

THEN THEY WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Judgments on Jerusalem and the surrounding nations accomplish God's revelatory purpose as He fulfils His promise to ultimately dwell with His people in a new temple in the Millennial Kingdom.

Paul Apple (December 2021)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Ezekiel 11:12 *“Thus you will know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed My ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you.”*

Ezekiel 24:24 *“Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord God.”*

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

BACKGROUND NOTES

J. Sidlow Baxter: We do not have to look deeply to find the **key idea** and the **focal message** of Ezekiel. They confront us on almost every page. With slight variations, that expression, “*They shall know that I am Jehovah,*” occurs no less than seventy times. It is used twenty-nine times in connection with Jehovah’s punishment of Jerusalem; twenty-four times in connection with Jehovah’s governmental judgments on the Gentile nations; and seventeen times in connection with the coming restoration and final blessing of the elect nation. To see this is to see the heart of the book unveiled. The elect people, and all other peoples, are to know by indubitable demonstration that Jehovah is the one true God, the sovereign Ruler of nations and history and they are to know it be three revelations of His sovereign power –

- first, by the punishment of Jerusalem and the captivity of the chosen people, which came true exactly as foretold;
- second, by the judgments prophesied on the Gentile nations of Ezekiel’s day, which also have come true exactly as foretold; and
- third, by the preservation and ultimate restoration of the covenant people, which had a partial fulfilment in the return of the “Remnant” under Ezra and Nehemiah, and which is still being fulfilled in the marvelous preservation of Israel, and which is even now hastening to its millennial consummation.

This, then, is Ezekiel – “*THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH.*”

David Malick: Message Statement:

Necessary judgment for sin upon Jerusalem and the nations becomes the means through which God will bring about a new life and a new order for both Judah and Israel when in the future he will dwell in their midst.

I. Prophecies Concerning Judgment on the Nation and the Nations:

Ezekiel was prepared by the Lord to proclaim to the Israel in captivity that the Lord was going to bring catastrophic judgment upon Jerusalem because of their sinful idolatry, that he had left the temple so that this judgment could occur, and that He will bring judgment through Babylon upon the nations who laughed at Jerusalem’s fall and afflicted Jerusalem so that they will know that Yahweh is God

1:1--32:32

II. Prophecies Concerning Blessing on Israel:

As the watchman for the city, Ezekiel proclaims that Israel will have a new life as the Lord brings her shepherds her, restores her, and protects her and she will have a new order as he provides a new temple, new forms of worship, and a new city where He will be present

33:1--48:35

Gleason Archer: The Hebrew name means *God strengthens*. The theme of Ezekiel’s prophecy is that the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity are necessary measures for the God of grace to employ if He is to correct His disobedient people and draw them back from complete

and permanent apostasy. But the day is coming when Jehovah will restore a repentant remnant of His chastened people and establish them in a glorious latter-day theocracy with a new temple.

Derek Thomas: Why should Ezekiel be called by this name [*God strengthens*]?

Two answers seem to be forthcoming from the book itself: firstly, because Ezekiel faced fierce and sustained opposition to his message (**3:8**), and anyone who has ever tried to preach in such circumstances will know the need for divine help; and secondly, not only Ezekiel, but all God's people need to be reassured of his help in times of weakness. '*I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak,*' God promises his flock in exile in Babylon (**Ezek. 34:16**), using the same word as Ezekiel's name to convey this reassurance. Both Ezekiel himself and the church of his day were to be reminded of God's power every time they heard the prophet's name mentioned in conversation. This must have been wonderfully reassuring to the faithful who perceived the significance of his name.

GotQuestions.org: 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.

Chuck Swindoll: God didn't exile the Israelites primarily to punish them. God never has been nor is He now interested in punishment for punishment's sake. Rather, He intended the punishment or judgment in Ezekiel's day as a means to an end—to bring His people to a state of repentance and humility before the one true God. They had lived for so long in sin and rebellion, confident in their own strength and that of the neighboring nations, that they needed God to remind them of His holy nature and their humble identity in a most dramatic way. After centuries of warnings, prophetic messages, and invasions, God decided that more significant action was required—He had to remove the people from their promised land.

Ezekiel's entire prophetic ministry centered around the small exiled community at Tel-abib, a people uprooted from their homes and livelihoods living out their days in a foreign land. Can you imagine the feelings of disorientation and confusion that accompanied these people? Even though many of the exiles were directly engaged in the sinful behavior that led to God's judgment, that would not prevent them from wondering why all this was happening to them.

We sometimes find ourselves in that predicament as well, asking "Why, Lord?" and waiting in silence for the answer. The exiles had to wait five years for God to send Ezekiel, and when God did, His prophet had a message that the people likely didn't want to hear: God is the Lord of heaven and earth, and the judgment the people were experiencing was a result of their own sin.

The book of Ezekiel reminds us to seek out the Lord in those dark times when we feel lost, to examine our own lives, and to align ourselves with the one true God. Will you consider doing so today?

Iain Duguid: In the providence of God, the Babylonians and the Assyrians had very different **policies of exile**. The Assyrians adopted the policy of divide and conquer; they would take large numbers of people from one area of their empire and resettle them in small groups in different parts of the empire. By breaking up old ties and alliances, they hoped to render the defeated peoples disorganized and disoriented, unable to mount any effective revolt. Their policy therefore represented a shuffling of the people groups around the margins of their empire, in what you might call a “melting pot” policy of imperial rule. The aim was that people would lose their original ethnic identity and become simply “Assyrians.”

The Babylonians, on the other hand, followed a less assimilationist “tossed salad” model of empire. They took the leaders and skilled workers from the subjugated nations and brought them from the margins of the empire to the center, to Babylonia itself. There they treated them reasonably well and allowed them to settle in ethnic groups and to advance within the Babylonian system. The goal, from a Babylonian perspective, was to incorporate these diverse people groups in the service of the empire by bringing their various talents and gifts into the center, while allowing them to retain their own ethnic identities. In addition, the margins of the empire were thereby left impoverished and leaderless and therefore less likely to rebel against the power of the center.

The results, from the perspective of Israel and Judah, were the different fates of the northern and southern kingdoms in exile. The northern kingdom of Israel was dispersed and effectively destroyed. Individual believers presumably remained, keeping hope alive among the Diaspora of a future reunion of the twelve tribes (as we will see in Ezekiel), but as a political entity, the northern kingdom was finished. Their land was occupied by a half-breed mixture of different ethnic groups, who had little more than a superstitious interest in the God of their land. Judah, on the other hand, remained largely denuded of population after the debacle of 586 b.c., allowing the possibility of a genuine return from exile on the part of those who had kept the faith. It was one of these groups of exiles living by the Kebar River in Babylonia, which included both faithful and not so faithful, to whom Ezekiel was commissioned to prophesy. . .

The task that was assigned to Ezekiel was to prophesy to the exiles of Judah, who had been carried away into captivity in distant Babylonia. It was an audience close to despair, asking why this disaster had come on them and where God was in the middle of their personal holocaust. Their assessment of their own condition was: “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” (**Ezek. 37:11**). What use was a God who seemed unable or unwilling to protect his own land? What use was a God who allowed his own temple in Jerusalem to be defiled? What use was a God who allowed his own people to be carried away from the land he had promised to the patriarchs? Even if he were to intervene now on behalf of his land, how would that help those who were far away in exile? These were the questions with which the exiles struggled.

The answers to these questions permeate the book.

MacArthur: In the more immediate setting, several features were strategic.

Politically, Assyria's vaunted military might crumbled after 626 B.C., and the capital, Nineveh, was destroyed in 612 B.C. by the Babylonians and Medes (cf. Nahum). The neo-Babylonian empire had flexed its muscles since Nabopolassar took the throne in 625 B.C., and Egypt, under Pharaoh Necho II, was determined to conquer what she could. Babylon smashed Assyria in 612–605 B.C., and registered a decisive victory against Egypt in 605 B.C. at Carchemish, leaving, according to the Babylonian Chronicle, no survivors. Also in 605 B.C., Babylon, led by Nebuchadnezzar, began the conquest of Jerusalem and the deportation of captives, among them Daniel (**Dan. 1:2**). In Dec., 598 B.C., he again besieged Jerusalem, and on Mar. 16, 597 B.C. took possession. This time, he took captive Jehoiachin and a group of 10,000, including Ezekiel (**2 Kin. 24:11–18**). The final destruction of Jerusalem and the conquest of Judah, including the third deportation, came in 586 B.C.

Religiously, King Josiah (ca. 640–609 B.C.) had instituted reforms in Judah (cf. **2 Chr. 34**).

Tragically, despite his effort, idolatry had so dulled the Judeans that their awakening was only “skin deep” overall. The Egyptian army killed Josiah as it crossed Palestine in 609 B.C., and the Jews plunged on in sin toward judgment under Jehoahaz (609 B.C.), Jehoiakim [Eliakim] (609–598 B.C.), Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.), and Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.).

Domestically, Ezekiel and the 10,000 lived in exile in Babylonia (**2 Kin. 24:14**), more as colonists than captives, being permitted to farm tracts of land under somewhat favorable conditions (**Jer. 29**). Ezekiel even had his own house (**3:24; 20:1**).

Prophetically, false prophets deceived the exiles with assurances of a speedy return to Judah (**13:3, 16; Jer. 29:1**). From 593–585 B.C., Ezekiel warned that their beloved Jerusalem would be destroyed and their exile prolonged, so there was no hope of immediate return. In 585 B.C., an escapee from Jerusalem, who had evaded the Babylonians, reached Ezekiel with the first news that the city had fallen in 586 B.C., about 6 months earlier (**33:21**). That dashed the false hopes of any immediate deliverance for the exiles, so the remainder of Ezekiel's prophecies related to Israel's future restoration to its homeland and the final blessings of the messianic kingdom.

Historical and Theological Themes

The “*glory of the Lord*” is central to Ezekiel, appearing in **1:28; 3:12, 23; 10:4, 18; 11:23; 43:4, 5; 44:4**. The book includes graphic descriptions of the disobedience of Israel and Judah, despite God's kindness (**chap. 23**; cf. **chap. 16**). It shows God's desire for Israel to bear fruit which He can bless; however, selfish indulgence had left Judah ready for judgment, like a torched vine (**chap. 15**). References are plentiful to Israel's idolatry and its consequences, such as Pelatiah dropping dead (**11:13**), a symbolic illustration of overall disaster for the people.

Many picturesque scenes illustrate spiritual principles. Among these are Ezekiel eating a scroll (**chap. 2**); the faces on 4 angels representing aspects of creation over which God rules (**1:10**); a “barbershop” scene (**5:1–4**); graffiti on temple walls reminding readers of what God really wants in His dwelling place, namely holiness and not ugliness (**8:10**); and sprinkled hot coals depicting judgment (**10:2, 7**).

Chief among the theological themes are God's holiness and sovereignty. These are conveyed by frequent contrast of His bright glory against the despicable backdrop of Judah's sins (1:26–28; often in **chaps. 8–11**; and **43:1–7**). Closely related is God's purpose of glorious triumph so that all may "*know that I am the LORD.*" This divine monogram, God's signature authenticating His acts, is mentioned more than 60 times, usually with a judgment (6:7; 7:4), but occasionally after the promised restoration (34:27; 36:11, 38; 39:28).

Another feature involves God's angels carrying out His program behind the scenes (1:5–25; 10:1–22). A further important theme is God's holding each individual accountable for pursuing righteousness (18:3–32).

Ezekiel also stresses sinfulness in Israel (2:3–7; 8:9, 10) and other nations (throughout **chaps. 25–32**). He deals with the necessity of God's wrath to deal with sin (7:1–8; 15:8); God's frustration of man's devices to escape from besieged Jerusalem (12:1–13; cf. **Jer. 39:4–7**); and God's grace pledged in the Abrahamic Covenant (**Gen. 12:1–3**) being fulfilled by restoring Abraham's people to the land of the covenant (**chaps. 34, 36–48**; cf. **Gen. 12:7**). God promises to preserve a remnant of Israelites through whom He will fulfill His restoration promises and keep His inviolate Word.

Lamar Cooper: At least six significant theological themes can be identified in the Book of Ezekiel.

The Holiness and Transcendence of God. The book opens with an account of the call of the prophet. The majesty and transcendence of God are portrayed in the vision of Yahweh on his chariot-throne reigning as the Lord of creation (1:1–28). The turmoil of the exile and the prediction of the imminent fall of Jerusalem (3:1–27) raised a serious theological issue. Where was Yahweh? Ezekiel saw him as the God who is still on his throne, still Lord of creation, transcendent yet caring and interactive with his creation. Yahweh was portrayed as a holy God who transcends his creation but who also was concerned for the sinfulness of humanity (44:23). The concern for priestly regulations and the vision of the restored temple (40:1–42:20) denote a non-mystical view of the holiness of God that compliments Ezekiel's mystical vision of **chap. 1**.

Divine justice is a theme in Ezekiel related to the holy character of Yahweh. Ezekiel's ministry and especially his role as a "*watchman for the house of Israel*" (3:17–21; 33:1–33) was considered by the rabbis as evidence of God's justice. Various other aspects of God's holy character are evident such as divine jealousy (8:3; 23:25), concern for foreign nations (25:1–32:32), mercy (37:10), and wrath (7:1–8; 15:7; 24:24).

The Sinfulness of Humanity. The holiness and transcendence of God are presented in contrast to the sinfulness of humanity, especially of Judah. Ezekiel used parables to illustrate his point. In **chap. 16** he told the story of a child who was abandoned, rescued from certain death, cared for by a benevolent benefactor, and who grew to be a young woman of marriageable age. When she was betrothed and prepared for marriage, she decided instead to become a harlot (16:15). From this point Ezekiel clearly identified Israel/Judah as the harlot and the story of her life as an allegory of its history. Other passages that center on the sinfulness of the people in general are 8:1–18; 20:1–44; and 23:1–49. Prophets such as Amos had stressed the social sins of the

nation, but Ezekiel took his message a step further and stressed the spiritual root of sin as the violation of God's holiness presented in his character and Commandments. The nation was so sinful that Ezekiel portrayed Yahweh reluctantly departing the temple (10:1ff.) and finally leaving Jerusalem (11:22–25).

The Inevitability of Judgment. In spite of the loss of independence to Babylon in 605 b.c., the people had high expectations that the foreign intervention by Nebuchadnezzar was temporary. Ezekiel condemned the false prophets in particular because they encouraged these ideas and thus made the people their prey instead of praying for the needs of the nation (13:1–14:23). They also predicted that Jerusalem would be spared. Ezekiel's indictment of these spurious prophets concluded with several ringing pronouncements of the doom of Jerusalem and the inevitability of the fall of Judah (14:12–23; 15:1–8; 16:1–63; 17:1–24). Ezekiel, like Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 25:1–14; 29:1–10), viewed coming judgment as a foregone conclusion.

Ezekiel also teaches a concept developed more fully in the New Testament, that judgment is not reserved for the ungodly alone. God's own people are liable for judgment when they are disobedient (Ezek 6:8–10; 34:17–22; 36:31). They will be held accountable before him for their stewardship of life, talents, and possessions (Rom 14:10–12; 2 Cor 5:10–11). The New Testament teaching on rewards (1 Cor 3:11–15) and chastening (Heb 12:3–11) is based on an understanding of this accountability.

Individual Responsibility. Ezekiel, like a good pastor, took his message a step further. He applied the issue of sinfulness and judgment on a personal level. The people had sinned, and judgment was inevitable. A popular proverb both Ezekiel and Jeremiah recorded, "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:1), was the people's way of complaining that their generation was suffering unjustly for the sins committed by previous generations. The prophets' response was that whereas former generations had sinned and these sins affected future generations, the people of Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's day were being judged for their own sins; they were not innocent victims of their past.

Ezekiel delivered his message of personal responsibility in which he stated that we all bear responsibility and are accountable to God for our own actions (18:4; 33:8–20). His message helped to demonstrate the difference between guilt for sin and consequences of sin. We are guilty before God and accountable to him only for our own sins. But the consequences of our sins are more far-reaching and will affect others for generations to come (Exod 34:6–7).

Hope of Restoration. After Ezekiel's messages of judgment and individual responsibility for Judah (4:1–24:27) and foreign nations (25:1–32:32), he turned to messages of hope for future restoration in chaps. 33–48. He predicted not only the return from captivity (36:1–15) but also the spiritual renewal (36:16–38) of the people, the reunification of the nation (37:1–28), the rebuilding of the temple (40:1–42:20), the reinstatement of the sacrificial system (43:1–46:24), the reapportionment of the land (47:13–48:29), and the building of a new Jerusalem (48:30–35).

His message was similar to that of Isaiah, whose messianic prophecies also were associated with the hope of restoration (cp. Isa 11:1–6 with Ezek 17:22; 34:25). Isaiah's hope focused on a general reign of peace in the world, whereas Ezekiel's hope focused on peace for the restored

nation of Israel. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah (**Jer 31:31–34**), based his hope for future restoration on a new covenant (**Ezek 36:24–28**). Although Jeremiah held forth some hope that judgment for Judah might be averted, Ezekiel clearly believed that the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem were inevitable.

The future hope of restoration was a familiar theme among the prophets in the Old Testament. Many of them presented that hope in terms that refer to the return to the ideal circumstances and characteristics before the fall in the garden of Eden. The most direct reference, however, is found in **Ezek 36:35**.

God's Redemptive Purpose. Ezekiel believed that God's actions in history had a singular purpose, namely, to bring the knowledge of his glory and greatness to all nations. By sharing the knowledge of God, human accountability to God, and his clear warning of impending judgment, Ezekiel wanted to help the exiles understand God's redemptive purpose for all people. The motive for God's actions always was redemptive even when he brought acts of judgment against his own people. The God of Israel is not capricious. Nor does he bring acts of judgment on people to get even or for the joy of inflicting pain on the disobedient (**18:31; 33:11**). Whenever God acts in judgment, he does so with the desire that redemption will be the result (**18:21–32; 33:11–20**).

This concept of the redemptive purpose behind judgment must be qualified as only applicable to judgment in this life. The final judgment at the end of human history will be purely and eternally punitive (**Rev 20:10–15**). Judgment in this life is based on God's desire for all people to share his redeeming grace. After this life all will be judged on whether they submitted to his lordship by faith. That faith was finally revealed in the person of the Messiah, who was the ultimate revelation of God's redeeming grace to humanity.

The Bible is replete with God's warnings of inevitable final judgment for all people. It is also replete with announcements of the availability of mercy and grace for the repentant who exercise faith (**John 3:16; Rom 3:23; 6:23**). The judgment of those at enmity with God (**Ezek 38–39**) and the resurrection and restoration of the faithful (**Ezek 33–37; 40–48**) are central themes in Ezekiel.

John Taylor: The Message of Ezekiel

A. The otherness of God.

1. The God of Israel did not simply possess the quality of holiness – He is Holiness! His name is holy, as are his people, His place of worship, His ministers and His place of dwelling.
2. The chariot-throne scene (**chs. 1-3**) typifies His otherness, His ultimate Holiness and Majesty. The presence of such power caused Ezekiel to fall to the ground on his face (compare Peter **Lk. 5:8**). The true prophet of God comes forth from His presence permanently marked with the glory of the Lord.
3. While Ezekiel knew that the God of Israel was the God of all creation, it must have been comforting that there on the banks of the river Chebar some 700 miles from the

Temple, His presence could be felt. Even in exile among the heathen Babylonians God still cared for His people.

B. The sinfulness of Israel.

1. Regardless of the fact that the Jews were God's chosen people, Ezekiel set out to prove to them that they were lost and unworthy of God's blessing and in need of full repentance. He will do this in two ways: generically and specifically.

2. He will bring their sins to their attention through the use of parables or stories, including:

- a. The parable of the foundling (**16:1-63**).
- b. Israel's history portrayed as a cycle of disobedience followed by God's decision to withhold His hand (**20:1-31**).
- c. The allegory of the two sisters (**23:1-49**).
- d. Compare this method of teaching to **Lk. 20:9-19**.

3. More specifically Ezekiel cites the wrongdoing going on in the Temple (**ch. 8**). Note that Ezekiel is concerned with the religious sins and scarcely mentions any social sins (as in Amos). They had profaned God's holy name and since God is holiness, their sins were of the most despicable nature.

C. The fact of judgment.

Ezekiel's prophecy was no mere threat of judgment to come, it was a foretelling of imminent judgment. God said, "*The words which I speak will be performed.*" (**12:28**)

D. Individual responsibility.

1. Ezekiel's intention in acting as a watchman was to turn the people from their sins ahead of God's impending judgment (**18:1-29**). Each man's fate is conditioned by his own personal choice. The wicked man must choose to return to God and the righteous man must choose to remain a child of God. The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but wishes that all would repent (**18:23, 32**).

2. No one can hide behind the righteousness of others (**14:12-20**). Yet even in the face of the destruction of Jerusalem individuals could repent and be saved.

E. The promise of restoration.

1. The individuals that are saved will enjoy their salvation in a restored community of fellow believers. This new community will not be divided (as Israel and Judah, **37:17**). This new land will have the Messiah King as its head (**37:24f.**). Under His rule, the downtrodden will be cared for, the land will flourish and the river of life will flow.

2. Each penitent soul will possess a new heart and a new spirit and be motivated to live a life based on the commandments of God (**Jer. 31:31-34**). The greatest stumbling-block that stands between man and God is man's own will.

Charles Lee Feinberg: At first his messages were not well received (**14:1, 3; 18:19, 25**), but with the passing of time his prophecies began to bear fruit, and the nation was purged of its idolatrous tendencies. Ezekiel lived in a context of spiritual declension, distress and uprooting. He saw clearly that the times called for further judgment from the Lord, which came in the third deportation from Judah. When judgment had accomplished its full work, then the need of the hour was consolation for the weary and wounded nation. . .

Ezekiel ministered to all twelve tribes and his purpose was twofold:

- (1) to remind them of the sins which had brought judgment and exile upon them;
- (2) to encourage and strengthen their faith by prophecies of future restoration and glory.

The style of Ezekiel is quite varied; he uses visions, symbols, parables, prophetic discourses and allegories (**chap. 23**). He liked to convey his messages in as concrete form as possible. His style ranges between poetry and prose.

Anton Pearson: In response to a magnificent theophany (**1:4-28**), he was charged to be God's spokesman and watchman to the exiles (**chs. 2, 3**). His ministry extended from the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, 592 B.C., to the twenty-seventh year, 570 B.C. (**1:2; 29:17**). Before the fall of Jerusalem in 586, he was primarily a preacher of repentance and judgment (**chs. 1-24**). To a people rebellious, inclined to idolatry, and susceptible to a pagan environment, he brought constant warnings (**2:3ff.; 3:4-11; 13; 14:1ff.; 18:2, 25; 20:1ff.**). He reminded the exiles that the people still living in Jerusalem falsely clung to the inviolability of the Temple and the land (**11:1-15**), and put far off the day of recompense (**12:21-28**). To his despairing hearers, after the fall of Jerusalem (**24:21ff.; 33:10, 17; 37:11**), he became a consoler, a herald of salvation, an expositor of the necessity of inner religion, a prophet of the regathering, and the envisage of God's restoration of the Temple, worship, and land to a redeemed and purified Israel (**33:11; 34; 36:25-31; 37; 40-48**). He pictured judgment falling on the hostile nations led by Gog and Magog (**chs. 38, 39**), but hinted of the conversion of other peoples, e.g., Sodom and Samaria (**16:53ff.**), and foresaw many nations taking shelter, like birds, under the goodly cedar, the Messiah (**17:22-24**).

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel is one of the less-often preached or taught books of the Bible. There are several reasons for this. As an Old Testament prophetic book, it is bound to suffer somewhat from the same neglect that applies to most prophetic books. To be understood, these books require some appreciation of the history of Israel as it intersects with the history of the ancient Near East, some appreciation of the prose and poetic speech forms employed routinely by the prophets, and some knowledge of the Mosaic covenant on which the blessings and curses of the prophets are based. In short, these books require effort, and the more effort a book requires, the less likely it is to be read—or preached.

Ezekiel also is a large book, not the kind that is usually picked as the subject for Bible studies or sermon series. Then there is the matter of its apocalyptic content. Ancient apocalyptic literature, such as is found in parts of Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Revelation, is so different from anything usually encountered in modern literature that the casual reader finds it genuinely difficult to fathom.

But perhaps more daunting than any of these other factors is the way that Ezekiel is a repetitive book. For example, the vast majority of the first twenty-four chapters is given over to the message that Jerusalem will fall to the Babylonians—a message told and retold dozens of times, from every conceivable angle, again and again and again. There is much to be learned from these chapters about the certainty of God’s judgment, about His faithfulness to His promises, about the wages of sin, about national and individual unrighteousness, about forgiveness, about the role of God in history, about the communicator’s responsibility to proclaim God’s message steadily and consistently as the years go by, and so on. But there’s no escaping the fact that there is a lot of space in those first twenty-four chapters devoted to a single topic in a manner that can tend to put off the casual reader or the busy expositor.

Likewise, the large number of oracles against the foreign nations of Ezekiel’s day (**chs. 25–32**) are not likely to be chosen as subject matter for sermons or lessons. And any seasoned communicator can tell at a glance that **chs. 40–48**, nine full chapters consisting mostly of measurements and building descriptions, is not the sort of material on which a great preaching or teaching career is likely to be built. What’s left, **chs. 33–39**, is the section from which most sermons on Ezekiel are preached. It is my hope that this commentary will help you, the communicator, to be able to understand and utilize the entire book, not merely the few chapters usually paid attention to, and to convey its abundant value to your audience.

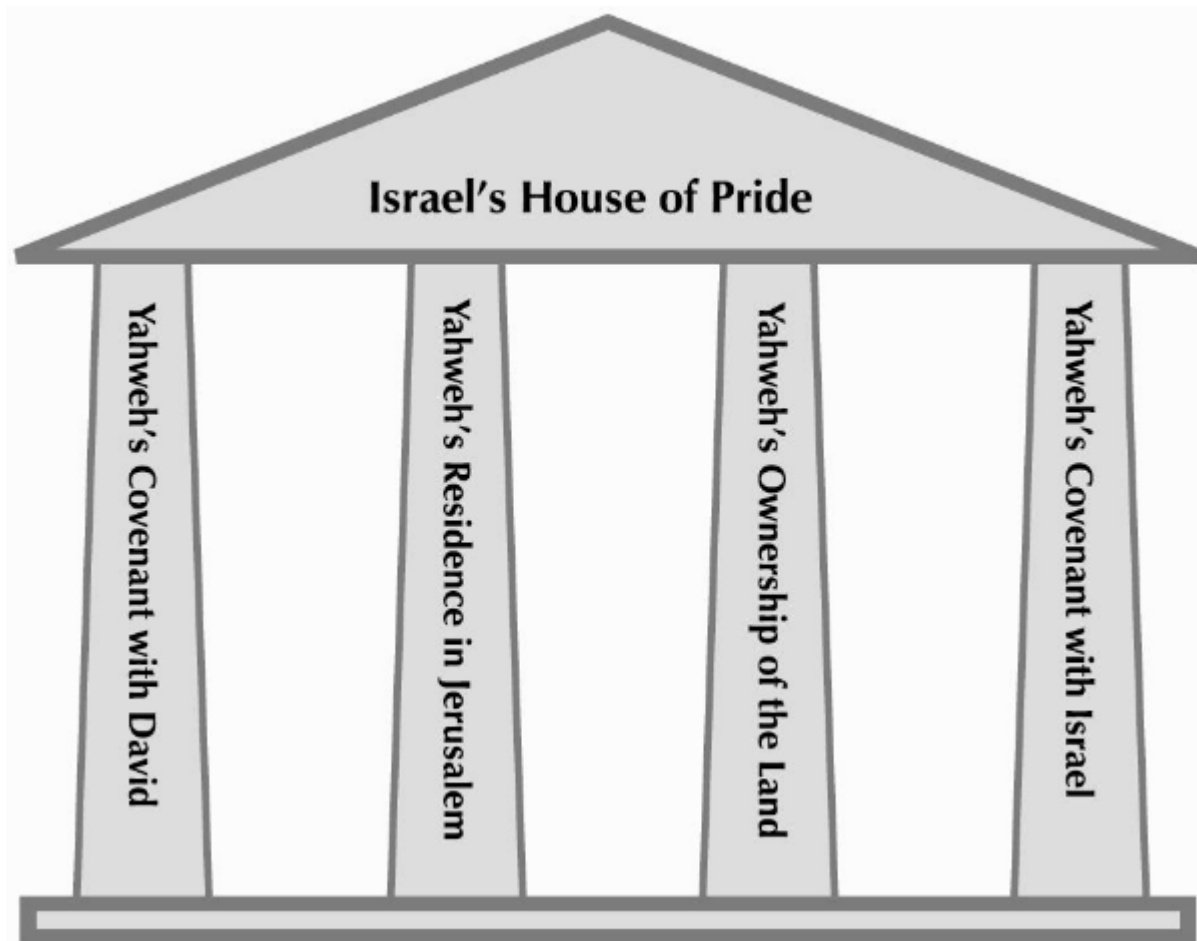
Christopher Wright: Thus, at its broadest level the book has a very simple and symmetrical arrangement.

1. **Chs. 1–24** Oracles of judgment prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587.
2. **Chs. 25–32** Oracles against the foreign nations.
3. **Chs. 33–48** Oracles of hope after the fall of Jerusalem, between 587 and 571.

Within each major section there are further sub-sections, which are reflected in the chapters of our exposition. Apart from this broad pattern, there are other signs of careful structuring. The opening vision of the glory of Yahweh that dominates **chapters 1–3**, is matched and surpassed by the closing vision of the glory of Yahweh returning to his temple, people and land, in **chapters 40–48**. The commissioning of the prophet to be a watchman occurs at the beginning of his ministry in **chapter 3**, and is then repeated at the fresh start heralded by the news of the fall of Jerusalem in **chapter 33**. In **chapter 6** Ezekiel addresses the mountains of Israel with words of coming judgment, desolation and desertion. In **chapter 36** he addresses the same mountains, but with words of coming restoration, repopulation and renewed fertility and abundance. **Chapter 7** proclaims that ‘*the end has come*’, bringing death to the whole community. **Chapter 37** proclaims that even dead bones can live when the powerful breath of God breathes on them, and promises Israel resurrection from the grave itself.

It is perhaps some relief that a book which for so many people is somewhat inaccessible, because of the tone and intensity of its language and imagery, at least has a structure which is easy to grasp. It is a structure which reflects not only the chronological career of the prophet himself with its two major phases, but also the core theological truth of biblical faith: judgment precedes grace.

Daniel Bock: More specifically, however, Israelite confidence in Yahweh was founded on an official orthodoxy, resting on four immutable propositions, four pillars of divine promise: the irrevocability of Yahweh's covenant with Israel (Sinai), Yahweh's ownership of the land of Canaan, Yahweh's eternal covenant with David, and Yahweh's residence in Jerusalem, the place he chose for his name to dwell. The nearer the forces of Nebuchadrezzar came, the more the people clung to the promises of God.



But Jerusalem fell, the Davidic house was cut off, the temple was razed, and the nation was exiled from the land. The spiritual fallout was more difficult to deal with than the physical. Nebuchadrezzar's victory left the Judeans emotionally devastated, raising many questions about Yahweh—questions of divine impotence, betrayal, abandonment. Based on appearances, Marduk, the god of Babylon, had prevailed. Ezekiel faced an audience that was disillusioned, cynical, bitter, and angry. The “*house of rebellion*” (*bêt mēri*, e.g., **2:5–6**) had collapsed, with no one to rescue them. . .

