

Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 2, Ezekiel's Visionary Call and Commission, Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 2, Ezekiel's Visionary Call and Commission. Ezekiel 1.1-3.15.

In our first lecture, we were seeing the position of Ezekiel alongside the other classical prophets.

Now we can move into the text itself, and we shall be studying chapters 1 and 2 and chapter 3 down to verse 15. And this represents Ezekiel's visionary call and commission. This is the beginning of the first part of the book, which is going to extend to the end of chapter 7. We notice that this is an autobiographical narrative in the main, and it's meant as an assurance to Ezekiel that he really is a prophet also it comes across as a testimony to other people as evidence of his status, his prophetic status.

And, of course, in the New Testament, we remember the vision that Paul had calling him to be an apostle, and he had a vision of Christ and three times that's emphasized in Acts, and once again, it's a sign of his authority. And then, of course, in Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah is called to be a prophet in that remarkable vision. Ezekiel chapter 1, that vision had a very strong effect on future readers of Ezekiel.

In the Apocrypha, there is the book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus and a review of Old Testament characters, and this is what it says about Ezekiel. It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of glory which God showed him above the chariot of the cherubim. And that stood out, this initial vision.

And so it was very effective, and he was one reader who acknowledged, yes, that he must be a prophet because of this remarkable experience. In chapter 1, we have a vision of God's special presence. In chapter 2, down to 3:11, we have the actual call and commission of Ezekiel.

And then, in 3:12 through 15, we have the aftermath where God warns Ezekiel about the exile's reaction to his future work. And we're told of Ezekiel's own reaction to his vision and commission. But we begin with the introduction in chapter 1, verses 1 through 3. And we're confronted with this strange chronology.

The 30th year, the 4th month, the 5th day. The 30th year of what? We're never told. And the best suggestion, but it's only a suggestion, is that it refers to Ezekiel's age.

Problematically it doesn't use the normal formula for indicating a person's age. But that's all it can refer to. He was 30 years old, we assume.

We take the text to mean that. When we move on to verses 2 and 3, we find that only in those two verses we lose the autobiographical character. And we have an editorial comment.

And this gives another chronology. This is the chronology, which is in line with the rest of the book. It was on the 5th day of the month, the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiakim.

And there it was. All the rest of the book dates Ezekiel's work in accord with that climactic year of 597, where Jehoiakim became an exile and was taken to Babylon. And that's the standard way.

And so that editorial note is admitting the awkwardness of that 30th year and say, well, in terms of the rest of the book, this is what it means. And that's a fascinating comment. In verse 1, Ezekiel gives a few details about him.

I was among the exiles by the river Kibar, and the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. The heavens were opened, which prepares for God's coming down to earth in the vision, which is going to be narrated in the next verses. He was standing by the Kibar Canal, which was a very important canal.

It was near a city called Nippur, which was east of the capital, Babylon. And we should talk more about the Kibar Canal when we come to chapter 3, where it's mentioned again. But we know from that chronology in verse 2, that Ezekiel has been four years in exile, along with those VIPs who were deported, first of all, along with the king in 597.

And so, this is 593, and scholars have worked out it was in July 593 that the vision took place. Interestingly, Ezekiel is called a priest. He already had a priestly rank and a priestly training.

He cannot yet be called a prophet because he hasn't been called to be a prophet. As I said last time, the importance of his priestly role is that one of the tasks a priest had was to teach the people, to teach the Torah traditions, the moral and religious traditions to the people. And Ezekiel very freely incorporates his priestly training into his prophetic work.

So that's an important word here, priest. Not only mentioning Ezekiel's past but also something that will mark his future ministry. At the end of verse 3, we're told the hand of the Lord was on him there.

The editor slips that in, and it's in line with what the rest of the book says. When Ezekiel receives an important vision, he feels this heavy hand as a signal. Wake up, Ezekiel, you're going to get a special message from God now.

And so, he does. He gets this signal, this sign. Chapter 1 is an overwhelming chapter.

It was overwhelming for Ezekiel, it's overwhelming for the reader. Ezekiel is talking about something that defies description. He cannot fully explain what he sees.

And perhaps the most common word in chapter 1 is the word like. It was like this, it was like that, it was like something else. And he's trying to describe the indescribable all the way through, and he can't quite make it.

