

## ***Ezekiel 1***

We are living in times that are declining, but we are not the first to find ourselves in this condition. Almost six hundred years before Christ, Ezekiel lived in times that were remarkable for their declension on just about every level. 2 Chronicles 36:11-16 states the condition of the nation of Israel at the time:

<sup>11</sup> Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years.

<sup>12</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

<sup>16</sup> But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah were contemporaries. Ezekiel was of the priestly line of Levi, but before he could serve as a priest, he along with King Jehoiachin, the upper classes, and many of the leading priests and craftsmen was taken into exile into Babylon, seven hundred miles north of Israel. As was common in ancient times, mass deportation of significant people from a conquered land and the settlement of people in that land made it harder for the conquered people to regroup and resist the occupation. Young King Jehoiachin (18 yrs old) was put under house arrest for thirty-seven years in Babylon. As exiles in Babylon, the people dreamed nostalgically of returning to their homeland and begged God to save them. They could not imagine that in ten years Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed (see additional note 1 below).

**1:1 Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.**

Ezekiel's prophecy began when he was thirty years old (the thirtieth year of his own life), on the fifth day of the fourth month (July 31), at the time he should have been entering his priestly duties – duties which he would obviously never get to practice in exile, for there was no temple for him to serve at. Nevertheless, God had not forgotten him or His people.

The exiles tried to settle on the banks of the Kebar (Chebar) River which was really a large irrigation canal that flowed southeast from the Euphrates (Feinberg, 18). It was here, in the fifth year of his exile

(and still six years before the destruction of Jerusalem) the heavens opened and Ezekiel was shown the throne room of God.

The appearance of God to Ezekiel in Babylon is significant for it dispelled the widespread myth that Yahweh was a local deity who was restricted to acting within the land of Israel alone, and that the one devoted to Him needed to be in Israel to access His help.

In commenting on Jeremiah 46, Carson in *“For the Love of God”* makes the following observation in this regard:

A COMMON THEME AMONG THE biblical prophets is that God is sovereign over all nations. To most who read these pages that seems obvious. But in the ancient world, most nations had their own gods. So when a nation went to war, the people prayed to their own gods; if a nation was defeated, so were their gods. Clearly they were not as strong as the gods of the ascendant nation.

But the God of Israel keeps telling her that he is the God over all the universe, over all the nations. He is not a tribal deity in the sense that they own him or that he is exclusively theirs. That is why in many chapters of Isaiah and Jeremiah God insists that he himself is the One who is raising up Assyria or Babylon to punish the people. In other words, the defeat of Israel does not signal the defeat of God. Far from it: this God keeps insisting that if Israel is defeated and punished, it can only be because he has ordained it—and he does this by utilizing the very nations Israel fears.

**1:2 (On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile,**

**1:3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans (In the Book of Ezekiel, the term “Chaldean” is interchangeable with “Babylonian” - Block, 88) by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him.)**

Verses 2 and 3 give further clarification of the time period. Ezekiel’s vision occurred in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, or in 593 BC. It is somewhat surprising that any time references be made to Jehoiachin’s reign since he only ruled for three months and ten days (2 Ki. 24:8; 2 Chron. 36:9), and he made no significant contribution to Israel at all. However, his removal from the throne at his deportation was a turning point in Israel’s history and had great theological significance. In Jeremiah 22:28-30, the prophet had predicted that Jehoiachin (called Coniah by Jeremiah) would be removed from his position and the Davidic line would end (Jehoiachin would be childless). The successor to Jehoiachin was Zedekiah (2 Ki. 24:17) who came from a secondary line and was never regarded by most Jews as a legitimate successor to the throne (see Block, 86). For the details about Jehoiachin, see 2 Kings 24:8-17 and 2 Chronicles 36:9-10. Also, the deportation of Jehoiachin probably had personal significance to Ezekiel since he may have been among the people who were deported with the king (note the use of the first person in Ezek. 33:21; 40:1).

There was no coincidence in the timing of Ezekiel's vision, for according to Jeremiah 51:59 it was in that year that Zedekiah, the successor to the Judean throne, paid a visit to Babylon. His presence made the exiles have a heightened hope that they may soon return to their land.

