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# THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

**OLD TESTAMENT**

**BOOK 26**

**EZEKIEL**



**The Prophet Ezeiel by Michelangelo**

## SUMMARY

The prophet, exiled in Babylon, experiences a series of seven visions during the twenty-two years from 593 to 571 BCE, a period which spans the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586. The visions, and the book, are structured around three themes:

judgment on Israel (chapters 1-24)

judgment on the nations (chapters 25-32)

future blessings for Israel, including the building of a new city (chapters 33-48)

As we might expect from a priest (and a priestly circle), Israel's sin is seen in holiness terms, and its restoration is imagined as a ritual cleansing following defilement (36:16-25). Restoration is also seen as a new creation (like the garden of Eden, 36:35), and as a new covenant ('a new heart...and a new spirit', 36:26).

In the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, by the river Chebar, Ezekiel has a vision of the four living creatures with four wings (each touching the wing of another) and four faces (man, lion, ox, eagle), and of the four wheels full of eyes that they are seen within. Above them is the firmament, where Ezekiel sees one with the appearance of a man sitting on a throne. The vision comes from a whirlwind from the north.

Elements of this vision are familiar:

The creatures with touching wings (verse 11) recall the golden cherubim in the inner sanctuary of tabernacle and temple (Exodus 25:18-20; 1 Kings 6:23-28).

The creatures are like the seraphim that surround God's throne in Isaiah's vision, with outstretched wings and others covering their body (Isaiah 6:2).

God addresses Ezekiel as the son of man. He says the children of Israel have transgressed. Ezekiel will prophesy, regardless of whether he is heeded or not. He is enjoined not to be afraid. A scroll is produced, filled with words of lamentation.

Ezekiel is commanded to eat the scroll, and it tastes as sweet as honey. Ezekiel is a watchman – if he does not warn the wicked, and the wicked die because of their iniquity, Ezekiel is answerable for it. If Ezekiel tells them and the wicked do not heed him, he is not answerable. Likewise, Ezekiel is answerable if a righteousness man commits iniquity and is not warned.

Ezekiel represents Jerusalem with a 'tile' (probably a brick) and uses an iron pan and models of a fort and battering rams to signify the forthcoming siege by the Chaldeans. Ezekiel is commanded to lie on his left side for 390 days (because the house of Israel has had 390 years of iniquity), and on his right side 40 days (because Judah has had 40 years of iniquity).

During this time, Ezekiel must eat the worst kinds of grain, and have only cow's dung for fuel, to denote the scarcity of provision, fuel, and necessities during the siege of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel commanded to shave: he must burn a third, smite a third with his knife, and scatter a third to the wind, to indicate the judgment to be executed on the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

## SUMMARY Continued

Further judgments are then enumerated more explicitly, including famine and wild beasts.

Ezekiel sets his face towards the mountains and prophesies against Israel: its high places will be made desolate. Then shall ye know that I am the Lord. A remnant shall be saved, however.

Judgment by sword, famine and pestilence. Robbers will defile the temple. Ezekiel is directed to make a chain, as a symbol of the impending captivity.

Ezekiel is carried in vision to Jerusalem and shown the idolatries committed by the rulers of the Jews there. Ezekiel describes idolatrous images, and idolatrous behavior, such as worshipping the sun. Great punishment is promised as a result.

Six men come from the north with weapons of slaughter in their hands. A few pious individuals distressed at the abominations committed in the land are marked on their foreheads by a man clothed in linen, so they may be spared: everyone else is to be smitten.

The shechinah (cloud of God's presence) moves from the inner sanctuary to the threshold of the temple, as a sign that God's presence will soon depart. Ezekiel tries to intercede for his people, but God will not be entreated.

The vision from chapter one is repeated. Between the wheels are coals of fire, which are scattered on Jerusalem to intimate that it was to be burnt. The glory of the Lord (shechinah) departs further.

The judgments of God are delivered against those who remained in Jerusalem and mocked of the predictions of the prophets. God promises favor to those who were gone into captivity, and their restoration. The shechinah leaves the city.

Ezekiel is told to move his stuff from one place to another, as a type of the displacement the people of Jerusalem will soon undergo. Disaster will befall imminently, not in the distant future.

Judgments are delivered against the prophets who flatter the people with false hopes of peace and security. They are compared to a frail building, which cannot stand against the battering elements of heaven. Judgment also delivered against false prophetesses who practice vain rites and divinations, seeking their own gain.

God threatens those hypocrites who pretend to worship him while also practicing idolatry. God will stretch out his hand against the guilty nation, and not listen to any intercession. Not even the presence of Noah, Daniel or Job could save the land.