This is so supernatural, this so defies human experience that he has a go. He does the best he can, and he acknowledges that he doesn't quite make it, but this is the best he can do. And the problem comes in trying to explain this vision, because if we're not careful, we can sort of demote it, and take away its mystery.

But what one has to say is that readers and hearers would already know a certain amount of what Ezekiel was talking about. And so there are certain conceptions, Israelite conceptions, ancient Near Eastern conceptions, which are taken up, which the readers and hearers would know about originally but which we don't. And so there's a certain amount of explanation that we do need to know to catch up with those first hearers and readers.

The vision is concerned with the presence of God. And this is one of the most important doctrines there is in the Old Testament. We would want to preface it with the existence of God, but you nowhere find that queried in the Old Testament.

The New Testament, in Hebrews 11, says we must believe that God exists, but in the Old Testament, it's taken for granted. Instead, you concentrate on the presence of God, and it's a very complex doctrine. God is present in all sorts of ways.

In the fullest sense, God is present in heaven. God has his heavenly palace, and that's where he lives. But he can also reveal himself on earth.

And so, the rest of the cases of the presence of God concern the earth. In a very diffuse way, he is everywhere in creation. A text in Jeremiah says, Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? God is present everywhere.

There's an omnipresence. But it's what we might call a thin presence, certainly compared with that heavenly presence. But in between those two presences, there are others too.

God was present in the Jerusalem temple. And that was where he was. And his presence was located in the Holy of Holies, above the Ark, which was the footstool underneath an invisible throne on which God invisibly sat.

So that was an important presence, too. And then, God can be present with the people, especially the leaders. Joshua is told, I will be with you.

I will be with you. So, there are all sorts of presence. In the prophets, God is present in judgment.

And we shall read again and again of God's intervention in the world, doing things in the world, there, exercising judgment against the people of God. And this is a very real and negative presence. But there's also a presence in theophany.

Theophany is the appearance of God. Very often in a human sort of form. But the... God appears in glory.

This is a priestly word that's very much associated with theophany. You may remember that when Solomon's temple was dedicated, apart from that ongoing presence above the Ark, there was a manifestation of glory in 1 Kings 8 and verse 11. A cloud filled the house of the Lord, so the priest could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

Again, this is a theophany. There are a number of prophetic... Isaiah has a theophany of God in the temple itself. But here, we aren't in Jerusalem; we're far away.

But God deigns to appear outside Israel, and he appears in this private vision to Ezekiel in this theophany. So, there's that complex doctrine, and we're looking at one segment in the theophany. There are two types of theophany.

There's a theophany of salvation. Remember that Moses had a vision of the burning bush, and he realized that that fire, then the non-consumption of the bush through that fire, was a sign of God's presence. And that was a theophany of salvation and an assurance that through Moses, God was going to lead his people out of Israel.

But also, you can have a theophany of judgment. And what we have here is a theophany of judgment because it's going to move on to the commission of Ezekiel to be a prophet of judgment. And so, it's a hostile revelation that's given to Ezekiel, and Ezekiel is to be an agent of that hostility against the people of God.

This vision is an introduction to the first phase of Ezekiel's ministry, up to 587, and those messages of judgment. And this justifies it, this theophany of judgment. You may remember that in Psalm 18, the king is given victory, a military victory, and it's described in terms of theophany.

Well, it's a theophany of salvation for the king, but it's a theophany of judgment for his enemies. And Psalm 18 speaks of this. He rode on a cherub and flew, and this is God.

Thick darkness was under his feet. He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water.

Out of the brightness before him, there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out his arrows and scattered them. He flashed forth lightnings and routed them.

Our vision in Ezekiel 1 is going to be rather like that, rather taking that form that we saw in Ezekiel 18, that rhetorical expression of God coming to save the king and his armies. Isaiah, of course, also had a vision of judgment, but there it was a heavenly vision superimposed upon the temple. And we've got God's heavenly presence there in the temple in a remarkable way that only Isaiah could see.

But now, as I said, we are far away, and to Ezekiel, one of the exiles, is given this vision as part of this prophetic commission. In verse 4, we get an item that we've just seen in Psalm 14. God is portrayed as a storm god.

As I looked at Ezekiel 1:4, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud with brightness around it, and fire flashing continually. And there it is. It's rather similar to Psalm 18. And there's very much a picture of God, God coming to earth in the form of a storm god, bringing this wind and bringing this cloud.