There is one more significant feature to the date of the book that cannot be overlooked; at the time that Ezekiel saw his vision (593 BC), Jerusalem had not yet rebelled. Six years would pass before the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed (in 587 BC). "If we don't recall those facts, the rest of the book makes no sense at all. When many were clamoring that God would spare Judah for the temple's sake, Ezekiel begins his ministry . . . "(Carson).

**1:4 As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.**

Verse 4 is the introduction to Ezekiel's vision. It began when Ezekiel saw a huge storm cloud coming in with the wind from the north, but it soon became apparent that the cloud was not an ordinary cloud. The cloud had lightning or fire darting about within it; it was surrounded by a glorious radiance, and its heart was lit up like molten metal in a smelter (Block, 92). All of these are symbols of God's glory (Ps. 18:8-13; Hab. 3; Jer. 4:11-13).

Making sense of the vision that follows is one of the most difficult undertakings in the Bible. There is puzzling imagery, grammatical inconsistencies, and abrupt, choppy sentences which make it all the more difficult. According to Block, the reason for this is probably due to the emotional state of the prophet who saw things that were beyond his experience and surpassed his ability to describe them. Thirteen months later, when the prophet pens a similar vision in chapter 10, the imagery is much more understandable and organized – probably because the prophet had over a year to think about what he had seen and was then able to communicate it more clearly (Block, 90-91). However, even though the imagery is difficult, the imagery depicted is full of majesty.

**1:5 Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form.**

**1:6 Each of them had four faces and four wings.**

**1:7 Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze.**

**1:8(a) Under their wings on their four sides were human hands.**

Out of the cloud emerged four living creatures.

Verses 5-8a give a summary description of the creatures before their wings and faces are considered more closely in verses 8b-14. Ezekiel says that they had human form. Each had four faces and four wings. Their legs had hooves like a calf, and they gleamed like polished bronze. Under their wings were human hands. The purpose of these hands is not disclosed until chapters 8-11. In Ezekiel 10:15 and 20,

they are called cherubim. Whenever cherubim are found in the Bible, they are in the presence of the glory of God (I Sam 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Ki. 19:15; Psa. 80:2; 99:1; Heb. 9:5).

The details about the wings and the faces follow:

**1:8(b) As for the faces and wings of the four of them,**

**1: 9 their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward.**

**1:10 As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle.**

**1:11 Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies.**

**1:12 And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went.**

**1:13 In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire.**

**1:14 And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.**

Ezekiel begins with their wings (1:9). Each creature had two pairs of wings (1:6). One pair of wings was used to cover their bodies (1:11) and one pair of wings stretched out above the creature (1:11). If their wing tips were touching the wing tips of the creature opposite them, this vision is reminiscent of the cherubim whose wings touched each other over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, which is the place where the glory of God rested (Exo 25:18-22; I Ki. 6:23 ff.). However, it is also possible that their wings touched the wings of the angel next to them. In either case, the four living creatures formed a sort of square, making a pedestal for the throne. In the midst of the living creatures was “something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings” (1:13).

In verse 24 the flutter of their wings sounded like “the great thunder of rushing water, a violent rainstorm, or a noisy military encampment – like the voice of the Almighty God (*sadday*; v. 24; 3:13; 10:5)” (Alexander, 757). In verse 25 it says that when the vehicle stopped, their wings would drop.

Each of the creatures had four faces (1:6). The four faces are described as the face of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle (1:10). It may seem odd to the modern reader that these faces are on the creatures, but to those who lived in Ezekiel’s world, the significance of each was pretty straightforward. The lion was a symbol of strength, ferocity and courage (Jdg. 14:18; 2 Sam. 1:23; 17:10), as well as serving as a symbol of royalty. The eagle was swift and stately (Deut. 28:49; Isa. 40:31; Jer. 48:40). The ox was known for its strength, and in the ancient world outside of Israel was a symbol of divinity (Psa. 106:19-20). Lastly, the human was the most noble and intelligent (Gen. 1:28; Psa. 8; See Block, 96-98 for more details). In Ezekiel 10:14, the same creatures reappear.

There are a number of things that make their movement unique. First, because they have four faces, each pointing in a different direction, they do not need to turn to change directions (1:9, 12). Secondly, the creatures do not move independently; rather, the Spirit of God acts upon them so that they all move in unison (1:12). Thirdly, according to verse 14 they could move with incredible speed, like bolts of lightning.

