

# Understanding Ezekiel Part 1

## Introduction

Ezekiel is one of the more difficult books of Scripture to understand, for several reasons. Not the least is that it is presented in 13 separate scrolls each of which is definitively dated in terms of king Jehoiachin's exile in Babylon. Unfortunately, the arrangement of the chapters in this book varies from the arrangement of the scrolls, thus the information is presented slightly out of order. Aligning the information with the order of the scrolls does help toward a better understanding of YHWH's message of the coming judgment and reward for the Israelite people of that day.

The whole of the visions and prophecies given to the prophet were to encourage those currently in exile to repent of their wickedness and return to YHWH. If they did this His glory would return and they could enjoy a blessed life in the land.

Amazingly confusion can be found in the first verses of the first chapter of this book,

*<sup>1</sup>Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Kevar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of Elohim.*

*<sup>2</sup> In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, <sup>3</sup> The Word of YHWH came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzy, in the land of the Kasdiym by the river Kevar; and the hand of YHWH was there upon him.*

Verse 1 has its own distinct timeline, distinguishing it from the rest of the book where the timing of the information is related to the length of king Jehoiachin's captivity. However, for verse 1, we do not know the event from which the thirty years is dated. Some relate the thirty years to the age of the prophet when he started his ministry. Another proposal is that these thirty years are to be reckoned from the time when Josiah and all the people of Judah entered into a solemn covenant with YHWH, mentioned in 2Kings.22. According to this record, the book of the law was found by Hilkiah the priest in the eighteenth year of Josiah. From this date to the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, was thirty years, thus, this second proposal ties the first two verses together. However, both proposals are speculative.

The issue arising within verse 3 is that this verse is written in the third person making it uncertain whether Ezekiel himself is the final redactor of the information. A further confusion concerns the unfulfilled prophecies and whether they remain valid today. But first let us consider the format in which the information is given.

## The Information as Presented

The order in which Elohim gave Ezekiel the information is defined by year/month/day in that sequence. As can be seen from the following tabulation, when we examine the order of the scrolls, the chronology of the chapters is disrupted at scrolls 5, 10 and 13. But the anomalies do not stop here, there is additional confusion with the dating of scrolls 9, 10 and 11.

Scroll No	Ezekiel Reference	Date			Synopsis
		Year	Month	Day	
1	1.01 - 7.27	5	1	5	Proclamation against Israel
2	8.1 - 19.14	6	6	5	YHWH showing Ezekiel the crimes of Israel and Y'hudah
3	20.1 - 23.49	7	5	10	Ezekiel to tell Israel they must acknowledge their guilt
4	24.1 - 25.17	9	10	10	Proclamation against the nations
5	29.1 - 16	10	10	12	Proclamation against the Egypt
6	26.1 - 28.26	11	1	1	Proclamation against the Tyre
7	30.20 - 26	11	1	7	Proclamation against the Pharaoh
8	31.1-18	11	3	1	Egypt brought to ruin
9	32.17 - 33.20	12	?	15	Egypt sent to the pit
10	32.1 - 32.16	12	12	1	Lamentation for Egypt
11	33.21 - 39.29	12	10	5	Fall of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)
		↑ 13 Yrs ↓			Why a 13 year gap? Was YHWH giving Israel time to digest the information contained in the previous scrolls?
12	40.1 - 48.35	25	10	4	Temple scroll - refer to commentary
13	29.17 - 30.19	27	1	1	Babylon will plunder Egypt

### Anomaly with scrolls 9, 10 and 11

Remembering that the dating is associated with king Jehoiachin's years in exile, the dating of scroll 11 is suspect. Historical records show King Jehoiachin came to the throne in 598 BCE but only reigned as king in the land for three months and was then taken to Babylon. As the fall of Yerushalayim was 587 BCE this would put scroll 11 in year 11 of the king's exile and not year 12 as described in Ezekiel. That said, it is very possible that the messenger taking the news of Yerushalayim's fall arrived in Babylon sometime during the following year. It is the messages arrival with the news that that is recorded in Ezk.33:21 and not the actual date of the city's ruin. So, we will assume year 12 to be correct.