This is going to be developed as the vision goes on because, in verses 13 and 14, we're going to mention lightning, flashes of lightning. And then, in verse 18, we're going to mention the bright rainbow over against the dark clouds on a rainy day. And so, this idea of the storm, it very much comes in.

We're not used to that very much, but it does come in a hymn, an old hymn, that we still sometimes sing: Oh, worship the king, his chariots of wrath, the deep thunder clouds form, and dark is his path on the wings of the storm. And this is part of the imagery of Psalm 18 and of Ezekiel chapter 1. But there's much more to say. There are in verse 5, there's something like four living creatures of human form.

Here are these angelic figures, we would call them. They are part of this vision. When we move on to verse 22, we see that they are supporting a platform.

And above their heads is this platform. In verse 26, we are told that on that platform was a throne on which God was sitting. And so, we're coming to a new aspect of this vision.

It's a mobile throne. It's a throne chariot. And it's supported by these living creatures, these supernatural living creatures, these flying creatures.

They've got wings. With two wings, they fly. With two wings, they cover their bodies, rather like the seraphim in Isaiah chapter 6. So, they're bringing this mobile throne down to earth, this throne that signifies the presence of God on which, in fact, God was sitting.

And this platform represents the firmament of heaven. Because what we have is a heavenly scene, a supernatural scene, which is sort of scaled down to a smaller proportion. So, we have a sort of heavenly throne, and then we've got the firmament, which is a lid over the world.

This takes us to some other scripture references: Psalm 97, verses 3 and 4. Well, that's about fire and lightning—that's the storm nature again.

Of course, in Genesis chapter 1, the story of creation, we have the firmament or the dome over the world. And the conception that there was water above this firmament was that it was transparent. And so, it was sky blue.

You looked through, and you could see the waters above it. And Genesis 1, verses 6 to 8, speaks of this lid over the world. Chapter 7 of Genesis and verse 12 speak of the windows of the heavens being opened.

And so, the rain, all the rain up there, a terrible flood in Noah's day, as the heavens were opened. Well, this idea is scaled down. We have this platform, which represents the firmament.

In verse 10, we're told, going back to these angelic figures, that they had four faces. These faces were of different forms, but they were scanning the earth on all four sides. They reflected aspects of power within God's creation.

One face was human. And then there was an ox. And there was an eagle.

And then there was a lion. Each one contributed to God's glory. They took up powerful aspects of God's creation.

And these are the faces that the living creatures wear. We're told in verse 12 about a spirit. And this was the controlling agency.

The living creatures were there, but their direction was determined by this spirit. Each living creature faced in a different direction. And the spirit animated the appropriate facing living creature to move forward in his own direction.

Also, inside this structure, underneath the firmament, in verse 13, there was this flashing core of fire, threatening fire. Oh yes, that was where I wanted that Psalm 97 reference. Because among the features of that vision there, fire goes before him and consumes his adversaries on every side.

There it is. You get this judgment theme in this case coming out as the meaning of the fire. 15 to 21, you're told about the wheels.

You're told a lot about the wheels. And this is for mobility on the ground. When the mobile throne is landed on the ground, then there's use of these wheels.

And these are also controlled by the spirit. The spirit is the animating force. And so, the spirit has the function of a sort of engine and a steering wheel, organizing where the living creatures go and where the direction that the wheels go.

And we have a strange statement about the wheels. At the end of verse 16, their construction is something like a wheel within a wheel. And what on earth does this mean? A wheel within a wheel.

Well, the only suggestion I've come across is that the whole wheel structure was a sphere. It was a globe. And on top of this globe or sphere, you had the actual rims of a wheel.

And here, I've only put two, but you see, one is overlapping. And so, you've got a top one, and then you've got one underneath, and then you had two more underneath, if I did it properly. And what would happen is this sphere would move, and at the edges, the proper wheel would come into operation and take it in a certain direction.

These wheels were fixed, but the globe had to move from side to side so that the appropriate wheel came into operation. And we're told that these wheels had eyes. They had eyes.

This represents what ordinary wheels were like in ancient times. They would have metal nails forced into them so that the wooden wheels wouldn't be worn away. I remember when I was young seeing workmen with heavy boots, and the leather soles would be protected by iron nails so that the soles didn't have to be re-sewed too often.