Ezekiel's overriding purpose is to transform his audience's perception of their relationship with Yahweh, exposing delusions of innocence and offering a divine understanding of reality. His pursuit of this goal divides into two discreet parts, separated chronologically by the announcement of the messenger from Jerusalem, “*The city has fallen!*” (**33:21**). Prior to the fall

of Jerusalem Ezekiel’s prophecies consist of negative pronouncements of judgment upon his people for their infidelity to the covenant. Contrary to prevailing opinion, the people of Judah have no reason to hope in Yahweh’s rescue. This message is communicated in **chs. 4–24** by systematically attacking the pillars on which official orthodoxy constructed its notions of eternal security. If Judah will be destroyed—and it will—it will not happen because Yahweh has reneged on his covenant commitment. Because they have been unfaithful to him, the deity-nation-land relationships must be ruptured: He will abandon his temple and send his people into exile in a foreign land.

But after 586 B.C. the tone and emphases of Ezekiel’s prophecies change. Once the old illusions of spirituality have been destroyed, he can look forward to a new day when the tripartite association is restored and all three parties experience covenant shalom. In the process Ezekiel affirms that official orthodoxy had indeed been based on a germ of truth. Yahweh’s covenant promises are eternal. The earlier problem had not been the veracity of the divine word, but the illegitimate appropriation of that word by those who failed to keep the terms of the agreement. Accordingly, in his vision of the new day, Ezekiel offers hope by systematically reconstructing the pillars on which the nation’s security had been based in the first place. In both, the judgment and the restoration, the word of Yahweh is affirmed: not only the immediate word, whose fulfillment confirms Ezekiel’s status as a true prophet; but especially the ancient word, declared in the act of redemption from Egypt, and at Mount Sinai in the covenant.

Table 1. The Relationship between Ezekiel’s Judgment and Salvation Oracles

Pillar of Orthodox Theology	Demolition Pronouncements	Reconstruction Pronouncements
Yahweh, the divine patron of Israel, has entered into an eternal covenant with his people.	3:16–21 ; 5:4, 16–17 ; 6:11–14 ; 14:1–23 ; 15:1–8 ; 16:1–60 ; 18:1–32 ; 20:1–44 ; 23:1–49 ; 33:1–20 ; 33:23–29	34:1–31 ; 36:16–32 ; 37–38 ; 37:1–14 ; 15–21 ; 25–28 ; 39:21–29
Yahweh, the divine patron of Israel, has given the nation the land of Canaan as their eternal territorial possession.	4:1–3 ; 9–17 ; 5:5–15 ; 6:1–7 ; 11–14 ; 7:1–27 ; 11:1–21 ; 12:17–20 ; 14:12–23 ; 15:1–8 ; 16:1–63 ; 21:6–22 (Eng. 1–17); 23–32 (Eng. 18–27); 22:1–31 ; 23:1–49 ; 24:1–15	34:25–29 ; 35:1–36:15 ; 36:33–36 ; 38:1–39:20 ; 47:1–48:7 ; 23–29
Yahweh, the divine patron of Israel, has chosen Jerusalem as his eternal residence, from which he exercises sovereignty over his people.	7:20–24 ; 8:1–10:22 ; 11:22–25 ; 24:16–27	37:26–27 ; 40:1–46:24 ; 48:8–22 ; 30–35
Yahweh, the divine patron of Israel, has promised the Davidic house eternal title to and occupancy of the throne of Israel.	12:1–16 ; 17:1–24 ; 19:1–14 ; 21:30–32 (Eng. 15–27)	34:23–24 ; 37:22–25

Table 3. The Message and Method of Ezekiel

The Messenger of Yahweh	1:1-28a ; 1:28b-3:15
The Watchman	3:16-21 ; 6:1-14 ; 7:1-27 ; 33:1-9
The True Prophet	12:21-28 ; 13:1-23 ; 14:1-11 ; 22:23-31
The Message Incarnate	3:22-27 ; 24:15-27 ; 33:21-22 ; 33:30-33
The Visionary	8:1-10:22 ; 11:22-25 ; 43:1-14
The Dramatist	4:1-5:17 ; 12:1-20 ; 21:23-32 (Eng. 18-27); 37:15-28
The Spinner of Parables and Riddles	17:1-24 ; 19:1-14 ; 21:1-22 (Eng. 20:45-21:17); 22:17-22
The Debater	11:1-13 ; 11:14-21 ; 18:1-32 ; 24:1-14 ; 33:10-20 ; 33:23-29
The Prosecutor	14:12-15:8 ; 16:1-63 ; 20:1-44 ; 22:1-16 ; 23:1-49
The Judge of the Nations	25:1-17 ; 26:1-21 ; 27:1-36 ; 28:20-23 ; 30:1-19 ; 32:17-32
The Conscience of Kings	28:1-10 ; 28:11-19 ; 29:1-16 ; 29:17-21 ; 30:20-26 ; 31:1-18 ; 32:1-16
The Pastor	34:1-31
The Herald of Good News	6:8-10 ; 11:14-21 ; 16:60-63 ; 28:24-26 ; 35:1-36:15 ; 36:16-38 ; 37:1-14
The Apocalypticist	38:1-39:29
The New Moses	40:1-48:35

Lamar Cooper:

Table 1: Dated Prophecies in Ezekiel ¹

PASSAGE	EVENT	EZEKIEL'S DATE			JULIAN CALENDAR
		MONTH	DAY	YEAR	
1:1-2	Ezekiel's call to be a prophet	4	5	30[5]*	July 593 B.C.
3:16	Ezekiel's commission in exile	4	12	30[5]*	Aug. 593 B.C.
8:1	Visions of judgment for polluting the temple	6	5	6	Sept. 592 B.C.
20:1	Inquiry of the elders	5	10	7	Aug. 591 B.C.
24:1	Siege of Jerusalem begins	10	10	9	Jan. 588 B.C.
26:1	Prophecy of Tyre's destruction	?	1	11	Feb. or Mar.(?) 586 B.C.
29:1	Prophecy of Egypt's destruction	10	12	10	Jan. 587 B.C.
29:17	Prophecy of Tyre and Egypt reinforced	1	1	27	Apr. 571 B.C.
30:20	Prophecy of Pharaoh's destruction	1	7	11	Apr. 587 B.C.
31:1	Prophecy of Pharaoh's destruction	3	1	11	June 587 B.C.
32:1	Lamentation of Pharaoh	12	1	12	Mar. 585 B.C.
32:17	Pharaoh in Sheol	12	15	12	Apr.(?) 585 B.C.
33:21	Lament over fall of Jerusalem	10	5	12	Jan. 585 B.C.
40:1	Vision of the new temple/Jerusalem	1	10	25	Apr. or Oct. 573 B.C.

Lamar Cooper: Three basic elements of the theology of Baal worship enhanced its attractiveness.

Relation to Cycles of Nature. Canaanite worship was closely linked with the cycle of the seasons. The people had observed that the seasons of the year followed a predictable pattern. In the fall vegetation became dormant and withered, then died in the winter months. Each spring vegetation revived, and in the summer it flourished. Also during the dormant winter months rains came and watered the earth. The rain was associated with the fertility of the land and the resurrection of vegetation in the spring. Rituals were performed to entreat Baal to send rain and

restore the fertility of the land. These involved the dying and rising of their god with appropriate laments and rejoicing (cf. **Ezek 8:14**). Thus the fertility cult, with its sacred prostitutes, was employed to insure the fertility of the land for another year. Such foreign practices in the name of religion and worship appealed to the young Hebrew men when the Moabite girls first introduced them to it, and it continued when they entered Canaan.

Immorality. Baal worship not only approved of but also encouraged immorality. The rituals of Baal worship included sexual intercourse, considered an imitative act that invited the rain to fertilize the ground. The Book of Hosea is an example of the evils and tragedy of Baal worship. Hosea, a devout man, married Gomer, a woman from a background of Baal worship (**Hos 1:1–11**). Soon Gomer returned to her old ways and left Hosea and their children for a life of prostitution (**Hos 3:1ff.**).

Like Gomer, the people of Israel exhibited only a token commitment to Yahweh (**Hos 4–7**). They worshiped Baal, believing that sexual acts with sacred prostitutes would insure fruitfulness and productivity. Israel, like Gomer, had forsaken its true lover and faithful husband. As a consequence of Israel's adultery, God promised judgment (**Hos 8–11**). Ezekiel soundly condemned the physical and spiritual adultery of his day (see **Ezek 8:1–9:11; 22:1–31**).

Polytheism. Israel's neighbors were polytheistic. This was a constant encouragement for the Hebrews to adopt a more syncretistic approach to religious faith and practice. Hosea stressed God's demand for exclusive worship: "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me*" (**Hos 13:4**). Ezekiel's emphasis on the exclusiveness of worshiping Yahweh and no other gods came in a constantly recurring phrase, "*Then you shall know the Lord your God.*" This phrase was used in association with judgment passages to warn that God would make himself known through the chastening and judgment of the exile.

Baal worship was popular and difficult to eradicate from Israel because it fed on the people's lust, fear, and the desire to conform to their neighbors. It was encouraged by natural concerns for food, farms, families, and flocks, believing that Baal could help them insure the best in each of these areas. By embracing polytheistic forms of worship, the Hebrews conformed to the standards and lifestyle of their neighbors and thus created the social, moral, and spiritual problems that brought about their judgment.

David Thompson: Ezekiel is a book of filled with some odd things. It is filled with "bizarre symbolism" and "strange visions." **Charles Dyer** said to the average reader Ezekiel is "a perplexing maze of incoherent visions—a kaleidoscope of whirling wheels and dry bones that defy interpretation" (*Ezekiel*, p. 1225). It is a book that is written by, what one commentator said, "the wildest man in the Bible." It is a book that is unusually colorful and very unpredictable.

Who Was Ezekiel?

Ezekiel is a man who was given some of the oddest assignments that God ever gave to one man.

- 1) God told Ezekiel to lock himself up in his house and bind himself with ropes (**3:24-26**);

- 2) God told him He would make him not be able to speak for many days, then later he could speak again (3:26/24:27);
- 3) God told him to lie bound on his right and left side for a total of 430 days, 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right side (4:4-8);
- 4) God told him to eat unclean bread baked over human dung (4:9, 12);
- 5) God told him to shave his head and beard and then weigh his hair and divide his hair (5:1);
- 6) God told him to pack some bags to go outside and dig a hole and crawl out with the bags (12:1-7);
- 7) God told him that his wife was going to die but he was not to mourn or cry (24:15-20); God would destroy Israel, His unfaithful wife, and not shed any tears.

Now one must admit those are some strange assignments. Of course the key to understanding all of these assignments is found in **Ezekiel 24:24**—Ezekiel was a physical sign of what God was doing to Israel and a sign of why He was doing it.

Who wrote Ezekiel?

Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel. This is easily established:

- 1) The unanimous testimony of Biblical scholars say Ezekiel wrote Ezekiel “with his own hand.”
- 2) There is much in the book that is autobiographical. All of the information concerning Ezekiel’s life and ministry come from this book, which had to have been written by him. The pronouns I, me, my show up in almost every chapter of the book (2:1-10).
- 3) There is a chronological sequence to the events in the book and the author was involved in it. In fact, all of the prophecies are arranged chronologically.
- 4) The entire book contains a uniformity of language and style. There is “literary coherence.”

What is the theme of the book?

There are several key phrases that show up in Ezekiel. There is a phrase that occurs more than 60 times in the book—“*Then they will know that I AM THE LORD.*” The judgments of God against His people and the restoration of His people are both designed to enable His people to know Him. His heart breaks when His people sin (**Ezek. 6:9**); but His heart rejoices when His people turn from sin and turn to Him. This is the God His people need to know.

Another key phrase that dominates the book of Ezekiel is the phrase “*son of man.*” This phrase is used over 90 times in the book. This phrase was one that God used for Ezekiel. Now we know from Daniel that this phrase is used for the Ancient of Days who will one day rule the world. In other words, it refers to Jesus Christ who will one day rule the world as the God/man.

The reason why this term is used of Ezekiel is not simply to show his humanity, but to show his Divine prophetic mission and ministry. He is on a Divine assignment, but he is also still human.

He is prophesying about One who will one day come to take over the world and establish Israel as the nation of God. But before that happens, Israel will go through some horrible things because as a nation she is a “*rebellious house.*” Israel’s rebellion was so abominable that God literally took away His glory from the Temple (**8:1-11:25**).

Now the basic theme of Ezekiel is that there will come a time when all Israel and all the world will know God. After a horrific time of judgment against the world and Israel, Jesus Christ will return to establish His kingdom. At that time the nations of the world, who mistreated Israel, will be punished and Israel will be fully and completely restored as the nation of God.

However, before this happens, Israel will suffer some terrible things because of her rejection and rebellion. Six amazing, wonderful themes pertaining to Israel that are amazing in view of all the evil she has done:

- 1) God will regather Israel (**11:16-17a; 20:41; 34:11-13a, 16; 36:24a; 37:21a**).
- 2) God will bring Israel back to her land and cleanse it (**11:17b-18; 20:42; 34:13b-15; 36:24b; 37:21b**).
- 3) God will give Israel a new heart and new spirit (**11:19-20; 16:62; 34:30-31; 36:25-28; 37:23-24**).
- 4) God will restore the Davidic dynasty (**34:23-24; 37:22-25**).
- 5) God will bless Israel with prosperity and security in her land (**34:25-29; 36:29-30; 37:26; 38:1-39:29**).
- 6) God will Himself live in Israel and there will be new Temple worship. (**27:26b-28; 40:1-48:35**).

God has permitted His people to be dominated by other powers as a judgment because of her rebellion against Him; but there will come a day when He will regather Israel and give her a new heart, a new status and a new Temple and a wonderful relationship with God will be fully restored forever.

Israel sure gives the rest of us **hope**. Because if we will loathe and be ashamed of our depraved sins, we can experience the full blessings of God. That will be the story of Israel.

John Taylor: There are six main reasons for ascribing the book to a single author, the prophet Ezekiel.

1. The book has a balanced structure, as we have already observed, and this logical arrangement extends from **chapter 1 to 48**. There are no breaks in the continuity of the prophecy, except where (as in the case of the oracles against the nations, **25–32**) this is done for deliberate effect. The only part that could readily be separated from the rest, the vision of the new temple (**40–48**), appears neatly to balance the opening vision of **chapters 1–3** and is better regarded as a fitting conclusion to the whole, although manifestly of somewhat later date (cf. **40:1**).

2. The message of the book has an inner consistency which fits in with the structural balance. The centre-point is the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. This is announced in **24:21ff.** and reported in **33:21**. From **chapter 1 to 24** Ezekiel's message is destructive and denunciatory: he is a watchman set to warn the people that this is the inevitable consequence of the nation's sins. But from **chapter 33 to 48**, while he still regards himself as a watchman with a message of individual retribution and responsibility, his tone is encouraging and restorative. Before 587 bc, his theme was that the deportation of 597 bc in which he himself was one of the victims, was certainly not the end of God's punishment upon his people: worse was to come, and

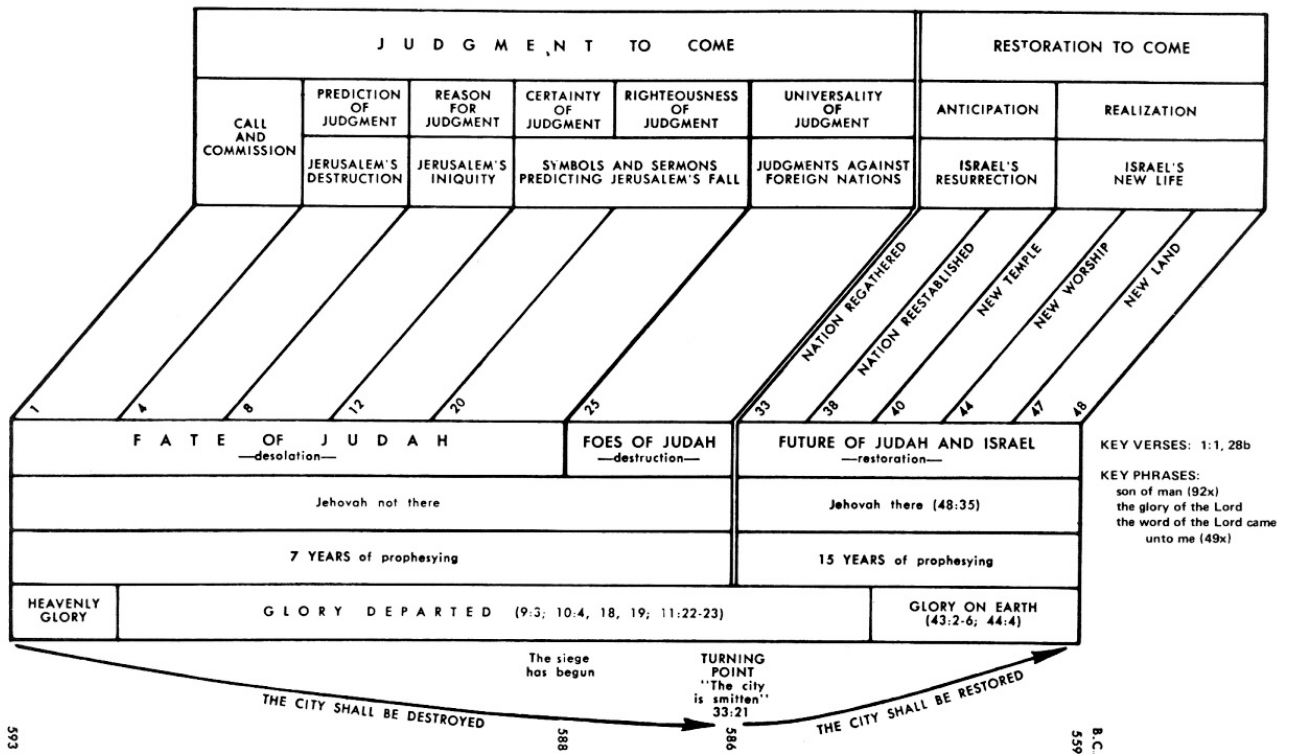
the exiles must be prepared to face it. But after it had come, and the worst had happened, God would act to rebuild and restore his chastened Israel.

3. The book shows a remarkable uniformity of style and language. This is largely due to the repetitious phraseology used throughout the book. **May** gives a list of no fewer than 47 typical Ezekielian phrases which appear periodically in its pages, and many of these are peculiar to this prophet. This does not of course prove anything about the actual authorship, because an editor could easily have picked up phrases typical of Ezekiel and woven them into the additional material he incorporated, but it is strong evidence for the unity and coherence of the book in its final stage, and it suggests that the editor of the finished work, if he was not Ezekiel himself, identified himself closely with Ezekiel's outlook and beliefs.

4. The book has a clear chronological sequence, with dates appearing at **1:1, 2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1**. No other major prophet has this logical progression of dates, and only Haggai and Zechariah among the minor prophets afford any comparable pattern.

5. Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos and Zechariah, which all combine material in the first and third persons singular, a feature which is usually regarded as a sure sign of editorial compilation, Ezekiel is written autobiographically throughout. The only exception is the duplicate introduction (**1:2, 3**), which looks very much as if it was an editor's explanation of an opening verse which clearly needed some kind of interpretation for his readers. But this is the only such instance.

6. The picture of the character and personality of Ezekiel appears consistent through the whole of the book; there is the same earnestness, the same eccentricity, the same priestly love of symbolism, the same fastidious concern with detail, the same sense of the majesty and transcendence of God.



The Book of Ezekiel

Focus	Inward						Outward		Onward															
Divisions	Ezekiel's Vision	Jerusalem's Signs		Condemnation for idolatry	Condemnation for Leaders	Parables	Pronouncements	Judgment on Judah's Enemies	Judgment on Egypt	New Shepherd	New Life	New Temple	New Worship											
	1	3	4	6	7	11	12	15	16	19	20	24	25	28	29	32	33	36	37	39	40	43	44	48
Topics	Predicting Jerusalem's Fall						Announcing the Fall		Promising Restoration															
	Judgment Near						Judgment Now		Hope Ahead															
Place	Babylonia																							
Time	About 22 Years (592-570 B.C.)																							
Author	The Prophet Ezekiel																							

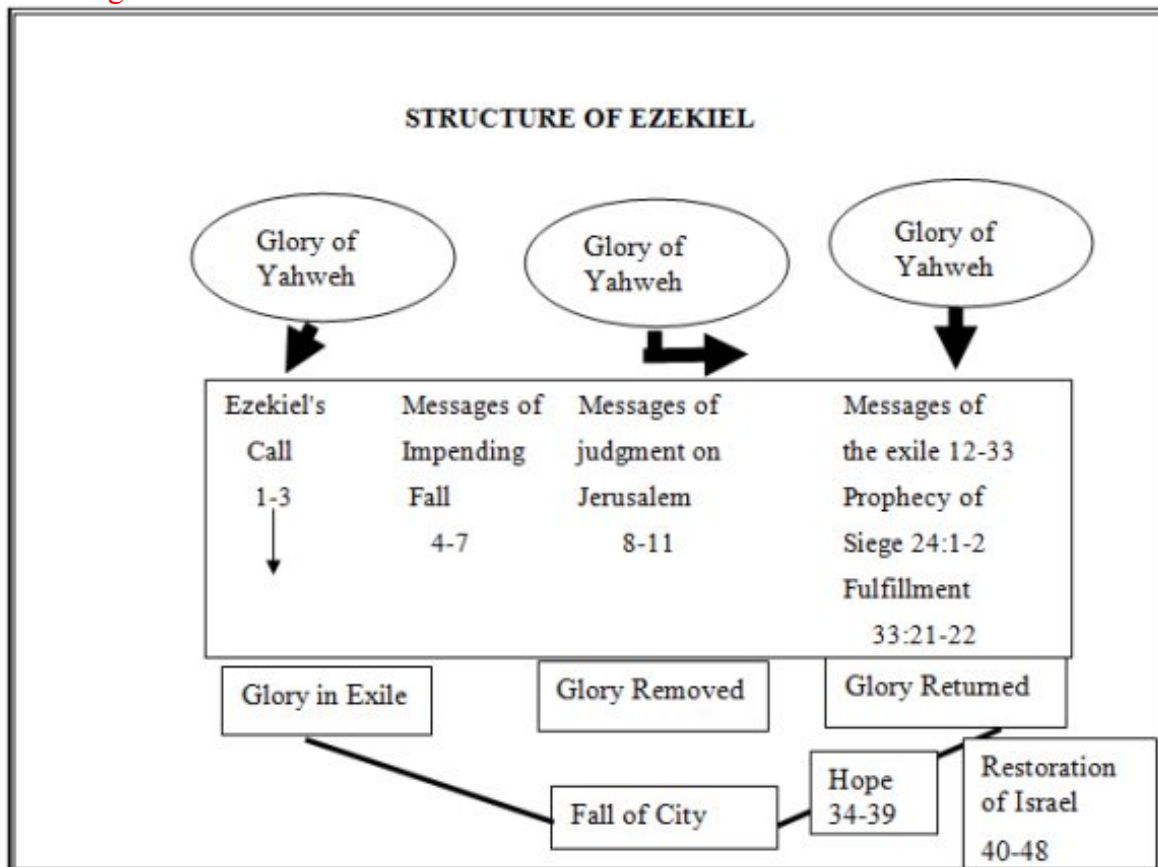
Chuck Swindoll: Insight for Living -- <https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-major-prophets/ezekiel>

EZEKIEL

	About the Prophet	Judgment on Judah	Judgment on the Nations	Restoration of God's People
	EZEKIEL'S CALL AND COMMISSION God's hand on him God's word in him God's message through him CHAPTERS 1-3	GOD'S GLORY DEPARTS CHAPTERS 4-24	ALL NATIONS ANSWER TO GOD CHAPTERS 25-32	GOD'S GLORY RETURNS CHAPTERS 33-48
Theme	God will be known through His judgment and restoration; God is sovereign over heaven and earth.			
Key Verse	39:28			
Christ in Ezekiel	The tender twig that becomes a stately cedar (17:22-24); the caring Shepherd (chapter 34)			

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OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL

THEN THEY WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD

Judgments on Jerusalem and the surrounding nations accomplish God's revelatory purpose as He fulfils His promise to ultimately dwell with His people in a new temple in the Millennial Kingdom.

(1-3) CALL AND COMMISSION OF EZEKIEL THE PROPHET

A. (1:1-28) THE FOUNDATION FOR DIVINE CALLING = EZEKIEL'S VISION OF GOD'S GLORY COMING IN JUDGMENT – THE FOUR LIVING BEINGS SUPPORTING THE CHARIOT-THRONE

- (:1-3) Superscription – Historical Setting for the Revelation of God's Glory
 - a. (:1a) Timing of the Revelation (with respect to Ezekiel's age)
 - b. (:1b) Physical Setting for the Revelation (defined by community)
 - c. (:1c) Nature of the Revelation (defined by method of communication)
 - d. (:2) Timing of the Revelation (with respect to the king's exile)
 - e. (:3a) Recipient of the Revelation = Priest Ezekiel
 - f. (:3b) Physical Setting of the Revelation (defined by political affiliation)
 - g. (:3c) Nature of the Revelation (defined by inspiration and intervention)
- 1. (:4-14) Vision of the Four Living Beings –
Highlights God's Presence
 - a. (:4) Arrival of the Vision of God's Glory
 - 1) Images of Power
 - 2) Images of Light
 - b. (:5-11) Appearance of the Four Living Beings Described
 - 1) (:5-6) General Appearance = Human Form
 - 2) (:6) Four Faces and Four Wings
 - 3) (:7) Legs and Feet
 - 4) (:8a) Human Hands
 - 5) (:8b-11) Adding Some Details Regarding Faces and Wings
 - c. (:12-14) Articulation of the Four Living Beings Described
 - 1) (:12) Impression of Their Movement = Straight Line Only
 - 2) (:13-14) Images Picturing Their Movement
- 2. (:15-21) Description of the Wheels and Their Movement –
Highlights God's Sovereign Power and Activity
 - a. (:15-18) Description of Their Wheels
 - 1) (:15) Alignment of the Wheels
 - 2) (:16) Appearance of the Wheels
 - 3) (:17) Articulation of the Wheels
 - 4) (:18) Appearance of Their Rims
 - b. (:19-21) Description of the Movement of the Four Living Beings

3. (:22-28) Focus of the Vision = the Enthroned Glory of God
 - a. (:22-25) Vision Supported
 - 1) (:22) Crystal Platform Over the Heads of the Living Beings
 - 2) (:23) Function of the Wings under the Gleaming Expanse
 - 3) (:24a) Sound of Their Wings
 - 4) (:24a-25) Dropping of Their Wings
 - b. (:26-28a) Vision Enthroned
 - 1) (:26a) The Brilliant Throne
 - 2) (:26b) The Kingly Figure
 - 3) (:27a) The Fiery Appearance
 - 4) (:27b-28a) The Surrounding Radiance
 - c. (:28b) Vision Defined = The Likeness of the Glory of the Lord

B. (1:28b – 2:10) COMMISSIONING OF EZEKIEL WITH MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT -- THERE CAN BE NO DEVIATION OF MISSION OR MESSAGE IN PROCLAIMING GOD’S WORD OF JUDGMENT DESPITE OPPOSITION AND REJECTION

- (1:28b) Transition – Response to the Vision of God’s Glory
1. (2:1-7) Stubborn Reaction from the People Promised During Commissioning of Ezekiel
 - a. (:1-2) Standing Before God to Receive the Commission
 - 1) (:1) Command to Stand and Hear
 - 2) (:2) Enablement to Stand and Hear
 - b. (:3-4a) Sending by God to a Stubborn and Rebellious People
 - c. (:4b-5) Speaking the Word of God as the Prophet of God – Irregardless of the Response
 - 1) (:4b) Prophetic Proclamation
 - 2) (:5) Prophetic Vindication
 - d. (:6-7) Staying the Course Despite Antagonism and Threats and Rejection
 - 1) (:6) No Deviation from the Mission Due to Fear and Opposition
 - 2) (:7) No Deviation from the Message Due to Rejection
 2. (2:8-10) Symbolic Rite of Commissioning Submitted to by Ezekiel
 - a. (:8a) Embrace God’s Word – Don’t Rebel
 - 1) Positive Charge = Listen to God’s Word
 - 2) Negative Warning = Don’t be Rebellious
 - b. (:8b) Consume God’s Word – Don’t Spit it Out
 - c. (:9-10) Accept the Message of Judgment – Don’t Sugarcoat it
 - 1) (:9) Presentation of the Message
 - 2) (:10) Pathos of the Message

C. (3:1-15) REINFORCEMENT OF THE COMMISSIONING OF THE FAITHFUL COMMUNICATOR OF GOD’S WORD

- THE VALUE OF THE WORD OF GOD,
- THE RESOLVE TO FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATE GOD’S WORD
- AND THE ACTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

1. (:1-3) The Value of the Word of God –
The Faithful Communicator of God’s Word Must First Feed on God’s Word
 - a. (:1) Priority of Feeding on the Word of God
 - 1) First Chew on God’s Word Yourself
 - 2) Then Communicate God’s Word to Others
 - b. (:2) Process of Feeding on the Word of God
 - 1) Responsibility We Have to Prepare to Receive the Word
 - 2) Role of God to Apply the Word to Our Hearts and Minds
 - c. (:3) Pleasant Impact of the Word of God
 - 1) Internalizing a Difficult Message
 - 2) Internalizing a Delicious Meal
2. (:4-11) The Resolve to Faithfully Communicate God’s Word –
The Faithful Communicator of God’s Word Must Be Fearless in the Face of Challenging Resistance
 - a. (:4) Commissioned to a Challenging Mission
 - b. (:5-6) The Challenge is Surprising -- Not Due to Cross-Cultural Differences
 - c. (:7) The Challenge Involves Stubborn Resistance
 - 1) Don’t Take the Resistance Personally
 - 2) Expect Stubborn Resistance
 - d. (:8-9) The Challenge is Scary – But God Has Hardened Ezekiel for the Mission
 - 1) (:8-9a) Resolve Enabled by Divine Hardening
 - 2) (:9b) Resolve Required by Opposition and Intimidation
 - e. (:10-11) The Challenge Requires Faithful Communication of God’s Message
 - 1) (:10) Pay Attention to God’s Authoritative Message
 - 2) (:11) Proclaim God’s Authoritative Message
3. (:12-15) The Activity of the Spirit of God –
The Faithful Communicator of God’s Word Must Be Driven by the Spirit of God
 - a. (:12) The Activity of the Spirit of God Reinforces the Glory of God
 - b. (:13) The Activity of the Spirit of God Makes a Lot of Noise
 - c. (:14) The Activity of the Spirit of God Takes Me Out of My Comfort Zone
 - 1) Lifts Me up and Takes Me Away
 - 2) Stirs My Emotions
 - 3) Controls My Destiny
 - d. (:15) The Activity of the Spirit of God Disturbs the People Around Me

D. (3:16-27) COMMISSIONED AS THE LORD’S WATCHMAN OVER ISRAEL -- THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A WATCHMAN INVOLVES THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATING GOD’S WORDS OF WARNING TO THOSE IN NEED OF REPENTANCE

- (:16) Prelude – Additional Commissioning
 1. (:17a) Appointment to the Role of the Lord’s Watchman
 2. (:18-21) Function of the Lord’s Watchman –
Warning both the Wicked and the Righteous

- a. (:17b) Communicating All of God's Warnings
- b. (:18-19) Warning the Wicked is the Watchman's Responsibility
 - 1) (:18) Accountability for Failing to Warn
 - 2) (:19) Deliverance for Faithfully Warning
- c. (:20-21) Warning the Righteous is the Watchman's Responsibility
 - 1) (:20) Accountability for Failing to Warn
 - 2) (:21) Deliverance for Faithfully Warning
- 3. (:22-23) Motivation for the Lord's Watchman =
Renewed Vision of God's Glory
 - a. (:22) Staging for the Renewed Vision
 - b. (:23) Spectacle of the Renewed Vision
- 4. (:24-27) Constraints upon the Lord's Watchman
 - a. (:24-25) Space Constraints
 - 1) (:24) Imposed by the Watchman Himself
 - 2) (:25) Imposed by His Target Audience
 - b. (:26-27) Speech Constraints
 - 1) (:26) Closing the Watchman's Mouth
 - 2) (:27) Opening the Watchman's Mouth