The burning coals in their midst with flashing lightning and torches of fire all symbolize God's terrifying presence (Carson). Such phenomena were commonly used to describe the glory of God, His judgment, and great power and are reminiscent of the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:6).

In general terms, what Ezekiel sees is a vision of the mobile throne of God. The throne is supported by the four "living creatures." The importance of this mobile throne becomes clear later in the book.

**1:15 Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them.**

**1:16 The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another.**

**1:17 Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved.**

**1:18 As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about.**

**1:19 Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also.**

**1:20 Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.**

**1:21 Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.**

Next to each creature, there was a beryl-colored wheel. Beryl can be a variety of colors including emerald green, yellow green, aquamarine, purple, etc. The wheels were resting on the earth (1:15). However, these were no ordinary wheels; they were wheels within wheels. Some envision this like a gyroscope, others see them intersecting each other at right angles so that they cannot fall over, and others see them aligned so together they form a disc. Whatever the configuration of the wheels, they support a platform above (1:22), like wheels support a chariot (cf. 1 Chron.28:18).



*beryl*

The wheels were magnificent to behold and were covered with eyes. This is a standard symbol in apocalyptic literature to indicate God's omniscience (Zech. 3:9; 4:10; Rev. 4:6; 2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3). However, the Hebrew word that is used here for "eye" can also be translated as "sparkle" or "gleam" (as

in Ezek. 1:4, 16), Thus, these could very well be eye-shaped jewels that were embedded into the wheel's rim that helped to emphasize the glorious nature of the vehicle.

Just as the Spirit animated the four living creatures to move at His will, so the Spirit empowers the wheels to move in the direction He desires (1:20, 21). The four creatures and the wheels all move in perfect synchronization (1:21). They move up or forward, lift off the earth or stand still. Chapters 3 and 10 describe the wheels as making a rumbling noise as they whirled (3:12-13; 10:5, 13).

Verses 22-27 describe the platform above the wheels and the throne that rests upon it.

**1:22 Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads.**

**1:23 Under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering its body on the one side and on the other.**

Above the heads of the four living creatures (1:22, 23) was something like a great expanse with a brilliant gleam, like a massive sheet of sparkling ice (1:22) that functioned as a platform for the throne to sit on. In the Book of Revelation John describes it as a sea of crystal (Rev. 4:6; Ex. 24:10).

**1:24 I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.**

**1:25 And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.**

In verse 24, Ezekiel comments on the sound of the creatures' wings. They were like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp. Scripture often speaks of visions of God in this way. In Revelation 4:5 John says, "from the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder." Ezekiel 43:2 says, "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory."

Psalms 18:7-13 has similar elements as well: "Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; Coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under His feet. **He rode upon a cherub and flew; And He sped upon the wings of the wind.** He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him, Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. **From the brightness before Him** passed His thick clouds, Hailstones and **coals of fire**. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire." In Deuteronomy 33:26 God is described as one "Who rides the heavens . . . and through the skies in His majesty."

When the creatures heard a great voice from above them they stopped moving, and their wings dropped.

**1:26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.**

**1:27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.**



*Lapis lazuli*

Notice that when the vision draws closer to God the less distinct it becomes. Ezekiel says, “there was something *resembling* a throne,” and there was “a figure with the *appearance* of a man.” In verse 28, he says, “*appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.*” God has manifested Himself, but the things Ezekiel sees are only likenesses of God.

As Ezekiel looks upward, he sees a throne above the expanse. The throne is similar to lapis lazuli (a stone, deep blue in color with golden inclusions of pyrites which shimmer like little stars). Lapis lazuli was one of the most precious stones in the ancient world. “At excavations in the ancient centers of culture around the Mediterranean, archaeologists have again and again found among the grave furnishings decorative chains and figures made of lapis lazuli – clear indications that the deep blue stone was already popular thousands of years ago among the people of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome” (description from the International Colored Gemstone Association).

The one on the throne had the appearance of a man, but his upper body glowed with the brilliance of amber and his lower body appeared as fire. Radiance shone around Him.

