheel within a wheel so that they can go any way without turning. What that seems to mean is that you've got a structure of wheels where you've got the rim of one wheel going this way and perpendicular and built into it.

Is a wheel going that way. You can roll either direction without turning the carriage. But you could never have an axle.

The wheel could never work. You know, it couldn't be a physical thing. And it's, you know, it's not intended to be taken as a physical thing.

God's not physical. His throne's not physical. And his chariot's not physical.

But it's got this interesting description of the wheels have eyes all around them. So I guess, I don't know if they're gathering information or if they are just watching where they're going so they don't get an accident or what. But there's eyes around the rims of these wheels.

And more interesting to most people is these footmen around the chariot. Creatures. Creatures that are later in chapter 10 referred to as cherubim.

He does not call them cherubim in chapter one, but he describes them in the same detail in chapter 10. And there he says, these are the cherubim. And I saw them by the river Kibar.

So he referred in chapter 10 back to this vision. In his second vision, the one where he's in Jerusalem and so forth. He sees them again.

This time in the temple. But at this point, they're not in the temple. They're in Babylon where he is.

And these creatures, these cherubim that he describes, they have four faces each. One face is like a lion. One face is like an ox.

One face is like an eagle. And one's like a man. Now you may recognize that in the book of Revelation, there are four living creatures around the throne there.

And they sound kind of reminiscent of these, but they're not the same. For one thing, in Revelation, there's four creatures, but they each have one face. There's still four faces.

One of a lion, one of an ox, one of an eagle, and one of a man. But one face per creature in Revelation. Whereas in Ezekiel, all four creatures have all four faces.

And that's like the wheels. They can turn and go different directions. They don't have to turn around.

They got a face facing that way already. I got one already going that way. I've got a face looking every direction.

So the chariot can move any which way, it says, without turning. It can go any direction. And they move as fast as lightning.

What is he saying? Well, I don't know what to say exactly about the cherubim. If we're talking about a symbolic description of something, or if there's really creatures in heaven that look like this. If there are, when John was caught up in heaven in Revelation, he didn't see them, he saw something that had some of the same symbolism, but not the same creatures.

So my feeling is that these are visions, like dreams. I mean, when Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, he saw the Babylonian Empire represented as the head of gold of a statue. When Daniel had a dream, and Daniel said, and he saw Babylon represented as a lion, and Persia as a bear.

Now, these are not literal. These are symbolic. And likewise, Ezekiel's dream.

This is symbolic, but what does it symbolize? Well, that's a good question. I can tell you, I think, with some certainty, what the major vision symbolizes. The details, a little more difficult.

The four faces, the Jewish rabbis have a theory about the four faces. The rabbis said, the lion is the chief of the wild beasts, and one of the faces is a lion. The ox, one of the other faces, is the chief of the domestic beasts.

The eagle is the chief of the birds, and man is the chief of them all. So you've got these different realms of the animate creation represented by their chief representative in these faces. Suggesting that all of nature, all of the created, sensate world, is attached to God in the book of Revelation.

Those four faces, they're praising God all the time, and nature does praise God. The heavens declare the glory of God. And so, that's what the rabbis thought.

Now, Christians have sometimes come up with the theory that the four faces represent the four aspects of Jesus seen in the four Gospels. Now, this is a little tricky, because it suggests that, you know, that in Ezekiel's time, there already was planned to be just four Gospels, no more, and so forth. But the truth is that the four Gospels do look at Jesus from different angles, different aspects.

If you look at these creatures from one angle, you're looking at an eagle. Look at another

angle, oh, it's an ox. I thought it was an eagle, but it's an ox after all.

Over here, oh, I'm looking at a lion here, or a man. So, also, when you read the Gospels, although they're very similar to each other in overlap, there's different emphases. Matthew presents Jesus specifically as the Messiah of Israel.

That's clearly the emphasis of Matthew, is that he's the Messiah, the king, like a lion, the lion of the tribe of Judah. Mark depicts Jesus active. That's why you always, when you read through Mark, you see about several dozen times, immediately, immediately, and immediately he did this, and then he did this, immediately, and then immediately, he went here, and then immediately he went out again.

All this immediately is this, you almost get out of breath reading it. It's like Jesus just doing stuff. There's not as many sermons of Jesus in Mark's Gospel, a lot of action.

Some say that, therefore, he depicts Christ sort of as the servant, the one who's serving, not so much talking, not even so much reigning, but it depicts him as the servant, and the ox is the servant of man. The ox pulls man's plows and things like that. It's a serving animal.

And then that Luke depicts Jesus as the man, the son of man more, and connects him more. Even the genealogy in Luke goes all the way back to Adam, which is our common ancestor of all mankind, whereas Matthew's genealogy only goes back to David and Abraham, because he's giving the Messiah picture. But Luke gives him as a man picture, like the face of a man.

And John, the face of a flying eagle, speaks of heavenliness, transcendentness. And by the way, in Christian history, John in statues and artwork and so forth is often represented as an eagle or having an eagle in the same statue with him, because this picture of the Gospel of John portraying Jesus and his deity, and his eagle being the creature that goes higher than any other creature, therefore represents transcendence. So some think that these four faces actually represent the four faces or four aspects of Jesus that are presented in the four Gospels.

So a very tempting conclusion. But where do we go from there? What's the got to? It's one of those things, it's a matter of curiosity. It doesn't have a lot of practical application, but it's Christians and rabbis give different significance to it, apparently.

Anyway, I believe the meaning of that vision is simply this. As Ezekiel sees God on his throne, his throne is mobile. Now God's throne is usually in heaven, but now he's kind of on a road trip.

God is thrown on a chariot, and he's traveling around. He's first seen in Babylon, next time he's seen in Jerusalem, same chariot. He gets around, and that's the point.

God does get around. God is not restricted to Jerusalem. The Jews who have been taken out of Jerusalem have not been removed necessarily from God's presence.

God is still in Babylon, too. He's mobile. Of course, God's not literally mobile.

He's literally everywhere it was. But to anthropomorphize someone, God can, he goes around like the speed of lightning, and he's everywhere. And that's, I think, what's being said.

The story of Ezekiel's ministry begins with him seeing a vision of comfort, I think, to the exiles who've been taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. They always associated God with the temple in Jerusalem, and now they're 700 miles away from there. But hey, he's here, too.

I just saw him. I saw him on his chariot. God is here in Babylon, too, among us.

And so I think that the visions of, the four visions in Ezekiel have these means. We're going to take a break, and then I'm going to come back to further information. Didn't I get, that's an L. I told you, go by like that, like lightning.

But let me just remind you, the first vision is the chariot throne vision. The second vision is all the abominations in Jerusalem followed by God's glory, leaving the temple and standing on the Mount of Olives. The third vision is the dry bones.

And the fourth vision is the temple vision at the end. And those are the four great visions and very important parts of Ezekiel. We have other things to talk about.

There's a lot of them. So we'll take a break.