I. (4-24) JUDGMENTS ON JUDAH (THE PEOPLE OF GOD) – FALL OF JERUSALEM

A. (4-5) DRAMATIZATIONS OF THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

- 1. (4:1-8) The Upcoming Siege of Jerusalem --
God Has Set His Face in Judgment against Jerusalem in Accordance with
the Duration of Her Iniquities
 - a. (:1-3) The Sign of the Brick and the Iron Plate –
God Has Set His Face in Judgment Against Jerusalem
 - 1) (:1-2) The Sign of the Brick
 - a) (:1) Acquisition, Positioning and Inscription of the Sign
 - b) (:2) Action Commanded
 - 2) (:3a) The Sign of the Iron Plate
 - a) Acquisition and Positioning of the Sign
 - b) Action Commanded
 - 3) (:3b) The Significance of the Sign
 - b. (:4-8) The Sign of Lying on the Left and Right Sides –
The Duration of Judgment Corresponds to the Duration of Iniquity
 - 1) (:4-5) Lying on the Left Side – Judgment against
Northern Kingdom
 - a) (:4) Symbolic Bearing of Judgment
 - b) (:5) Duration of Judgment
 - 2) (:6) Lying on the Right Side – Judgment against
Southern Kingdom
 - a) Symbolic Bearing of Judgment
 - b) Duration of Judgment

- 3) (:7) Judicial Action from the Lord is Prepared
- 4) (:8) No Escaping Divine Punishment
- 2. (4:9-17) Famine Conditions of Jerusalem Siege – The Sign of the Unclean Food
 - a. (:9-12) Instructions Regarding the Preparation of the Unclean Food
 - 1) (:9) Ingredients and Duration of the Meal
 - 2) (:10-11) Amount of Food and Water
 - 3) (:12) Public Enactment Emphasizing Defilement Based on Manner of Baking
 - b. (:13-15) Confession of Substitution of Cow Dung for Human Dung
 - 1) (:13) General Command
 - 2) (:14) Personal Objection
 - 3) (:15) Divine Concession
 - c. (:16-17) Application of the Drama to the Upcoming Siege of Jerusalem
 - 1) (:16-17a) Anxiety and Horror of Deprivation
 - 2) (:17b) Humiliation and Dissipation of Corporate Culpability
- 3. (5:1-17) The Sign of the Shaved Head and Divided Hair – Catastrophic Punishment of Apostate Jerusalem Executed by the Angry Divine Judge before a Watching World
 - a. (:1-4) The Instructions Regarding the Sign of the Shaved Head and Divided Hair – The Punishment of Jerusalem
 - 1) (:1) Punishment of Jerusalem Acted Out
 - a) Shaving the Head
 - b) Dividing the Hair
 - 2) (:2) Punishment of Jerusalem Takes Three Different Forms
 - a) Destruction within the City
 - b) Death in Fighting All around the City
 - c) Driven Into Exile – Dispersion among the Nations
 - 3) (:3) Punishment of Jerusalem Will Leave a Small Remnant
 - 4) (:4) Punishment of Jerusalem Will Extend to Exiles in Babylon
 - b. (:5-17) The Interpretation of the Sign – The Culpability of the Privileged Covenant Nation
 - 1) (:5-6) Incomparable Privilege and Incomprehensible Rebellion
 - a) (:5) Incomparable Privilege
 - b) (:6) Incomprehensible Rebellion
 - 2) (:7-8) Distinctive Disobedience and Divine Judgments
 - a) (:7) Accusation of Distinctive Disobedience Compared to Pagan Nations
 - b) (:8) Announcement of Divine Judgments on the World Stage
 - 3) (:9-10) Unholy Abominations and Unspeakable Horrors
 - a) (:9) Unholy Abominations
 - b) (:10) Unspeakable Horrors
 - 4) (:11-12) Defiling the Temple and Diverse Punishments
 - a) (:11) Defiling the Temple
 - b) (:12) Diverse Punishments

- 5) (:13) Satisfying Divine Wrath and Speaking of Divine Vindication
 - a) Satisfying Divine Wrath
 - b) Speaking of Divine Vindication
- 6) (:14-15) Reviling Reproaches and Raging Rebukes
 - a) (:14) Reviling Reproaches
 - b) (:15) Raging Rebukes
- 7) (:16-17) Deprivation by Famine and Destruction by Violent Means
 - a) (:16) Deprivation by Famine
 - b) (:17) Destruction by Violent Means

**B. (6-7) DIVINE JUDGMENT EXALTS THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD --
RECOGNITION REFRAIN = “KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD”**

- 1. (6:1-10) Pronouncement of Judgment Tempered with Remnant Promise
 - (:1) Revelation Pronouncement
 - a. (:2-7) Pronouncement of Judgment
 - 1) (:2-3a) Directed Against the Mountains
 - 2) (:3b) Destructive in its Intent
 - 3) (:4-7a) Defiling and Desecrating in its Execution
 - 4) (:7b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b. (:8-10) Remnant Promise
 - 1) (:8) Remnant Preserved but Dispersed
 - 2) (:9) Repentant and Remorseful
 - 3) (:10) Revering the True God
- 2. (6:11-14) Punishment of God’s Covenant People Designed to Reinvigorate the Knowledge of God
 - (:11a) Revelation Pronouncement
 - a. (:11b-12) Punishing God’s Covenant People
 - 1) (:11b) Shocking Devastation Corresponds to Evil Abominations
 - 2) (:11c) Standard Catalog of Covenant Punishments
 - 3) (:12a) Slaying All Hope of Escaping Destruction
 - 4) (:12b) Spending Divine Wrath
 - b. (:13-14) Reinvigorating the Knowledge of God
 - 1) (:13a) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:13b) Exposing the Impotence of Their Idols
 - 3) (:14a) Executing Devastating Judgments
 - 4) (:14b) **Recognition Refrain**
- 3. (7:1-13) Four Oracles of Imminent, Comprehensive, Horrific and Deserved Judgment
 - (7:1) Prelude – Announcement of Revelation
 - a. (:2-4) Oracle #1 – Judgment is Near – Deserved Retribution for Abominations
 - 1) (:2-3) Judgment is Coming Soon
 - 2) (:4a) Judgment is Unrelenting Because it is Deserved
 - 3) (:4b) **Recognition Refrain**

- b. (:5-9) Oracle #2 – Judgment is Horrific – the Outpouring of Deserved Wrath
 - 1) (:5-7) Imminent Horror
 - 2) (:8-9a) Imminent Wrath Due to Abominations
 - 3) (:9b) **Recognition Refrain**
- c. (:10-11) Oracle #3 – Judgment is the Fruit of Arrogance – Image of the Budding Rod
- d. (:12-13) Oracle #4 – Judgment is the Economic Leveler -- Image of the Business Transaction (cf. Year of Jubilee)
- 4. (7:14-27) Finality of the Judgment
 - a. (:14-18) Total Destruction
 - 1) (:14) No Fighting Back
 - 2) (:15) No Escape
 - 3) (:16-18) No Hope
 - b. (:19-22) Total Futility
 - 1) (:19) Futility of Materialism
 - 2) (:20-21) Futility of Idolatrous Worship
 - 3) (:22) Futility of False Confidence in Covenant Relationship
 - c. (:23-27a) Total Chaos as Jerusalem Falls
 - 1) (:23) Chaos of Captivity and Violence
 - 2) (:24) Chaos of Foreign Occupation and Humiliation
 - 3) (:25) Chaos of Unmitigated Anguish
 - 4) (:26a) Chaos of Compounded Disaster and Uncertainty
 - 5) (:26b) Chaos of Religious Disintegration
 - 6) (:27a) Chaos of Political Disintegration
 - d. (:27b) Total Payback for Sinful Conduct
 - e. (:27c) **Recognition Refrain**

C. (8-11) THE VISION OF THE DEPARTURE OF YAHWEH'S GLORY

- 1. (8:1-18) Visions of Temple Pollution Leading to Judgment –
Idolatrous Abominations Polluting the Temple Arouse Divine Jealousy and Disgust
 - a. (:1-4) Divine Jealousy Directed Towards Disloyal People –
Main Vision of the Glowing Glory of the Jealous God of Israel
 - 1) (:1) Divine Intervention
 - 2) (:2) Divine Appearance
 - 3) (:3) Divine Transportation
 - 4) (:4) Divine Glory
 - b. (:5-16) Divine Disgust Directed Towards Detestable Practices –
Series of Four Visions of Disturbing Abominations
 - 1) (:5-6) Vision #1 – The Idol Provoking Jealousy –
Just Outside the Temple Gate
 - a) (:5) Desecration of the Temple by the Idol
Provoking Jealousy
 - b) (:6) Divine Distancing as a Result of Abominations
 - 2) (:7-13) Vision #2 – Animal Worship --
Secretive Cultic Worship of Animals by the Elders

- a) (:7-10) Carved Images of Animals
 - b) (:11-13) Censers with Cloud of Incense
 - 3) (:14-15) Vision #3 – Nature Worship –
Women Weeping for Tammuz = Pagan Fertility Deity
 - a) (:14) Example of Pagan Nature Worship
 - b) (:15) Escalation of Visions of Depravity
 - 4) (:16) Vision #4 – Sun Worship in the Inner Court Showing
Contempt for God
 - c. (:17-18) Cause and Effect Relationship between the Abominations of the
House of Judah and the Unrelenting Wrath of God
 - 1) (:17) Cause = Abominations of the House of Judah
 - 2) (:18) Effect = Unrelenting Wrath of God
- 2. (9:1-11) Destruction or Deliverance?
The Mark of God Differentiates between Judgment and Preservation
 - a. (:1-2) Summons of the Supernatural Agents –
Both for Destruction and for Mercy
 - 1) (:1) Summons Directed to Armed Executioners
 - 2) (:2) Response to the Summons
 - a) Six Armed Heavenly Men Arrive
 - b) One Unarmed Linen-clad Heavenly Man Arrives
 - c) Position Themselves beside the Bronze Altar
 - b. (:3-7) Sparing vs Slaying Commissioned
 - 1) (:3-4) Sparing Commissioned
 - a) (:3) Engagement with the Linen-clad Heavenly Man
 - b) (:4) Excluding the Righteous from Judgment by Marking
Them
 - 2) (:5-7) Slaying Commissioned
 - a) (:5) Mobilizing the Executioners
 - b) (:6) Making No Exceptions for the Unmarked
 - c) (:7) Stacking the Slain in the Temple Courts
 - c. (:8-11) Slaughter Justified
 - 1) (:8) Protest of Ezekiel
 - 2) (:9-10) Perspective of the Lord
 - a) (:9) Causes of Provocation
 - b) (:10) Corresponding Judgment without Pity
 - 3) (:11) Performance Report by Linen-clad Angel
- 3. (10:1-22) Vision of God’s Glory Departing from the Temple –
Jerusalem will be Judged by Fire after the Glory of God Departs from the Temple
 - a. (:1-2) First Command from the Throne of the Glory of God:
Execute Judgment – Take and Scatter Coals of Fire of Judgment against
Jerusalem
 - 1) (:1) The Vision of the Glorious Throne above the Cherubim
 - 2) (:2) The Command to Execute Judgment by Fire upon Jerusalem
 - b. (:3-8) Second Command from the Throne of the Glory of God:
Execute Judgment – Take and Scatter Coals of Fire of Judgment against
Jerusalem

- 1) (:3-5) The Vision of the Glory of the Lord Retreating to the Threshold of the Temple
 - a) (:3) Vision Focusing on the Cherubim Serving the Glory of God
 - b) (:4) Vision Focusing on the Movement of the Glory of the Lord
 - c) (:5) Vision Focusing on the Awesome Sound of the Almighty in Motion
- 2) (:6-8) The Command to Execute Judgment by Fire upon Jerusalem
 - a) (:6) Preparation for Angel of the Lord to Receive the Coals of Fire
 - b) (:7-8) Role of the Cherub in Distributing the Coals of Fire
- c. (:9-17) Description and Function of the Chariot-Throne Wheels – Integrally Linked to the Cherubim – Designed to Transport the Glory of God
 - 1) (:9-14) Description of the Chariot Wheels / Cherubim
 - a) (:9) Connection between the Gleaming Wheels and the Cherubim
 - b) (:10) Integration of the Four Wheels
 - c) (:11) Unison of Movement
 - d) (:12) Universal Vision
 - e) (:13) Whirling Wheels
 - f) (:14) Four Faces
 - 2) (:15-17) Function of the Chariot Wheels / Cherubim
 - a) (:15) Repetition of the Same Vision from Earlier
 - b) (:16) Coordination in Movement of the Wheels and the Cherubim
 - c) (:17) Animation of the Movement via the Spirit of Living Beings
- d. (:18-22) Vision of the Glory of God Departing from the Temple in Conjunction with the Cherubim
 - 1) (:18-19) Testimony to the Departure of the Glory of God
 - a) (:18) Retreating from the Threshold of the Temple
 - b) (:19) Hovering over the Entrance of the East Gate
 - 2) (:20-22) Testimony to the Reality of the Involvement of the Cherubim
 - a) (:20) Same Living Beings as Seen Earlier
 - b) (:21-22a) Same Appearance as to Their Faces, Wings and Hands
 - c) (:22b) Same Purpose and Direction
4. (11:1-25) Final Departure of the Glory of the Lord – As the Glory of the Lord Departs Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s Vision Concludes with Words of Judgment and of Mercy
 - a. (:1-13) Pronouncing Judgment upon the Arrogant Jewish Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem
 - 1) (:1-4) Targeting the Wicked Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem

- a) (:1) Identifying the Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem
 - b) (:2-3) Indicting Them for Their Evil and Arrogant Counsel
 - c) (:4) Imploring Ezekiel to Condemn Them
- 2) (:5-12) Testifying against the Wicked Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem
 - a) (:5-6) Exposure of Their Wicked Thoughts and Harmful Effects
 - b) (:7-12) Expectation of Punishment
- 3) (:13) Traumatized by the Death of Pelatiah
 - a) Statement of the Death
 - b) Wrestling with the Significance of the Death
- b. (:14-21) Promising Future Regathering and Restoration of the Regenerate Remnant Despite their Present Exile in Babylon
 - 1) (:14-16) Special Protection for the Exiles Despite Their Humiliation
 - a) (:15) Exiles Scorned
 - b) (:16) Exiles Sheltered
 - 2) (:17-20) Secure Future for the Repentant Remnant
 - a) (:17) Regathered to Possess the Promised Land
 - b) (:18) Repented
 - c) (:19-20) Regenerated – Blessings of the New Covenant
 - 3) (:21) Severe Retribution for the Unrepentant
- c. (:22-25) Picturing the Final Removal of the Glory of the Lord out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives as the Vision Concludes
 - 1) (:22-23) Final Removal of the Glory of the Lord from Jerusalem
 - a) (:22) Glory of the Lord Taking Off
 - b) (:23) Glory of the Lord Relocating to the Mount of Olives
 - 2) (:24-25) Final Conclusion to the Vision of Ezekiel
 - a) (:24a) Return of Ezekiel
 - b) (:24b) Retirement of the Vison
 - c) (:25) Retelling the Prophetic Vision to the Exiles

D. (12 –14) FALSE PROPHETS AND IDOLATROUS LEADERS CREATE FALSE HOPE WHILE ENSURING JERUSALEM’S DEMISE

- 1. (12:1-20) Popping the Balloon of False Hope Promoted by False Prophets – King Zedekiah and the Jews Still in Jerusalem Should Fear Imminent Deportation:
 - It Is Certain
 - It Will Be Devastating
 - a. (:1-16) Sign Drama #1 = Carrying Packed Luggage into Captivity – Deportation is Certain
 - 1) (:1-7) The Command
 - a) (:1) Introductory Refrain
 - b) (:2) Receptivity to the Prophecy Impacted by Rebellious Heart

- c) (:3-6) Details of the Command to Act Out the Sign-Drama
 - d) (:7) Obedience to the Command
 - 2) (:8-16) The Interpretation – Clearly Applied to King Zedekiah and His People
 - a) (:8) Introductory Refrain
 - b) (:9) Receptivity to the Prophecy Impacted by Rebellious Heart
 - c) (:10-14) Clear Explanation
 - d) (:15-16) Divine Purpose
 - b. (:17-20) Sign Drama #2 = Eating and Drinking in Fear and Anxiety – Deportation Will Be Deserved and Devastating
 - 1) (:17-18) The Command
 - a) (:17) Introductory Refrain
 - b) (:18) Details of the Command
 - 2) (:19-20) The Interpretation
 - a) (:19-20a) Reason for Fear and Anxiety
 - b) (:20b) **Recognition Refrain**
2. (12:21-28) Muzzling the Denials of God’s Promises by False Prophets –
- How Long?
 - Where is the Promise of?
- Fulfillment of Prophecy Silences any Mocking of Delay in God’s Timetable --
Two Divine Muzzlings of the Mockers of God’s Promises of Judgment
- a. (:21-25) First Divine Muzzline – Directed against the Specific Proverb Mocking the Certainty of God’s Promise of Judgment
 - 1) (:21) Introductory Refrain -- Authoritative Source of the Refutation
 - 2) (:22) Arrogant Sarcasm of the Specific Proverb Mocking God’s Promise of Judgment
 - a) Charging God with Delayed Promises – Unexpected / Incomprehensible
 - b) Charging God with False Promises
 - 3) (:23-25) Almighty Sentence of Imminent Fulfillment
 - a) Nullifying the Mocking Proverb
 - b) No More Delay in Fulfillment of God’s Prophecy
 - c) No More False Promises of Peace and Security
 - d) Near-Term, Complete, Certain Fulfillment of Every Promise
 - b. (:26-28) Second Divine Muzzling – Directed against the General Consensus Mocking the Nearness of God’s Promise of Judgment
 - 1) (:26) Introductory Refrain -- Authoritative Source of the Refutation
 - 2) (:27) Arrogant Sarcasm of the General Consensus Mocking God’s Promise of Judgment
 - 3) (:28) Almighty Sentence of Imminent Fulfillment
 - a) No More Delay
 - b) Imminent and Complete Fulfillment

3. (13:1-23) Both Male and Female False Prophets Condemned –
False Prophets and Practitioners of the Occult Must Be Condemned for Their Lies and
Empty Promises that Originate from Their Own Crystal Ball

- a. (:1-16) Condemnation of Male False Prophets
 - 1) (:1-7) Promote Lies Rather Than Proclaim Truth
 - a) (:1-5) Promote Their Own Independent Visions
 - b) (:6-7) Promote False Hope
 - 2) (:8-16) Indicted by the Supreme Judge Who Executes His Wrath
 - a) (:8-9) Permanent Rejection from Covenant Blessing
 - b) (:10-12) Phony Façade that Misleads the People
 - c) (:13-14) Precarious Lack of Substance Leading to Sudden Destruction
 - d) (:15-16) Punished by God's Wrath
- b. (:17-23) Condemnation of Female False Prophetesses
 - 1) (:17-19) Exposing Their Occult Practices
 - a) (:17) Misdirected Authority
 - b) (:18) Malevolent Intent
 - c) (:19) Mercenary Motivation
 - 2) (:20-23) Opposing Their Harmful Impact on God's People
 - a) (:20-21) Rendering Them Impotent
 - b) (:22-23) Removing Their Platform

4. (14:1-11) Hypocritical Idolatrous Leaders Denounced –
Hidden Idolatry Proves to be a Stumbling Block for Sin and a Red Flag in Terms of
Divine Confrontation and Condemnation

- a. (:1-5) Exposing Idolatry in the Heart as the Source of External Sin
 - 1) (:1-3) Outwardly Sincere Seekers Can Have Inwardly Idolatrous Hearts
 - a) (:1-2) Apparent Interest in the Word of the Lord
 - b) (:3) Hypocritical Paradox of Idolaters Seeking Counsel from the Lord
 - 2) (:4-5) The Stumbling Block of Idolatry Must be Denounced by the Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - a) (:4a) Idolatry in the Heart Leads to Outward Iniquity
 - b) (:4b) Inquiring of the Lord Demands the Denouncing of Idolatry
 - c) (:5) Indictment Intended to Recapture Hearts and Restore the Relationship
- b. (:6-11) Urging Repentance to Escape Judgment
 - 1) (:6) Call for Drastic Repentance
 - 2) (:7-8) Condemnation of the Inquiring Idolaters
 - a) (:7) Divine Confrontation
 - b) (:8a) Divine Opposition and Judgment
 - c) (:8b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 3) (:9) Culpability of the False Prophets
 - 4) (:10-11) Considerations of Divine Judgment

- a) (:10) Same Judgment for the Idolater and the False Prophet
 - b) (:11a) Solidarity and Sanctification are the Behavior-Oriented Goals
 - c) (:11b) Securing the Covenant Bond is the Ultimate Relationship Goal
5. (14:12-23) Impossibility of Jerusalem Surviving Divine Punishment –
Jerusalem Cannot Escape Judgment Even if the Most Righteous Men Intercede
- a. (:12-20) Inevitability of Jerusalem’s Demise –
Four Arguments Based on Different Types of Divine Punishment to Prove Jerusalem Cannot Survive
 - 1) (:12-14) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Famine
 - a) (:13) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Famine
 - b) (:14) Impossibility of Deliverance --
Three OT Examples of Loyalty and Righteousness
 - 2) (:15-16) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Wild Beasts
 - a) (:15) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Wild Beasts
 - b) (:16) Impossibility of Deliverance
 - 3) (:17-18) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by the Sword
 - a) (:17) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Famine
 - b) (:18) Impossibility of Deliverance
 - 4) (:19-20) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Plague
 - a) (:19) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Plague
 - b) (:20) Impossibility of Deliverance
 - b. (:21-23) Justice of Jerusalem’s Demise –
Justification of Divine Punishment against Jerusalem
 - 1) (:21) Unleashing of a Variety of Divine Judgments
 - 2) (:22a-23a) Unrighteous Survivors Prove the Lord’s Case
 - 3) (:23b) Ultimate Vindication for the Lord

E. (15-17) 3 PARABLES JUSTIFYING THE COMING JUDGMENT

- 1. (15:1-8) Parable of the Worthless Vine –
Jerusalem as the Worthless Vine Can’t Escape the Consuming Fire of God’s Judgment
 - a. (:1-5) Allegory of the Worthless Vine
 - 1) (:2-3) Relative Intrinsic Worthlessness of Vines = Not Good for Much Except Burning
 - a) (:2) Compared to the Superior Wood from Other Trees
 - b) (:3) Compared to its Lack of Utility
 - 2) (:4-5) Reduced Value after Burning = Good for Nothing
 - a) (:4) Combined Fires Degrade its Value
 - b) (:5) Consuming Fire Eliminates any Possible Utility
 - b. (:6-8) Application to Fiery Judgment upon Jerusalem
 - 1) (:6-7a) Divine Decision to Consume Jerusalem with Fiery Judgment is Final

- a) (:6) Jerusalem Destined to be the Fuel for God's Fiery Judgment
 - b) (:7a) No Possibility of Escape
 - 2) (:7b) Divine Vindication for Unleashing Wrath
 - 3) (:8) Desolation Due to the Nation's Persistent Unfaithfulness
- 2. (16:1-63) Parable of Jerusalem as the Unfaithful Harlot – Despite Unprecedented Abominations, Privileged but Unfaithful Jerusalem Will Be Restored to Covenant Security after Deserved Judgment
 - a. (:1-14) Rags to Riches – Jerusalem Rejected at Birth but Elevated to Beautiful Queen
 - 1) (:2-5) Unwanted and Uncared for at Birth
 - a) (:2) Tone of Indictment
 - b) (:3-5) Background of Paganism and Abandonment
 - 2) (:6-14) Rescued, Embraced, Exalted and Revered
 - a) (:6-7) Rescued
 - b) (:8) Embraced – Covenant Relationship
 - c) (:9-13) Exalted -- Greatness of Her Exaltation and Beauty
 - d) (:14) Revered – for the Greatness of Her Fame and Glory
 - b. (:15-34) Royalty to Harlotry – Jerusalem Forsaking Royalty to Act the Harlot
 - 1) (:15-25) Rejecting God in Favor of Pagan Idolatry
 - a) (:15-19) Converting God's Gifts into Tools for Harlotry
 - b) (:20-21) Sacrificing Children to Idols
 - c) (:22) Forgetting God's Compassion and Grace
 - d) (:23-25) Worshiping on the High Places
 - 2) (:26-29) Playing the Harlot with Pagan Nations – Political Promiscuity
 - a) (:26) Playing the Harlot with the Egyptians
 - b) (:27) Playing the Harlot with the Philistines
 - c) (:28) Playing the Harlot with the Assyrians
 - d) (:29) Playing the Harlot with the Chaldeans
 - 3) (:30-34) Surpassing the Wickedness of Typical Harlots
 - a) (:30) No Shame
 - b) (:31-34) No Limit to Your Unfaithfulness
 - c. (:35-43) Exposed and Punished – Jerusalem Exposed and Punished for Harlotry until the Lord is Satisfied
 - 1) (:36-37) Exposed by Judging the Nakedness of Harlotries with the Nakedness of Shame
 - a) (:36) Nakedness Exposed by Shocking Harlotries
 - b) (:37) Nakedness Exposed by God Inflicting Shame
 - 2) (:38-41) Punished by the Unleashing of God's Wrath
 - a) (:38) Punishment Appropriate for Adultery
 - b) (:39) Punishment Devastating to the Point of Stripping Naked
 - c) (:40) Punishment Lethal Via Mob Violence

- d) (:41a) Punishment Fiery and Shameful) (:41b)
Punishment Effective in Stopping Harlotries
 - 3) (:42-43) Satisfied
 - a) (:42) Propitiation of God's Wrath
 - b) (:43) Justification for God's Wrath
 - d. (:44-52) Shamed and Disgraced – Jerusalem Shamed and Disgraced for Greater Abominations than Sodom and Samaria
 - 1) (:44-46) Shamed and Disgraced in Terms of Spiritual Identity
 - a) (:44) Chip off the Old Block – Citing the Family Tree
 - b) (:45) Child of Immoral Pagan Parents
 - c) (:46) Categorized with Samaria and Sodom
 - 2) (:47-52) Shamed and Disgraced in Comparison to Sodom and Samaria
 - a) (:47) More Corrupt than Sodom and Samaria
 - b) (:48) More Corrupt than Sodom
 - c) (:49) Guilt of Sodom Detailed
 - d) (:50) Judgment of Sodom Recalled
 - e) (:51a) More Corrupt than Samaria
 - f) (:51b-52) Shamed and Disgraced in Terms of Surpassing Abominations
 - e. (:53-58) Restored by Grace – Jerusalem Restored by God's Grace Despite Shame and Disgrace
 - 1) (:53-55) Restoration of Captivity
 - a) (:53) Promise of Restoration
 - b) (:54) Purpose of Restoration
 - c) (:55) Promise of Restoration
 - 2) (:56-58) Resolution of Reproach
 - a) (:56-57) Pride Replaced by Reproach
 - b) (:58) Penalty for Abominations Fully Borne
 - f. (:59-63) Renewed to Covenant Security – Jerusalem Forgiven and Provided Covenant Security
 - 1) (:59) Punishment that Fits the Crime
 - 2) (:60-63) Progression from Abrahamic Covenant to New Covenant
 - a) (:60) Faithfulness of God to the Covenant Relationship
 - b) (:61) Family of God's People Renewed
 - c) (:62-63) Forgiveness Removes All Foundation for Pride
3. (17:1-24) Parable of the Two Eagles and the Vine – Judgment on Jerusalem Justified in Light of the Treachery of Zedekiah but Ultimately Superseded by Messianic Restoration
- a. (:1-10) The Expounding of the Parable – What's the Story?
 - Foolishness of Turning Away from Babylon towards Egypt
 - 1) (:2-6) Dominion of King Nebuchadnezzar in Deporting Jews to Babylon – Captivity but not Catastrophe
 - a) (:2) Medium of Communication
 - b) (:3) Majestic Domination of Judah by the Powerful Eagle of Babylon

- c) (:4) Major Leaders of Judah Relocated to Commercial Center of Babylon
- d) (:5) Meticulous Planting and Nurturing of the Exiles in Babylon
- e) (:6) Maturing of the Exiles under Favorable Circumstances in Babylon
- 2) (7-10) Foolishness of King Zedekiah in Turning towards Egypt – Exchanging Flourishing for Withering
 - a) (:7-8) Redirection towards Egypt Totally Unnecessary
 - b) (:9-10) Rhetorical Questions Highlighting the Folly of Redirection
- b. (:11-21) The Explanation of the Parable – What Does It Mean? Treachery Leads to Catastrophic Judgment
 - 1) (:12-18) Historical Interpretation of the Events of the Fable
 - a) (:12a) Rebels Need Instruction
 - b) (:12b-14) Resistance Will Undermine Covenant Security
 - c) (:15-18) Redirection of Loyalties to Egypt Has No Chance of Success
 - 2) (:19-21) Theological Implications of the Fable
 - a) (:19b-21a) Judgment against Treacherous Zedekiah Comes from the Lord
 - b) (:21b) Vindication of the Lord’s Words of Judgment
- c. (:22-24) Messianic Epilogue of Kingdom Restoration and Dominion – What Does the Future Hold for Israel?
 - 1) (:22-23) Messianic Restoration in Final Kingdom Dominion
 - a) (:22) Kingdom Derivation from the Messianic Davidic Branch
 - b) (:23) Kingdom Dominion over All the Nations
 - 2) (:24) Majestic Reputation of Divine Sovereignty Vindicated
 - a) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b) Reversal Images of Ultimate Restoration Following Certain Judgment
 - c) Reinforcement of Divine Sovereignty in Accomplishing Kingdom Agenda

F. (18 -19) BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. (18:1-32) Principle of Individual Accountability for Conduct – God Cannot be Accused of Injustice Because He Holds Each Individual Accountable for His Own Conduct
 - a. (:1-9) Advocating for the General Principle = The Soul Who Sins Will Die
 - 1) (:1-4a) Denying the Principle of Family Guilt for Sin
 - a) (:2-3) Dismissing the False Proverb Promoting Family Culpability
 - b) (:4a) Declaring God’s Lordship over Each Individual Soul

- 2) (:4b-9) Asserting the Principle of Individual Accountability for Sin
 - a) (:4b) Statement of the Principle
 - b) (:5-9a) Characterization of the Righteous
 - c) (:9b) Verdict Regarding the Righteous
 - b. (:10-20) Applying the Principle – Tracking Sin and Righteousness Down through Generations
 - 1) (:10-13) Case of the Unrighteous Son of a Righteous Father = He Will Die
 - a) (:10-11a) Introducing the Case
 - b) (:11b-13a) Unrighteous Lifestyle
 - c) (:13b) Verdict = Death
 - 2) (:14-18) Case of the Righteous Grandson of Unrighteous Father = He Will Live
 - a) (:14) Introducing the Case
 - b) (:15-17a) Righteous Lifestyle
 - c) (:17b) Verdict = Life
 - d) (:18) Addendum
 - 3) (:19-20) Answering Objections
 - a) (:19a) Complaint
 - b) (:19b-20) Refutation
 - c. (:21-29) Applying the Principle – An Individual Can change His Own Status – You are Not Locked In to Your Initial State
 - 1) (:21-22) Repentance Changes Your Status to Life
 - a) (:21) Conversion to Righteousness
 - b) (:22) Deserving of Life
 - 2) (:23) Preference of the Lord
 - 3) (:24) Backsliding Changes Your Status to Death
 - a) Conversion to Sin
 - b) Deserving of Death
 - 4) (:25-29) Answering Objections
 - a) (:25a) Complaint.
 - b) (:25b-28) Refutation
 - c) (:29) Restatement
 - d. (:30-32) Urgent Call for Repentance
 - 1) (:30a) Reality of Individual Judgment
 - 2) (:30b-32) Repentance Essential for Spiritual Life
 - a) (:30b) Call for Repentance so that Sin Does Not Trip You Up
 - b) (:31a) Repentance Essential for Regeneration
 - c) (:31b) Stubborn Persistence in Path of Death Makes No Sense
 - d) (:32a) Judgment of Death Not God’s Desire
 - e) (:32b) Call for Repentance in Order to Live
2. (19:1-14) National Accountability Due to Failed Leadership – Lament that the Davidic Dynasty Has Gone Down in Flames Due to Failed Leadership
- (:1) Prologue – Command to Lament Failed Leadership