**1:28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.**

The radiance that surrounded God formed a glow around Him – like a rainbow. In John’s vision of the throne room he says “there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance” (Rev. 4:3). Ezekiel proclaims, “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD!” Ezekiel was more acutely aware of what he was seeing than we are. He was of the priestly line and was familiar with the glory of God that rested above the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the temple (Exo. 40:34-38; I Kid. 8:6-11).

Here we must grasp two things:

- (a) The closer the vision gets to God himself, the more distantly He is described. The culmination—“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (1:28)—elicits not an artist’s conception, but worship.
- (b) More broadly: visions of God always induce brokenness, humility, and worship (cf. Isa. 6; Rev. 1, 4-5) (Carson, “For the Love of God”)

Block, in his commentary on Ezekiel (106-109), draws out seven theological implications from Ezekiel’s vision of God that are worth mentioning here:

1) First, the vision proclaims the transcendent glory of God. Everything about the apparition proclaims his glory: dazzling brilliance of the entire image, the gleam of creatures’ bronze legs, the jewels on the wheels, the crystalline platform, the lapis lazuli throne, the amberous and fiery form of the “man.” Everything about the vision cries “Glory!” even the prophets’ frustrating search for adequate forms of expression. Unlike the gods of the nations depicted on ancient seals and carvings, the glory of Yahweh defies human description, verbally or visually. And unlike the images of the heathen, which require constant attention and polishing, Yahweh's radiance emanates from His very being.

2) Second, the vision proclaims the transcendent holiness of Yahweh. Unlike Isaiah, Ezekiel hears no seraphim calling out Holy! Holy! Holy!, but the absolute distinction between Yahweh and all of creation is clearly recognized. Surely this is why the creatures cover their bodies with their second pair of wings. But this is also one of the functions of the platform. Unlike the pagan gods, who mix freely with lesser beings and are often indistinguishable from them, Yahweh sits on His throne, separated from all inferior creatures. Divine and created spheres are not to be confused.

3) Third, the vision proclaims the sovereignty of Yahweh. All His attendants are noble creatures, but He is enthroned, the King over all! The universality of His reign is reflected in the prominence of the number four (for the four winds), and especially in the absolute freedom with which His heavenly chariot moves; but it is demonstrated in his invasion of Babylon, the heartland of Marduk’s realm, to

appear to Ezekiel. Furthermore, although the prophet does not yet realize it, Yahweh has served notice that regardless of the fate of Jerusalem, He will remain in full control.

4) Fourth, the vision proclaims Yahweh's interest in His people. His condescending appearance in human form undoubtedly finds its basis in Genesis 1:26-27, which describes humankind created as the "image" (*selem*) and "likeness" (*demut*) of God. But in this remarkable role reversal, God appears in the likeness of humankind (*demut kemar eh adam*). Although the terms *selem* and *demut* may be used as virtual synonyms, Ezekiel's preference for the latter seems deliberate. Etymologically, *selem* suggests the notion of "carved image," and may have been too closely associated with the kind of idolatry Ezekiel witnessed all around him in Babylon. *demut* may also be used of idols (cf. Exo. 20:4), but it is more abstract. What Ezekiel sees is not an actual representation but a reflection of deity. Nevertheless, the redundancy of "a likeness like the appearance of a man" guards the prophet from even contemplating any idolatrous notions. While extra-Israelite motives may have been incorporated into the vision, this strategy does not represent capitulation to pagan thought. On the contrary, the vision challenges pagan conceptions at every turn. The glory of Yahweh cannot be reduced to human definition or plastic art. Everything about the vision is in the superlative mode. God alone is above the platform, removed from all creatures, and stunning in His radiance. There is none other beside(s) Him. But this does not prevent Him from communicating with mortals. Whereas Yahweh had chosen "the language [lit. 'lip'] of Canaan" (Isa. 19:18) as the vehicle of verbal intercourse in an earlier revelatory moment, now He adopts the art of Mesopotamia as His method of ocular communication.

5) Fifth, as a corollary, the vision proclaims the presence of Yahweh among the exiles. God is with His people who, however, are not defined in terms of residence within His land. Contrary to prevailing Jerusalemite opinion (11:15), God's people are in Babylon, far from their native land. More particularly, God is with Ezekiel. Where other call narratives portray Yahweh responding to hesitant servants with a verbal "I will be with you," this vision declares the same truth more forcefully than words ever could. For the exilic prophet robbed of the opportunity to perform divine service in the temple, this message will have been particularly satisfying.

