

“And thou shalt speak My words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.”

Even though Ezekiel is actually a major prophet, the book is labeled in the Minor Prophets quite often, being placed among the smaller Old Testament books after the poetry section of the Holy Scriptures. Ezekiel was among the aristocratic elite of Judah that was removed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:14) when he destroyed Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's army took the king of Judah, Jehoiachin, as well as the rest of the leadership of the nation to devoid it of potential organized rebellions. Ezekiel was the son of Buzi and priest of the family of Zadok, and was therefore both a Levitical priest and prophet of the LORD. Much has been conjectured about what the phrase, “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year...” in the first verse. What the starting point of this refers to has been a point of contention and debate. As in the Book of Jeremiah 52:29, 30, 31 dating using the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and his destruction of Jerusalem seems to continue in Ezekiel. Most recently, the dating is interpreted to mean the thirtieth year of Ezekiel's life, who like John the Baptist and our Lord, Jesus Christ, were commissioned for the ministry when they were thirty years of age. This concept of the dating of the prophecy is questionable. This was not Ezekiel's calling by the LORD, because he was already called to service as a priest at the age of thirty so this, then is a special commission as a prophet sent on a mission to captive Israel. A missionary almost always has a particular people they are called to which to minister. Throughout Ezekiel's writing, he shows an expert command of the Mosaic Law. There is little doubt as to the authorship of this book, and it shows a consistent style throughout. Ezekiel's ministry as a prophet lasted about twenty two years, beginning in 592 BC to 570 BC. The first part of his ministry was directed at Jerusalem in the form of warnings, (years 592-586), the second part began with the destruction of Jerusalem, and went from 586 to the year 570 BC. Daniel was among the first who were deported out of Jerusalem, and Ezekiel was quite possibly among the second group, after Nebuchadnezzar humiliated Jerusalem and its apostate king, Jehoiakim, who was given an ignominious death and had the “burial of a jack-ass” according to Jeremiah 22, 18,19. The captives of Jerusalem were placed in various areas throughout the Babylonian Empire. Some of these were able to rise above slavery, and serfdom to become leaders in their communities, since a certain amount of freedom was granted to the captives. Some of the exiles even became important people as in the case of Daniel. As the empire prospered, so did the captives, so much so that when given the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, some chose to stay. Ezekiel lived in a principle colony called Tel Abib by the Chebar River. He was married and had a home of his own as a captive in the Babylon Empire. Modern critics often hold that Ezekiel was psychopathic, suffering from Paranoid Schizophrenia and catatonia. These critics, however, are merely judging

from a fallen flesh frame of mind and have little to no account of the Spirit of God. Upon close examination, these words are not the words of a mad man. Archeological finds have confirmed much of the historic record found in the Book of Ezekiel. A brief outline of the Book would be as follows: I. Prophecies against Israel (chapters 1-24). II. Prophecies against foreign nations. (25-32). III. Prophecies of Restoration (33-39) IV. Vision of the Ideal Theocracy of the Messiah. (40-48). Now, for a brief examination of the Sacred Text, beginning with the preface, verses one through three.

“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 Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity, Jehoiachin gave himself up as prisoner, he wasn’t captured (2 Kings 24:12). The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.” Thus we are introduced to the background information by Ezekiel, himself. The actual vision of his prophecies begin immediately with the next verse, verse four. The first verse of the book begins with the word, “And” but in order to keep this complete revelation from looking as if it were only a fragment that has been separated from another document, the word, “Now,” is substituted. Many view this book, therefore as a continuation of the Book of Jeremiah, noting how Jeremiah ends. As seen in Jeremiah 29, this continued a similar message of warning. The word “And,” is a frequently used word to indicate a revelation and was used by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation to indicate a continued revealing. Ezekiel gives no indication that he had any personal knowledge of Jeremiah, therefore it can be concluded, that they really didn’t know each other or were even aware of the other’s existence. Ezekiel’s timeline, however continues Jeremiah’s despite this. The phrase, “I saw visions of God,” brings home the point that these were not merely visions thought up in his mind, but those brought about and authorized by God, Himself. Verse two solidifies the dating of the prophecy, using the captivity of Judah’s king, Jehoiachin (the son of Jehoiakim) and the destruction of Jerusalem as the starting point. According to the dating by Archbishop Ussher, it is the year 594 BC. Calvin states on verse two, “That it was already the fifth year was held up as a reproach to the stiffnecked stubbornness of the Jews.” As in chapter two, verse four, these words are expressly given as being the Words of God, not Ezekiel’s. These, in other words, are not Ezekiel’s own words merely inspired by what he saw, but are indeed the Words of God, or “Thus saith the LORD,” in the truest sense. Some seem to interpret this revelation as Ezekiel not being really at the river at Chebar, but only in a vision, however, there is no solid justification for this idea. “And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof was the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.” Geneva of 1655,

asserts: "In the whole of the Old Testament there is nothing more obscure than the beginning and the end of the book of Ezekiel." Under the same impression Calvin declares, that "he acknowledges that he does not understand this vision." Jerome had pronounced that "In its interpretation all the synagogues of the Jews are dumb, giving as their reason that it transcends man's capacity." This is the beginning of Ezekiel's marvelous visions. "The heavens were opened" (verse one) permitting Ezekiel to actually see that which normally isn't even imagined. There is a tremendous similarity in the wording and symbolism of this divine Book with the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. One would do well to read and study this book, before doing so with the Book of Revelation. According to ancient Jewish tradition, the reader was to be at least thirty years of age to be mature enough to read the Book of Ezekiel, thus, we can see that it is rather on the difficult side to interpret properly.

We, as the people of God, are as Ezekiel, to keep up with dates and times of God's blessings. These things that are recorded are words of encouragement in the faith to ourselves as well as other. We are to go back and reread what God has done for us in our lives, and not just go on and forget blessings. We can look at our lives and the great things God has done with thanksgiving. Also to be noted, is that Ezekiel and Daniel both were taken captive along with the wicked of Judah. This shows that the Godly are not immune to troubles but share with their fellow travelers and pilgrims in this world of common woes. God preserves the Godly as He did with Daniel in the lion's den. The three faithful young Jewish men who were thrown to the flames of the fiery furnace in the same book, the Book of Daniel, were thrown in, bound, but came out without so much as a smell of smoke, Daniel 3:27. The deciding factor in all of this is the fellowship with God, as seen in the fourth One in the flames, walking among and with them, was like unto the Son of the Living God, Daniel 3:25. The Godly, as with Ezekiel, find the heavens opened to them, but, sadly, the ungodly, find only the pit opened for them. The difference is found in their relationship with God. Similar to Ezekiel, all believers are entrusted with God's Word. It is up to us to proclaim it in one way or another, remembering that it isn't our Word and therefore, we have no authority or excuse to change it. This is the Word that is hidden as a treasure in the heart, and a true believer out of love shares that treasure with others. We are to thankfully be faithful in this simple task as well as live in accord with it.

With the next lesson, we will get into more of this marvelous revelation, and what it all means. Until then, read, study and act upon your faith.