

Ezekiel

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

Ezekiel is a very distinctive writer! He wrote during the time of the exile in Babylon (approximately 593 to 563 B.C.), and his writings can basically be divided into three sections: (1) oracles of warning that take place before the fall of Jerusalem, (2) oracles against foreign nations, and (3) oracles of hope that belong after the fall of Jerusalem.

His writing is very symbolic, which makes it difficult to interpret what he meant. Probably his best-known use of symbolism is found in the very first chapter, which describes the throne of God as being composed of four living creatures, each of human form and with four faces and wings. The faces were (1) the face of a human being, (2) the face of a lion, (3) the face of an ox, and (4) the face of an eagle. Beside this throne of living creatures, he also saw a wheel for each of the creatures, described something as “a wheel within a wheel.”

He laid the groundwork for the later symbolic universe of apocalypticism (writings about the end of the world coming through some catastrophic global event). However, even in his writings, he made it clear that there were no words that he could use that would do justice to things dealing with God.

His primary message to the exiles was that God was always among them. A refrain that occurs frequently is that the Lord is in the events of the day so that Israel and the other nations “will know that I am the Lord.”

He challenged the people to be people of integrity, reminding them that each one had a personal responsibility to God. And at a time when the people of Israel felt helpless and hopeless, he brought them a hope of the restoration to their homeland and temple by God.

Ezekiel’s writings pull together both the terrestrial (earthly) and celestial (heavenly) in Israel’s religion, and his ministry marks the transition from the pre-exilic Israelite religion to post-exilic Judaism.