6) Sixth, the vision hints at the impending judgment of Yahweh. Although the account contains no formal announcement of disasters ahead, several features of the vision have an ominous ring. For the moment, the heavenly chariot serves a positive goal to reassure the prophet of Yahweh's presence, but the prophet cannot know yet that in thirteen months, it will return to transport the glory of Yahweh out of the temple and out of Jerusalem. Yahweh's departure will remove the last hindrance to Nebuchadnezzar's razing of the city. Furthermore, Ezekiel must have been puzzled over the fire motif, particularly the reference to burning coals in the midst of the creatures (v. 13), whose function is not obvious from the context. But when the vision returns, the prophet will witness a man taking these coals and spreading them over Jerusalem (10:2). Accordingly, as a portent of future events, this vision not only serves as a means of calling Ezekiel to the prophetic ministry; it also provides an orientation to his message.

7) Seventh, on a practical and professional note, this vision serves notice that whoever would enter into divine service must have a clear vision of the one into whose service he or she is called. The ministry is a vocation like no other; it represents conscription into the service of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who sits on His glorious throne, unrivaled in majesty and power. God's kingdom will be built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and his servants go forth on its behalf.

In conclusion, in times when culture is moving away from God, "it is essential that those who proclaim the Word of God have their eyes so fastened on what God is like in all His transcendent glory that they are devoured by Him. And thus speak out of the fear of this living God" (Carson, excerpts from a sermon "The Call of the Prophet in Declining Times" -Ezekiel 1-3).

The image of God in Ezekiel reminds us of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Philippians 2:6-7, Paul tells us that Christ existed in the form of God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Though during His earthly ministry the resplendent glory of God was veiled in Him for a time (except see Matt 17:5), He returned to the glory that He had with the Father before the world was after His resurrection (Jn. 17:5). When the apostle Paul was still persecuting the church and was traveling on the road to Damascus, he reported that "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him and he fell to the ground" (Acts 9:3-4); the person who appeared to him was the Lord Jesus in full possession of the glory He had before His incarnation. Likewise, when John saw a vision of the resurrected Christ in Revelation 1:13-15, he saw the same characteristics in Christ that we see in the Father who is seated on the throne in Ezekiel. He is described as "*one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool (Dan. 7:9), like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.*" In 2 Corinthians 4:6 it tells us, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Even though we may have believed in Christ, many still do not clearly see His glory. Paul prayed for the believers in the church of Ephesus that "the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:7). It is a clear vision of the glory of God in Christ that is necessary for all who are called to minister in declining times to keep us from succumbing to the worldly influences around us.

Note 1 – the man, Ezekiel:

Ezekiel was the son of a priest. Since he was called to prophetic office when he was thirty years old, during the fifth year of the exile of Jehoiachin, king of Judah (592 B.C., Ezek. 1:1-2), the prophet must have been born around 623-622. His ministry continued for at least twenty-two years, through the time of the last dated oracle in the book in Jehoiachin's twenty-seventh year of exile (571, 29:17). His membership in a priestly family reveals itself throughout the book in

Ezekiel's concern with the temple and its rituals. An eligible man ordinarily began his service in the temple when he reached thirty years of age (Num. 4:3). However, Ezekiel was unable to fulfill his calling as a priest while living in exile far from Jerusalem. Instead, in the year that Ezekiel would have begun his priestly vocation, God called him to serve as a prophet. In his inaugural vision Ezekiel saw God riding in his war chariot—it was an ominous portent, for God would soon abandon Jerusalem (Lam. 10:1-2, 18-22). Rather than defend the city, God would decree, plan, and superintend its destruction. The exiles, among whom Ezekiel lived, had come from the upper classes of Judean society. They were a privileged group that had not often heeded prophetic warnings in the past (Lam. 2:3-8). They hoped for a short time of exile and a speedy return to their positions of wealth and privilege. They were hostile to Ezekiel's message and dismissed his words as entertaining prattle (20:49; 33:30-32). But God would soon vindicate himself and his prophet (33:33). The exile would not be brief, and the city would not be spared. (Dillard and Longman - AN INTRODUCTION to the OLD TESTAMENT)