And this was rather like that. But here, instead of seeing these shiny nail heads, it comes over as eyes. And again, these all-seeing... It's the all-seeing nature of God that comes out in these eyes that these wheels have.

There's a verse in Zechariah that speaks of the eyes of the Lord in terms of the omniscience of God. Zechariah 4 and verse 10. And this is what it says.

The eyes of the Lord range through the whole earth. This represents God's knowledge of everything that's going on in the world. We appeal to various elements associated with God, and they're brought together.

And then in 22 we come back to that firmament and it's a sky-blue firmament shining like crystal. Rather interestingly, in Exodus, you remember the elders were allowed to go up with Moses to Sinai and they had a vision of God there. And it links up with what we read here in Ezekiel.

In Exodus chapter 24 and verse 10. They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness.

And so, this transparent sky, sort of solid form of sky. But here, as I say, it's a scaled-down platform for this throne of God. In verse 24, up to now, it's been very much a visual vision describing what Ezekiel has seen.

But now we find auditory elements come in. In verse 22, you have the flapping of the wings of these angelic figures. And they make a terrific noise.

And Ezekiel tries very hard to say what the noise is like. He has a number of goes. The sound of their wings was like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the Almighty.

A sound of tumult like the sound of the army. Oh my, he must have put his hands over his ears. It was so loud, the flapping of these wings.

And so, you're moving from sight to sound. And this is a preparation for what we read in verse 25. There's a voice.

Now, there's a voice in verse 25. And that is mentioned again in the end of verse 28. So, new auditory elements are coming in here.

But in between, there's a description of the person that the voice referred to, in verses 26 and 27. And there's someone there.

You can see there's this silhouette that takes a sort of human form. It's surrounded by a bright and colorful aura of light.

It's like a bright rainbow. So, we go back to this storm vision again. And of course, a bow, if we think of what a bow is like.

A bow is what the storm god carries. From which the lightning arrows are sent. So, we're back to this storm language.

So, we've come to the climax of theophany, the climax of the vision of theophany, in verses 26 and 27.

In verse 28, it is described as glory. This ultimate presence of God on earth. Glory.

This priestly word. This radiant power. That's what he sees.

And what does Ezekiel do? He falls in worship and submission. The end of 28. When I saw it, I fell on my face.

We've described this as a theophany of judgment. And there are some hostile elements. And this is appropriate.

Because when we come to the call and commission of Ezekiel. In chapter 2:1 to 7 is the commission. We find that Ezekiel is commissioned as a prophet of judgment.

As I say, this vision applies strictly to the first part of his ministry. Those first four years where he had that severe ministry. So, 2:1 to 7 is the commission.

2:8 down to 3:3 is a symbolic rite of ordination. One might say of Ezekiel as a prophet. And then 3:4 to 11 is a sort of a recapping.

Confirming what the commission was. In chapter 2:1 to 2 we have an introduction. And Ezekiel hears the voice of God.

He said to me, Oh mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak to you. And he's empowered to do so. And he said to me, again in verse 3, mortal.

This is the standard way that God addresses Ezekiel. In the new RSV, it's mortal. In the margin, it's the son of man.

The NIV uses the son of man. We might translate it human. You're human.

The living creatures had been like humans. And God himself had been like a human in shape. But here we have an actual human.

Those were supernatural beings. But here we have the real human person. And there's a great gulf between the two standards.

But now this supernatural power, a spirit. We had the spirit organizing the mobile throne. But now the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.

And so, he's given this supernatural power. So that he can recover from that sense of shock that he had from encountering that vision. Verse 3 is a very important verse that sets out Ezekiel's mission.

I am sending you to the people of Israel to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me. They and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. In a number of succeeding chapters, we are going to find the exiles of 597.

Described in this way as rebels or a rebellious house, a rebellious community. And they, of course, are representatives of Judah as a whole. And they, in turn, are this rebellious house.

And rebellion by contrast it speaks of a king. It speaks of God as the king. But a king who was being ignored, a king who was being slighted.

And so, this monarch, this heavenly monarch faced with this rebellious people. And here is this basic problem that has to be dealt with and has to be sorted out. And in verse 4 there is a formula that Ezekiel is told to bring in his prophesying.

Thus says the Lord God. He is to be the spokesperson for God himself. And this picks up the standard formula that we find in all the classical prophets.