The idolaters of Jerusalem and Judah shall be visited with four judgments: famine, wild beasts, the sword and pestilence. A remnant shall be delivered from the wrath coming upon the land.

The Jews are compared to a barren vine, fit for nothing but to be cast on the fire.

God is like a person who takes up an exposed infant, brings her up, adorns her and marries her.

## SUMMARY Continued

She repays this care with ingratitude, polluting herself with idolatry, sacrificing her children, playing the whore with foreign nations, and departing from her husband.

Her nakedness will be discovered by those she has committed whoredoms with. Sodom is her sister. Nonetheless, after due correction, she may again be restored to his favor.

A riddle: an eagle (Babylon) takes the top twigs and branches from a cedar tree, and takes it off. It also takes the seed of the land and plants it in a fruitful field. The seed becomes a vine.

The vine bent to another eagle (Egypt), and is promptly destroyed by the first eagle. Changing his tone, the Lord says he will take the highest branch of the cedar tree and set it in the mountain of the height of Israel (ie Zion), where it shall prosper.

The soul that sinneth shall die, and the soul of the just shall live. A litany of just and sinful things are cited. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. Those turning away from righteousness and away from sin shall die and live respectively. The way of the Lord is equal, and the way of the house of Israel is unequal. The Lord has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

Jerusalem is a lioness – the first of her young is Jehoahaz, deposed by the king of Egypt; the second is Jehoiakim, brought in chains to Babylon. The Jewish nation is a vine – it flourished but was plucked up in fury and planted in the wilderness, in dry and thirsty ground.

The elders of Israel come to ask Ezekiel's counsel. God orders Ezekiel to remind them of their rebellion and idolatry, in Egypt, in the wilderness and in Canaan. However. They will be restored, after being purged. Jerusalem is represented as a forest doomed to be destroyed by fire.

The Lord's sword is against Jerusalem. Ezekiel is ordered to sigh, cry and howl conspicuously. Ezekiel represents the king of Babylon intent on vengeance against both Jews and Ammonites, for allying themselves with Egypt.

He is described standing at the parting of the roads leading to the respective capitals of the Jews and Ammonites. He divines to ascertain which to attack first, and Jerusalem is picked. Destruction is also predicted for the Ammonites.

A litany of the sins of Jerusalem (cultic, sexual, social), which God promises to punish, in order to purify the dross. As the corruption is general, perverting prophets, priests, princes and the people.

Samaria and Jerusalem are denoted as two harlots, the daughters of one mother, who committed whoredoms in Egypt, then with the Assyrians (Samaria and Jerusalem) and the Babylonians (Jerusalem). They are brought low by those they doted on (those who idolatrous practices they adopted). The nakedness of their whoredoms shall be discovered.

Jerusalem is like the scum in a pot of boiling water with bones and meat in it.

## SUMMARY Continued

Her scum shall be in the fire. The Lord causes Ezekiel's wife to die – Ezekiel is not allowed to mourn, to indicate that the Jerusalem will not be permitted to mourn for its forthcoming calamity.

God's judgment against the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Philistines, because they showed hatred for His people, and insulted them in their distress. I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.

Tyre has gloated at Jerusalem. Tyre's walls and towers will be destroyed, and the city and its inhabitants laid waste to at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The princes will be clothed with trembling. Desolation is promised. Tyre's beauty and commercial prosperity is described, before a day of ruin is prophesied.

Tyre has said, 'I am a god'. Strangers will be brought against it. The corrupting influence of its material wealth and beauty is described. It will be devoured in fire. Sidon will be destroyed, so it is no longer a pricking briar to Israel. The Jews will be restored after the Babylonian captivity.

The Lord will put a hook in the jaws of the Pharaoh, like a fish in the river. The river (the Nile) is the Lord's, not Pharaoh's. The Egyptians will be scattered. Egypt will be restored after captivity, but merely as a base kingdom of no importance. God promises Nebuchadnezzar Egypt after the long (and disappointing) siege of Tyre.

Ezekiel prophesies the ruin of Egypt and her allies, including the Ethiopians, at the hands of the Chaldeans. The principal cities are referred to specifically. The Assyrian empire was like a tall and strong cedar tree – the very trees of Eden envied it. The tree was brought down, however, just as Egypt shall be.

Egypt is imagined as a large threatening animal, such as a lion or a whale, caught, slain and left exposed to the elements. The sky will be darkened, and surrounding nations terrified. Egypt will be left so desolate, that its rivers shall run as smooth as oil, with nobody to disturb them.