- a. (:1-9) Indictment of Judah's Final Kings
 - 1) (:2) Leadership of Judah Should Rule Like a Lioness – with Power and Dominion
 - 2) (:3-4) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Jehoahaz
 - a) (:3) Oppressive Ruler – Devouring Men
 - b) (:4) Offensive Ruler – Captured and Subjugated by the Nations
 - 3) (:5-9) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Jehoiachin
 - a) (:5) Opportunistic Leader
 - b) (:6-7) Oppressive Leader
 - c) (:8-9) Offensive Leader – Captured and Subjugated by the Nations
- b. (:10-14a) Indictment of the Nation Itself
 - 1) (:10-11) Lofty Position of Privilege for the Nation of Judah
 - a) (:10a) Planted by the Waters
 - b) (:10b) Prosperous and Fruitful
 - c) (:11a) Producing Strong Leaders
 - d) (:11b) Prominent in Reputation among the Nations
 - 2) (:12-14a) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Zedekiah
 - a) (:12) Devastated Nation and Defeated Rulers
 - b) (:13) Doomed to Exile in Babylon
 - c) (:14a) Davidic Dynasty Extinguished for Now
- (:14b) Epilogue – Lamentation Concluded

G. (20:1-44) ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF SIN ULTIMATELY REDEEMED BY MILLENNIAL RESTORATION

- 1. (20:1-32) Israel's History of Sin – Israel's Consistent Pattern of Sin Down through Her History Justified God's Judgment and Magnifies His Mercy
 - (:1-4) Prologue – Don't Challenge the Lord Your God – Israel's Past Generations Deserve God's Judgment
 - 1) (:1) The Challenge from Israel's Elders
 - 2) (:2-3) The Rejection of the Challenge by the Lord
 - 3) (:4) The Changing of the Narrative to Focus on Deserved Judgment for a History of Sin
 - a) (:4a) Judgment Commanded
 - b) (:4b-6) History Lesson Prescribed
 - a. (:5-9) Pattern of Sin for the Generation in Bondage in Egypt
 - 1) (:5-6) The Origin of the Nation in the Land of Egypt
 - a) (:5) Establishment of the Covenant Relationship with the Chosen People
 - b) (:6) Intention to Deliver Them Out of Egypt and Into the Promised Land
 - 2) (:7-8a) The Objective that the People Repent of Pagan Idolatry
 - a) (:7) Repentance Commanded
 - b) (:8a) Rebellion Persisted

- 3) (:8b-9) The Opposing Commitments of God – Mercy Must Triumph over Judgment
 - a) (:8b) The Commitment of God to Pour Out His Wrath in Judgment
 - b) (:9) The Commitment of God to Show Mercy to Protect His Reputation among the Nations
- b. (:10-26) Pattern of Sin for the Generations in the Wilderness
 - 1) (:10-14) First Generation in the Wilderness Rebelled Against God’s Goodness
 - a) (:10-12) Demonstration of God’s Goodness
 - b) (:13a) Rebellion against God’s Goodness
 - c) (:13b-14) Conflict Between Commitment to Wrath vs. Mercy
 - 2) (:15-17) Discipline Coupled with Mercy
 - a) (:15-16) God’s Discipline
 - b) (:17) God’s Mercy
 - 3) (:18-21a) Second Generation in the Wilderness Persisted in Rebellion
 - a) (:18) Repentance Commanded
 - b) (:19) Relationship to the God of the Covenant Should be the Motivation to Obey
 - c) (:20) Reminders by Sanctifying God’s Sabbaths Should be Helpful (not Burdensome)
 - d) (:21a) Rebellion Persisted
 - 4) (:21b-26) Discipline Coupled with Mercy
 - a) (:21b-22) The Opposing Commitments of God – Mercy Triumphant over Judgment
 - b) (:23-24) The Ordained Discipline of Scattering the Jews among the Nations
 - c) (:25-26) The Outrageous Idolatrous Practices Designed to Bankrupt Them to Restore Them to the Covenant Relationship
- c. (:27-29) Pattern of Sin for the Generation Entering the Promised Land
 - 1) (:27) History of Blasphemy and Treachery
 - 2) (:28) Perversion of God’s Gifts into Instruments of Idolatry
 - 3) (:29) Futility of Worshiping on the High Places
- (:30-32) Epilogue – Don’t Challenge the Lord Your God – Ezekiel’s Current Generation Deserves God’s Judgment – Asking the Tough Questions:
 - 1) (:30-31a) Why Continue in the Harlotries of Your Ancestors?
 - 2) (:31b) Why Seek Counsel from the Lord While You Persist in Rebellion?
 - 3) (:32) Why Desire to be Like the Pagan Nations Who Serve Dead Idols?
2. (20:33-44) Millennial Restoration – Millennial Restoration Transforms Worship and Glorifies God
 - a. (:33-38) Millennial Restoration Requires Preparatory Judgment and Purging

- 1) (:33) Assertion of Powerful Sovereignty over Israel
- 2) (:34-36) Adaptation of Former Historical Experiences
 - a) (:34) New Exodus
 - b) (:35) New Wilderness Experience
 - c) (:36) New Confrontation in Judgment
- 3) (:37-38a) Abandonment of Covenant Transgressors
 - a) (:37) Passing under the Rod of Examination and Discipline
 - b) (:38a) Purging the Rebels
- 4) (:38b) **Recognition Refrain**
- b. (:39-42) Millennial Restoration Features Transformed Worship – Unified and Purged
 - 1) (:39) Service No Longer Profaned
 - 2) (:40-41) Series of Dramatic Reversals
 - a) Change in Venue
 - b) Change in Corporate Loyalty
 - c) Change in Divine Favor and Acceptance
 - d) Change in Approval of Offerings
 - e) Change in the Positive Receiving of Scattered Peoples
 - f) Change in Divine Reputation
 - 3) (:42) **Recognition Refrain**
- c. (:43-44) Millennial Restoration Manifests a Heart of Repentance and True Knowledge of God
 - 1) (:43) Heart of Repentance
 - 2) (:44) **Recognition Refrain – True Knowledge of God**

H. (20:45 – 22:22) CERTAINTY OF DEVASTATING AND DESERVED JUDGMENT

1. (20:45 – 21:32) Certainty of Devastating Judgment – The Sword of the Lord Will Accomplish Its Mission of Judgment
 - a. (20:45-49) The Parable of the Sword of the Lord – Judgment Coming against Jerusalem
 - 1) (:46-48) Directed Prophecy of Coming Judgment against Jerusalem
 - a) (:46-47a) Certain Target is Jerusalem
 - b) (:47b) Consuming Fire of Comprehensive Scope and Catastrophic Severity
 - c) (:48) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:49) Dismissive Response by the People
 - b. (21:1-7) The Unsheathing of the Sword of the Lord – The Explanation of the Riddle = The Sword is Coming
 - 1) (:2-3) Comprehensive Judgment Executed by the Sword of the Lord
 - a) (:2) Targets the City, the Sanctuaries and the Land
 - b) (:3) Targets Both the Righteous and the Wicked
 - 2) (:4-5) Committed Judgment – No Turning Back of the Sword of the Lord

- a) (:4) Sword Slaughters without Exception
 - b) (:5) **Recognition Refrain – Sword Cannot be Restrained**
 - 3) (:6-7) Compassionate Concern of the Prophet
 - a) (:6) Prophetic Empathy for the Condemned People
 - b) (:7) Paralyzing Impact of the News of Imminent Attack
- c. (21:8-17) The War Song of the Sword –
 - Prepared to Execute the Slaughter of Divine Judgment
 - 1) (:8-13) The Execution of the Slaughter Demonstrates the Power of the Sword and Grieves the Prophet of God’s People
 - a) (:9-11) Preparing the Sword for Action
 - b) (:12) Mourning over the Targeting of both People and Princes
 - c) (:13) Recognizing there is No Defense against God’s Coming Judgment
 - 2) (:14-17) The Effectiveness of the Slaughter Secures both Prophetic and Divine Approval
 - a) (:14a) Prophetic Approval of Coming Judgment
 - b) (:14b-16) Effectiveness of the Sword in Executing the Slaughter
 - c) (:17) Divine Approval of Coming Judgment
- d. (21:18-27) The Target of the Sword = Jerusalem –
 - Nebuchadnezzar’s Decision to Attack Jerusalem and Not Ammon
 - 1) (:18-23) The Sword is Aimed at Jerusalem
 - a) (:19-21) Discerning the Target
 - b) (:22-23) Deceiving the Inhabitants of Jerusalem
 - 2) (:24-27) The Sword Specifically Singles Out Zedekiah
 - a) (:24) Remembering the Sins of Zedekiah
 - b) (:25-26) Removing the Priestly and Royal Leadership
 - c) (:27) Ruination until the Scepter Passes to the Messiah
- e. (21:28-32) The Sheathing of the Sword –
 - Prophecy of Judgment on the Ammonites
 - 1) (:28-29) Taunt Directed Against Jerusalem –
 - Ammonite Version of the Sword Song
 - 2) (:30-32a) Turning the Tables on the Ammonites
 - a) (:30a) Sword of the Ammonites Must Be Sheathed
 - b) (:30b) Security of Home Country No Refuge
 - c) (:31) Wrath of God Unleashed in Brutal Fashion
 - d) (:32a) Consuming Fire Will Leave Nothing but the Blood of the Slaughtered
 - 3) (:32b) Targeting Ammon for Irreversible Eradication
- 2. (22:1-22) Certainty of Deserved Judgment –
 - Jerusalem Deserved the Furnace of God’s Judgment Because of Her Documented Abominations
 - a. (:1-16) The Focus of God’s Judgment Was the Multitude of Abominations Committed by Jerusalem

- 1) (:2-5) Staging of the Trial –
Social Sins and Cultic Sins Lead to Guilt and Defilement
 - a) (:2) Call for Judgment of the Bloody City
Based on a Multitude of Abominations
 - b) (:3) Charged with Social and Cultic Sins
 - c) (:4a) Condemned with Execution of Judgment Imminent
 - d) (:4b-5) Castigated by the Nations
- 2) (:6-12) Presentation of the Evidence –
The Forgetting of God Leads to All Kinds of Sin
 - a) (:6) Shedding of Blood Starts with the Rulers of Israel
 - b) (:7-12a) Catalog of Specific Abominations
 - c) (:12b) Root Problem
- 3) (:13-16) Announcement of the Sentence –
The Failure of the Covenant Nation Results in Widespread Dispersion
 - a) (:13) Convicted of Shocking Financial Corruption and Physical Violence
 - b) (:14) Powerless before God’s Unrelenting Wrath
 - c) (:15) Dispersed among the Nations
 - d) (:16a) Exposed before the Nations
 - e) (:16b) **Recognition Refrain**
- b. (:17-22) The Furnace of God’s Judgment Destroys Worthless Dross
 - 1) (:18) Rejection Valuation – House of Israel is Dross
 - 2) (:19-22a) Refinery Process in the Furnace of God’s Judgment
 - a) (:19) Gathered for the Purpose of Refining
 - b) (:20) Melted by God’s Wrath
 - c) (:21) Gathered, Burned and Melted
 - d) (:22a) Melted in the Furnace of God’s Judgment
 - 3) (:22b) **Recognition Refrain**

**I. (22:23-31) NOBODY FOUND TO STAND IN THE GAP --
THE FAILURE OF JERUSALEM’S LEADERS DEMANDS GOD’S IMMEDIATE AND
SEVERE JUDGMENT UPON HIS CORRUPT HOLY CITY**

1. (:24-29) Comprehensive Indictment of Jerusalem
 - a. (:24-25) Summary Indictment
 - b. (:26-28) Indictment of All Classes of Rulers
 - c. (:29) Indictment of the People of the Land –
Oppressing the Vulnerable and Denying Justice
2. (:30) Futile Search for a Rebuilder / Advocate
 - a. Recruitment Effort = Focused Internally
 - b. Job Description = Critical Roles
 - c. Urgency of the Search = High Stakes
 - d. Futility of the Search = No Viable Candidates
3. (:31) Fiery Divine Wrath Justifiably Unleashed

**J. (23) TWO SISTERS OF HARLOTRY AND THEIR TERRIBLE JUDGMENT –
THE ABOMINABLE SINS OF PERSISTENT SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY DEMAND
SEVERE JUDGMENT**

1. (:2-4) Introduction of the Accused Harlots = Samaria and Jerusalem
 - a. (:2) Common Origin
 - b. (:3) Common Offense
 - c. (:4) Capital City Identifications
2. (:5-10) Samaria's History of Harlotry (Oholah)
 - a. (:5a) Violation of Covenant Relationship
 - b. (:5b-7) Unfaithful Liaisons with Assyria
 - c. (:8) Consistent with Her Harlotries in Egypt
 - d. (:9-10) Condemned to Suffer Abuse and Disgrace
 - 1) (:9) Punished by Her Paramours
 - 2) (:10a) Punished In Horrible Ways
 - 3) (:10b) Punished by Disgrace
3. (:11-21) Jerusalem's History of Harlotry (Oholibah)
 - a. (:11) Multiplied Harlotries of Jerusalem – Surpassing Samaria
 - b. (:12-13) Harlotries with Assyria
 - c. (:14-18) Harlotries with Babylonia
 - 1) (:14-16) Seduced
 - 2) (:17-18) Shamed
 - d. (:19-21) Harlotries with Egypt
 - 1) (:19-20) Seduced
 - 2) (:21) Shameless
4. (:22-35) Four Messages of Judgment on Jerusalem (Oholibah)
 - a. (:22-27) #1 -- Savaged by Her Former Lovers
 - 1) (:22-24) Onslaught of Judgment from Former Lovers
 - 2) (:25-27) Oppression of Judgment from Former Lovers
 - b. (:28-31) #2 -- Stripped Naked for Her Idolatry
 - 1) (:28) Abandoned to Her Enemies
 - 2) (:29) Abused and Exposed
 - 3) (:30-31) Aligned with the Harlotries and Punishment of Samaria
 - c. (:32-34) #3 -- Scorned and Sorrowful as She Drains the Cup of God's Judgment
 - 1) (:32) Scorned – Emphasis on the Size of the Cup
 - 2) (:33) Sorrowful – Emphasis on the Effects of Drinking the Cup
 - 3) (:34) Staggered – Emphasis on the Finality and Brutality of Drinking the Cup
 - d. (:35) #4 -- Sowing What She Reaped by Forgetting Her Covenant God
 - 1) Root Problem
 - 2) Retribution
5. (:36-49) Judgment on Both Sisters – Summary Judgment for Harlotries
 - a. (:36-45) Statement of the Charges
 - 1) (:36) Call to Judgment
 - 2) (:37-39) Catalog of Indiscretions

- 3) (:40-44) Seductive Solicitations of International Liaisons
- 4) (:45) Confirmation of Judgment
- b. (:46-49) Sentencing Judgment Pronounced
 - 1) (:46) Mob Justice
 - 2) (:47) Brutal Devastation
 - 3) (:48) Goal of Deterrence
 - 4) (:49a) Accountability for Harlotries and Idolatry
 - 5) (:49b) **Recognition Refrain**

**K. (24) DAY OF RECKONING FOR JERUSALEM –
PARABLES OF THE BOILING POT AND REFRAINING FROM MOURNING –
DESPITE HER FALSE SECURITY, JERUSALEM EXPERIENCES THE
DEVASTATION OF DESERVED JUDGMENT**

- 1. (:1-14) Parable of the Cooking Pot – Siege of Jerusalem Has Arrived and It Is All Consuming
 - a. (:2-5) Enactment of the Parable – Boil the Pot of Choice Meat
 - 1) (:2) Precise Dating of Siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar
 - 2) (:3-5) Parable Details
 - b. (:6-14) Explanation of the Parable
 - 1) (:6-8) Total Culpability
 - 2) (:9-11) Total Consumption
 - 3) (:12-13) Total Contamination
 - 4) (:14) Total Commitment to Judgment – No Relenting
- 2. (:15-24) Refraining from Mourning – Response to the Death of Ezekiel’s Wife Applied to the Loss of the Temple and the City of Jerusalem
 - a. (:16-17) Command to Refrain from Outwardly Mourning Death of the Prophet’s Wife
 - 1) (:16) Unnatural Command in Response to Death of Wife
 - 2) (:17) Unchanged Behavior = No Signs of Mourning
 - b. (:18-19) Compliance and Request for Explanation
 - 1) (:18) Compliance of Ezekiel
 - 2) (:19) Request for Explanation by the People
 - c. (:20-23) Application: No Mourning for the Death of the Temple
 - 1) (:21) Unspeakable Loss
 - 2) (:22-23a) Continue Normal Behavior
 - 3) (:23b) Refrain from Outward Mourning
 - d. (:24) **Recognition Refrain**
- 3. (:25-27) Crushing of Jerusalem (False Security) Opens the Door to Future Revelation (New Hope)
 - a. (:25) Removal of False Security
 - b. (:26-27a) Revelation of New Hope
 - c. (:27b) **Recognition Refrain**

**II. (25-32) FUTURE DESTINIES OF THE ENEMIES OF JUDAH –
MISTREATMENT AND MALICE TOWARDS ISRAEL WILL BE PUNISHED BY GOD**

- A. (25:1-7) PROPHECY AGAINST AMMON**
 (:2-3a) Authoritative Word of Prophetic Judgment
1. (:3b-5) First Oracle
 - a. (:3b) Charge = Reason for Judgment = Indictment
 - b. (:4-5a) Punishment = Description of Judgment = Sentence
 - c. (:5b) **Recognition Refrain**
 2. (:6-7) Second Oracle
 - a. (:6) Charge
 - b. (:7a) Punishment
 - c. (:7b) **Recognition Refrain**
- B. (25:8-11) PROPHECY AGAINST MOAB**
1. (:8) Charge
 2. (:9-11a) Punishment
 3. (:11b) **Recognition Refrain**
- C. (25:12-14) PROPHECY AGAINST EDOM**
1. (:12) Charge
 2. (:13-14a) Punishment
 3. (:14b) **Alternative Recognition Refrain**
- D. (25:15-17) PROPHECY AGAINST PHILISTIA**
1. (:15) Charge
 2. (:16-17a) Punishment
 3. (:17b) **Alternate Recognition Refrain**
- E. (26:1--28:19) PROPHECY AGAINST TYRE**
1. (26:1-21) Prophecy of the Destruction of Tyre –
 Waves of Invading Nations Will Utterly Destroy Tyre Who Had Hoped to Profit
 By Jerusalem's Destruction
 - a. (:1-6) Dashed Hopes of Tyre Profiting from Jerusalem's Destruction
 - 1) (:1) Authoritative Word of Prophetic Judgment
 - 2) (:2) Charge
 - 3) (:3-6a) Punishment – Fivefold Description
 - a) (:3b) Divine Opposition
 - b) (:3c) Deployment of Multiple Invasions by a Variety of
Enemy Nations
 - c) (:4) Destruction and Devastation
 - d) (:5) Despoiled by the Nations
 - e) (:6a) Death by the Sword
 - 4) (:6b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b. (:7-14) Destructive Forces of King Nebuchadnezzar
 - 1) (:7) Military Might of God's Instrument of Judgment =
King Nebuchadnezzar
 - 2) (:8-12) Military Mission of King Nebuchadnezzar
 - 3) (:13-14) Mashed Mound of Crushed City of Tyre

- a) (:13) Silenced of Any Joy and Revelry
 - b) (:14) Stripped Down to the Bare Rock
 - c. (:15-18) Disgraced Lamentation over the Fall of Tyre
 - 1) (:15-16) Panicked Reaction of Tyre's Maritime Partners
 - 2) (:17-18) Fearful Lamentation of Tyre's Maritime Partners
 - d. (:19-21) Destined for Extinction
 - 1) (:19) Two Images of Desolation and Irrelevance
 - a) Uninhabited City
 - b) Underwater and Forgotten
 - 2) (:20-21) Termination in the Pit of Extinction
- 2. (27:1-36) Allegory of the Shipwreck of Tyre – Boasting in Prosperity and Prominence Brings God's Devastating Judgment
 - (:1-3a) Prologue
 - a. (:3b-7) Building and Beautifying the Ship – Its Construction
 - 1) (:3b-4) Arrogance of Magnificence and Worldwide Impact
 - a) (:3b) Basking in Her Beauty
 - b) (:4a) Boasting of Her Vast Influence
 - c) (:4b) Basking in Her Beauty
 - 2) (:5-7) Assembled from the Finest Materials
 - a) (:5a) Her Planks
 - b) (:5b) Her Mast
 - c) (:6a) Her Oars
 - d) (:6b) Her Deck
 - e) (:7a) Her Sail
 - f) (:7b) Her Awning
 - b. (:8-11) Manning the Ship – Its Crew
 - 1) (:8) Rowers and Pilots
 - a) Rowers
 - b) Pilots
 - 2) (:9) Mechanics and Traders
 - a) Mechanics
 - b) Traders
 - 3) (:10-11) Mercenaries as the Protective Force
 - a) (:10) From Persia, Lud and Put
 - b) (:11) Sons of Arvad and the Gammadim
 - c. (:12-25) Worldwide Trading Partners for the Ship – Its Cargo of Merchandise
 - 1) (:12-15) Trading with Mediterranean Areas and Asia Minor
 - 2) (:16-17) Trading with Palestinian Regions from South to North
 - 3) (:18-19) Trading with Syria
 - 4) (:20-22) Trading with Arabia
 - 5) (:23-24) Trading with Mesopotamia
 - 6) (:25) Summary
 - d. (:26-36) Sinking the Ship – Its Catastrophe
 - 1) (:26-27) Reversal of Fortunes
 - a) (:26) Destruction of Her Invincibility

- b) (:27) Drowning of Her Glory
 - 2) (:28-32) Reaction from Onlookers
 - a) (:28-31) Bitter Mourning
 - b) (:32) Shocked Lamentation
 - 3) (:33-36) Repercussions of Her Demise
 - a) (:33-34) Bankrupt of Wealth and Impact
 - b) (:35-36) Boasting Transformed into Derision
- 3. (28:1-19) Proud King of Tyre Struck Down –
God Strikes Down Arrogant Political Leaders Who Boast in Their Wealth and Glory
 - a. (:1-10) Downfall of Tyre’s Proud King
 - 1) (:2b-5) Puffed Up with Pride
 - a) (:2b) Puffed Up by Superior Ego
 - b) (:3) Puffed Up by Superior Wisdom
 - c) (:4-5) Puffed Up by Superior Wealth
 - 2) (:6-10) Struck Down by Strangers
 - (:6a) Authoritative Word of God
 - a) (:6b-8) Triumph Turned to Tragedy –
Slain in the Heart of the Seas Where Once You
Reigned in Glory
 - b) (:9-10a) Significance Transformed to Insignificance –
Ending up as a Nobody When You Thought You
Were a Somebody
 - (:10b) Authoritative Word of God
 - b. (:11-19) Lament over the Downfall of Tyre’s King = Type of Satan
 - 1) (:12b-15) Lament over Squandered Potential
 - a) (:12b) Perfection of Wisdom and Beauty
 - b) (:13) Preference of Environment and Adornment
 - c) (:14) Privilege of Function and Fellowship
(Access to God’s Presence)
 - d) (:15) Perfection of Character and Morality
 - 2) (:16-18) Lament over Sinful Attitudes and Actions
 - a) (:16) Judged for Sinful Violence
 - b) (:17) Judged for Shameful Pride
 - c) (:18) Judged for Shady Business Practices
 - 3) (:19) Reaction to Divine Judgment
 - a) Reaction of the Observing Nations
 - b) Reaction of the King of Tyre

F. (28:20-24) PROPHECY AGAINST SIDON = SISTER CITY

- 1. (:22b) Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment
 - a. Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment =
Manifesting God’s Glory
 - b. **Recognition Refrain**
 - c. Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment =
Manifesting God’s Holiness
- 2. (:23-24) Specific Judgments on Sidon and Relief for Israel

- a. (:23) Specific Judgments on Sidon
- b. (:24) Relief for Israel

(:25-26) PROMISE OF RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL

- 1. (:25-26a) Regathering for the Purpose of Secure Living in the Promised Land
 - a. (:25a) Regathering Israel to Manifest God's Holiness
 - b. (:25b-26a) Secure Dwelling in the Promised Land after Purging Judgments
- 2. (:26b) **Recognition Refrain**

G. (29:1--32:32) PROPHECY AGAINST EGYPT

- 1. (29:1-21) The Fate of Egypt –
Images of a Captured Monster Crocodile and a Broken Reed Speak to the Demise of Egypt as God Reassures His People
 - a. (:1-6a) The Fate of the Proud Monster Crocodile
 - (:1-3a) Prologue
 - a) (:1a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) (:1b) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - c) (:2-3a) Target of the Prophecy
 - 1) (:3b) Divine Opposition to the Monster Crocodile Due to Pride
 - a) Divine Opposition against the King of Egypt
 - b) Domain of the Monster Crocodile
 - c) Deceived by Pride = His Root Problem
 - 2) (:4) Dramatic Capture of the Monster Crocodile
 - 3) (:5) Disgraceful End of the Monster Crocodile =
Abandoned in the Wilderness, Unburied and Ravaged
 - a) Abandoned
 - b) Unburied
 - c) Ravaged
 - 4) (:6a) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b. (:6b-9b) The Fate of the Spineless, Unreliable, Broken Reed
 - 1) (:6b-7) The Accusation
 - a) (:6b) No Backbone = Spineless
 - b) (:7) Broken Commitments = Unreliable and Broken
 - 2) (:8b-9a) The Announcement of Judgment
 - a) (:8b) Destruction by the Sword
 - b) (:9a) Desolation for the Entire Land
 - 3) (:9b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - c. (:9c-16) Yahweh's Plans for Egypt
 - 1) (:9c-12) Yahweh's Immediate Plans for Egypt
 - a) (:9c) Presumptuous Boast
 - b) (:10-12) Punitive Consequences
 - 2) (:13-16a) Yahweh's Long Range Plans for Egypt
 - a) (:13) Regathering the Egyptians
 - b) (:14-15) Rebuilding Them as a Diminished Nation
 - c) (:16a) Reminding Israel of the Futility of Trusting Egypt
 - 3) (:16b) **Recognition Refrain**

- d. (:17-21) Yahweh's Wages for Nebuchadnezzar –
Egypt to be Given to Nebuchadnezzar as Payment for Executing
Divine Judgment against Tyre
 - (:17) Prologue
 - a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 1) (:18) Reason for the Payment
 - 2) (:19-20) Reward for Nebuchadnezzar
 - a) (:19a) Divine Gift of Egypt
 - b) (:19b) Despoiling of Her Wealth
 - c) (:19c) Deserved Wages for Military Service
 - d) (:20) Divine Agent of Judgment
 - 3) (:21a) Reassurance to the Nation of Israel
 - a) Renewed Power
 - b) Renewed Boldness and Acceptance of Prophecy
 - 4) (:21b) **Recognition Refrain**
2. (30:1-19) The Impact of the Day of the Lord on Egypt and Her Allies –
The Coming Judgment on Egypt Prefigures the Eschatological Day of the Lord and
Impacts Egypt's Allies
- a. (:1-5) Association of the Coming Judgment on Egypt with the End-Times
Day of the Lord
 - (:1-2a) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 1) (:2b) Anguished Anticipation of the Coming Judgment
 - 2) (:3) Doomsday Scenario of the Coming Judgment –
the Day of the Lord
 - a) Closeness but with Eschatological Implications
 - b) Catastrophic
 - 3) (:4-5) Devastating Judgment Destroys Egypt's
Foundations and Jeopardizes Her Supporters
 - a) (:4a) Devastating Judgment Impacts Ethiopia as well
 - b) (:4b) Destruction of Egypt's Foundations
 - c) (:5) Death to Egypt's Supporters
 - b. (:6-9) Allies of Egypt Included in Coming Judgment
 - (:6a) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 1) (:6b) Egypt Humiliated by the Fall of Her Supporters
 - 2) (:7) Excessive Devastation and Desolation
 - 3) (:8) Edification Purpose of God's Judgment
 - a) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b) Unleashing of Divine Wrath
 - 4) (:9) Ethiopia Terrified as a Result
 - a) Frightening News
 - b) Fearful Anguish
 - c. (:10-12) Agent of Judgment = Nebuchadnezzar
 - (:10a) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 1) (:10b) Agent of Judgment Identified as Nebuchadnezzar
 - 2) (:11) Agent of Judgment Described as Ruthless and Violent

- 3) (:12a) Results of God's Judgment
- (:12b) Authoritative Word of the Lord
- d. (:13-19) All-Encompassing Geographic Hit List for the Coming Judgment
- (:13a) Authoritative Word of the Lord
- 1) (:13b) Purging of Idolatry and Arrogant Leadership
 - a) Purging of Idolatry
 - b) Purging of Arrogant Leadership
 - c) Promotion of the Fear of God
- 2) (:14-18) Places Targeted for Judgment
 - a) (:14) Pathros, Zoan and Thebes
 - b) (:15-16) Sin, Thebes and Memphis
 - c) (:17) On and Pi-beseth
 - d) (:18) Tehaphnehes
- 3) (:19) Final Summary of Judgment
 - a) Certainty of Divine Judgment
 - b) **Recognition Formula** =
Purpose of Divine Judgment
- 3. (30:20-26) Arms Battle – Breaking the Arms of Pharaoh and Strengthening the Arms of Nebuchadnezzar –
Ultimate Success or Failure Comes from the Arm of the Lord
- a. (:20-21) Past Intervention by the Lord to Break the Arm of Pharaoh –
Learn the Lessons of History
 - 1) (:20) Introduction to the Prophecy
 - a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 2) (:21) Defeat of Egypt without Possibility of Recovery
 - a) Image of Breaking the Arm
 - b) Impossibility of Healing
 - c) Incapable of Future Warfare
- b. (:22-25a) Future Intervention by the Lord to Oppose Pharaoh
and Strengthen Nebuchadnezzar –
Make Sure the Lord is on Your Side
 - 1) (:22b-23) Total Defeat of Egypt Leading to Dispersion
 - a) (:22b) Divine Opposition
 - b) (:22c) Dual Breaking of Both Arms
 - c) (:22d) Disarming
 - d) (:23) Dispersing
 - 2) (:24-25a) Success and Failure Governed by the Lord
 - a) (:24) Contrast between Success and Failure Detailed
 - b) (:25a) Contrast between Success and Failure
Summarized
- c. (:25b-26) Purpose of the Lord's Intervention –
Embrace the Lord's Sovereignty before being Forced to Acknowledge Him
via Judgment
 - 1) (:25b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:25c) Accomplished by Strengthening Nebuchadnezzar