But this issue spreads across all 9, 10 & 11 scrolls, because depending upon the translation used, the dates of these three scrolls can read as either the eleventh year or twelfth year. For example, the Aramaic Peshitta has year 11 for each of scrolls 9, 10 & 11. It is plausible that a copying error occurred with the dating of scroll 10 but is such a repetition of the same error plausible? We do know that the fall of Yerushalayim was after the fall of Egypt.

The confusion is further exacerbated with the LXX inferring month 1 for scroll 9. I believe this is correct thus, scroll 9 would have to be year 12 as it could not occur before scroll 8. Incidentally, the 1851 Benton's English Septuagint concurs with the LXX dating. So, if we put all this together the following order is the result,

Scroll No	Location	Date			Synopsis
		Year	Month	Day	
8	31:1-18	11	3	1	Egypt brought to ruin
9	32:17 - 33:20	12	1	15	Egypt assigned to the pit
11	33:21 - 39:29	12	10	5	Fall of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)
10	32.1: - 32.:16	12	12	1	Lamentation for Egypt

Thus, based on the timing the information was given to the prophet, a correct sequence of the 13 scrolls is more likely the following,

Scroll No	Ezekiel Reference	Date			Synopsis
		Year	Month	Day	
1	1.01 - 7.27	5	1	5	Proclamation against Israel
2	8.1 - 19.14	6	6	5	YHWH showing Ezekiel the crimes of Israel and Y'hudah
3	20.1 - 23.49	7	5	10	Ezekiel to tell Israel they must acknowledge their guilt
4	24.1 - 25.17	9	10	10	Proclamation against the nations
5	29.1 -16	10	10	12	Proclamation against the Egypt
6	26.1 - 28.26	11	1	1	Proclamation against the Tyre
7	30.20 - 26	11	1	7	Proclamation against the Pharaoh
8	31.1-18	11	3	1	Prophecy of Egypt's ruin
9	32.17 - 33.20	12	1	15	Egypt assigned to the pit
11	33.21 - 39.29	12	10	5	Fall of Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)
10	32.1 - 32.16	12	12	1	Lamentation for Egypt
		↑ 13 Yrs ↓			Why a 13 year gap? Was YHWH giving Israel time to digest the information contained in the previous scrolls?
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It should be noted that there is no reason to assume the order of the events prophesied should follow the order the prophecies in which were given.

### Scroll 12 – The Temple Scroll

When we examine the earlier scrolls, we see that the prophet was in regular conversation with the elders of the people but then there is a 13 year gap before he delivers the next message from YHWH, why is this? Let us examine some verses from chapter 43, covered by scroll 12,

*So, the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of YHWH filled the house. And I heard him speaking to me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And he said to me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places. (Ezek.43:5-7)*

***Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. You son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.*** (Ezek.43:9-10)

***And since they shall be ashamed of all that they did, make known to them the design of the House and its structure, and its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its laws, and all its forms and all its ordinances. And write it down before their eyes, so that they observe its entire design and all its laws and shall do them.*** (Ezek.43:11).

If we abstract the highlighted sections the resulting message given to the prophet is, “If the people stop their iniquities show remorse and repent you may show them the temple design and its laws that they may do them.” Thus, it was a conditional offer. But the people never fully repented, indeed many had established such a good lifestyle they refused to go back to the land. It is true that YHWH commanded for the exiles to flourish under the Babylonians (Jer.29:4-7) but He never intended for them to remain in the hands of pagans. They were supposed to return after 70 years. Hence, the Talmud states ‘That because there was only a partial redemption YHWH prevented them from building Ezekiel’s temple’. *Mishnah Middot*. Even the Rabbis agree that the temple was for the people of that day and conditional. As confirmed in the Talmud because the people never fulfilled the condition the temple was never built.

It should be remembered that Ezekiel lived amongst the exiles in Babylon and died many years before the return of the exiles to Yerushalayim. Thus, he lived before the reconstruction of either the city of Yerushalayim or the second temple. This fact is most pertinent when considering the above verse: clearly it was YHWH’s intention for the reconstruction of this second temple to follow the plans He had just given to the prophet. It makes no sense to think otherwise. Hence, Ezekiel was given the plans for the second temple not a third temple, as some believe today.