And even before in the pre-classical prophets that they are the agents of God. They are the messengers of God. And they can quote what God has told them.

They have this divine authority. And so here is this investiture in a way with this formula. I give you this formula that you can say thus says the Lord God.

And at the end of verse 5 we come across something that occurs so often in the book of Ezekiel. Verse 5 as a whole. Whether they hear or refuse to hear for they are rebellious house.

They shall know that there has been a prophet among them. That's what we call a recognition formula. And it occurs so often.

One commentator says it occurs a hundred and twenty-six times in the book of Ezekiel. But elsewhere in the book, it's always they who shall know, or you shall know that I am the Lord. But here in this inaugural chapter, it takes the form they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

A representative of God speaking to them. But we shall notice this recognition formula again and again. Ezekiel is warned that his task will be a difficult one and a dangerous one.

In verse 6, don't be afraid of them. Do not be afraid of their words. Though briars and thorns surround you, and you live among scorpions.

Do not be afraid of their words. Do not be dismayed at their looks. And he's empowered.

He's encouraged. He's warned not to fear because he has great authority behind him as God's spokesman. But there will be opposition.

Expect it. Don't be put off by it. Isaiah, in chapter 6, was given a similar warning, wasn't he? And then, in 2:8 down to 3:3, we have this sort of rite of ordination.

This symbolism of eating a scroll. It's split into different parts. In verse 8, verse 8 is introductory.

He's told to eat a scroll. Eat a scroll? It could have been of leather. I hope it was of papyrus for the sake of Ezekiel's stomach.

And so that's the introduction in verse 8. And then, in verses 9 to 10, he's handed a scroll. And then in 3:1 to 2, he's told again to eat it. And he takes it.

He holds it in his hand. Lastly, in verse 3, he is told to eat it, and he does.

There's a sort of distaste there. I don't know whether I want to God. Yes, go on, go on, go on.

Chew it up, chew it up. And there it is. And what is this scroll? He catches a glimpse.

There was writing on the front and back, and he managed to see the title: words of lamentations, mourning, and woe.

Well, that's not a very happy scroll, is it? And it's a reference to the grim contents. And it's really saying that he is to be a prophet of judgment. And this title refers not to the judgment but to the effect of the judgment upon the people.

That when the disaster Ezekiel prophesied comes to pass, my, there's going to be such suffering and such lamentation and mourning and woe piling up of this effect of the judgment that Ezekiel is to proclaim. 593 down to 587. Then in 3.1 we're given an explanation of this symbolism that eating the scroll is a representation of what he is to do in real life in his prophetic ministry.

Go and speak to the house of Israel. He's to digest the scroll and make it his own and then pass it on. And we have a surprising statement at the end of verse 3. I ate it and in my mouth, it was as sweet as honey.

My, this terrible scroll and this nasty contents, but it turned out to be as sweet as honey. And that's very striking. But it represents Ezekiel's acceptance, his willing acceptance and his sense of satisfaction that he's going to be doing God's will.

And so, there's a great contrast between the harsh content of his ministry and the feeling of satisfaction and acceptance that Ezekiel has that he knows he's speaking God's word. Very striking. There's a contrast in verse 4. Go and speak to the house of Israel.

These are the 597 exiles. Speak my very words to them. You're not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language but to the house of Israel.

And there's a contrast here between the Babylonians who spoke Akkadian. That, indeed, was obscure speech and difficult language. No, you're going to speak to Judeans who know Hebrew.

And then there's another contrast. I'm not sending you to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language whose words you cannot understand. And these are references to the ethnic groups of exiles.

Different Palestinian groups landed up in the labor camps of Babylonia, and the Judeans were only one section in these labor camps. But I'm not sending them to you. The contrast is made, and even if you went to these groups, they would listen to you.

They would take what you're saying seriously. But I'm sending you to Judeans. They're not going to listen to you at all.

And they will not listen to you. They're not willing to listen to you. And there it is, that stark contrast.

I wish I could send you to the Babylonians. They'd listen to what you say. Wish I could send you to the Phoenicians or the Philistines in their labor camps.

They'd listen. But the Judeans were in their labor camps, in no way! They're so rebellious. They're turning against their own God.