- 3) (:26a) Accomplished by Scattering the Egyptians
- 4) (:26b) **Recognition Refrain**
- 4. (31:1-18) The Felling of the Mighty Tree –
If the Powerful Nation of Assyria Can Suffer Such a Humiliating Demise, How Much More the Arrogant Nation of Egypt
 - a. (:1-9) Magnificent Cosmic Tree – Greatness and Power of Assyria to be Compared to Arrogant Egypt
 - (:1-2a) Introduction to the Prophecy
 - a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) Authoritative Word of the Lord
 - 1) (:2b) Challenge to Egypt’s Arrogance –
Key Rhetorical Question Setting up the Comparison to the Fall of Assyria
 - 2) (:3-4) Testimony to Assyria’s Greatness
 - a) (:3) Compared to a Majestic Cedar Tree in Lebanon
 - b) (:4) Cultivated by Extensive Water Channels
Impacting Surrounding Nations
 - 3) (:5-6) Testimony to Assyria’s Impact on Other Nations
 - a) (:5) Spread of its Empire
 - b) (:6) Security Provided to Other Nations
 - 4) (:7-9) Summary of Assyria’s Majestic Beauty
 - a) (:7) Beauty without Boundaries
 - b) (:8) Beauty Unrivaled
 - c) (:9) Beauty Derived from God
 - b. (:10-14) Reversal of Fortunes Due to Pride – Tree Cut Down by King Nebuchadnezzar
 - 1) (:10b) Problem = Pride
 - 2) (:11-13) Retribution = Rejection
 - a) (:11) Agent of Judgment
 - b) (:12) Abandoned as Worthless
 - 3) (:13-14a) Lesson = Lowliness
 - a) (:13) Reality of Ruin
 - b) (:14a) Prevention of Pride
 - 4) (:14b) Destiny = Death
 - c. (:15-18) Final Resting Spot in Sheol – No Better Off than the Dregs of Society
 - 1) (:15-17) Reaction of the Nations
 - a) (:15) Mourning over Assyria’s (Egypt’s)
Descent into Sheol
 - b) (:16) Momentary Comfort over the Removal
of Such a Powerful Adversary
 - c) (:17) Matching Fate
 - 2) (:18) Application of the Parable to Egypt
 - a) Comparison to Trees in Garden of Eden

- b) Condition in Death = No Better than the
Lowest Elements of Society
 - c) Condemnation of Pharaoh and the People
of Egypt
5. (32:1-32) Two Laments over the Fall of Egypt
- a. (32:1-16) First Lament: Over the Fall of Pharaoh and of Egypt –
God Promises to Utterly Destroy Pharaoh and Egypt
 - (:1-2a) Prelude – Introduction to the Lament
 - a) (:1a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) (:1b) Authoritative Word of Prophecy
 - c) (:2a) Lamentation Commanded
 - 1) (:2b-10) Shocking Demise of Pharaoh
 - a) (:2b) Rebellious and Chaotic Sea Monster
on the Political Scene
 - 1)) Perception vs. Reality
 - 2)) Promoter of Chaos
 - b) (:3-8) Record of Egypt’s Fall
 - 1)) (:3b-4) Death – Taking Him Captive to
Expose Him to a Cruel Death
 - 2)) (:5-6) Desecration – Trashing His Carcass
 - 3)) (:7-8) Darkness – Turning Out His Lights
 - c) (:9-10) Reaction of Horror among the Nations
 - 2) (:11-15) Shocking Demise of Egypt
 - a) (:11b-12) Devastation of Egypt
 - b) (:13-14) Destruction of Egypt
 - c) (:15) Desolation of Egypt
 - 1)) Comprehensive Divine Judgment
 - 2)) **Recognition Refrain**
 - (:16) Postlude – Call to Mourning
 - b. (32:17-32) Second Lament: Egypt Hits Bottom in Sheol –
Descent into Sheol Eliminates All Boasting for Egypt as She is No Better off
than Any Other Nation that was Judged for Violence
 - (:17) Prelude to the Lament
 - a) (:17a) Dating of the Prophecy
 - b) (:17b) Authoritative Word of Prophecy
 - 1) (:18-21) Humiliating Reception as Egypt Descends to Sheol
 - a) (:18) Mourning Commanded as Egypt Descends
to Sheol
 - b) (:19) Boasting Eliminated as Egypt Descends
to Sheol
 - 1)) Preeminence Gone
 - 2)) Privilege Removed
 - c) (:20) Violence Slaughtered as Egypt Descends
to Sheol
 - d) (:21) Reputation Mocked as Egypt Descends
to Sheol

- 2) (:22-30) Vanquished Roster of Former Violent Powerhouse Nations
Lying alongside Egypt in Sheol
 - a) (:22-23) Presence of Assyria
 - b) (:24-25) Presence of Elam
 - c) (:26-28) Presence of Mesheck, Tubal et al
 - d) (:29) Presence of Edom
 - e) (:30) Presence of Phoenician City-States
- (:31-32) Postlude – Recapitulation – Egypt Has Joined the Other Nations
in Sheol
 - a) (:31) Strange Comfort as Misery Loves
Company
 - b) (:32) Divine Emasculation of Once Powerful
Egypt

III. (33-48) RESTORATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE AND FINAL CONSUMMATION

A. (33:1-20) ROLE OF EZEKIEL AS THE FAITHFUL WATCHMAN – ISRAEL MUST RESPOND IN REPENTANCE TO EZEKIEL’S WARNINGS

- (:1) Prelude – Authoritative Word of God
1. (:2-6) Explanation of the Watchman Function Regarding Culpability
 - a. (:2b) Function of a Watchman – General Principle
 - 1) Approaching Danger Creates a Need for a Watchman
 - 2) Appointment of a Watchman
 - b. (:3-5) Scenario of a Faithful Watchman
 - 1) (:3-4a) Conduct: Warns the People
 - 2) (:4b-5) Culpability: Blood is on the People
 - c. (:6) Scenario of an Unfaithful Watchman
 - 1) Conduct: Fails to Warn the People
 - 2) Culpability: Blood is on the Watchman
2. (:7-9) Application of the Watchman Function to Ezekiel’s Current Situation
 - a. (:7b) Ezekiel Appointed Watchman and Charged with Faithfulness
 - 1) Appointed Watchman for Israel by the Lord
 - 2) Charged with Faithful Performance of His Duties =
Hear and Warn
 - b. (:8) Scenario of an Unfaithful Watchman
 - 1) Conduct: Fails to Warn the People
 - 2) Culpability: Blood is on the Watchman
 - c. (:9) Scenario of a Faithful Watchman
 - 1) Conduct: Warns the People
 - 2) Culpability: No Blood on the Watchman
3. (:10-11) Disposition of the Lord Favors Grace and Mercy over Judgment
 - a. (:10b) Complaint of Hopelessness and Despair
 - b. (:11) Challenge to Choose Righteousness and Live
4. (:12b-16) Past Conduct Does Not Lock in Your Future Destiny
 - a. (:12b) Foundational Principles Regarding the Connection between
the Past and the Future

- b. (:13-16) The Present is More Determinative than the Past
- 5. (:17-20) Present Conduct Will Be the Basis for God's Righteous Justice
 - a. (:17) Misunderstanding of Justice
 - b. (:18-19) Two Examples of God's Righteous Judgment
 - c. (:20) Misunderstanding of Justice

B. (33:21 – 39:29) RESTORATION TO THE PROMISED LAND

(:21-22) Date and Setting of Messages Regarding Israel's Restoration to the Land

- a. (:21) Date – Report of the Fall of Jerusalem
 - 1) Calendar Timeframe
 - 2) Historic Reference Point
- b. (:22) Setting – Renewal of Prophesying for Ezekiel
- 1. (33:21-33) Restoration Impossible Apart from Obedience to God's Word – Rejection of God's Prophetic Word Confirms both the Remnant in Judah and the Exiles in Babylon on their Path to Continued Divine Judgment
 - a. (:23-29) Prophecy Rebuking the False Security of the Remnant in Judah – How Did They Reject God's Prophetic Word and What Were the Consequences?
 - 1) (:24) Thesis – The Promised Land Belongs to Us
 - a) Addressing the Prophet
 - b) Targeting the Remnant in Judah
 - c) Quoting their Boastful Slogan – Reflecting False Security
 - 2) (:25-26) Dispute – Do They Really Deserve to Possess the Land?
 - a) (:25b) First Argument – Specific Sins Disqualify them from the Promise
 - b) (:26) Second Argument – Additional Sins Disqualify them from the Promise
 - 3) (:27-28) Counterthesis – Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the People and the Land
 - a) (:27b) Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the People
 - b) (:28) Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the Land
 - 4) (:29) Purpose of Severe Judgment for their Abominations
 - a) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b) Deserved Judgment
 - b. (:30-33) Prophecy Rebuking the Superficiality of the Exiles – How Did They Reject God's Prophetic Word and What Were the Consequences?
 - 1) (:30) Professed Renewal of Interest in God's Word
 - a) Addressing the Prophet
 - b) Targeting the Exiles in Babylon
 - c) Quoting their Professed Interest in Prophecy – Reflecting Superficiality
 - 2) (:31) Exposure of their Hypocrisy
 - a) Outwardly Desirous of Hearing God's Word

- b) Exposed as Hypocrites by their Failure to Obey God's Commands
 - c) Inwardly Driven by Greed
 - 3) (:32) Exposure of their Shallowness
 - a) Attracted by the Sensuality of the Prophetic Word
 - b) Exposed as Shallow by their Failure to Obey God's Commands
 - 4) (:33) Alternate Recognition Refrain
- 2. (34:1-31) Restoration Requires Replacing Selfish Former Shepherds with the Messianic Shepherd-King
 - a. (:1-16) Replacing Selfish Shepherds with the Good Shepherd
 - (:1-2a) Prologue – Prophecy against the Selfish Shepherds of Israel
 - 1) (:2b-10) Condemnation of Selfish Shepherds
 - a) (:2b-6) Charged with a Wide Range of Offenses
 - b) (:7-10) Censured with Judgments Matching Their Offenses
 - 2) (:11-16) Commitment of the Lord to Personally Shepherd His Sheep
 - a) (:11-13a) Personal Care in Seeking, Regathering and Restoring the Flock to the Promised Land
 - b) (:13b-15) Pasturing Them in Restful Grazing Grounds
 - c) (:16) Proactively Restoring the Weak to Full Health While Destroying the Proud and the Oppressors
 - b. (:17-22) Rendering Judgment for Selfish Sheep Who Only Look Out for Themselves
 - 1) (:17-19) Transition from Judging Shepherds to Judging Sheep
 - a) (:17) Judgment Will be Individually Based
 - b) (:18) Judgment Exposes Those Who Not Only Act Selfishly, but Wreck Things for Others
 - c) (:19) Judgment Takes Into Account the Impact of Your Actions on Others
 - 2) (:20-22) Judgment Belongs to the Lord
 - a) (:20) God Will Make Things Right
 - b) (:21-22a) God Will Punish Oppressors and Deliver the Oppressed
 - c) (:22b) God Will Judge Individually and Without Partiality
 - c. (:23-24) Raising Up the Messianic Shepherd-King as the Lord's Servant = The New David for Israel
 - 1) (:23) The Good Shepherd Who Faithfully Feeds and Cares for the Flock
 - 2) (:24a) The Lord's Servant as the New David Reigning Among Them
 - (:24b) You Can Count On It
 - d. (:25-31) Ratifying the Covenant of Peace in the Millennial Kingdom
 - 1) (:25-27a) Blessings of the Covenant of Peace
 - a) (:25) Security
 - b) (:26) Prosperity – Showers of Blessing

- c) (:27a) Prosperity -- Fruitfulness
 - d) (:27b) Security
 - 2) (:27bc) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 3) (:27d-29) Deliverance from the Enemies of Peace and Security
 - a) (:27d) Deliverance from Enslavement and Oppression
 - b) (:28a) Deliverance from the Sword
 - c) (:28b) Deliverance from Fear
 - d) (:28c) Deliverance from Famine
 - e) (:28d) Deliverance from Disgrace and Ridicule
 - 4) (:30-31) Loyal Relationship with the Lord
 - a) (:30) **Alternate Recognition Refrain**
 - b) (:31) Privileged Relationship with the Covenant-Keeping God
- 3. (35:1 – 36:15) Judgment for Mount Seir vs Blessing for the Mountains of Israel -- The Restoration of Yahweh's Land Requires First Rendering Edom Desolate for Her Treatment of Israel
 - a. (35:1-15) Prerequisite of Restoration = Judgment and Desolation against Mount Seir -- 4 Reasons for Judgment of Desolation against Mount Seir
 - (:1-3a) Prologue – Addressing Mount Seir
 - 1) (:3b-4) Vindication of the Lord's Sovereignty
 - a) (:3b-4a) Divine Opposition in Assertion of Sovereignty
 - b) (:4b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:5-9) Hatred and Treachery against Israel
 - a) (:5) Charge of Hatred and Treachery
 - b) (:6-9a) Judgment of Bloodshed and Desolation
 - c) (:9b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 3) (:10-13) Appropriation of Yahweh's Land
 - a) (:10) Aggressive Expansionist Policies
 - b) (:11) Attitude of Defiance
 - c) (:12-13) Arrogant Boasting
 - 4) (:14-15) Gloating over Israel's Desolation
 - a) (:14-15a) Promise of Desolation in Return
 - b) (:15b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - b. (36:1-15) Restoration and Blessing for the Mountains of Israel
 - (:1-2a) Prologue – Addressing the Mountain of Israel
 - 1) (:2b-7) Returning Reproach on the Surrounding Nations for Their Insults against Israel
 - a) (:2b) Taunting by the Enemy with Arrogant Boasts
 - b) (:3) Tormenting by the Enemy for Good Cause
 - c) (:4-5) Taking Back the Land of Israel as God's Possession
 - d) (:6) Terminating the Insults and Abuse
 - e) (:7) Turning the Tables on the Enemy Nations
 - 2) (:8-12) Restoring Fruitfulness and People to the Land of Israel
 - a) (:8-9) Restoring Fruitfulness to the Land of Israel
 - b) (:10-11) Repopulating the Land of Israel

- c) (:12) Permanent Possession of the Promised Land
 - 3) (:13-15) Removing Israel's Reproach
 - a) (:13b) Stinging Insults Hurlled at Israel
 - b) (:14) Secure Future Promised
 - c) (:15) Shame Removed Permanently
- 4. (36:16-38) God's Motivation for the Restoration of Israel –
The Vindication of God's Reputation Motivates the Gracious Restoration of His
Wayward Elect Nation
 - a. (:16-21) Background for Restoration = the Scattering of Israel Because of
Uncleanness
 - 1) (:17) Polluting God's Holy Land
 - a) Activities of Defilement
 - b) Analogy of Defilement
 - 2) (:18-19) Punished by Dispersion
 - a) (:18) Reasons for the Outpouring of God's Wrath
 - b) (:19a) Response of Dispersion among the Nations
 - c) (:19b) Rightness of God's Judgment
 - 3) (:20-21) Profaning God's Holy Name
 - a) (:20) Israel's Disregard for God's Reputation
 - b) (:21) God's Concern for His Holy Name
 - b. (:22-32) Basis for Restoration = the New Covenant
 - 1) (:22b-23) Vindication of God's Holy Name
 - a) (:22b) Basis for God's Gracious Restoration of Israel
 - b) (:23a) Essential to Defending the Holiness of God's
Great Name
 - c) (:23b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:24-30) Sovereign Progressive Actions Accomplishing Israel's
Restoration
 - a) (:24) Regathered
 - b) (:25) Cleansed
 - c) (:26) Regenerated
 - d) (:27) Empowered by Indwelling Holy Spirit
 - e) (:28) Secured – in the Land and in their Covenant
Relationship with God
 - f) (:29a) Sanctified and Protected from Relapse into Idolatry
 - g) (:29b-30) Prospered – Fertility and Fruitfulness
 - 3) (:31-32) Remembrance of Sin Eliminates Nationalistic Pride
 - a) (:31) Loathing of Israel's Past Sins
 - b) (:32a) Squelching of Nationalistic Pride of Israel
 - c) (:32b) Repentance and Sorrow over Prior Unfaithfulness
 - c. (:33-36) Benefits of Restoration = Transformation from Desolation to
Paradise Conditions
 - 1) (:33b-34) Cleansed, Rebuilt and Cultivated
 - 2) (:35) Beautified, Fortified and Inhabited
 - 3) (:36) Divine Vindication and Guarantee

- a) **Alternate Recognition Refrain**
 - b) Guarantee
 - d. (:37-38) The Breadth of Restoration = Multitudes of Inhabitants
 - 1) (:37b-38a) Population Explosion
 - 2) (:38b) **Recognition Refrain**
- 5. (37:1-28) Revival and Reunification – The Valley of Dry Bones and the Joining of the Two Sticks – God Will Powerfully Work Through Revival and Reunification to Accomplish His Ultimate Kingdom Agenda for His Elect Nation Israel
 - a. (:1-14) Revival – The Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones
 - 1) (:1b-10) Divine Accomplishment of Revival in Transforming Dry Bones into Great Army
 - a) (:1b-6) Means of Revival Commanded
 - b) (:7-10) Miraculous Stages of Revival
 - 2) (:11-14) Divine Interpretation of the Significance of this Vision of Revival
 - a) (:11-13) National Resurrection of Israel Rescues them from Hopelessness
 - b) (:14) New Covenant Relationship Ensures Secure Dwelling in the Land
 - b. (:15-28) Reunification – The Joining of the Two Sticks
 - 1) (:16-23) Significance of the Joining of the Two Sticks
 - a) (:16-17) Instructions Regarding the Symbolic Action – Joining of Two Sticks
 - b) (:18-19) Interpretation of the Meaning of the Action
 - c) (:20-23) Integrity of Revived National Identity
 - 2) (:24-28) Seven Descriptions of Revival Kingdom Blessings for the Nation of Israel
 - a) (:24a) Messianic Shepherd King
 - b) (:24b) Covenant Obedience
 - c) (:25a) Permanent Occupation of the Promised Land
 - d) (:25b) Davidic Dynasty Guaranteed Forever
 - e) (:26a) Everlasting Covenant of Peace
 - f) (:26b) Established, Multiplied and Consecrated
 - g) (:27) Covenant Relationship and Fellowship
 - (:28) **Recognition Refrain**
- 6. (38:1 – 39:29) Defeating the Gog Squad – Yahweh Glorifies His Name by His Sovereign Control and Covenant Protection of Israel against the Invading Confederacy of Nations Led by Gog in the End Times
 - a. (38:1-13) Gog’s Military Mobilization and Greedy Objective
 - (:1-2) The Identification of the Invading Adversary as Gog
 - 1) (:3-9) God’s Summons to Mobilize the Invading Forces
 - a) (:3b-6) Divine Opposition and Control of Gog
 - b) (:7-9) Divine Mobilization of Invading Forces
 - 2) (:10-13) Gog’s Evil Scheme
 - a) (:10b-12) Motivation of Instigating Commander
 - b) (:13) Motivation of Participating Vultures

- b. (38:14-23) Gog's Expectation of Easy Victory Met with Angry Divine Judgment
 - 1) (:14b-16) Gog's Expectation of Easy Victory
 - a) (:14c) Strategic Timing and Circumstances
 - b) (:15-16a) Superiority of Forces
 - c) (:16b) **Recognition Refrain**
 - 2) (:17-23) God's Angry Divine Judgment against Gog
 - a) (:17b) End Times Invasion of Israel Should be no Surprise
 - b) (:18-22) Covenant Curses Unleashed by God's Wrath
 - c) (:23) Divine Objective
- c. (39:1-16) Gog's Slaughtered Carcasses Glorify God's Holy Name and Require Special Burial Instructions to Ensure the Cleansing of the Land
 - 1) (:1b-5) Military Rout of Gog's Invading Forces
 - a) (:1b) Divine Opposition
 - b) (:2) Divine Instrument of Aggression against Israel
 - c) (:3) Divine Disarming by God
 - d) (:4-5) Destiny = Defeated, Dead and Dishonored
 - 2) (:6-8a) Motivation = to Highlight God's Holy Name
 - a) (:6) Revelatory Retribution
 - b) (:7) Reinforcement of God's Holy Name
 - c) (:8a) Reassurance of Coming Divine Judgment
 - 3) (:8b-10) Magnitude of Gog's Defeat
 - (:8b) Transition
 - a) (:9-10a) Discarded Weapons Burned for Fuel for Seven Years
 - b) (:10b) Tables Turned on the Greedy Invaders
 - 4) (:11-13) Multitude Buried in the Valley of Hamon-gog
 - a) (:11) Burial Plot Designated for Gog
 - b) (:12) Burial Process Requires Seven Months to Cleanse the Land
 - c) (:13) Burial Participants Honored as God Glorifies Himself
 - 5) (:14-16) Maintenance Procedures to Ensure Total Cleansing of the Land
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- d. (39:17-29) Gog's Sacrificial Feast Reveals God's Glory and Highlights Israel's Restoration
 - 1) (:17b-20) The Sacrificial Feast of Gog
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 - 2) (:21-24) The Glory of the Lord Revealed
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- c) (:23) Vindication of the Discipline of Captivity
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C. (40-48) FINAL CONSUMMATION

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 - b) (:6-7) The Threshold of the East Gate
 - c) (:8-9) The Porch of the Gate and its Side Pillars
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 - 2) (40:17-27) The Outer Court
 - a) (:17-19) The Chambers and Pavement
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 - 1) (:1-3) Protection of the Sanctity of the Sanctuary by the Closed East Gate and the Privileged Prince
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 - 1)) Size of the City
 - 2)) Name of the City = The Lord is There

TEXT: Ezekiel 1:1-28

TITLE: *EZEKIEL'S VISION OF GOD'S GLORY:
THE FOUR LIVING BEINGS SUPPORTING THE CHARIOT-THRONE*

BIG IDEA:
**THE FOUNDATION FOR DIVINE CALLING IS THE VISION OF GOD'S
GLORY COMING IN JUDGMENT**

INTRODUCTION:

Ezekiel and the other exiles had to be feeling alone and abandoned there in Babylon. What a hard fall from their nationalistic pride in God's covenant promises related to possession of the Promised Land and His presence among His people in the temple in Jerusalem and His protection of His people against pagan enemies. But sin has consequences and spiritual apostasy requires God's judgment. As the scene opens along the river Chebar, God prepares His prophet for his difficult commissioning by revealing a vision of His awesome glory. God was still active and sovereign in the affairs of Israel and of the nations. Therefore judgment was coming – both upon Jerusalem and upon her surrounding enemies. Yet the tremendous promises of national restoration and millennial blessing would still be fulfilled. Our sin never negates God's faithfulness.

Leslie Allen: **God's transcendence.** The book begins and ends with **visions**. These visions are of a great God and what He can and will do. He is not limited to Israel's tiny boundaries or narrow interests. He is a universal God who will judge all the nations, untie the bonds that keep His people oppressed and downtrodden, free them from their slavery to sins of all sorts, and rule the nations.

Lamar Cooper: The vision of the glory of Yahweh was comforting because it confirmed God's continued concern for his people. But it was also the foundation for the call of Ezekiel as the prophet of judgment. This vision has five elements:

- (1) the windstorm (v. 4),
- (2) the four living creatures (vv. 5–14),
- (3) the wheels (vv. 15–21),
- (4) the platform (vv. 22–27), and
- (5) the prophet's response (v. 28).

Constable: Ezekiel saw God, in all His glory, at work in the world, not inactive, as the Israelites might have thought that He was because He had allowed them to go into captivity. And he saw God in the act of judging His people, not forsaking them.

Anton Pearson: From his vision Ezekiel learned that God was not limited to Palestine, but was present in Babylon among the exiles, descending to the earth on cherubim and storm (**Ps 18:10; 104:3**). The chariot could move swiftly in all directions, symbolized by the number four. The figures facing four directions (vv. 9, 10, 17) suggest the

thought that all parts of the universe are open to the gaze of God. The wings connected the vision with heaven and the wheels with earth. Thus no spot is inaccessible to the divine presence and energy. The omnipresence of God is hereby forcefully conveyed. The figure seated on the throne speaks of the omnipotence and sovereign rule of God (v. 26).

Ralph Alexander: Throughout the OT God's prophets were confronted with a revelation of his glory that made an indelible imprint on their ministry. When they became discouraged, they would recall the revelation of God's glory at their commission, which spurred them on in the Lord's service steadfastly.

Likewise, today if one is to minister for the Lord, that person must first have a divine confrontation and come to an understanding of God's great glory; for only in light of the knowledge of God will one have strength and perseverance to serve God humbly – no matter what the situation may be. This divine confrontation adds seriousness and purpose to the call of God's servant. He may not necessarily see a vision or have an emotional experience in this confrontation, but the Holy Spirit will impress God's character on the servant's heart as he seeks to live and minister in light of God's person revealed in God's Word. When one genuinely comes to see God's glory, he cannot help but fall prostrate in worship before the almighty God, even as Ezekiel did (v. 28).

This manifestation of the Lord's glory formed a backdrop for the announcements of judgment that Ezekiel would make. Since the glorious, holy God who gave the Mosaic covenant (**Exod 19**) could not tolerate disobedience to that covenant because of his righteous character, he had to execute judgment on the iniquity that his holy nature could not tolerate. Therefore, when God brought judgment on Jerusalem, his glory had to leave its residence in the temple (**10:1-20; 11:22-23**). However, the Lord's glory would return (cf. **ch. 43**) after the cleansing of God's people would be completed. Thus the revelation of God's glory became a significant theme throughout the prophecy, showing a unity of purpose within the book.

(:1-3) SUPERScription – HISTORICAL SETTING FOR THE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY

A. (:1a) Timing of the Revelation (with respect to Ezekiel's age)

“Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month,”

MacArthur: Most likely this was Ezekiel's age, since he ate relative to the king's reign is given in 1:2. Thirty was the age when a priest (cf. v. 3 with **Nu 4**) began his priestly duties.

David Thompson: This was exactly the age of Jesus Christ when He saw heaven opened at His baptism (**Matt. 3:16; Luke 3:21**).

Leslie Allen: **vv.1-3** -- These verses are like the title page of a book, or the information on its dust jacket or front cover. They are not intended to be exciting or dramatic, but to

orient us in as simple and direct a fashion as is possible to the subject matter of what follows. While it is quite true that you can't judge a book by its cover, a good descriptive title and mention of the author's name still provide a great deal of important information.

B. (:1b) Physical Setting for the Revelation (defined by community)

“while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles,”

MacArthur: A major canal off of the Euphrates River, S of Babylon.

Allen: It was part of a complex network of canals that came into being in the Mesopotamian heartland to provide artificial irrigation from the Euphrates and, to a lesser extent, the Tigris for the grain crops and date orchards, and also, in the case of larger watercourses, transportation of these and other goods.

David Thompson: When a servant of God finds himself in some place or situation that he never thought he would be, he needs to know that God is still sovereign and He has a sovereign plan to use him right where he is.

Derek Thomas: two features now emerge about the times in which Ezekiel preached.

1. A time of great change
2. A time of near despair

C. (:1c) Nature of the Revelation (defined by method of communication)

“the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”

MacArthur: This scene has similarities to the visions of God's throne in **Rev 4, 5**, where the emphasis is also on a glimpse of that throne just before judgment is released in **Rev 6-19**.

Leslie Allen: In the OT the “windows” or floodgates of heaven were opened to permit the sending down of either blessing (**2 Kgs 7:2; Mal 3:10**) or judgment (**Gen 7:11; Isa 24:18**) (see **F. Lentzen-Deis**, Bib50 [1969] 303). The subsequent content of the vision will make clear that here a revelation of judgment is in view.

D. (:2) Timing of the Revelation (with respect to the king's exile)

“(On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile,”

MacArthur: This is 593 B.C. The king, Ezekiel, and 10,000 others (**2Ki 24:14**) had been deported to Babylon in 597 B.C., Ezekiel at the age of 25.

E. (:3a) Recipient of the Revelation = Priest Ezekiel

“the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi,”

Wiersbe: It would have been much easier for Ezekiel to remain a priest, for priests were highly esteemed by the Jews, and a priest could read the Law and learn everything he

needed to know to do his work. Prophets were usually despised and persecuted. They received their messages and orders from the Lord as the occasion demanded and could never be sure what would happen next. It was dangerous to be a prophet. Most people resent being told about their sins and prefer to hear messages of cheer, not declarations of judgment.

Lamar Cooper: Although he was taken captive in 597 b.c., Ezekiel's prophetic call and ministry did not begin until 593 b.c. His name means "*God Strengthens*," an appropriate title for one called to serve his people in a time of crisis. His ministry continued until at least 573 b.c. (see **40:1**), but we know nothing of how it ended or of his final fate. His entire ministry was conducted in Babylon. Because of his return to Jerusalem in a vision as stated in **40:1–2**, some have held that he actually visited the city. Yet there is no indication he ever physically returned to the city after his capture.

David Thompson: [Ezekiel was anticipating entering upon his priestly ministry] -- This is probably why Ezekiel is so focused on the future Temple in Jerusalem that will be eventually built (**Ezek. 40- 43**). He was very familiar with the Temple and the Furniture and the ceremonies.

Charles Dyer: *The word of the Lord* points to the **source** of Ezekiel's message. Ezekiel was to receive the message **God** wanted him to deliver.

F. (:3b) Physical Setting of the Revelation (defined by political affiliation)

"in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar;"

G. (:3c) Nature of the Revelation (defined by divine inspiration and intervention)

*"and there the **hand of the LORD** came upon him.)"*

Feinberg: The *hand of the Lord* upon the prophet was actually a gripping which speaks of the special influence and power the Spirit of God had on the prophets; thus they became channels for the communication of divine truth. So important and prominent is the thought expressed here that the phrase occurs in six other verses of **Ezekiel: 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1** and **40:1**.

Charles Dyer: The hand of the Lord described Ezekiel's mandate for his ministry. He was not acting on his own initiative but was constrained by God to minister, a fact detailed later (**3:12-27**).

Wiersbe: The word of the Lord brings enlightenment and the hand of the Lord enablement (see **Eph. 1:15-23**).

Merrill: These three elements—vision [v. 1], word [v. 3], and power (or hand) [v. 3]—appear pervasively in Ezekiel's descriptions of his call and of Yahweh's self-revelation. The vision is the abstract message itself, the word is its interpretation, and the power is the means by which the message is effectually communicated. For the hand of the Lord to come on the prophet is to assure him of the Lord's affirmation and enablement.

Daniel Bock: The superscription ends with the divine coercion formula, an announcement of the hand of Yahweh coming upon the prophet. This idiom highlights the physical aspect of Ezekiel's call, referring metaphorically to the overwhelming pressure that God exerts on the prophet. In this prophet's ministry Yahweh's "hand" exercises complete control over his movements, even transporting him back and forth to distant places. More than any other prophet, Ezekiel is **a man possessed**.

Christopher Wright: A single word, however, captures the amazement of the moment more than any other. It is the simple expression *There* (3). Emphatic in its position, it focuses on the contrast between what is being described (or about to be), and where it is all happening. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is appearing, is speaking, is putting forth his mighty hand, there, in the land of exile, uncleanness and despair. Ezekiel, with his fellow exiles, most probably believed that God was far away, or to be more precise, that they were far away from God's presence in the Jerusalem temple. The exiles felt despised and rejected by those who had been left behind in Jerusalem (11:15). Yet even there, in remarkable similarity to **Psalm 139:7–12**, the powerful presence of Yahweh in all his glory was about to be revealed. God is **there** in Babylon! What comfort! And yet, as the storm clouds rush in over the plain towards Ezekiel, he knows that God is coming in judgment, terrifying judgment as it will turn out. No wonder he was scared witless for a week (3:15).

God is there. There are times when our doctrinal conviction of God's omnipresence needs to become an experienced reality again. Whether through geographical distance, like Ezekiel's, or through more spiritual or emotional alienation, the experience of exile from the presence of God can be dark and terrible. We may not be privileged with an overwhelming vision like Ezekiel's, and most of us will be grateful to be excused the privilege, but we can certainly pray for the reassurance of the touch of his hand reminding us that **God is there**, even there.

I. (:4-14) VISION OF THE FOUR LIVING BEINGS HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S PRESENCE

A. (:4) Arrival of the Vision of God's Glory

"And as I looked, behold,"

1. Images of Power

a. Storm Wind

*a storm wind
was coming from the north,"*

b. Great Cloud

"a great cloud"

2. Images of Light

a. Flashing light

“with fire flashing forth continually”

b. Bright Light

“and a bright light around it,”

c. Glowing Light

*“and in its midst something like glowing metal
in the midst of the fire.”*

Feinberg: The wind, cloud and fire (v. 4) are all symbols of God’s glory (see **Ps. 18:8-13; Hab. 3; Jer. 4:11-13**).

