**Old Testament Survey**

**Ezekiel 1–36**

In the year 606 B.C., the Babylonians began the first of several deportations of the Jews; Daniel was in this group. In the second group (597 B.C.) was young Ezekiel, then about twenty-five years old. There he lived in his own house with his beloved wife (8:1; 24:16). Five years after Ezekiel came to Babylon, he was called to be a prophet of God, when he was thirty years old (592 B.C.). This was six years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, so while Jeremiah was ministering to the people back home, Ezekiel was preaching to the Jews of the captivity in Babylon. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest called to be a prophet.

His book may also be divided into three sections, following the prophet’s call in 1–3: (1) God’s judgment on Jerusalem, 4–24; (2) God’s judgment on the surrounding nations, 25–32; and (3) God’s restoration of the Jews in the kingdom, 33–48. Chapters 1–24 were given before the siege of Jerusalem; chapters 25–32 during the siege; and chapters 33–48 after the siege. Though the prophet was in distant Babylon, he was able to see events in Jerusalem through the power of the Spirit of God. Ezekiel not only proclaimed God’s message to the people, but he had to live the message before them. God commanded him to do a number of symbolic acts in order to get the attention of the people: play at war (4:1–3); lie on his side a certain number of days (4:4–17); shave his hair and beard (5:1–4); act like someone fleeing from war (12:1–16); sit and sigh (21:1–7); and, the most difficult of all, have his wife die (24:15–27). It was not easy to be a prophet.

**The Glory Revealed Ezekiel 1-7**

In this section we shall concentrate on Ezekiel’s visions of God’s glory (Spirit).

1. Ezekiel (“God strengthens”) was a priest in captivity (1:1), and was thus unable to exercise his ministry since he was away from the temple and the sacred altar. But God opened the heavens to him and called him to be a prophet. He had been in captivity for five years when his call came; priests began their ministry at the age of thirty (Num. 4:3). See Ps. 137 for a picture of the spiritual condition of the captives. Jeremiah had told them to settle down in Babylon for seventy years, but the false prophets told the people that God would destroy Babylon and set the captives free (Jer. 28–29). It was Ezekiel’s task to tell the people that God would destroy Jerusalem, not Babylon, but that there would one day be a glorious restoration of the people and a rebuilding of the temple.
2. The phrase “The Word of the Lord came” is used nearly fifty times in this book. How wonderful to know that God’s Word is never far from God’s people if they will only listen. John heard the Word when an exile on Patmos (Rev. 1:9), and Paul received the Word when in prison. What did Ezekiel see that day?
3. **A fiery whirlwind (1:4).** This symbolized God’s judgment on Jerusalem, Babylon coming out of the north. The storm cloud with its fiery lightning meant destruction for Jerusalem.
4. **The cherubim (1:5–14).** These creatures symbolize the glory (Spirit) and power of God. They could see in all directions and move in all directions without turning. The four faces speak of their characteristics: the intelligence of man; the strength and boldness of the lion; the faithfulness and service of the ox; and the heavenliness of the eagle. Some see in these faces the four Gospels: Matthew (lion—king); Mark (ox—servant); Luke (man—Son of Man); John (eagle—Son of God from heaven). The creatures could move quickly to accomplish the will of God.
5. **The wheels (1:15–21).** Each creature was associated with a set of wheels, two wheels in each set. The wheels were constantly turning and, since they faced in all four directions, they could move in any way without changing motion, just like the cherubim. They were “full of eyes” (v. 18), picturing the omniscience of God as He rules His creation (Prov. 15:3), and the movements of the wheels and the cherubim occupy the same space. All of this speaks of God’s constant working in the world, His power and glory, His presence in all places, His purpose for man, His providence. The world was full of terror and change, but God was at work.
6. **The firmament (1:22–27).** This was a beautiful “platform” above the wheels and the cherubim, containing the throne of God. God is still on the throne, and His will is being accomplished in this world even if we do not always see it.
7. **The rainbow (1:28).** There was a rainbow in the storm. Certainly this told Ezekiel that God’s mercy and God’s covenant will not fail His people. See Gen. 9:11–17, where the rainbow was appointed as a sign of mercy and also Rev. 4:3 and 10:1. Noah saw the rainbow after the storm, the Apostle John saw it before the storm, but Ezekiel saw it within the storm. This entire vision of God’s glory shows God at work in the world, judging the sins of His people, but still keeping His covenant of mercy. The result of this vision was total collapse on the part of Ezekiel (1:28). But God set him up on his feet, called him to be a watchman, fed him with the Word (see Jer. 15:16; Job 23:12; Matt. 4:4; Rev. 10:9), and filled him with the Spirit. “They shall know that I am the Lord”—this phrase is found seventy times in this book; it summarizes the ministry and message of Ezekiel.