God orders the slain Pharaoh and his host to be dragged down to the lower regions of the earth. The Pharaoh will share these regions with uncircumcised tyrants and oppressors. The Pharaoh's particular region is for those who have been slain by the sword.

The duty of the watchman is reiterated. The righteous who turn from righteousness shall die, and the wicked to turn from iniquity shall live. Ezekiel receives news of the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Chaldeans. The hypocrisy and abominations of the people are recounted. When the Lord is destroying these hypocrites, they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Woe to the shepherds (Levites?) of Israel, that do feed themselves, and do not feed the flock. Lord will recall the scattered sheep. David shall be their shepherd. Mount Seir of Idumea (Edom) will be filled with the bodies of slain men, because of the blasphemies spoken against Israel.

## SUMMARY Continued

The mountains of Judah, occupied by the Idumeans, will be rid of their alien occupants and their idolatries. The idolatries and other sins of the Jews are the cause of their dispersion and captivity. The Israelites will be restored after the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel is set in the midst of a valley full of dry bones. Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the dry bones, saying 'Hear the word of the Lord.' As Ezekiel prophesies, the bones are joined together, and covered with flesh.

In the same way, Israel shall be brought up from its grave. Ezekiel is commanded to write 'Judah' on one stick, and 'Ephraim' on another stick, which will become joined into one stick in his hand. At the restoration, there shall be no more idolatry, David shall reign, and God shall be in his sanctuary.

The Lord will intervene and execute furious judgment against Gog (a Scythian prince) when he seems about to defeat Israel. All creation will shake at the presence of the Lord. The Lord will be known in the eyes of many nations.

The slaughter and burial of the forces of Gog are described. Birds and beasts of prey feast on the slain. The Lord will have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and restore it to blessedness, no longer hiding His face from them.

In the fourteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel has a vision of a man with an appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand and a measuring reed. A temple is described: the exact dimensions of the east, north and south gates are given. There is further description of the eight tables for the preparation of sacrifices, the chambers, and the porch. All measurements are given precisely in cubits.

The chambers and ornaments of palm trees and cherubim's are described. The priests' chambers are described, along with the dimensions of the holy mount on which the temple stood.

The glory of the Lord fills the temple. The measurements of the altar are given in cubits. Stipulations given for seven days of sin offerings when the altar is made – precise cultic instructions in the manner of Leviticus.

The east gate is to be kept permanently shut, for the Lord has entered through it into the temple. The prince shall enter and leave via the porch of that gate. Strangers uncircumcised in heart or flesh are not to be admitted to the sanctuary. The Levites will minister in the sanctuary.

Regulations for Levites – they must be clothed in linen while in the inner courts (not wool, which might make them sweat), no wearing of the garments they ministered in in the outer courts, no marrying of widows, no drinking of wine in the inner courts. The Levites will teach the people the difference between the clean and the unclean. The Lord will be their portion.

The Levites who worked at the high places would be punished by becoming mere temple servants. Only the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem could fully carry out priestly duties. No awareness of the idea of a distinction between a hereditary

**SUMMARY Continued**

Aaronide priesthood and the rest of the Levites suggesting that this is a post-exilic addition to the Pentateuch, and that Levites were in fact full priests in pre-exilic times.

Portions of land appointed for the sanctuary, the city, and the prince. Regulations concerning weights and measures. Ordinances regarding provisions for the ordinary and extraordinary sacrifices (for the major feasts).

Gate of the inner court facing eastwards is only opened on sabbaths and new moons. The prince shall offer six lambs and a ram on the sabbath. Further stipulations for new moon offerings. The prince will leave by the gate he entered, but at the big feasts, the people will leave by the opposite gate to the one they came in by.

Stipulations for princely peace offerings given. Stipulations for daily offerings given. Ordinances prescribed for the gifts a prince may bestow on his sons and servants – a servant's gift must be returned if the servant is set at liberty. Measurements of the courts appointed for boiling or baking of the holy oblations.

The vision of the holy waters issuing out of the temple, starting as a shallow stream, then getting deeper and fuller until it is over a man's head. The river travels east until it reaches a sea which will teem with fish. Only the marshy ground will still be salty. Fruitful banks will grow on the banks of the river. A description of the division of the land shared between Jews and proselytes.

A description of the several portions of the land belonging to each tribe, together with the portion allotted to the sanctuary, city, suburb, and prince. The measurement of the gates of the new city – three facing north, three south, three east and three west, each named after a tribe. The city will be named 'The Lord is there'.

**NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE**

- 18:30** *Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.*
- 18:31** *Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?*
- 18:32** *For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live!*
- 29:19** *Therefore thus says the Lord God: Surely I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry off her spoil, and remove her pillage; and that will be the wages for his army.*
- 29:20** *I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor, because they worked for Me, says the Lord God.*
- 33:7** *So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.*
- 33:8** *When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die! and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.*

## NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

**33:9** *Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.*

## CHARACTER Definitions

**EZEKIEL** - The Prophet Ezekiel is the author of the Book. He was a contemporary of both Jeremiah and Daniel. The Book of Ezekiel was likely written between 593 and 565 B.C. during the Babylonian captivity of the Jews.

Ezekiel ministered to his generation who were both exceedingly sinful and thoroughly hopeless. By means of his prophetic ministry he attempted to bring them to immediate repentance and to confidence in the distant future.

He taught that: (1) God works through human messengers; (2) Even in defeat and despair God's people need to affirm God's sovereignty; (3) God's Word never fails; (4) God is present and can be worshiped anywhere; (5) People must obey God if they expect to receive blessings; and (6) God's Kingdom will come.

How can you cope with a world gone astray? Ezekiel, destined to begin his life's ministry as a priest at age thirty, was uprooted from his homeland and marched off to Babylon at age of twenty-five. For five years he languished in despair. At age thirty a majestic vision of Yahweh's glory captivated his being in Babylon.

The priest/prophet discovered God was not confined to the narrow strictures of Ezekiel's native land. Instead, He is a universal God who commands and controls persons and nations. In Babylon, God imparted to Ezekiel His Word for the people. His call experience transformed Ezekiel. He became avidly devoted to God's Word.

He realized he had nothing personally to assist the captives in their bitter situation, but he was convinced God's Word spoke to their condition and could give them victory in it. Ezekiel used various methods to convey God's Word to his people.

He used art in drawing a depiction of Jerusalem, symbolic actions and unusual conduct to secure attention. He cut his hair and beard to demonstrate what God would do to Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

Ezekiel 34 is the chapter wherein God denounces the leaders of Israel as false shepherds for their poor care of His people. Instead of caring for the sheep of Israel, they cared for themselves. They ate well, were well-clothed and well-cared for by the very people they had been placed over.

By contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep and who protects them from the wolves who would destroy the flock. Verse 4 of chapter 34 describes people whom the shepherds failed to minister to as weak, sick, injured and lost.

Jesus is the Great Physician who heals our spiritual wounds by His death on the cross. He is the one who seeks and saves that which is lost.



## CHARACTERS Continued

The Book of Ezekiel calls us to join in a fresh and living encounter with the God of Abraham, Moses and the prophets. We must be overcomers or we will be overcome.

Ezekiel challenged us to experience a life changing vision of God's power, knowledge, eternal presence and holiness; to let God direct us; to comprehend the depth of and commitment to evil that lodges in each human heart; to recognize that God holds His servants responsible for warning wicked men of their peril.

## BIBLE TIMELINE

593 BC	Ezekiel's Prophecy at Chebar	Ezekiel 1
593 BC	Ezekiel's Calling and Instruction	Ezekiel 2
593 BC	Ezekiel Eats the Scroll	Ezekiel 3
593 BC	Ezekiel Foretells Siege of Jerusalem	Ezekiel 4, 5
593 BC	Ezekiel's Vision of the End	Ezekiel 6, 7
592 BC	Ezekiel's First Temple Vision	Ezekiel 8 - 19
591 BC	Ezekiel Sees God Refuse the Elders	Ezekiel 20
591 BC	Ezekiel Prophesies against Jerusalem	Ezekiel 21, 22
591 BC	Ezekiel Prophesies against two Sisters	Ezekiel 23
588 BC	Siege of Jerusalem Begins	Ezekiel 24
587 BC	God's Vengeance on Ammon and Edom	Ezekiel 25
586 BC	Ezekiel Pronounces Judgment on Tyre	Ezekiel 26 - 28
586 BC	Ezekiel Prophesies against Egypt	Ezekiel 29 - 32
586 BC	Ezekiel the Watchman	Ezekiel 33
585 BC	Ezekiel Explains Jerusalem's Fall	Ezekiel 33:21
585 BC	Ezekiel Foresees Reproof and Restoration	Ezekiel 34 - 36
585 BC	Ezekiel Sees Resurrection of Dry Bones	Ezekiel 37
585 BC	Ezekiel Sees Future battle	Ezekiel 38
585 BC	Ezekiel Sees God's judgment upon Gog	Ezekiel 39
573 BC	Ezekiel's Second Temple Vision	Ezekiel 40 - 48

**MAP REFERENCES**

**EZEKIEL'S VISION BY THE RIVER CHEBAR**