Daniel Bock: But the cloud that was blown in by the wind was no ordinary cloud. It was lit up with a brilliance whose superlative intensity is reflected in a triad of modifying phrases.

(1) It was accompanied by fire or lightning bolts darting back and forth.

(2) It was surrounded by a glorious radiance (*nōgah*).

(3) Its heart was lit up like molten metal in a smelter. The term *hašmal* is a hapax, related perhaps to *Akk. elmešu*, a brilliant precious stone used in the fabrication of divine statues to enhance its shine. LXX translates it *ἤλεκτρον*, “*electrum*,” which identifies both amber and a gold-silver alloy. The former is probably intended here. While its meaning remains somewhat uncertain, the employment of the rare term reflects the brilliance of the image but also enhances its mystery.

Derek Thomas: ‘Fire’ (1:4) is a frequent symbol of God’s holiness, purity and awesomeness in Scripture (**Exod 3:2, 3; 13:21; 19:18; 1 Kings 18:24, 38; 2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 10:27; 12:29; Rev. 1:14; 2:18**). And *storm clouds* are frequently used in Scripture to depict the Lord’s coming in wrath (**Ps. 29:3–9; 104:3; Isa. 29:6**). The Second Coming of Christ is depicted using the same imagery of storm and fire (**Matt. 24:30; 26:64; 1Thess. 4:17; 2 Thess. 1:7**).

B. (:5-11) Appearance of the Four Living Beings Described

1. (:5-6) General Appearance = Human Form

*“And within it there were figures resembling four living beings.
And this was their appearance: they had human form.”*

MacArthur: Four angels, most likely the cherubs in **10:1-22**, appearing in the erect position and figure of man emerge to serve God who judges. The number 4 may have respect to the 4 corners of the earth, implying that God’s angels execute His commands everywhere.

Feinberg: The church Fathers connected the living creatures with the Gospels: the lion, Matthew; the ox, Mark; the man, Luke; the eagle, John. However, other combinations were also suggested.

The hands of a man speak of the power of manipulation and a certain deftness of touch. The joining of the wings emphasizes the perfect unity of action on the part of the living creatures. Their faces are that of a man, speaking of intelligence; of a lion, standing for majesty and power; of an ox, displaying patient service; of an eagle, depicting swiftness in meting out judgment, and discernment from afar. The rabbis said of the living creatures:

“Man is exalted among creatures; the eagle is exalted among birds; the ox is exalted among domestic animals; the lion is exalted among wild beasts; and all of them have received dominion, and greatness has been given them, yet they are stationed below the chariot of the Holy One.” (Midrash R. Shemoth)

Wiersbe: There is also a connection here with the covenant God made with Noah after the Flood (**Gen. 9:8-17**). God promised not to destroy the world again with a flood, and He gave this promise to Noah (a man) and his descendants, the birds (the eagle), the livestock (the ox), and the wild animals (the lion). The presence of the cherubim before the throne of God is assurance that God remembers His promise and cares for His creatures. But it also reminds us that all of creation is used by the Lord to bless or to chasten His people. In this vision, they are a part of God’s judgment on His sinful people.

2. (:6) Four Faces and Four Wings

“Each of them had four faces and four wings.”

3. (:7) Legs and Feet

“And their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf’s hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze.”

Lamar Cooper: The term “straight” refers to their unjointed structure. The foot was like the hoof of a calf, rounded for ease in turning. This characteristic suggested the **stability** of these creatures in performing assigned tasks.

4. (:8a) Human Hands

“Under their wings on their four sides were human hands.”

5. (:8b-11) Adding Some Details Regarding Faces and Wings

a. (:8b-9) Regarding Faces and Wings

“As for the faces and wings of the four of them, 9 their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward.”

b. (:10-11a) Regarding Faces

“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. 11 Such were their faces.”

c. (:11b) Regarding Wings

“Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies.”

C. (:12-14) Articulation of the Four Living Beings Described

1. (:12) Impression of Their Movement = Straight Line Only

“And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went.”

Lamar Cooper: This suggests a sense of purpose, commitment, and availability for assignments.

2. (:13-14) Images Picturing Their Movement

a. (:13a) Like Torches

“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”.

MacArthur: Their appearance conveyed God’s glory and pure, burning justice (cf. **Is 6**) which they assisted in carrying out even on Israel, who had for so long hardened themselves against His patience.

b. (:13b-14) Like Bolts of Lightning

“The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. 14 And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.”

Leslie Allen: So here we have special creatures, supernatural and unusual, coming out of a cloud lined with fire. So far, Ezekiel hasn’t told us everything about his vision, but from what we already know, two things are evident.

- (1) Something that is supernatural and that involves God on the move is about to happen.
- (2) It is happening in Mesopotamia, to exiles who thought themselves hopelessly removed from God’s presence and out of the picture religiously, as well as economically and politically.

This visual display, and those that follow in the book, were by no means ends in themselves. The purpose was not simply to dazzle Ezekiel, but to point to a message. God is on the move, He is allowing Himself to be seen, He is appearing even in what people thought was a godforsaken place. What an enduring message of hope! How important it is for us to remember that God is never confined, never limited, never distracted, never disinterested in His people.

II. (:15-21) DESCRIPTION OF THE WHEELS AND THEIR MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS GOD’S SOVEREIGN POWER AND ACTIVITY

A. (:15-18) Description of Their Wheels

1. (:15) Alignment of the Wheels

“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.”

2. (:16) Appearance of the Wheels

“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.”

3. (:17) Articulation of the Wheels

“Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions, without turning as they moved.”

4. (:18) Appearance of Their Rims

“As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about.”

Constable: Most expositors view these cherubim as forming, supporting, or pulling a throne-chariot on which Ezekiel saw God riding (cf. **Exod. 25:10-22; 2 Sam. 22:11; 1 Chron. 28:18; Ps. 18:11; Dan. 7:9; Heb. 8:5; Rev. 4**). I think this makes sense. Perhaps the mobility of the wheels suggests God's omnipresence, the eyes His omniscience, and the elevated position His omnipotence.

Derek Thomas: God has shown his people that they are not forgotten; he has called from among them a prophet to speak his Word. The visions of Ezekiel have reminded us of some of God's great attributes: his holiness and power in particular. But these 'coloured pictures' have also depicted God's coming. If along the banks of the River Kebar nothing seemed to be happening; if, as some imagined, God seemed far away; if the prayers of his faithful people seemed unheard—the truth was otherwise: God was on the move. The councils of heaven were fully active. The rims of the wheels, which 'were full of eyes all around' (**1:18**), were meant to convey that God sees everything that goes on. Nothing is hidden from him. God has a plan which every day unfolds before us. It involves the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue his people and destroy his enemies. Here is our Deliverer: Jesus on a fiery chariot.

B. (:19-21) Description of the Movement of the Four Living Beings

“And whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings rose from the earth, the wheels rose also. 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. 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.”

Lamar Cooper: the cherubim were divinely appointed and empowered to do the will and work of God. . . These spiritual beings who were part angel, part human, and part animal were fitting representatives of the whole created order. Their activity affirmed the relationship of God to his creation as Lord of all things. This idea was vital in helping Ezekiel and the captives in exile and the people in Judah understand that in the midst of the storms of life, God was still on his throne. He was not oblivious to their circumstances.

Leslie Allen: In fact, the explanation is not complicated, and it relates to the **omnidirectional** emphasis already made in the preceding passage in connection with the cherubim. The two sets of wheels were within each other in the sense of being interconnected on different axes. One wheel intersected the other at right angles so that no turning was necessary to go in any of the four main directions, as **verse 17** says. (Each wheel could, of course, go in two directions since a wheel can go forward or backward equally easily.) Moreover, the wheels were so closely linked to the cherubim (**v. 22**), which they were right beside (**v. 15**), that there was no lack of response to the cherubim's leading (**v. 19**). Together, the cherubim all flying in concert and the wheels always ready to go without needing to turn provided a means of conveyance that could go anywhere, in any direction, immediately (**v. 21**).

That was the point: the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels so that this chariot could move fast. God was moving—and fast! Ezekiel and his compatriots needed to be encouraged and challenged. Ezekiel's vision provided him with a vivid symbol of the fact that nothing was keeping God from going wherever He wanted to. Just as He had protected these people and controlled their fortunes in Palestine, He was now prepared to protect and direct their lives in exile in Babylon. God had wheels! He was not limited. He could go anywhere anytime.

Christopher Wright: The main point of the construction was that it enabled the four interlocked creatures to move in any direction without appearing to swivel or turn (**17**). Though the presence of wheels gives a chariot-like feel to the whole apparatus, the multidirectional potential seems to surpass any two-wheeled or four-wheeled chariot. Total and unrestricted freedom of movement seems to be the primary function of these wheels. Apart from that, they had their own share in the majestic splendour of the rest of the vision: they sparkled, they were high and awesome, and they were full of eyes.

The wheels, then, provide the answer to how the living creatures were able to move as they did. For it would seem that neither their wings nor their legs were actually the primary means of locomotion. The wings made a frighteningly powerful noise when the creatures moved—comparable to a mighty waterfall, or a battlefield, or the voice of God himself (**24**), but it is not explicit that they were being used to 'fly', since the creatures moved horizontally as well as vertically. Ezekiel's vision seems to have something unparalleled in the paintings and statues of his surroundings. Strong legs and multiple wings seem to have indicated the capacity for support and movement. Yet here movement actually comes from an unexpected source—wheels. And even then, it is not the wheels themselves that do the moving, for they in turn are empowered or driven

by the spirit (20; cf. 12). And that spirit is further described as ‘*the spirit of life*’ (20, 21). The whole **dynamic scene**, even before Ezekiel has been able to take it all in, is animated by the spirit that he recognized as the Spirit of the living God—the same Spirit that would be needed to revive and empower the prophet himself (2:2; 3:24).

III. (:22-28) FOCUS OF THE VISION = THE ENTHRONED GLORY OF GOD

A. (:22-25) Vision Supported

1. (:22) Crystal Platform Over the Heads of the Living Beings

“Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads.”

2. (:23) Function of the Wings Under the Gleaming Expanse

“And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other.”

3. (:24a) Sound of Their Wings

“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;

Derek Thomas: When the psalmist describes God as ‘*riding*’ on a wind-driven chariot (Ps. 104:3), accompanied by a terrible sound, it is the same verb that is used in **Genesis 3:8** to describe God ‘*walking*’ in the garden ‘*in the cool of the day*’, following Adam and Eve’s transgression. The point of **Genesis 3** is not to tell us that God was out on some leisurely walk, but that he was coming in judgement, accompanied by all the terror that later ‘comings’ in the Bible evoke.

Sound also accompanied the visions of Isaiah and John (Isa. 6:4–8; Rev. 1:15). Of greater significance is the fact that such a ‘noise’ is said to accompany the Lord’s return at the end of the age (1 Thess.4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 1:10, 15; 4:5; 10:3; 11:19). Clearly, Ezekiel is telling us that **God is coming in judgement!**

4. (:24a-25) Dropping of Their Wings

“whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.”

Constable: Ezekiel also heard a voice coming from above the expanse over the creatures. It was evidently the voice of God (cf. Job 37:4- 5; 40:9; Ps. 18:13; 104:7).

B. (:26-28a) Vision Enthroned

1. (:26a) The Brilliant Throne

“Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance;”

2. (:26b) The Kingly Figure

“and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.”

3. (:27a) The Fiery Appearance

“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;”

4. (:27b-28a) The Surrounding Radiance

*“and there was a radiance around Him.
As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance.”*

Charles Dyer: The multi-splendored colors of the rainbow were refracted from the blazing light of God’s glory. The Apostle John described the same beauty in his vision of God’s throne in heaven (**Rev. 4:3**).

C. (:28b) Vision Defined = The Likeness of the Glory of the Lord

“Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.”

Duguid: God's glory is the visible manifestation of his presence among his people. . . Two kinds of imagery dominate the opening vision of Ezekiel: images of **motion** and images of **judgment**.

Cooper: The opening vision of Ezekiel's ministry affirmed three significant truths about God that are summarized in v. 28. First, the vision was a reaffirmation of the nature of God as holy, powerful, and majestic. Second, the rainbow was a reminder of God's promise-making and promise-keeping character (**Gen 9:16**). It was a rekindler of hope that God could and would help. Third, it was an assurance that nothing, including geographic location, separated one from God (cf. **Rom 8:38-39**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of fears and doubts were afflicting the Jewish exiles in Babylon?
- 2) What is the hermeneutical distinction between rightly understanding biblical symbolism and wrongly applying an allegorical method of interpretation?
- 3) What is the overall impact of this vision on you personally as you absorb it and meditate on it?

4) What do we learn about God from this vision?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: Here is an outline of the literary unit:

<u>1:1–28b α</u>	<u>Ezekiel’s vision of God</u>
1:1	Introduction
1:2–3a	Chronological clarification and general introduction
1:3b–4	A theophany of storm, fire, and radiant aura
1:5–12	The winged beings who fly
1:13–14	The fire and aura of the storm theophany
1:15–21	The wheels that could move on the ground
1:22–25	The firmament-platform and the noise made by the flying wings
1:26–28a	The throne and the enthroned deity; the fire and the aura
1:28b α	Conclusion
<u>1:28b β – 3:11</u>	<u>Ezekiel’s message from God</u>
1:28b β – 2:7	Commissioning to be a prophet
2:8–3:3	Ordination
3:4–11	Confirmation
<u>3:12–15</u>	<u>Ezekiel’s translation</u>

Lamar Cooper: Quoting **H. Parunak** – he has produced a more detailed structural analysis of **1:1–3:15** as a chiasm that demonstrates the intricacy of its design:

- A Circumstances of the Vision (**1:1–3**)
 - B Divine Confrontation: Chariot’s Approach (**1:4–28**)
 - C Introductory Word (**2:1–2**)
 - D First Commission and Reassurance (**2:3–8a**)
 - E Confirmatory Sign (2:8b–3:3)**
 - D’ Second Commission and Reassurance (**3:4–11**)
 - C’ Introductory Word (**3:12**)
 - B’ Divine Confrontation: Chariot’s Departure (**3:13**)
 - A’ Circumstances of the Vision (**3:14–15**)

Iain Duguid: Although Ezekiel, like other Old Testament prophets, hears the word of the Lord, for him **the visual aspect** of God’s revelation has a particularly prominent place. Thus the book is in important ways structured around the vision of God’s throne-chariot prepared for action in **chapter 1**, that of the abominations that cause the glory to depart from the Jerusalem temple in **chapters 8–11**, the vision of the renewal of the dry bones in **chapter 37**, and the vision of the new temple in **chapters 40–48**. God is

dramatically at work even in the apparently hopeless situation of the exiles, a work that the prophet is invited to “show and tell” to those around him. . .

In the meantime, alongside **weeping**, there was also room for **dreaming**. According to **Psalm 126:1**, “*When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.*” The dreaming actually started a long time before the captives began to return. When everything has been torn down to the foundations, when nothing remains of the structures of the past, but when at the same time there is confidence that the nation will rise again, phoenix-like, from the ashes, visionary dreams can flourish. There can be dreams of a future that will preserve the best of the past while avoiding the worst.

This context of weeping and dreaming describes well Ezekiel’s task. On the one hand, he speaks clearly and unequivocally of judgment and destruction. During the early years of his ministry, he spoke of more judgment yet to come. In 589 b.c., in spite of the warnings of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians, hoping to break free with Egypt’s help. It was a disastrous error of judgment; in the aftermath, the temple itself was destroyed and Jerusalem razed to the ground (see **2 Kings 25**). The people needed to know that the events of the fall of Jerusalem and its temple were no mere accidents of fate but were the result of the people’s sin. Those responsible had to be called to account.

Yet while he was called to tear down the ruins of the past, at the same time Ezekiel was called to portray also a message of **hope for the future**. Though the judgment was from God, so also was the possibility of restoration. In the opening portion of the book the emphasis is on tearing down: The ruins must first of all be cleared, yet hope for the future is not completely lacking. Likewise, in the latter portion of the book, though the emphasis is on hope and dreams of the future, there is also room for a return to criticism and weeping for the past.

There is thus both **continuity** and **discontinuity** in Ezekiel’s presentation of the Exile. On the one hand, things can never again be as they once were. Because of the idolatry of the past, God’s judgment has come upon his people with devastating effect. The glory has departed, not just symbolically but really from Israel. God has turned his face away, abandoning his people, leading to their certain death. Had that been all there was to the history of redemption, no one could have faulted God.

But amazingly in the midst of that sentence of death comes God’s re-creative word of life. God speaks to these people where they are, in exile! God tears the heavens open and invites his chosen prophet to see his glory, the grounds of both judgment and hope. There will be, after the Exile, life from the dead—not because of any claim Israel may have but simply because of the mercy of God. In the meantime, Israel in exile is not forgotten or abandoned by God but is to live in the light of that promise, with hope. Though they live after the coming of night before even the first rays of dawn, yet in the light of who God is and his free promise to his people, they can live in expectant hope.

David Thompson: Ezekiel is going to see a vision of God in which the LORD is sovereignly operating on earth.

OBSERVATION #1 – Ezekiel saw a storm wind coming from the north. **1:4a**

As this began, Ezekiel looked toward the north and he saw a stormy wind, like a whirlwind approaching. It must have initially looked like some odd electrical storm, because there was something like lightning flashes in the storm. The northern direction of this storm is critical because nearly all of Israel's enemies who brought evil upon Israel came out of the north. Even today many of Israel's enemies are to her north. To the north of Israel are countries like Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and if you go far north there is Russia. So many enemies of Israel came from the north.

What this text says is that these enemy powers are all controlled by God and when they move against Israel, it is even sovereignly authorized by God (i.e. **Jer. 1:14-15**). He controls the storm. What this teaches Israel and us is that Israel's enemies are sovereignly controlled by God and so are ours. What this warns is that a judgment of God is coming from the north against Israel and His glorious, living being agents will see to it that it is precisely carried out.

OBSERVATION #2 – Ezekiel saw a great cloud. **1:4b**

As Ezekiel kept looking at this ominous cloud, there was something very unusual about it. Now a cloud often displayed the glory of God for Israel and apparently that is what Ezekiel saw. It was perhaps a dark mysterious cloud that was rolling in and it featured an amazing light show. The cloud was flashing forth light continually. The cloud had a bright light around it. The cloud had glowing metal like fire in the midst of it.

We know from Revelation that the flashing of lightning is something that continually exists at the Throne of God (**Rev. 4:5**). So we may conclude that everything happening here is being authorized right from the throne of God.

One of the things that dominate Ezekiel is God's movement. God's glorious work is in motion and these living creatures will carry it out.

OBSERVATION #3 – Ezekiel saw four living beings within the cloud. **1:5-12**

In the middle of this electrical storm and cloud were four living beings. The word "*living beings*" means that these were real living beings. They are not symbolic figures. They are obviously very distinct from the other angels, but they are very real and very alive. Ezekiel goes to great lengths to describe the living beings. Later in this book Ezekiel will classify these living beings as being Cherubim angels (**10:5, 20**). They display the glory of God (**9:3**). So these are high-ranking, living beings sent right from the throne of God.

There are at least eleven descriptions we get concerning these living beings:

Description #1 - The beings had a human form. **1:5**

Ezekiel was impressed with the fact that they had a likeness of humans. These were real living beings.

Description #2 - Each of the beings had four faces and four wings. **1:6**

In Revelation there are four beings but they only have one face, not four, and six wings, not four (**Rev. 4:6-8**). I believe this is very significant. Because by the time one gets to Revelation, there is one more judgment to come and it will come with rapid speed, thus the one face and the additional wings.

Description #3 - Each of the beings had straight legs. **1:7a**

This probably means that it did not have a jointed knee. They had legs that were straight and tall in a complete vertical line. They could swiftly move straight forward without any effort. Apparently this is the point. They move in a straight direction in accordance with the Word of God. There is no variation. They carry out His commands.

Description #4 - Each of the beings had feet like a calf's hoof. **1:7b**

The foot was roundish. One of the things that this kind of hoof enables an animal to do is to scale mountains like they are nothing. We suspect that one of the things this indicates is that when God sends His judgment, there is no place that people can go to escape it.

Description #5 - Each of the beings gleamed like burnished bronze. **1:7c**

Each of the legs gleamed like burnished bronze. This imagery of burnished bronze is one that means there is a radiant glow that is as hot metal coming out of a fire. Daniel saw a vision of a man with the same thing (**Dan. 10:6**) and the Apostle John saw this in connection to the feet of Jesus Christ (**Rev. 1:15**). In all instances it reflects the glory of God and it portrays the idea that God can and will stamp out and crush that which is evil as a direct judgment from Him.

Description #6 - Each being had human hands under each wing. **1:8a**

Now one wing seems to be on each side of this being and under each wing were human hands. These beings are able to carry out judgments against humans that come from the hand of God.

Description #7 - Each being had wings that touched one another. **1:8b-9a**

These beings were connected to each other. Just as in the Tabernacles, the wings touched each other, so the real cherubim did in carrying out their assignments. They function as a unit.

Description #8 - Each being had faces that looked straight ahead. **1:9b**

These beings are focused on one objective and that is to carry out the will of God.

Description #9 - Each being had four faces. **1:10-11a**

Each being had the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of a bull and the face of an

eagle. Now the face of the man was the dominant face because it was located on the front of the being. The face of the lion was on the right side, the face of the ox was on the left side and the face of the eagle was on the back side.

The image indicates that these judgments will be real judgments against Israel. The judgment will be a ferocious judgment like that of a lion. It will be a powerful judgment like that of an ox. It will be a swift judgment that is as fast as an eagle.

The reason why there are four faces versus one face in Revelation is because at the time Ezekiel is writing, God was going to authorize four ferocious judgments to come against Israel – Babylon, Medo Persia, Greece and Rome. When you get to Revelation there is one left. It is the revived Roman Empire dominated by the Antichrist, who will unleash the most ferocious judgment against Israel that she has ever seen.

Description #10 - Each being had four wings. **1:11b**

The wings were spread out above them. Two touched each other and two covered their bodies. Four wings speak of four swift judgments that God would authorize.

Description #11 - Each being went straight in the direction of the spirit. **1:12**

They would not turn to the right or left. They did exactly what God's Spirit led them to do. Do not miss this key point. They went exactly where God's spirit directed them to go. These beings are moving under the control and in Harmony with direction of the Holy Spirit.

OBSERVATION #4 – Ezekiel saw the activity in the midst of the living beings.
1:13-21

Notice from **verse 15** again, just as we saw in **verse 4**, we learn Ezekiel "*looked.*" He actually saw these things.

Verse 13 says in the middle of these beings was something that looked like burning coals, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. It was like lightning flashes bright and darting back and forth among the living creatures. This certainly has to do with judgment that all stem from the justice and holiness of God.

Verse 14 says that the living creatures ran to and fro as fast as bolts of lightning. There was obviously tremendous activity and quick activity. When God authorizes judgment, there is no dilly-dallying.

Verse 15 says that there was one wheel on the earth for each of the four. This will be a swift judgment that will roll through the earth sanctioned right out of heaven.

Verse 16 says that the wheel was beautiful craftsmanship and one wheel was within the other wheel. Each wheel sparkled like beryl or chrysolite. This was one of the stones on Aaron's priestly breastplate (**Ex. 28:20**). This judgment these beings bring is priestly.

Wheels were intersecting wheels. When these wheels are moving, there is symmetry and harmony with a wheel within a wheel. Everything was being beautifully orchestrated by God.

Now keep in mind that this is judgment about to hit and when it hits it is carrying out the beautiful plan of God. They could move in any of four directions without turning (v. 17). They were “omnidirectional.”

The rims of the wheels were lofty and awesome and the rims of the wheels were full of eyes and could see everything (v. 18). They can move in any direction and carry out any assignment, anywhere.

From **verse 19** we learn that whenever the living beings moved, the wheels did too. The wheels were involved in movement of these beings so the purpose of the beings became the purpose of the wheels. Judgment was authorized from heaven to roll through the earth.

Verses 20-21 make it clear that the living beings followed the leading of the Spirit of God on earth (v. 12). The beings would move in accordance to the work of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the living beings and the purpose of the wheels were to carry out the will of the Spirit of God on earth. See, people do not like this about God. They want a God whose Spirit will just tolerate anything. That is not how God reveals it to be.

OBSERVATION #5 – Ezekiel saw what was over the heads of the living beings. **1:22**

He saw an awesome gleam of crystal spread out over their heads. This is a pure judgment coming right out of heaven that specifically is given to these beings.

OBSERVATION #6 – Ezekiel saw what was under the wings of the living beings. **1:23**

The wings were stretched out straight. Two wings covered its body and two wings touched the other wings on each side.

OBSERVATION #7 – Ezekiel describes what he heard concerning the living beings. **1:24-25**

There are four sounds that Ezekiel mentions that give us some great data about their work.

Sound #1 - Ezekiel heard what sounded like abundant water when they moved. **1:24a**
When the wings fluttered there was a thunderous sound like rushing water. There was tremendous power on those beings. It was like the roar of an ocean.

Sound #2 - Ezekiel heard a voice like the sound of the Almighty. **1:24b**
When these beings moved they were obviously moving for God. Their movement and

voice was His movement and voice. They are carrying out the sovereign judgment of a sovereign God.

Sound #3 - Ezekiel heard the sound of an army camp. **1:24c**

This immediately causes us to realize that God moves among military forces to accomplish His sovereign will. These beings are involved in stirring up military forces to accomplish God's purposes. They can stand still and let them carry out the will of God.

Sound #4 - Ezekiel heard a voice coming from the expanse above. **1:24d-25**

They apparently would stop moving when the voice told them to. They would lower their wings and stop moving. What this means is when God would authorize some military to come up against His people, these beings would oversee it. They monitored the action and lowered their wings and let the army do the work.

Now from this description we conclude that these beings have thunderous, unstoppable power. They get direct orders from Almighty God and they carry out those orders, apparently using military army camps to accomplish their purposes. When they are told to stop, they do. When they are told to move, they do.

OBSERVATION #8 – Ezekiel describes what was over the heads of these living beings. **1:26-28**

It is very clear that these amazing, heavenly beings are under the control of someone who sits on the beautiful Throne of God. This Divine Person has the appearance of a man (**v. 26**).

He has the appearance of a judge who has fire all around Him and the glory of God above Him. This one is none other than Jesus Christ and when Ezekiel saw Him, **verse 28** says he fell on his face.

Now carefully observe what is said in **verse 28**: all of this movement of these beings was for the glory of God.

As the book of Ezekiel begins, Ezekiel sees a glorious display of the glory of God in which God specifically and sovereignly authorizes horrible judgments to come against His own people. Why? The reason for all of this is because of Israel's rebellion (**2:3**). The reason why Israel was in Babylon was because of her rebellion. The reason why God sanctions bad things against His own people is because of their rebellion. God's first message to His own people in Ezekiel is the wages of sin is death. God is a sovereign God. God is Almighty God. He will not let Israel and He will not let us get away with sin. We are to judge ourselves or He will judge us.

John Taylor: At last, the prophet can lift his eyes upwards to describe what is on top of the platform. He has been approaching this with the utmost caution, beginning with the features farthest away, but eventually he comes to describe the throne (like sapphire, or

'*lapis lazuli*', a stone highly prized in the ancient world) and the One who sat upon it. Here either his eye or his nerve fails him. Whereas the four living creatures could be described in detail, all he could say of God was that he had human form and the appearance of fire (27). To say even this, however, was incredibly bold, for was not Yahweh invisible and therefore indescribable? It was an idea deeply written into Israelite thinking that no ordinary person could set eyes on God and live to tell the tale. Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Gideon and Manoah, all had remarkable experiences which proved the rule (**Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 33:20–23; Judg. 6:22; 13:22; cf. Deut. 5:24**), but in their case they met what at first seemed to be a human being who subsequently turned out to be an angel or some other manifestation of God. Their sense of shock was based on being wise after the event and therefore on not having given the divine messenger due deference. With the prophets, however, some kind of experience of God, either purely auditory or, as with Isaiah and Ezekiel, in a vision, was almost a necessity in order to authenticate their later ministry. For Moses, God spoke out of a burning bush (**Exod. 3:1–6**). Jeremiah had no visual experience, though his call was associated with two messages based on the sight of an almond-rod and a boiling pot (**Jer. 1:11ff.**). Isaiah, however, had a most impressive vision, all of which he recounts (**Isa. 6**), except for the actual appearance of the Lord whose '*train filled the temple*'. Ezekiel opens the door a little further and lets God be seen in a human outline but with so dazzling a splendour that nothing more could be seen or said. It is left to Daniel to go all the way and to describe in detail the features of the Ancient of Days (**Dan. 7:9ff.**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 1:28b-2:10

TITLE: COMMISSIONING OF EZEKIEL WITH MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

THERE CAN BE NO DEVIATION OF MISSION OR MESSAGE IN PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD OF JUDGMENT DESPITE OPPOSITION AND REJECTION

INTRODUCTION:

The vision of the glory of the Lord from chapter 1 prepared Ezekiel for his ministry. The calling and commissioning of Ezekiel are also important prerequisites to his prophetic burden. He did not enter into ministry out of self will but out of a divine sense of calling with all of the authority that God bestows. He was not to evaluate successful ministry according to the flesh – for he was promised much opposition and rejection. Instead, the measuring stick for a prophet of God would always be faithfulness – both to the mission and to the message.

Lamar Cooper: This section has an introduction (2:1–2) and a conclusion (3:12–15). Described within is the prophet's mission, his motivation, and the divine fortification for the difficult task ahead.

J. I. Packer: There is no other book in the whole Bible that presents the sins of God's people in as much detail as the Book of Ezekiel. Do you want to get the full picture of the sinfulness of man? Do you want to get the full picture of the hopeless situation of man? Do you want to get the full picture of the awesome character of God and His holiness? Do you want to get the full picture of the **wrath of God**? Study the Book of Ezekiel, and your life will be transformed.

Feinberg: The first two chapters deal with the call and commission of Ezekiel who received his call after he had fallen prostrate on his face at the vision of the glory of the Lord. The voice that spoke to him was not that of one of the cherubim for they are never authorized as commissioners to the service of God, but it was rather the One seated on the throne (1:28). Ezekiel's vision of the Lord in chapter 1 reminds us of the vision of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1), while his commission resembles that given to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:8).

(1:28b) TRANSITION – RESPONSE TO THE VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

“And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.”

Lamar Cooper: Like Isaiah (6:1–9), Ezekiel fell on his face in response to the awesome presence of God. Ezekiel, prostrate before God, must have wondered who could minister in such a place, to such people. The answer came in the voice that related the details of his call. The opening vision of Ezekiel's ministry affirmed three significant

truths about God that are summarized in v. 28. First, the vision was a reaffirmation of the nature of God as holy, powerful, and majestic. Second, the rainbow was a reminder of God's promise-making and promise-keeping character (**Gen 9:16**). It was a rekindler of hope that God could and would help. Third, it was an assurance that nothing, including geographic location, separated one from God (cf. **Rom 8:38–39**).

Bruce Hurt: Ezekiel had received his initial "job training", a vision of the **glory of God**, the single most important aspect of his preparation for his difficult task. Speaking truth to rebellious people is not an easy task but the key is doing so not in our power but God's power. In Acts we see the early church facing intense opposition and yet Luke records that as the Jewish leaders

"observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

Would they say the same about me?

I. (2:1-7) STUBBORN REACTION FROM THE PEOPLE PROMISED DURING COMMISSIONING OF EZEKIEL

A. (:1-2) Standing Before God to Receive the Commission

1. (:1) Command to Stand and Hear

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!'"

David Guzik: There were no chapter divisions in the original writing of Ezekiel, so we should not miss the fact that Ezekiel's call to prophetic work came from the overwhelming vision of God, His chariot throne, and the cherubim described in **Ezekiel 1**.