**The Glory (Spirit) Removed Ezekiel 8–35**

1. A year later, God gave Ezekiel another vision, this time of the sins of the people back in Jerusalem. The glory appeared again (8:2), and God took the prophet in a vision to the holy city. There he saw a four-fold view of the sins of the people: (1) an image set up at the north gate of the temple, 8:5; (2) secret heathen worship in the hidden place in the temple, 8:6–12; (3) the Jewish women weeping for the god Adonis, who was supposed to die and be raised from the dead each spring, 8:13–14; and (4) the high priest and the twenty-four courses of priests worshiping the sun, 8:15–16. Is it any wonder God planned to destroy the city?
2. Of course, the glory of the Lord could not remain in such a wicked place. The glory had come to the temple, 8:4; but in 9:3 the glory moved to the threshold of the temple. The throne of glory was now empty. It would become a throne of judgment. In chapter 9 we see God’s servant putting a mark of protection on the faithful remnant of believers, lest they be slain in the judgment to come. Then, in 10:4, the glory of God moved above the threshold of the house, hovering there before judgment was going to fall. In 10:18 the glory moved with the cherubim off the threshold to the eastern gate of the temple (v. 19); and finally, in 11:22–23, the glory moved out of the temple to the top of the Mount of Olives. “Ichabod—the glory has departed” (1 Sam. 4:21).
3. Why was the glory removed? Because God cannot share His glory with another. The idols and the sins of the people had driven Him away. Their sins may have been hidden from the people, but God saw them, and God judged them. So today God will remove His glory (Spirit) and His blessing from our lives unless we serve Him faithfully with honest and pure hearts.

**The Glory (Spirit) Restored 36-48**

1. In chapters 36-48 the prophet sees the future restoration of Israel and her glory in the kingdom. He describes the restored city and temple, greater than anything Israel has ever known. In 43:1–6 he sees the glory of God return to the temple. Note that the glory will return by the same route it used when it departed. Of course, Jesus Christ is the glory of the Lord and He will return the glory of God to the nation of Israel. Certainly, the Word given in chapters 40–48 was not fulfilled when the Jews returned to their land after the captivity, so it must have a future fulfillment when Jesus returns to earth to reign.
2. These closing chapters look forward to the future of Israel and Judah, to a time when God will do a new work and His glory will return to the land.

**The New Nation (37)**

1. At this time, both Israel and Judah were ruined politically. Assyria had scattered Israel, and Judah had just been captured by Babylon. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted a return from captivity, but Ezekiel’s vision goes even farther down the years. He saw the time when the dead nation would come alive again. In the vision, he saw very many bones in the valley (literally, “battlefield”), and the bones were very dry. It was a picture of defeat, with the bones of the armies unburied.
2. What a vivid description of the Jewish people! Through the power of God’s Word, the bones came together and formed men, and through the power of the Spirit (“wind”), life was given to them. This pictures the future revival of the nation, when the Jews will be brought up out of the “graves” of the Gentile nations where they have been scattered. Politically, this took place May 14, 1948, when the modern nation of Israel entered the family of nations again. Of course, the nation is dead spiritually; but one day when Christ returns, the nation will be born in a day and be saved.

**Reunited (vv. 15–28).**

1. The division of the nation into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms was the beginning of their downfall. One day God will reunite all the tribes under their true David, Jesus. He will make a covenant of peace with them (v. 26) and bring glory to His people once again.

**The New Victory (38–39)**

1. These chapters deal with the famous “battle of Gog and Magog.” Do not confuse this war with the Battle of Armageddon described in Rev. 19:11–21, because Armageddon takes place at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period. Nor is it the same as the battle involving Gog and Magog mentioned in Rev. 20:7–9, for that will take place after the close of the millennial reign of Christ when Satan will again be loosed. The battle given in Ezek. 38–39 takes place at a time when the Jews are safely living in their own land (38:8, 11–12, 14) in the “latter years” (38:8).

**The New Temple (40–46)**

1. Certainly, this temple has never been built, so it must refer to a future time. Most take this to be the great millennial temple that will be filled with God’s glory during Christ’s thousand-year reign on earth. Ezekiel was told to reveal these plans to the people in order to make them ashamed of their sins and rebellions (43:10–11). Note that the sizes are all increased, so that the entire “sacred area” is almost fifty miles square. How all of this is going to fit into the land and the city of Jerusalem, we are not told. Perhaps there will be changes in the land.
2. Since Christ has fulfilled the OT types (sacrifices, priesthood), then why should they be reinstituted and practiced for a thousand years? It is likely that Ezekiel is using the language the people understood to convey truths about the future worship in the temple. The Passover spoke of redemption by the blood (45:21–24), and the Feast of Tabernacles spoke of God’s care for His people and their joy in the kingdom (45:25).
3. What will happen to this temple? When God creates the new heaven and earth, there will be no need for any temple (Rev. 21:1–5, 22). The New Jerusalem that John describes in Rev. 21–22 will far surpass anything Ezekiel ever saw! The entire holy city will be a temple to the glory of God.

**The New Land (47–48)**

1. The land will be refreshed by the healing waters of the river issuing from the altar of God. All of God’s blessings must begin with the altar. Ezekiel is describing the healing of the land, the blessing of God upon the land that He chose for Israel. Note that there will be a new border for the land (13–21).
2. We can see in this life-giving river a beautiful picture of the Spirit of God. The source is the altar, the death of Christ (John 7:37–39). The river became deeper, so that the prophet could swim in it. Oh, that we might go deeper and deeper into the things of God and stay out of the shallow waters! The river brought healing and life; so the Spirit heals and gives life today.

**Redivided (chap. 48).**

1. We have already noted the new boundaries of the land. This chapter explains how the tribes will be allotted their inheritance during the kingdom age. All of the tribes will be west of Jordan; the nation will no longer be divided. Seven tribes will be located at the top of the land: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, and Judah. Then will come the huge “sacred tract” for the temple area (vv. 8–20). At the bottom of the land will be five more tribes: Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. The tribes will all be there and the Lord will be there! (v. 35) The name of the city shall be “Jehovah-Shammah”: “The Lord is there!”