

Ezekiel is outlined with less difficulty than Jeremiah as one can easily see.

Regarding the history of Redemption, among Ezekiel's themes three stand out. The most basic is the concept of the transcendence of God. This is emphasized in Ezekiel's inaugural vision and call (1-3). He uses the words "like" and "likeness" many times, emphasizing that what he is seeing is intimately unlike anything normally seen on earth. God is totally different and above man.

Ezekiel also develops another teaching of Scripture--that of personal moral responsibility. The emphasis in Ezekiel is on the individual and personal aspects of God's relationship with Israel. This doctrine of personal moral responsibility is present even in the Sinai covenant (the ten commandments all use singular verbs), but Ezekiel brings it to its most explicit development (18).

The final of these themes or emphases seems paradoxical at first glance. It can best be stated as a series of propositions: The holiness of God causes his wrath against sin which led (historically) to the exile. The holiness of God causes his faithfulness to his own name (and covenant) and leads to the restoration of Israel. The last stage of that restoration will be the final defeat of the nations and, by that judgment, their realization that the Lord is God. That faithfulness to the holiness of his name will lead to the regeneration of Israel so that his name can no longer be profaned by their sin (36:16-36).

Archaeological concepts and Ezekiel. Josephus, a Jewish apologist of the first century AD (see ETERNITY, April, 1981), wrote that Ezekiel "left behind him in writing two books." These are generally identified as chapters 1-24 and 25-48. At Qumran the book of Isaiah was found in a complete scroll. A blank space of three lines was found, not between chapters 39 and 40 as most critics naturally supposed, but between chapters 33 and 34, thus dividing the book into two roughly equal parts. It seems that the same practice was not uncommon in the ancient Near East. Books were written as two equal parts and balanced in length and content. This, if true of Ezekiel, could explain many of its doublets and repetitions. Compare, for example, his call in 3:16-21 with 33:1-9, the result in 3:25-27 with 33:21-22, the theme of renewal in 24:15-27 with chapters 40-48.

Ezekiel begins by describing his first vision "while I was among the exiles by the Chebar River...in the land of the Babylonians." The Chebar, known as the Kabar or "The Grand Canal" by the Babylonians, stretched from Babylon through Nippur to the southeast. In Nippur, near the Chebar, evidence of a sizable Jewish colony was found. No means of identifying Tel Aviv (3:15) has yet been determined.

Key to the study of the book include Ezekiel's call to the ministry (1-3), especially his vision of God and his commission as a watchman. His emphasis on personal responsibility (14:12-20) and extensive development of the imagery of idolatry as spiritual prostitution (16; 23), on the restoration of Israel, and the new covenant (36:16-36) are all results of his realization of the Lord's holiness. Ezekiel best sums up 'the hope of the book in 48:35 (especially after the despair of chapter 10).

With other study tips consider these: reading through Ezekiel at one sitting (if you must break it into two sections, stop after chapter 24). Read through a second time noting the themes of the first half and how they are developed in chapters 25-48. How does Ezekiel's priestly background affect his style and content? How do the sins which he condemns reflect those condemned in the Mosaic legislation?