Considering that a second temple was to be built, if YHWH meant for the design given to Ezekiel not to be followed surely, He would have instructed the prophet to conceal, not reveal, the plans. Also, why would YHWH give the prophet such intricate details of a temple that is to be built several millennia after his death.

Nowhere does Scripture infer that Ezekiel is going to return with a set of temple plans to be given to someone or other. The Rabbis agree that the temple was meant to be built by the exiles on their return to the Land but they but they did not meet YHWH’s criteria.

So, what happened to these plans? It was almost a generation after Ezekiel’s death when the people returned to the Land - did the temple plans die with the prophet?

Whilst there are several prophetic passages within Ezekiel, we must exclude those verses associated with a temple.

### **Some Contentious Scriptures**

Notwithstanding all we have said there are several scriptures, particularly in the book of Isaiah, which would appear to support a future temple construction and so we need to examine what is said.

*And it shall be in the latter days that the mountain of the House of YHWH is established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills. And all nations shall flow to it. And many peoples shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of YHWH, to the House of the Elohim of Ya’akov, and let Him teach us His ways, and let us walk in His paths, for out of Tziyon comes forth the Torah, and the Word of YHWH from Yerushalayim.* (Isa.2:2-3).

This passage is plagued by poor translations resulting in a complete distortion of the true message. The first issue is with the end of verse 2 ‘And all nations shall flow to it.’ The last four words ‘shall flow to it’ is a translation of the Hebrew **אֵלָיו** pronounced *ey’lahv*. Which throughout the Torah and Tanakh has the meaning flow to him or them. Overwhelmingly the Hebrew refers to a person not an object. So, who is the ‘mountain of the house of YHWH?’ – Mashiach. When we substitute Mashiach for mountain it harmonises with the phrase ‘let Him teach us His ways, and let us walk in His paths,’ in verse 2.

A further problem is how to interpret the Hebrew (*Bayit*) translated house in this passage? Scripture uses the word in several ways; to describe a dwelling place (home, temple, even a prison), a particular household or collection of people such as a family or lineage; the house of Ya'akov or the house of David etc. Out of 86 times temple is mentioned in the Scriptures, 80 times (93%) *Heykal* is the Hebrew used and only 6 times (7%) *Bayit* is used. We have a verse in Hosea where YHWH describes the body of His people as His house,

*Set the trumpet to your mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of YHWH, because they (the house) have transgressed my covenant and trespassed against my law. (Hos.8:1).*

The author of Hebrews employs the same terminology,

*But Mashiach as a son over his own house; **whose house we are**, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (Heb.3:6)*

So, if we personalize 'ey'lahv' in terms of Mashiach and interpret *bayit* in terms of a household or family, we get a new presentation for the above verse from Isaiah,

*And it shall be in the latter days that Yahusha HaMashiach the head of the family of YHWH is established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills. And all nations shall flow to him. And many peoples shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the Mashiach of YHWH, to gather with the family/household of the Elohim of Ya'akov and let Him **(Mashiach)** teach us His ways, and let us walk in His paths, for out of Tziyon comes forth the Torah, and the Word of YHWH from Yerushalayim. (Isa.2:2-3).*

Not only does this revised presentation harmonize with Zech.8:23 where it says ten pagans will take hold of the robe of a Jew and want to go up to Zion and worship with him but this revision also finds credibility in the book of Enoch, where it talks of YHWH carving out His throne within the mountains over Yerushalayim,

*I went from there to another place and saw a mountain of fire and flashing both by day and night. I proceeded towards it and perceived seven splendid mountains which were all different from each other. Their stones were brilliant and beautiful all were brilliant and splendid to behold and beautiful was their surface. Three were towards the east and strengthened by being placed one upon another and three were towards the south, strengthened in a similar manner..... And the seventh mountain was in the midst of them. In length they resembled the seat of a throne and odoriferous trees surrounded them. Among these trees was a tree of unceasing smell..... its leaf, its flower and its bark never withered and its fruit was beautiful.*

Enquiring about the vision Miyka'el the angel escorting Enoch explains,

*That mountain which you behold the extent of whose head resembles the seat of YHWH will be the seat on which shall sit the Holy and Great YHWH of glory, the Everlasting King, when He shall come and descend to visit the earth with goodness. And that tree of an agreeable smell, not one of carnal odour, there shall be no power to touch until the period of the great judgement. When all shall be punished and consumed for ever, this shall be bestowed on the righteous and humble. The fruit of the tree shall be given to the elect. For towards the north life shall be planted in the holy place, towards the habitation of the Everlasting King. (En.24 Abstract).*