Peter Pett: The command to 'stand on your feet' revealed that God had an active purpose for him which had to be fulfilled. He could not receive such words flat on his face. God would not speak to him until he had stood up. Often we too are on our faces when we should be up and ready to be doing. Unlike the ancient kings He did not want man in humiliating postures. He wanted them erect and active in His service.

2. (:2) Enablement to Stand and Hear

"And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me."

Iain Duguid: The prophet himself is to provide an alternative model of behavior. Unlike Israel he is to listen to what the Lord says to him and not to rebel as they do (**Ezek. 2:8**). Throughout the vision, Ezekiel is the very picture of compliant obedience to the Word of God. When he comes face-to-face with the glory of God, he falls face down in humble submission (**1:28**); he is not obstinate in God's presence. When God speaks, he listens; when he is commanded to stand, he rises to his feet (**2:1–2**). However, this obedience comes not because of some special measure of holiness intrinsic to Ezekiel

but because of an infusion of divine Spirit (*rûah*; **2:2**). The entry of the Spirit not only raises him to his feet but enables him to hear God's speech (**2:2**). God not only hands the scroll to Ezekiel, he causes him to eat it (**3:2**). He is the One who will strengthen Ezekiel to make him as tough as his opponents. When the vision and commissioning are over, the Spirit lifts Ezekiel up and deposits him among the exiles again, where he sits motionless. Without God's power, Ezekiel literally can do nothing.

B. (:3-4a) Sending by God to a Stubborn and Rebellious People

"Then He said to me, 'Son of Man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children,'"

Daniel Block: Prophets functioned primarily as **messengers of God**, and the critical issue in the conflict between true and false prophets was which persons had actually been commissioned (*salah*) by Yahweh. Accordingly, the most serious charge that could be leveled against a true prophet was 'Yahweh has not sent you' (cf. **Jeremiah 43:2**).

Leslie Allen: Two topics are in view: the new role Ezekiel is to play and the moral nature of the people of God. First, the verb "send" is emphasized by its double occurrence in **vv 2b** and **4a**. It is a basic and characteristic term in prophetic call narratives (cf. **Isa 6:8**; **Jer 1:7**), which identified the human object as the authorized agent of God (cf. **Jer 14:14–15**). Significantly, Jeremiah's letter to the hostages in Babylon denounced prophets whom Yahweh had not sent (**Jer 29:9, 31**). Second, there is a concern for the ultimate recipients of the divine message. They are defined not yet as Judean exiles (**3:10**) but in wider terms as representatives of "the community of Israel" (בית ישראל), which is a standard designation in the book of Ezekiel for the covenant people, used eighty-three times according to **Zimmerli** (Ezekiel 2 564). The scope of the designation extends not only horizontally from the exiles back to the people in the homeland but also vertically in a series of generations (cf. **Jer 3:25**). Ezekiel's message in **20:1–32** is a virtual commentary on their sinful past and present. Their sin is characterized as rebellion, both as an attitude and as a succession of acts that exemplified it. The Hebrew term for rebelling (מרד) is a theological metaphor derived from a political act, the refusal of subjects to give loyalty to their king (cf. **2 Kgs 18:7**; **Ezek 17:15**). The present generation is defined as worse than their predecessors, both in external behavior and in internal attitude. Externally, they are marked by brazenness. Literally, they are hard-faced (קשי פנים), a variation of the usual "stiff-necked" (קשה ערף, e.g., **Exod 32:9**), intended to pave the way for the reaction they will present to the prophet according to **v 6** (פנים "faces" twice; cf. **3:8a**). Internally, they are strong-willed in their opposition to God.

Bruce Hurt: "Transgressed" is the Hebrew word "pasha" which is the strongest word available for expressing a covenant violation or one who breaks away from authority. The word is used in the diplomatic arena to express treaty violation (**2Ki 1:1**; **3:5, 7**).

Pasha conveys the fundamental idea of a breach of relationships (civil or religious) between two parties. It means to be in open defiance of an authority or standard of an agreement. Israel stood condemned of rebelling against her King and His covenant (cf **Isa 1:28; 48:8; Hos 8:1**). Webster adds that "*transgress*" means to go beyond set or prescribed limits (in this case the "limits" set by the Mosaic covenant).

C. (:4b-5) Speaking the Word of God as the Prophet of God – Irregardless of the Response

1. (:4b) Prophetic Proclamation

“and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

2. (:5) Prophetic Vindication

“As for them, whether they listen or not-- for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

Iain Duguid: The essence of the people’s transgression lies in their rebellion, that is, their refusal to recognize God’s sovereignty over them. In that attitude they have hardened themselves, externally and internally, becoming “*obstinate*” and “*stubborn*” (**Ezek. 2:4**). Though language will not be a barrier, they will not listen to Ezekiel because they are not willing to listen to the One who sent him (**3:7**). If responsiveness is to be the measure of success, Ezekiel’s mission is declared a failure before it even begins. But Ezekiel’s mission will be judged by another standard, for even though the people will not listen to his words, yet “*they will know that a prophet has been among them*” (**2:5**). That is, when the predicted disasters befall Israel, they will recognize that God had previously warned them of what was about to happen.

David Guzik: Collectively, it is a remarkably negative picture:

- They are the **children of Israel**, yet often fleshly and grasping like their father Jacob.
- They are a **rebellious nation**, often more like the Gentiles (*goyim*) than God’s own people.
- They have **rebelled against** God and are traitors and rebels.
- They are **impudent and stubborn children**, like insubordinate teens.

Lamar Cooper: God also described to Ezekiel the character of those to whom he was sent. Four terms were used to define their character. First, previously they were called “*rebellious*” here and throughout the call narrative (**2:3, 5, 6–8; 3:9, 26–27**). Except for the use in v. 3, “*rebellious*” in Ezekiel translates the noun *mēri* (“*rebellion*”). It usually is found in the expression (literally) “*house of rebellion*” (**2:5–6; 3:9, 26–27; 12:2–3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3**), although it also occurs independently (**2:7–8; 44:6**). The final clause in v. 7 is literally “*for they are rebellion*.” The emphasis is on Israel’s **disloyalty** to Yahweh their God. The history of the nation was replete with examples of their rebellion against God. From their first episode with the golden calf in **Exod 32:1–35** to the introduction of Baal worship in **Num 25:1–18** and in later occurrences in 1 and 2 Kings, there was constant recurrence of idolatry. This behavior accelerated after the division of the kingdom in **1 Kgs 12**.

In spite of the past history of the nation as a rebellious people, Ezekiel was not to let personal feelings or the hope of visible response from the people become the measure of his success as a prophet.

Second, the term “*revolt*” (*paša*, v. 3) was the word often translated “*transgress*,” meaning to go beyond the bounds proscribed by the law of God, or to betray a trust.

Thus the term referred to an act of defiance against the will of God. The people were rebellious because they had revolted against the commands of God.

Third, the people were described as “*obstinate*” (v. 4) or literally “*hard [qěšē] of face*.” This referred to their stubborn selfish will, which totally disregarded the commands of God’s Word. This stubbornness was further reinforced by the fact that even though the prophet brought a message from God, it made no difference in their behavior.

Fourth, the term “*stubborn*” reinforced the third characteristic and is literally “*firm [hizqē, a synonym of qěšē] of heart*.” The word “*heart*” (*lev*) is most often used in the Old Testament to refer to the “*will*” or center of volition. Thus the people were described as motivated by a fixed, stubborn self-will that dismissed the will of God as irrelevant.

With the message destined for such an unwelcome audience, there should be no surprise that God warned the prophet of the rejection he would face. His success would not be measured in terms of the people’s response but in terms of his obedience. Though he was told that no one would welcome his messages from God, the prophet still was responsible for delivering them. Once delivered, the messages placed the burden of response on the people (v. 5).

Daniel Block: Yahweh offers no illusions of glory. Israel is a household in revolt against its God. Ezekiel should therefore not be surprised if they reject his message. But neither is he to lose heart. His calling is simple: to declare the messages of Yahweh, irrespective of audience response, and to trust God for his security. The only reward offered for his effort and grief is that when all is said and done, his people will recognize that a true prophet (*nābī*) has been among them (v. 5). This vindication will obviously not come through masses of repentant converts, and probably not through the commendation of other prophets. All that remains is the traditional sign of a true prophet—the fulfillment of his predictions. But this requires a limited chronological range for at least some of Ezekiel’s prophecies. Little does the prophet realize that by the time he passes from the scene, his world and the world of his people will have been turned upside down—all in fulfillment of his word. And when the prophet’s word will be fulfilled, the character of God will be vindicated.

D. (:6-7) Staying the Course Despite Antagonism and Threats and Rejection

1. (:6) No Deviation from the Mission Due to Fear and Opposition

*“And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words,
though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions;*

*neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence,
for they are a rebellious house.”*

Bruce Hurt: God warns Ezekiel that his job description will not be the proverbial "bed of roses".

2. (:7) No Deviation from the Message Due to Rejection

*“But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not,
for they are rebellious.”*

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel is fully briefed on the negative reactions of his audience, so that their antagonism would be no shock that reduced him to panic and consequently to abandonment of his prophetic task. He is strongly urged—even ordered—not to succumb to the fear that would be a natural reaction to so daunting an audience as their characterizations in **vv 4a** and **5aβ** had indicated they would be. Unlike Jeremiah at his prophetic call (**Jer 1:8, 18**), he is not comforted with the promise of Yahweh’s presence or enabling: the latter assurance will, however, be given in **3:8–9**. At this point, to be forewarned is to be psychologically forearmed. Thorns are a standard metaphor of hostility (cf. **28:24; Mic 7:4**), while sitting on scorpions vividly conveys a sense of shock. Their opposition in demeanor and verbal retort was grounded in their basic antagonism to Yahweh, as a “*rebel community*” (cf. **3:7**). It was no reason for Ezekiel to fail to discharge the mandate of **vv 4b–5**. He must present God’s message in a forthright, take-it-or-leave-it fashion.

Lamar Cooper: The measure of success in God’s work is not always in terms of the amount and frequency of visible response. Success is to be measured in terms of our obedience to the words, commands, and will of God regardless of the visible results. So the mission of the prophet was to proclaim the word of God to a rebellious and unresponsive Israel.

John Taylor: Ezekiel is scarcely given an opportunity to make excuses for himself, in the tradition of Moses (**Exod. 3:11–4:17**) and Jeremiah (**Jer. 1:6**), for God immediately forestalls any hesitations by giving him an exhortation to take courage (**2:6–8**), followed by a foretaste of his message (**2:9–3:3**). This in turn is followed by the promise of the power to persevere in the face of opposition (**3:4–9**). To judge from his subsequent ministry, Ezekiel does not give the impression of being anything but fearless. It is almost as if he is immune to the many human reactions of fear and inadequacy and sorrow that dog most of God’s servants. It is therefore all the more illuminating to see the repeated way in which God has to tell him to be free of his natural fears and not to be dismayed at their looks. The verb here is a very strong word, meaning ‘*to be shattered*’. And the Israelite exiles are described as though briars and thorns are with you and you sit upon scorpions. The prophet’s feelings will be painfully hurt by the cruel and rancorous treatment he must expect to receive from the exiles in response to his oracles. But it will be easier for him to bear it if only he realizes that such reactions are entirely in character as far as his hearers are concerned, for they are a rebellious house.

Calvin: For some who seem to be sufficiently ready to obey, yet when difficulties and obstacles occur, desist in the middle of their course, and many recede altogether; and some we see who have renounced their vocation, because they had conceived great and excessive hopes of success, but when the event does not answer their expectations, they think themselves discharged from duty, and even murmur against God, and reject the burden, or rather shake off what had been imposed upon them. Because, then, many retreat from the course they had undertaken, because they do not experience the success they had imagined, or had presumed upon in their minds, therefore before Ezekiel begins to speak, God sets before him trials of this kind, and informs him that he would have to deal with a rebellious people.

II. (2:8-10) SYMBOLIC RITE OF COMMISSIONING SUBMITTED TO BY EZEKIEL

A. (:8a) Embrace God's Word – Don't Rebel

1. Positive Charge = Listen to God's Word

"Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you;"

2. Negative Warning = Don't be Rebellious

"do not be rebellious like that rebellious house."

Lamar Cooper: After being warned about Israel's obstinacy he would experience, Ezekiel was instructed to submit to the will of God and to indicate his obedience by eating what God offered to him. If **Parunak's** analysis of **1:1–3:15** is correct, this paragraph (**2:8–3:3**), which contains ten commands, is at the center of the chiasm and is therefore the most prominent paragraph of the entire section. This is because of the critical importance to be played by the **Word of God** in Ezekiel's ministry.

B. (:8b) Consume God's Word – Don't Spit it Out

"Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."

Douglas Stuart: The command to eat the scroll given him from God represents both the first act of obedience on the part of Ezekiel and also a divine means of encouragement to the newly called prophet. Scrolls were no more appetizing in Bible times than they would seem to be today. Yet by his obedience to this unusual command, Ezekiel shows himself to have accepted God's call to be a prophet to his fellow exiles and also demonstrates that he is willing to do whatever God commands him to do as part of the process. The Israelites were in deed rebellious. Ezekiel could not be if he were to serve God responsibly (**2:8**). The "*scroll of a book*" (Hebrew, *megillat-sēper*) would not be a dainty thing but a big, thick papyrus or leather roll. Indeed, Ezekiel reports that "*He caused me to eat that scroll*" as if it were something he would otherwise expect to choke on and not be able to consume. To his apparent surprise, however, it was as sweet as honey when he actually ate it (**3:3**).

C. (:9-10) Accept the Message of Judgment – Don't Sugarcoat it

1. (:9) Presentation of the Message

“Then I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it.”

Peter Pett: The scroll was handed over by a mysterious hand, possibly one of the hands of the living creatures (**Ezekiel 1:8**), or even the hand of the One Whose appearance was like that of a man (**Ezekiel 1:26**). Normally a scroll would be made of papyrus or leather, but this was a heavenly scroll in vision. We do not know what it was made of.

2. (:10) Pathos of the Message

“When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back; and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.”

Peter Pett: ‘*And he spread it before me.*’ A decisive and demanding action that required it to be read at once.

‘*And it was written on both sides.*’ Normally a scroll would only have writing on one side. This was to indicate that it was overfull and that what was contained in it would be of overflowing measure.

‘*And there was written in it lamentations, and mourning, and woe.*’ The message it contained was an unpalatable one. It presaged misery to come. And indeed for Ezekiel the next few years would be full of that message. Before building up hope he was first to proclaim the certainty of overflowing judgment. This would result in cries and groaning, weeping, and disasters and judgments. It was only after that that he would be able to offer hope.

Douglas Stuart: Characteristic of Ezekiel's obligatory preaching would be lamentation, mourning, and woe (**2:10**). In the Hebrew these words function as synonyms for one another, so there is no suggestion here that his message had three slightly differing facets or the like. Rather, what Ezekiel had to bring to his fellow exiles was a message of bad news, and plenty of it. In fact, when Jerusalem fell in 586 b.c. (**ch. 33**), God immediately gave to Ezekiel a message of hope for the future of Israel. So his preaching was not entirely negative throughout his career. But the bulk of it was indeed bad news for those to whom it was addressed, the Jews in exile as well as the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem, and the many nations of the Fertile Crescent whose actions in opposing and oppressing one another would not remain unpunished by the Righteous Judge of all nations.

Correspondingly, the faithful communicator of the Word of God has no right to soften the blow that hearing the truth may bring to those caught up in sin. While no preacher, teacher, evangelist, or counselor should want to emphasize the negative out of proportion to the positive, and while the gospel represents by its very essence good news announced to the whole world, there is also the inescapable fact that God has appointed a time at which He will judge the world. There is a hell, and it will receive

for destruction those who have rebelled against God. To hide this from people is to do them no favor. Lovingly, sensitively, but honestly and seriously, the warning must be heard along with the invitation.

John Taylor: The point of this description is rather to emphasize the contrast between the apparently unpalatable contents of the scroll and the honey-sweet taste that it left in the prophet's mouth. This sweetness had nothing to do with the nature of the contents, but came simply from the fact that these were the words of God, who makes the bitterest experience of life sweetly satisfying. Jeremiah expressed the same thought when he wrote: *'Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart'* (**Jer. 15:16**; cf. also **Pss 19:10; 119:103**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection in your service for Christ between the impact of the glory of God and your sense of calling to particular ministries?
- 2) How have we proven to be rebellious or stiff-necked or stubborn or hard-hearted or obstinate when it comes to obeying God's truth?
- 3) Does opposition cause us to shrink back from our mission or be tempted to water down the severity of God's message?
- 4) How can we be more attentive to the Word of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: In light of the characterization of the Israelites as rebels (**vv. 3, 5, 6, 7**), transgressors (**v. 3**), and impudent and stubborn (**v. 4**), it is no wonder that Ezekiel might be afraid to go to them as a prophet. Who wants a career full of hostility? Who could enjoy the kind of angry criticism and contempt that would be as painful to endure as thorns or scorpions? What modern-day pastor would choose to take a parish where he or she was guaranteed a hostile rejection from the congregation? Is it easy for a missionary to set off for a tribe or territory where he or she is sure to meet not merely hostile disapproval of God's message, but rejection personally? There are many modern-day saints who understand from experience exactly what Ezekiel was called to endure, but there are few who enjoyed the process. Rare is the person who can set out on a task knowing that people will hate him or her for doing it. But this is exactly what Ezekiel was called to do. His faithfulness stands as a challenge to ours.

Iain Duguid: This depiction of Ezekiel as the model of Spirit-infused submission suggests that there is more than one dimension to the Lord's characteristic address to Ezekiel as *ben- 'ādām*, usually translated "*son of man*." This expression occurs over ninety times in Ezekiel, compared to a mere fourteen times in the rest of the Old Testament. As has often been recognized, this form of address sharply distinguishes Ezekiel from the Sovereign God and the divine beings of **chapter 1**; *ben- 'ādām* marks him out as a mere mortal.

But this expression may perhaps also mark him out from all of his contemporaries. They are the "*sons of Israel*" (*benê yiśrā'ēl*, **2:3**), the true descendants of the one whose nature was to strive with God (**Gen. 32:28**); Ezekiel, on the other hand, is literally designated "*the son of Adam*." Just as the first Adam received the breath of life from God (**Gen. 2:7**), so Ezekiel as "*son of Adam*" receives an infusion of divine Spirit (*rūah*), which raises him, as it were, to renewed "life" by enabling him to obey. This unusual form of address may thus be an aspect of the creation theme we saw in **Ezekiel 1**. This re-creation theme emerges more clearly in the related passage in **Ezekiel 37**, where the coming of the Spirit (*rūah*) into the skeletons brings new life to the dry bones, but what happens later for the community happens first of all here to the prophet. Ezekiel himself is to be the founding member of a new community, empowered by the infusion of the divine Spirit to a life of radical obedience.

Like the first Adam, Ezekiel faces a test of obedience that revolves around the idea of eating, though in his case he is to eat whatever the Lord commands him to (**Ezek. 2:8**) rather than to abstain from eating what the Lord prohibits. In another reversal of the original sin, what Ezekiel is given to eat is anything but "*good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom*" (**Gen. 3:6**); rather, it is a scroll covered on both sides with words of lament and mourning and woe (**Ezek. 2:10**). But though its appearance is unattractive, to the obedient eater it tasted "*as sweet as honey*" (**3:3**). Ezekiel's obedient consumption of the scroll is his only activity in an otherwise completely passive vision. By it, he is equipped as God's messenger to go and speak the unpalatable truth to his fellow exiles.

Feinberg: As one reads the chapter of the prophecy he is struck by the clear picture God gives of the hardened, rebellious condition of His people. Some may be inclined to ask, why a prophet at all? Had the Israelites not become the very embodiment and symbol of opposition and revolt against God? But God's love could not let them go without another and another, and still another, loving entreaty to flee to the refuge available in God Himself. Is not this the basis of all missionary endeavor to Israel today? True, they have opposed the message of the gospel and have refused it repeatedly, but the loving heart of God would warn them again while it is the day of His boundless grace.

Besides the local application, God still works in all the contemporary world despite the indifference and rejection of Him which is prevalent. May we today fortify ourselves with the same resources by which Ezekiel was encouraged in his ministry. Futility was not then and need not be now a barrier to service for God.

David Thompson: GOD, BY HIS SPIRIT, CALLED EZEKIEL TO BE A PROPHET TO HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL AND GAVE HIM THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ACCURATELY COMMUNICATE HIS WORD REGARDLESS OF THE SUBJECT AND REGARDLESS OF THEIR RESPONSE.

vv. 6-9

Attitude #1 - He is not to fear them. **2:6a**

Those who are in tune with the Holy Spirit need not fear fleshly rebels. Even though they may threaten them, God's ministers are not to fear them. Sometimes we get intimidated by others who reject truth. Our job is not to fear them, but to tell them the truth.

Attitude #2 - He is not to fear their words. **2:6b**

God's own people would be nothing but thistles and thorns to Ezekiel. His ministry would be like sitting with scorpions. They would not be friendly to him or what he had to say. But he was to stick to his assignment even though they were a "*rebellious house*." The entire household, the nation Israel, was in total resistance against God and His Word.

Attitude #3 - He is not to fear their presence. **2:6c**

When your assignment is to minister to people who don't like you or your message, it can be very intimidating. God did not want Ezekiel afraid of them or their faces.

Attitude #4 - He is to speak God's Word. **2:7**

This is what a minister's job is—you preach and speak God's Word. We are not to preach my convictions or opinions or philosophies or imaginations; the job of a minister is to speak forth God's Word in a way that is accurate. . . . The job of the minister and the job of Ezekiel is not to put together some oratorical imaginative lecture; it was and is to accurately proclaim God's Word. He is to do this regardless of the response of the people.

Attitude #5 - He is to listen to God's Word. **2:8a**

Regardless of the audience, Ezekiel's job is to understand and communicate accurately the Word of God. What this shows us is that we could be surrounded by people who don't love God's Word and we can still love it. We can live in a world in which most don't want to hear God's Word and we do.

Attitude #6 - He is to feed on God's Word. **2:8b-10**

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TEXT: Ezekiel 3:1-15

TITLE: REINFORCEMENT OF THE COMMISSIONING OF THE FAITHFUL COMMUNICATOR OF GOD'S WORD

BIG IDEA:

THE REINFORCEMENT OF EZEKIEL'S COMMISSIONING STRESSES

- **THE VALUE OF THE WORD OF GOD,**
- **THE RESOLVE TO FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD**
- **AND THE ACTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

This continuation of the calling and commissioning of Ezekiel progresses from God's role in feeding the prophet His Word to the responsibility to obey the charge to faithfully proclaim that same Word to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The degree of difficulty of the mission derives from the rebellious stubbornness of an obstinate nation that has a history of rejecting God's Word and His messengers. Regardless of the negative response and intimidating opposition, Ezekiel has been supernaturally strengthened and needs to remain faithful in His task. The dynamic activity of the Spirit of God transports the prophet to the banks of the river where his mission will begin after a seven day adjustment period.

I. (:1-3) THE VALUE OF THE WORD OF GOD -- THE FAITHFUL COMMUNICATOR OF GOD'S WORD MUST FIRST FEED ON GOD'S WORD

A. (:1) Priority of Feeding on the Word of God

1. First Chew on God's Word Yourself

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll,'"

2. Then Communicate God's Word to Others

"and go, speak to the house of Israel."

B. (:2) Process of Feeding on the Word of God

1. Responsibility We Have to Prepare to Receive the Word

"So I opened my mouth,"

2. Role of God to Apply the Word to Our Hearts and Minds

"and He fed me this scroll."

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel was commanded four times to eat the scroll, then to go preach his message to the Israelites. These commands revealed that the message of the Old Testament prophets was external and originated with God. They did not discover the truths they preached through logic or deduction but through divine revelation. Nevertheless, God did not supplant the personality of the prophets through whom he

spoke. Their messages also reflected their personalities, backgrounds, and individual character traits. Thus the truths that emerged were neither wholly from the prophets alone nor from God alone but from both. Their messages were divine truths through human channels.

David Thompson: Carefully observe from **verse 2** that Ezekiel was fed the scroll by God. God is the One who feeds His people. Understanding God's Word is a true gift and blessing of God.

C. (:3) Pleasant Impact of the Word of God

1. Internalizing a Difficult Message

“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.’”

MacArthur: God's messenger must first internalize God's truth for himself, then preach it.

Daniel Block: the event demonstrates the nature of the prophetic office. Ezekiel is not a psychopath but a man filled, nourished, and empowered by the divine word. More than any other prophet, he will embody the message he proclaims, functioning as a sign of its reality and power (cf. **24:24**). Herein lies the key to the prophet's authority: he carries in his own body the word of God.

2. Internalizing a Delicious Meal

“Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.”

Feinberg: Though the message was a bitter and difficult one, he had the joy of knowing he was the channel for the Lord's truth to Israel. No matter how painful the labor, there is satisfaction in finding and doing the will of God and in realizing service in fellowship with the living God.

Charles Dyer: The sweetness came from the source of the words (God) rather than the content of the words (judgment).

Lamar Cooper: When Ezekiel obeyed the command to consume the scroll, he discovered that its taste was sweet though its message was stern (**vv. 2–3**). The subject of his message was judgment, a message that was just and right in light of Judah's rebellion and disobedience.

MacArthur: Even though the message was judgment on Israel, the scroll was sweet because it was God's Word (cf. **Pss 19:10; 119:103**) and because it vindicated God in holiness, righteousness, glory, and faithfulness, in which Jeremiah also delighted (**Jer 15:16**). Bitterness also was experienced by the prophet (**3:14**) in the message of judgment confronting Judah's rebellion (**v. 9**). The Apostle John records a similar bittersweet experience with the Word of God in **Rev 10:9, 10**.

II. (:4-11) THE RESOLVE TO FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD -- THE FAITHFUL COMMUNICATOR OF GOD'S WORD MUST BE FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGING RESISTANCE

A. (:4) Commissioned to a Challenging Mission

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.'"

Lamar Cooper: vv. 4-11 -- These verses reiterate the message of 2:3-7. Their unity is confirmed by the parallel phrases at the beginning and end, "Go now to the house of Israel" in v. 4 and "Go now to your countrymen in exile" in v. 11. The focus is on the difficulty of the assigned task and the specific qualities with which God had endowed the prophet to enable him to face opposition. The irony in this passage is its observation that foreigners would have been more receptive to a message from God than were the Israelites. The difficulties of cross-cultural communication are nothing compared to the obstacle of spiritual blindness.

B. (:5-6) The Challenge is Surprising -- Not Due to Cross-Cultural Differences

"For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you,"

David Thompson: This would be one odd ministry. He was being sent to a people who could clearly understand God's Word in their own language, but they would treat God's Word as if it were a foreign language.

Bruce Hurt: The point is that Israel was more hardened than the worst of the nations round her. Going to another culture and nation would have been difficult because of the language barrier, the results would have been more rewarding for they would listen to him. It is amazing and sad that those who knew nothing of the One Living God would have been more responsive than those who claimed His Name.

C. (:7) The Challenge Involves Stubborn Resistance

1. Don't Take the Resistance Personally

"yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me."

Douglas Stuart: Perhaps the key statement in the present passage is found in verse 7, "Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me." Ezekiel must understand that the rejection he encounters is not ultimately personally directed, though it may appear so. If he speaks only what God has given him, adding nothing of his own making to the inspired word (2:10; 3:4), then he can at least have the confidence that any lack of acceptance of his message is not his fault.

2. Expect Stubborn Resistance

“Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.”

Bruce Hurt: Obstinate describes the whole house of Israel as fixed and unyielding in course or purpose with the implication of usually an unreasonable persistence in such behavior. The whole house of Israel is perversely adhering to their opinion, purpose, and course (in this case headed for disaster) in spite of God's reasoning, arguments, and persuasion through his prophets like Ezekiel. In **3:10** Ezekiel by contrast was to have a supple, teachable, tender heart ready and willing to receive all of the Words of the LORD. How is your heart? Tough or tender? Resistant or receptive to His Word.

D. (:8-9) The Challenge is Scary – But God Has Hardened Ezekiel for the Mission

1. (:8-9a) Resolve Enabled by Divine Hardening

*“Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces,
and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.
Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead.”*

Daniel Block: Yahweh assures Ezekiel that he will equip him fully with the emotional resources needed for the challenge—I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their forehead. Instead of being hardened against God, he will become “Ezekiel” (*yēhezqē’l*, “God hardens”) in the fullest sense of the name. To emphasize the superlative degree of hardening, Yahweh compares the mettle of his forehead with emery (*šāmîr*), a form of corundum, the hardest substance known at the time, and here described as harder than flint. This divine hardening rendered realistic Yahweh’s challenge to Ezekiel not to fear or be terrified (*tēḥat*), emotionally shattered, by the rebellious reaction of his audience.

Charles Dyer: Figuratively “forehead” expresses determination or defiance (cf. **Isa. 48:4; 50:7**, “face” is lit., “forehead”; **Jer. 3:3**, “the brazen look of a prostitute” is lit., “a harlot’s forehead”; **48:45**). Ezekiel’s determination would not waver when beset by opposition.

2. (:9b) Resolve Required by Opposition and Intimidation

*“Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them,
though they are a rebellious house.”*

Leslie Allen: vv. **5-9** -- The continuation of the basic message in **2:3-4a** was concerned with Israel’s fundamental rejection of Yahweh, while the context of **2:7a** had to do with Ezekiel’s hostile reception in the constituency to which he was being sent and with the need for an unflinching commitment to his task (**2:6**). These two themes are now developed together. The three parties of Yahweh, Ezekiel, and Israel would be split adversarially: Israel vs. Yahweh and Ezekiel.

E. (:10-11) The Challenge Requires Faithful Communication of God’s Message

1. (:10) Pay Attention to God’s Authoritative Message

“Moreover, He said to me, ‘Son of man, take into your heart all My

words which I shall speak to you, and listen closely.”

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel also had a part to play in this partnership with Yahweh. His prophetic ministry must be in tune with his rite of ordination. Two lessons are drawn. First, the once-for-all command to digest the scroll in **3:3a** was to find a constant counterpart in his inner acceptance of God’s messages. Second, the command to “hear” in that sacramental rite, which was symbolically interpreted as eating with one’s mouth (**2:8**), must be a watchword for his future ministry.

2. (:11) Proclaim God’s Authoritative Message

“And go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”

John Taylor: In the concluding words of his vision Ezekiel hears his sphere of ministry specifically defined as the people in exile (lit. ‘*to the Gôlâ, to the sons of thy people*’). For all practical purposes the exiles were the house of Israel as far as Ezekiel was concerned; and they were his people for whom he had a responsibility. He was not to be influenced by their reactions to his words, but he was to declare authoritatively a message that was not his own, Thus says the Lord God. At the same time the phrase all my words that I shall speak to you allows for the possibility of further revelations that are yet to come to Ezekiel for him to assimilate and to pass on to his hearers.

III. (:12-15) THE ACTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD -- THE FAITHFUL COMMUNICATOR OF GOD’S WORD MUST BE DRIVEN BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

A. (:12) The Activity of the Spirit of God Reinforces the Glory of God

“Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, ‘Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place.’”

Douglas Stuart: In **verse 12**, the statement, “*Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place*” is apparently the result of a scribe’s copy mistake, at a time when the Hebrew letter *mem* could easily be mistaken for the Hebrew letter *kaph*. Thus an original *berûm* (“*as ... arose*”) was miscopied into *barûk* (“*blessed ...*”). It would be best, then, to translate “*I heard behind me a great thunderous sound [Hebrew, gôl] as the glory of the Lord arose from its place,*” which fits the context completely and lets us know that God’s great omnidirectional chariot was taking off and Ezekiel’s inaugural vision had come to an end.