And so, a very vivid way of speaking here. And so, it's very discouraging what Ezekiel's told. But he's given an assurance in verse 8. See, I've made your face hard against their faces and your forehead hard against their foreheads.

I'm going to make you tough. When I think of toughness among the prophets, I think of Amos. He was as hard as nails.

Not like Hosea, who is so sentimental, loving, kind, and so on. But over against that, Amos was as hard as nails. And Ezekiel is told he's going to be like that.

In the book, he's not always like that. We find that he can't take it. Very rarely we find he can't take it.

And occasionally, he complains. Very occasionally. But there it is.

Mostly he apparently did what he was told. And so he's sent back to the exiles. And he's told it doesn't matter whether they listen to you or not.

Because this is judgment, this is inevitable. And it's immaterial.

It doesn't matter whether they listen or not. They've just got to be told in advance. This is what is going to happen in due course.

The fall of Jerusalem. The destruction of Judah, as it turns out to be. But then in verse 11, he's sent back to the exiles.

Go to the exiles, to your people, and say to them, thus says the Lord God, whether they hear or refuse to hear. There's something very poignant in this verse. Go back to your people.

Ezekiel had a foot in both camps. He was the representative of God, but he was a Judean citizen.

He'd been brought up among his fellow people. And it was so difficult. He needed all the encouragement that he could get.

That he was turning against his own people in God's name, and I think some of that poignancy is brought out here. That however committed he was to God, it was a painful experience to go back to his own people and to have to tell them these terrible things.

And so, he goes back to the labor camp. Where he lived. And an interesting fact comes in verse 12.

The spirit lifted me up. And as the glory of the Lord rose from its place, he's able to see the mobile throne going back to heaven and carried by the angels. And he hears the wheels rumbling along the ground.

And he hears the flapping of the wings. And he's left by himself on the earth. Meanwhile, the spirit lifted me up and bore me away.

And I came to the exiles in Tel Aviv. And we were talking about this in our first lecture. That Elijah was very much associated with this sort of physical transportation.

And we read a verse from 2nd Kings 2 in verse 16. How some of Elijah's disciples said, Oh we've got to look for him. Perhaps the spirit has caught him up and thrown him down on some mountain or into some valley.

And then back in 1st Kings 18 and verse 12 we see a similar sort of thing. The spirit of the Lord speaking to Elijah will carry you I know not where. And the interesting thing, we find the same phenomenon in the New Testament.

Do you remember where it is? It's in Acts chapter 8. And Philip had been ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch. And then what are we told in Acts 8 and verse 39? When they came out of the water, the spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.

The eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus. And there we are.

So, it's a New Testament phenomenon as well as an Old Testament phenomenon. But it comes over in Ezekiel. It's very much a sort of an old world phenomenon that that great pre-classical prophet Elijah.

Ezekiel is empowered to do the same sort of thing. And he comes back to the settlement where he's living and he's exhausted. I sat there among them, stunned for seven days.

And you can well imagine that. He's emotionally devastated after this wonderful but terrible vision. But let's think a little bit more about the labor camp.

And it must have been a series. I don't know if they were all there or if there were a number of Judean labor camps. But they were for prisoners of war.

And they had a job to do. It was near the Chebar Canal which was in turn near Nippur, east of Babylon. And the Chebar Canal was part of a complex network of canals in the Mesopotamian heartland.

There were a number of these big canals used for transporting river water, transporting of goods and food. But another purpose of these canals was for

irrigation because these canals linked up with the Euphrates and the Tigris. And they were 150 miles apart.

And in between was this flat plain with no water. And so, this canal system was inaugurated, I think, perhaps centuries before. There could also be irrigation for crops and fruit growing.

And so that was the work in the labor camps that these exiles had to do. They didn't sit there twiddling their thumbs, doing nothing. They had work to do.

And why was this work necessary? Well, in the 7th century there had been a series of battles between the Assyrians and the Babylonians. And that whole area had been devastated and depopulated. And that irrigation system was no longer working.

And so, they had to re-inaugurate it, work on the fields, and load the boats. And that was the work in the labor camp that Ezekiel must have had to do as well. And so that's the situation.

And that's the beginning of Ezekiel. And next time we will be moving on from 3.16 to the end of chapter 5. So, try and find time to read that material before my lecture. Thank you.

This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 2, Ezekiel's Visionary Call and Commission. Ezekiel 1.1-3.15.