It was always YHWH desire to reside amongst His people, which was the purpose of the tabernacle/temple (Exod.25:8), but through sin He had to remain separated, behind a temple curtain. The situation in the millennium is very different, only a righteous people will live in the Land, thus the Land will be without sin so there is no longer a need for YHWH to remain in separation. Enoch tells us His throne will be on the highest of the mountains overlooking the new Yerushalayim and His shining glory will be seen over the whole Land. This being the situation what purpose will a temple structure serve if YHWH's presence is located elsewhere - on His mountain throne? A further verse of contention is Isaiah 66:20,

*And they shall bring all your brethren as an offering to YHWH out of all nations, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Yerushalayim, declares YHWH as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of YHWH. (Isa.66:20).*

It is the latter half of the above translation that is most problematic for us,

*'...as the children of Israel bring (H935) an offering in a clean (H2889) vessel (H3627) into the house of YHWH.*

Whilst this section of the verse appears troublesome, we must not interpret a single isolated verse in a way to create contradiction with the cumulative effect of many other verses. Scripture is not contradictory; contradiction is usually the result of poor translation or a lack of contextual application by the reader. This said, let us examine the above section of Isaiah 66:20 from a Hebraic perspective,

- 'Bring:' Strong's H935 is the Hebrew (*Bo*) and can mean to come, go or enter.
- 'Clean:' Strong's H2889 is the Hebrew (*tahor*) and can mean pure.
- 'Vessel:' Strong's H3627 is the Hebrew (*k'liy*) and can mean article or object.

Considering the earlier analysis of the Hebrew (*Bayit*) Isaiah 66:20 could legitimately read,

*And they shall bring all your brethren (the remnant of Israel) as an offering to YHWH out of all nations, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to My holy mountain Yerushalayim, declares YHWH as the children of Israel bring pure offerings into the family of YHWH. (Isa.66:20).*

This new rendering removes all conflict with the earlier verses referred to above. Let us take a final verse from Isaiah,

*Even them (the stranger, the Eunuch) will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. (Isa.56:7)*

In my view this verse has nothing to do with the issue under discussion. I understand the issue here is that of prejudice. YHWH is dealing with the attitude of superiority instituted by the Jewish people over the foreigners living amongst them which was inappropriate. Using the metaphor of the established worship practices given to the Jewish people and in use at that time, YHWH is explaining the neutrality of class that is; the offering of one was to be as acceptable as that of another. In other words, Gentile worship is equally acceptable to YHWH as that of the Jewish people. I believe the verse is meant to overcome on the one hand, a Jewish sense of superiority due to the conviction that, they alone by special favour, were the inheritors of the venerable promises and on the other hand, the inferiority effects this attitude has on the foreigners living amongst them. In Isaiah YHWH is making it clear that the Torah observant foreigner is equally acceptable as the Israelite. Does He not claim all souls are His not just Jewish souls? (Ezek.18:4).

Again, this verse at first appears very troublesome. The verse seems to positively suggest the existence of a temple. However, if we accept that this verse is referring to the millennium period then we must consider it in terms of Mashiach. As we have said, Mashiach removed the separation between YHWH and His creation and restored the divine spiritual element of worship that existed before the fall, thus removing the need for a temple system. Aligning with Mashiach's words in John 2:19 referred to earlier, the apostolic Scriptures say the following,

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up the sacrifices of praise to Elohim, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. (Heb.13:15).*

*You also, as living stones, are being built up, a spiritual house, (Body of people) a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual (not animal) sacrifices acceptable to Elohim through Yahusha Mashiach. (1Pet.2:5).*

Speaking specifically of Mashiach's body of believers the writer of Hebrews says,

*For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moshe, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honour than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is Yah. And Moshe indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Messiah as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb.3:3-6).*

It is probable that the apostle had Isaiah 56:7 in mind when he wrote to the congregation in Rome about the neutrality of the 'body of Mashiach,' where he used his own metaphor of circumcision and uncircumcision. Just as with Isaiah the apostle makes it clear that all have access to YHWH but now it is through Mashiach. Continuing with Isaiah 56:7 let us examine some other phrases in the verse,

'House of Prayer'- YHWH's desire is to be worshipped which we do through prayer (offering of our lips). Thus, the body of Mashiach which is open to every race and creed is a literal house of prayer.

'Burnt Offerings'- When we realise the issue is concerning equality and YHWH is affirming that the foreigner's worship is equally acceptable to him it is clear this phrase is merely a euphemism for worship.

To summarise, we can present the following alternative for Isaiah 56:7,

*Even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my household/ family: their worship and prayers shall be accepted by Me; for my household shall be called a household for all people.*

Mashiach was obedient to the will of the Father (John 5:30) and when we read verses from the Tanakh (Old Testament) that refer to the post Mashiach era we must interpret them in a way that aligns with all Mashiach and the apostles have said. As demonstrated above it does not take much effort to achieve this alignment. Now let us consider a couple of verses from Zechariah,

*<sup>20</sup>In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO YHWH; and the pots in YHWH's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. <sup>21</sup>Yes, every pot in Yerushalayim and in Judah shall be holy unto YHWH of hosts: and all they that sacrifice (bring offerings) shall come and take of them and use them: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of YHWH of hosts. (Zech.14:20-21)*

It is important not to read verse 20 in isolation from verse 21: every pot in the city will be sanctified thus verse 20 cannot be referring only to the utensils in a temple building. In consideration of verse 21, verse 20 is merely confirming that because in the millennium, the whole of YHWH's household will be holy, all of their utensils will be considered just as holy as were those used by the temple priests. Verse 21 is merely an amplification of this claim.

Another interesting comment is 'there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of YHWH of hosts' how can this comment be referring to the temple? When was a Canaanite allowed into the temple?

The above are just a few examples of how poor translation can lead to confusion.

## Conclusion

Ezekiel lived at the same time as his contemporary Jeremiah. However, Ezekiel accompanied the two tribes Judah and Benjamin in their exile to Babylon, whereas Jeremiah remained in the land. YHWH had a deliberate purpose for Ezekiel in Babylon. Ezekiel was to tell both the exiles in Babylon and those that remained in the Land that Yerushalayim was finished, their city would be destroyed. But the people didn't believe the prophet and you can understand why. You can imagine their response,

*"How could YHWH let Yerushalayim go? It's the city of the great king. Moreover, he had previously worked miraculously to spare the city when it was besieged by Sennacherib (2Kings.17). Will He not do*

*the same again for His namesake? Didn't He promise there would always be a king from the Davidic line on the throne? And besides there is a temple where YHWH meets with His people, where He chooses to manifest Himself. Do you really think YHWH could forsake such a city?"*

But the constant message of Ezekiel is,

*"You don't understand, you people are worse than you think, and YHWH has had enough. Judgement is decreed"*

But YHWH has a habit of revealing the other side of the coin and encouraging a return to righteousness. As said above, He describes the reward for repentance: a new city, a new temple, and the promise of His presence amongst them again. He will be their Elohim and they will again be His chosen. But they ignored the prophet and, as quoted by the Rabbi, they refused to stop sinning, hence when they did return it was without YHWH's presence. His glory never returned to the Land. This was symbolized by the absence of the Ark of the Covenant from the temple the exiles ultimately built. But what of the words of the prophet Haggai,

*"Let the esteem of this latter House be greater than the former," said YHWH of hosts. "And in this place, I give peace," declares YHWH of hosts. (Hag.2:9).*

I believe these words from Haggai were prophetic and I don't think Haggai was talking in terms of aesthetics or beauty but rather to the spiritual esteem this temple would experience. I further believe there was a double fulfilment of this prophecy – when Elohim personally (not just His glory as with the first temple) entered the temple. The first fulfilment was when Mary visited the temple with her son to offer the specified ransom for the first born in accordance with the Torah command,

*And every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among your children shall you redeem, (Exod.13:13).*

Luke 2.22-38 records Mary's compliance with this Torah decree. The second fulfilment of Haggai was when Mashiach Himself visited the temple, described in Mat.12:1-8.

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