Peter Pett: Some have suggested translating, ‘*Then the Spirit lifted me up and as the glory of Yahweh arose from its place I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake.*’ This translation requires the changing of *kaph* in *brk* (to bless) to *mem* to make it *brm* (using the root *rum* - to lift up). These two letters were easily confused in ancient Hebrew. They see the text as it stands as a little awkward, They suggest that after the great roaring or earthquake we do not expect an interjection, especially as the great roaring is repeated in **Ezekiel 3:13**, nor, they say, does ‘*from His place*’ fit well

with the interjection. The sense is in fact fairly similar but loses the paean of praise. However it seems to us that the text makes good sense as it stands.

David Guzik: Having been given such a difficult commission, it was important for Ezekiel to remain impressed by and confident in **the glory of the LORD**.

B. (:13) The Activity of the Spirit of God Makes a Lot of Noise

“And I heard the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound.”

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel was lifted by the Spirit (v. 12), the same activating force of 2:2. This was a subjective visionary experience like the one experienced in 8:3 when he returned in a vision to Jerusalem. As he was “*lifted*,” he also heard the sound of the wings of the creatures and the movement of the wheels, suggesting the movement of the chariot throne and the end of the vision (v. 13). The Spirit took the prophet to his place among the captives by the River Kebar at Tel Abib (v. 15). This was the same location identified in 1:1, where only the river was mentioned. But here in v. 15 the name of one city of the exile appears.

C. (:14) The Activity of the Spirit of God Takes Me Out of My Comfort Zone

1. Lifts Me up and Takes Me Away

“So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away;”

2. Stirs My Emotions

“and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit,”

Two possibilities here:

- Ezekiel was wrestling internally with the challenging message of judgment
- Ezekiel was identifying with God’s indignation against the sins of His people

Clarke: translates the verse: “Being filled with indignation at the wickedness and obstinacy of my people, I went, determining to speak the word of God without disguise, and to reprove them sharply for their rebellion; and yet I was greatly distressed because of the heavy message which I was commanded to deliver.”

Feinberg: As Ezekiel was conveyed to Tel-abib, he entered into the spirit of his message, projecting himself into bitterness and intensity of spirit. He assumed the same position as God did toward their sin; like Jeremiah (6:11) he shared God’s indignation against Israel.

3. Controls My Destiny

“and the hand of the LORD was strong on me.”

Douglas Stuart: The bitterness and heat (anger and agitation) that he felt were understandable. His life had been changed by the call of God from what may well have been a quiet, perhaps even comfortably secure existence to one characterized, according

to God's promise, by difficulty, rejection, and hostility. The word "but" should read "and" in **verse 14**, since the idea of the Lord's hand being "strong" (Hebrew, *hāzāqāh*) upon someone is a way of conveying that one has been forced into a difficult set of circumstances. We already learned from **1:3** that the Lord's hand (control) was on Ezekiel. Now we know that it was not always a pleasant experience.

D. (:15) The Activity of the Spirit of God Disturbs the People Around Me

"Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Telabib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them."

Daniel Block: The encounter with God, the digestion of the scroll, the charge to go and preach to an unresponsive audience, the hardening of his forehead, the sound of the throne-chariot, and the pressure of the hand of Yahweh upon him have left Ezekiel in a wretched state—socially ostracized, physically exhausted, and emotionally disturbed.

Lamar Cooper: One other fact that contributed to the overwhelming weight of the moment was the prophet's declaration, "I sat among them seven days" (**v. 15**). As a prophet in the midst of the people, he was able to identify their needs and feel the weight of impending judgment. It is a reminder that we must identify with the needs of those who search for God. While we do not participate with them in a godless lifestyle, we must seek to understand their emptiness and alienation if we are to be effective communicators of the words of God.

John Taylor: On the period of seven days (**15**), compare Ezra's experience of sitting in a state of horror until the evening sacrifice (**Ezra 9:4**). Job's friends sat with him for seven days and seven nights without speaking a word to him (**Job 2:13**). Saul of Tarsus needed three days without food and vision to recover from his Damascus Road experience (**Acts 9:9**). Perhaps it is not without significance that seven days was the period for the consecration of a priest (**Lev. 8:33**) and Ezekiel may have regarded this as the preparation for his ordination to a prophetic priesthood. Certainly he was not yet ready to open his mouth in prophecy. A **period of readjustment** was needed as he sat with his fellow-exiles and allowed the vision and the message to sink in. The message that he had received was a horrifying one, of judgment and misery and bloodshed. What made it even more horrifying was that he had to proclaim it not just to the winds, but to real people whom he knew and liked, who had suffered with him on the long journey from Jerusalem to Babylon, and with whom he had learnt to live in the strange new community of the exiles. 'Zeal for God becomes tempered and humanized in actual service' (**Davidson**).

Charles Dyer: Ezekiel's vision of God's glory had provided the needed perspective for his task (**1:4—2:7**). The message he was to deliver was provided by God (**2:8—3:11**). Then he needed motivation to direct him to the task. That motivation was provided by the 'hand of the LORD' (cf. **1:3**). He was first guided by the Spirit to his place of ministry (**3:12-15**); he was then formally appointed as God's watchman to Israel (**vv. 16-21**); then the Lord imposed several physical restraints on Ezekiel (**vv. 22-27**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When do we become so consumed with ministry activity that we fail to properly nourish ourselves with the Word of God as our priority?
- 2) Are Christians today too soft in some respects where God wants us to be hardened in order to courageously face ministry challenges?
- 3) What type of opposition and resistance have you faced in trying to proclaim God's Word to others?
- 4) When have you chosen to remain in your comfort zone rather than submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: If the account of Ezekiel's inaugural vision provides the reader with important lessons about God, the commission narrative offers vital information on the relationship between God and those whom he calls into his service.

First, whoever would serve as a messenger of God must recognize that the calling comes from God alone. Neither the needs of the field, nor oratorical gifts, nor any other external qualifications authorize one to enter divine service. Moreover, the God who appoints his servants also defines the task, chooses the field of service, provides the message, and assumes responsibility for the outcome. The less evident the fruit for one's ministry, the more critical is a clear sense of calling.

Second, whoever would serve as God's messenger must first have a clear vision of the one who sends him or her. Although Yahweh prepared Ezekiel for his ministry by hardening him commensurate with the hardness of his audience, the primary preparation occurred in **ch. 1**. Unless the servant of God enters divine service with a sense of awe at the privilege of representing the glorious King of heaven and earth, and unless one is convinced of God's sovereignty over all the earth and over all of human history, the ministry may be a burden. Without a firm conviction of God's call the ministry may be one's undoing—especially when the opposition is strong and fruit is absent.

Third, whoever would serve as God's messenger must be empowered by the Spirit of God. Ezekiel was "*the prophet of the Spirit.*" Animated and energized by the infusion of God's Holy Spirit, he serves as a model to all who would stand in the Lord's presence and all who would enter his service.

Fourth, whoever would serve as the messenger of God must be inspired by the message of God. To be sure, the personalities of God's agents color the manner in which the calling is fulfilled. This was certainly the case with Ezekiel. But the prophet is primarily accountable to God and the divine word. Twice Ezekiel's word is labeled "*Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared*" (2:4; 3:11); three times the prophet is charged to speak "*my words*" (2:7; 3:4, 10); three times he is told to ingest the divine message, which he is to proclaim (2:8; 3:1, 3); twice he is told to listen to what God has to say (2:8; 3:10). Merely hearing that message is obviously not enough: it must be digested, internalized, incorporated, embodied, and lived. The medium becomes the message. Furthermore, the message of God's spokespersons derives not from private reasoning or logic, or from mystical reflection, but from revelation. Even so, prophetic "inspiration" does not cancel out or overwhelm natural abilities and qualities—it uplifts and quickens them.

Fifth, whoever would serve as the messenger of God will be divinely equipped commensurate with the calling. God is aware of the challenges his agents face. When he assigns a task, he assumes responsibility for preparing them for that work. Indeed, God's call to service is not made on the basis of gifts, but vice versa; gifts are given on the basis of the assignment.

Sixth, whoever would serve as the messenger of God must recognize that the calling is not to success but to faithfulness. Every aspect of vocational service remains under the sovereign control of God, especially the results. Accordingly, apparent effectiveness is no proof of calling, nor even a sure criterion by which to measure faithfulness. The messenger embarks on his or her mission as an emissary of the divine King. That privilege alone should provide sufficient motivation for unconditional service.

David Thompson: EZEKIEL WAS ENRAGED AND ANGERED BY THE FACT THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT TAKE GOD'S WORD SERIOUSLY EVEN THOUGH HE HAD BEEN COMMANDED BY GOD TO CAREFULLY TAKE IN THE WORD OF GOD AND ACCURATELY COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORDS TO ISRAEL.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/82116136170.pdf>

Galen Doughty: God needed two prophets who would fearlessly proclaim his Word to Judah and Israel, one in Jerusalem and one in Babylon. Jeremiah and Ezekiel would need to be strong because the people's hearts were so hard and they were so deep in idolatry and rebellion against God. The official theology justified that idolatry and the wonder is that Ezekiel found it just as strong among the exiles while Jerusalem survived as Jeremiah found it in Jerusalem. It is a great lesson for us today that false theology and teaching can blind us to our sin and justify even the most rebellious behavior against the Lord. We need the pure Word of God today and those who fearlessly proclaim it if we are not to follow rebellious Israel and their example. . .

The Spirit lifts up Ezekiel; something that will occur many times in his prophecy, whether it is literal or symbolic in a vision is often difficult to tell. He takes Ezekiel

away to Tel Abib. Ezekiel for his part is overwhelmed by the experience. He says the strong hand of the Lord was upon him and his spirit was filled with bitterness and anger, presumably over the rebellion and sin of his people. When God put him down in Tel Abib he sat among them seven days. The implication is he did not speak for that week or interact with people at all. He is married and it must have been both strange and very troubling for his wife. She must have wondered what had happened to her husband. His friends and neighbors must have thought the same thing.

<http://southsidespokane.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/A-Commentary-on-the-Book-of-Ezekiel.pdf>

Wiersbe: As the Spirit began to work, Ezekiel heard behind him several sounds: the rustling of the cherubim's wings, the whirring of the wheels, and "*a loud rumbling sound*" (NIV), like an earthquake. He knew that God's glorious throne was moving and that the Lord was working out His purposes. What was the origin of the praise statement, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place"? (**Ezek. 3:12**) Both the KJV and the NASB translate it as coming from the cherubim, but the NIV suggests that it was Ezekiel himself who spoke it. However, it could also be translated "*as the glory of the Lord arose from its place,*" a description rather than a declaration. As we shall see in **chapters 8-11**, the movement of God's glory is a key theme in this book.

TEXT: Ezekiel 3:16-27

TITLE: COMMISSIONED AS THE LORD'S WATCHMAN OVER ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A WATCHMAN INVOLVES THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATING GOD'S WORDS OF WARNING TO THOSE IN NEED OF REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION:

This section concludes the commissioning of Ezekiel as he enters into his ministry to the Jews in exile in Babylon. The faithful communication of the Word of God remains the central focus for the prophet. His encouragement and motivation derives from a renewed vision of the glory of God. His role as a watchman is carefully defines since the stakes are so high. Ezekiel is not responsible for the reaction of the people to God's call to repentance – only to his faithful proclamation. At times God will restrict his movements and speech and at other times God free him up to speak boldly and directly.

Constable: This section describes God's formal induction of Ezekiel into the prophetic office in legal language designed to impress his pastoral accountability on him (cf. **Jer. 6:16-21**).

Galen Doughty: God gave Ezekiel the task of speaking his Word to the people and he will hold his prophet accountable for his task. How people respond to Ezekiel's preaching is not Ezekiel's responsibility. God will hold each person who hears Ezekiel accountable for how they respond to his message. What God needs from his prophet is faithfulness to his calling and task. Ezekiel has no power to make people respond to God's Word in a positive or negative way. That is out of his control. Each person is responsible to God's Word as they hear it. If they sin they will be held accountable for their sin whether they hear God's warning to repent or not.

Lamar Cooper: After his initial vision Ezekiel was silent and overcome with awe for seven days. The second appearance of God after the seven days was therefore a natural development. God appeared a second time to reaffirm Ezekiel's call, to remind him of his responsibility as a watchman, and to warn the Israelites of their need for repentance. The theme of individual responsibility also occurs in **Ezek 18:1–32** and **33:1–20**.

(:16) PRELUDE – ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONING

*“Now it came about at the end of seven days
that the word of the LORD came to me, saying,”*

I. (:17a) APPOINTMENT TO THE ROLE OF THE LORD'S WATCHMAN

“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel;”

Douglas Stuart: We are also told that God made Ezekiel as a watchman. This was an assignment, not an invitation. As a prophet, he would have to do the job required of him, and this one carried with it extensive responsibility. Prophets are often likened to watchmen in the Old Testament (**Is. 56:10; Jer. 6:17; Hos. 9:8; Hab. 2:1**) because they must be aware of what is happening and especially what is coming in the future, because they have to try to arouse their fellow citizens to take account of the threats that they face, and because they are responsible for the fate of a community—others expect them not to fail to warn the populace of important events or of danger.

Constable: Yahweh told Ezekiel that He had appointed him to a ministry that was similar to that of a watchman who stood sentry and watched for any threat to his city (cf. **2 Sam. 18:24-27; 2 Kings 9:17-20; Jer. 6:17**). Whenever Ezekiel received a word from the Lord he was to pass it along to the Israelites (cf. **Isa. 56:10; Jer. 6:17; Hos. 9:8**).

Lamar Cooper: A watchman was a city employee appointed to be a lookout from some high vantage point such as a tower or the city wall. Such an office was extremely important because the safety of the entire population rested with the watchman. If a watchman failed in his duty to warn inhabitants of the town of impending attack, he was held personally responsible for any loss. God appointed Ezekiel as his watchman to warn Judah and Jerusalem of impending destruction. He was to open their eyes to “profounder evils that encompassed them, ... break the spell ... of delusions and raise the cry of danger when none was suspected.” If he chose to remain silent, he would be held accountable.

II. (:18-21) FUNCTION OF THE LORD’S WATCHMAN – WARNING BOTH THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS

A. (:17b) Communicating All of God’s Warnings

“whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me.”

Daniel Block: The burden that Yahweh places on Ezekiel is presented by means of four hypothetical scenarios. The first two cases refer to the accused as the wicked (*rāšāʿ*), a term widely used in the OT to denote “wicked, criminal, villain.” The thirty-seven occurrences of the root in Ezekiel represent a higher frequency than in any other prophetic book. Of these more than two-thirds are found in this passage and the thematically related **chs. 18** and **33**. The meaning of the root is best illustrated by **5:6**, which contains the only verb form (infinitive construct): “[Jerusalem] has rebelled (*mārâ*) against my laws (*mišpāṭîm*) with greater wickedness (*lēriš ʿâ*) than the nations, and against my decrees (*ḥuqqôt*) more than the countries that surround her. For they have rejected (*māʿas*) my laws, and they have not followed my decrees (*lōʿ hālĕkû bāhem*).” Fundamentally, then, in Ezekiel *rāšāʿ* denotes a “wicked” person, one who holds Yahweh the covenant Lord in contempt and displays this attitude by willful violation of the covenant stipulations. He is ostensibly part of the covenant community

(these warnings are addressed to “*the house of Israel,*” v. 17), but in reality he has set himself in opposition to it.

A righteous man (*ṣaddîq*) represents the polar opposite of *rāšā'*. This is evident not only from the present context but from the frequency with which these two words occur as an antithetical pair in the OT. The distribution of this term in the OT resembles that of *rāšā'*. The root *ṣdq* represents judicial court terminology, relating specifically to conformity to established norms, which for Israel were defined in the stipulations of Yahweh's covenant (cf. 5:6). Just as Yahweh's actions in support of the relationship are called his “*righteous acts*” (*ṣdqôt yhw*; 1 Sam. 12:7; Mic. 6:5), so Israel's obedient response constituted her *ṣēdāqâ*, “*righteousness*” (Deut. 24:13). If a *rāšā'* is one who has rejected the covenant and the covenant Lord, a *ṣaddîq* is one who holds Yahweh in highest respect and expresses that disposition by joyful compliance with the covenant stipulations. The contrast will be evident in the hypothetical cases that follow.

B. (:18-19) Warning the Wicked is the Watchman's Responsibility

1. (:18) Accountability for Failing to Warn

“When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die'; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.”

John Taylor: The warning that the sinner would die had a purely temporal reference. As far as we can see Ezekiel had little or no concept of resurrection, still less of eternal life, and the threat that was inherent in this word of warning was that the wicked man would meet with an early or a violent death. Death that came at the end of a long life was no hardship, especially if a man had children and grandchildren to continue his name after him. But a short life and an untimely end were punishments indeed. If this happened as a result of the prophet's failing in his duty to warn the sinner to turn from his ways, God said, His blood I will require at your hand (18, 20). This allusion to the principle expressed in **Genesis 9:5f.** implies that, just as the blood of a murdered man demanded requital through the next-of-kin taking vengeance on the murderer, so a man dying unwarned would be regarded virtually as the victim of a murder committed by the watchman who failed in his duty. It is of course put metaphorically, but it none the less emphasizes the overpowering responsibility with which Ezekiel was entrusted. The Christian's responsibility to warn a lost generation is surely no less terrifying.

2. (:19) Deliverance for Faithfully Warning

“Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.”

C. (:20-21) Warning the Righteous is the Watchman's Responsibility

1. (:20) Accountability for Failing to Warn

“Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he shall die; since

you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.”

MacArthur: Here is a person who was obeying God by doing what was right, but fell into sin and God took his life in chastisement. The “*obstacle*” was a stone of judgment that kills. **Ps 119:165** says: “*Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.*” The crushing stone always falls on the disobedient.

John Taylor: The word stumbling-block (**20**; Heb. *mikšól*), like its New Testament Greek counterpart, *skandalon*, means an occasion for stumbling, either literally or in an ethical sense. It does not here indicate that God deliberately sets out to trip up the righteous and bring him crashing to the ground, but that he leaves opportunities for sin in the paths of men, so that if their heart is bent on sin they may do so and thus earn their condemnation. There is no sense in which stumbling is inevitable: it always involves moral choice, and there was also the watchman’s word of warning to point out where and what the stumbling-blocks were.

2. (:21) Deliverance for Faithfully Warning

“However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.”

Peter Pett: The importance of this passage cannot be over-emphasised. Each individual is shown to have individual responsibility. The one will not suffer for the sinfulness of the group. It also brings out that, in the place where they were, they still came within the covenant. They were still responsible to God. Furthermore it demonstrated that away from Jerusalem, and away from the possibility of offering sacrifice at the central shrine in Jerusalem, forgiveness was still possible. Both the righteous who sin, and the wicked who have lived sinfully, could still be spared through repentance and return to the covenant, even though sacrifices for sin were not available.

On the other hand it also warned that God was there. He saw their ways and their behaviour, and He would require it at their hands. Transportation had not removed them from their responsibility to God. They were still His people and He was still their Overlord.

And it finally emphasised that He had set over them a watchman. This was for them an act of mercy. He had not left them just to struggle on as they could. If they failed it would not be because God had failed to give them an opportunity for repentance, as long as the watchman was faithful. And for Ezekiel the stress was on the importance of his faithfulness. It is a solemn task to be pastor to a people.

III. (:22-23) MOTIVATION FOR THE LORD’S WATCHMAN = RENEWED VISION OF GOD’S GLORY

A. (:22) Staging for the Renewed Vision

*“And the hand of the LORD was on me there,
and He said to me, ‘Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.’”*

Lamar Cooper: As the nation faced days of judgment, the needs of the people could not be met by offering a new perspective on their problems. What the nation needed was a new perspective on God. The call experience of Ezekiel supplied that new perspective by reinforcing the holiness and majesty of God. He was able to share that viewpoint with the certainty of judgment. That judgment included the fall of Jerusalem, which God declared through the symbolic actions and prophetic messages of Ezekiel.

B. (:23) Spectacle of the Renewed Vision

*“So I got up and went out to the plain;
and behold, the glory of the LORD was standing there,
like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar,
and I fell on my face.”*

Peter Pett: This was a parallel vision to that in chapter 1, repeated in full for reassurance and to press home its effect, but it was in a different place. Going out into ‘the valley’ He saw the throne-chariot of God and the accompanying glory, including the splendid figure on the throne. He saw the glory of Yahweh. And again it had the same effect. He fell on his face before God.

Lamar Cooper: Such an awesome responsibility needed a fresh dose of divine reinforcement. One gets the feeling that Ezekiel needed an enormous amount of persuasion and pressure from God to accept his role: first the role of having to speak for God at all, and now this additional model of what kind of speaker he was to be—a lone sentry, calling out warnings to a defiant people from the God they would not listen to. The hand of the Lord which had gripped him in his speechless rage all week (14) was again needed to propel him out of his stunned inertia and into action (22). God, it seems, would not take no for an answer.

So Ezekiel, under God’s instruction, got up and went out to the plain (23). And there, to his amazement, stood the same vision of the glory of Yahweh as he had seen the previous week. This time he uses none of the circumlocution of his earlier description (‘something like’, ‘appearance of the likeness of ...’). He knows what he is looking at (lit. ‘]and behold, there, the glory of Yahweh, standing’), and recognizes it as the same as the vision by the Kebar River. Why this repeat vision? Perhaps to dispel any thought that the whole birthday experience had been a terrible nightmare or hallucination. It had not been some wild fantasy brought on by the thunder and lightning of a terrifying storm. Perhaps the change of location also reinforced the awareness that Yahweh was truly mobile in Babylon. Yahweh was no more confined to the rivers of Babylon than to the mountains of Israel. Perhaps it was simply because God knew the reluctance of this young would-be priest and would-rather-not-be prophet and needed to impress upon him once and for all the reality of his glory and his presence. This was the one who was coming in judgment; this was the one who was posting him as a sentry. If Ezekiel had

spent the week in silent, angry resistance, it is now overcome as, for the second time, he finds himself flattened on his face by God's glory and then hoisted to his feet by God's Spirit.

IV. (:24-27) CONSTRAINTS UPON THE LORD'S WATCHMAN

A. (:24-25) Space Constraints

1. (:24) Imposed by the Watchman Himself

"The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, 'Go, shut yourself up in your house.'"

2. (:25) Imposed by His Target Audience

"As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them."

Lamar Cooper: In considering, finally, the combined significance of this double restriction on Ezekiel we need to take note of the way Ezekiel functioned as a sign to the people (**12:6; 24:27**). His actions, his circumstances and his afflictions all pointed to something—either about Yahweh, or about Israel. So, for example, in the case of his 'binding', it is noticeable that the same phrase is used when describing Ezekiel lying on his side to bear the sin of the houses of Israel and Judah (**4:8**). Again, it is not clear whether the ropes of 4:8 were meant literally or metaphorically, but it must be connected with what God had said to him in **3:25**. Being 'housebound', whether enforced by others or as a voluntary self-imposed act, and whether in reality or symbolically, came to signify the way Israel would be confined in siege and be punished for their guilt.

Similarly, Ezekiel's silence, other than when delivering the direct words of Yahweh (which until after the fall of Jerusalem would be almost entirely words of inescapable judgment), was profoundly significant. Just as all normal relations between himself and his family and neighbours would be broken off by such dumbness, so too was all 'conversation' between God and Israel. One of the key tasks of a prophet was to intercede on behalf of individuals or the people. But that will be no part of Ezekiel's task. Jeremiah had to be told to stop praying for his people, in the face of Israel's incorrigible, irredeemable rebellion; Ezekiel will not even be allowed to start.

Daniel Bock: With **3:22–27** the most complex call narrative in all of Scripture concludes. The opening vision had ushered Ezekiel into the heavenly court for an audience with Yahweh (**1:4–28a**); he has received his commission and been outfitted with the resources necessary for dealing with rejection (**1:28b–3:11**); he has been introduced to his audience (**3:11–15**); and he has heard Yahweh's charge to faithful sentry duty (**3:16–21**). All that remains before he may commence his new vocation is the ritual initiation into the prophetic office, which ironically stifles his freedom of expression rather than liberating it. Taken at face value, Ezekiel's speechless state lasted more than seven years, from one week after his inaugural vision (cf. **1:3; 3:16**) to the day he received the news that Jerusalem had fallen (**33:21–22**).

B. (:26-27) Speech Constraints

1. (:26) Closing the Watchman's Mouth

“Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be dumb, and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house.”

2. (:27) Opening the Watchman's Mouth

“But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God. He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.’”

Derek Thomas: Three things were required of the prophet. First, he must stay at home (3:24), thereby indicating that whenever he appeared in future it was as God's messenger. When people saw Ezekiel coming it was the voice of God that would speak. Second, he was to be tied up (3:25), thereby indicating that he was God's prisoner, or slave. And third, whenever he was not speaking God's Word he was to be silent (3:26). He is not allowed to reprove the rebels of the exile unless God says so (3:26–27). This muteness was to last for almost seven and a half years, until the fall of Jerusalem (33:21–22).

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel ... has to experience the inability to speak ... as a forceful experiential reminder of the fact that he has no authority to make up on his own what he says to his fellow Israelites. Rather, only God can, as it were, loose his tongue. He must let God speak through him, and not invent anything himself or take his message from anyone else. Originality is usually prized among writers and speakers. Yet there was to be no originality in Ezekiel's doctrine. In all five commissions [2:1—3:27] he is reminded that his job is to convey and not to create.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you view your responsibility and accountability as a watchman in your own evangelical context?
- 2) How does this passage speak to individual responsibility for sin?
- 3) Why did the Lord use so many visual signs throughout the ministry of Ezekiel?
- 4) When have you felt a wrong type of pressure to elicit a positive response from your proclamation of God's Word rather than leaving the results in God's hands?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: The Mosaic Law promised life for obedience and death for disobedience. This was physical life and physical death, not eternal life and death. The Lord gave the Mosaic Law to a people who had already entered into relationship with Himself by faith (cf. **Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:37-40; 6; 7:6-11; 10:15-17; 30:15-20**; see also **Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 5:27**). The possibility here is premature physical death or extended physical life. Eternal life and eternal security are not the issues. . .

Evidently Ezekiel's muteness lasted for several years, until he received news of the fall of Jerusalem (cf. **1:1-3; 24:25-27; 33:21-22**) He was not entirely silent during this several-year period, from the present until Jerusalem fell, but he only spoke to the people when God gave him special messages to deliver (cf. **11:25; 14:1; 20:1**). Rather than speaking publicly from time to time, as he lived among the people, as other prophets normally did, Ezekiel remained at home except to deliver special messages from the Lord (cf. chs. 4—5). Thus Ezekiel spoke less publicly and led a more reclusive life than the Lord's other prophetic spokesmen.

David Thompson: GOD APPOINTS EZEKIEL TO BECOME A WATCHMAN WHO IS RESPONSIBLE TO LITERALLY UNDERSTAND AND FAITHFULLY COMMUNICATE THE WORD OF GOD TO ALL THE PEOPLE AND LITERALLY APPLY GOD'S WORD WITH HIS OWN LIFE.

Ezekiel's job was to warn wicked people that God was about to destroy them. He was to go to wicked people and give them a "repent or die message." God was literally about to kill them so that they would die. What we are talking about here is an untimely death that God sends against a person as a judgment against their wickedness. We know that God is a patient and gracious God, but He does have a limit and when certain wicked things reach some level, He will kill people.

Apparently God would give specific revelatory information to Ezekiel that someone was about to die by judgment of God and Ezekiel's job was to take that message to him. Often times, God would name the specific sin and the reason for the judgment. Ezekiel's job was to look people in the eyes and tell them the truth. . .

It isn't only the wicked who need to be warned, but also the righteous. Now Ezekiel had another job as a watchman and that was to spot one who is righteous and has wandered off the path of righteousness and wandered into sin. Ezekiel's job was to warn the righteous sinner that he/she needed to do turn from his sin and do what was right. . .

God told Ezekiel that He would prevent him from speaking. **3:26**

God's people were so rebellious that God would prevent them from being able to hear a rare, true prophet of God. God apparently kept Ezekiel silent from a major public ministry for many years until the fall of Jerusalem (**Ezek. 33:21-22**).

This was a judgment of God. The Word of God is designed to reprove and rebuke. If God does not send a man who teaches the whole Word of God that does that, it is His judgment.

Most people do not have a clue how privileged they are if they are able to actually hear the Word of God accurately communicated. Most don't care. But God can actually prevent people from hearing His Word.

God said to Ezekiel I am so fed up with my people that even though you are the watchman for Israel, I will literally at times prevent you from speaking truth to them. My people are so rebellious they do not deserve My Word and I will not let you proclaim My Word. Sometimes God in His sovereignty will not allow His faithful men to be around anymore to communicate His Word anymore and when that happens, it is a judgment of God.

God told Ezekiel that He will enable him to speak at certain times. **3:27**

God says I will literally open your mouth at times and you will say exactly what I want you to say. If people hear, they will hear. If they refuse, they will refuse. But Ezekiel would be recognized as "the mouthpiece of God." God would spread his reputation as a man who would communicate the truth. That was Ezekiel's job regardless of the response of the people. His job was to communicate truth, even to those who don't want to hear it.

I believe there are certain times when God's Spirit convicts His people and then there are times when God says I won't convict them anymore. One of the most dangerous situations to be in is when God says, "I am through convicting you."

We are in some respects watchmen. We need to communicate the truth.

Douglas Stuart: Three kinds of confinement are required of him in this enactment. First, he must stay at home (v. 24). This symbolizes his need from now on to appear formally in public only on official business as God's representative. Such a prohibition would not prevent him from ever setting foot outside his house in the future, but his public service from now on must be limited to his role as a prophet.

Second, and closely related, he must be tied up (v. 25). This symbolizes that he is God's prisoner, subject to God's will. The apostle Paul, literally a Roman prisoner, likewise saw himself as a prisoner of Christ (e.g., **Philemon 1**). The Hebrew literally says "*they will put ropes on you and bind you*" but "they" can be just as indefinite in Hebrew as in English. In other words, this is not an enactment that Ezekiel was forced into, but something he arranged. Friends or family would publicly tie him up now and again to symbolize his restriction to God's ministry. He would not, however, actually be tied up constantly.

Third, Ezekiel would be denied speech. This was an involuntary action and probably the most miserable of the three. For the tongue to cling to the roof of the mouth (v. 26) is an idiomatic way of saying that one cannot talk (cf. **Job 29:10; Ps. 137:6**). God says that Ezekiel cannot be a “*reprover*” (Hebrew, *mokîah*) to the Israelites in exile, meaning that he cannot on his own criticize them even though they are, as has been said often already and is said again here, rebellious (vv. 26–27). He must learn to wait for God to give him the message. This God promises to do (v. 27).

Lamar Cooper: The task of rebuke and warning is difficult to do in a way that is sensitive and yet effective. But to avoid it for fear of hurting people’s feelings is like a sentry failing to sound the alarm for fear of upsetting people by disturbing their sleep. Those of us called to pastoral ministry must not trifle with people’s spiritual health if we are aware that they are in serious danger—provided of course we come to that awareness out of a deep biblical and God-centred understanding of what actually constitutes spiritual health or danger, and not on the basis of our own prejudice or the latest fashion in quasi-Christian therapy. Paul seems to have been well aware of the double-edged nature of this model of ministry, and urged it on Timothy and Titus: both to confront the wicked by doing the work of an evangelist, [1] and also to warn those who belonged to the righteous but were in danger of falling away. [2] By such careful ‘watching’, Timothy would save himself and his hearers, [3] which may well be an echo of Ezekiel’s watchman model.

For us such a task is made even more uncomfortable in our own day with the dominant cultural atmosphere of postmodern relativism, in which people are not to be deemed right or wrong, still less righteous and wicked, but rather to be coming from different ‘perspectives’, all of which must somehow be affirmed lest we diminish people or threaten their personal and cultural identities. However, in real life there is still a recognized place for fire-alarms, early-warning systems, smoke detectors, night security guards, motorway hazard signs and anti-virus software. The task of the evangelist and pastor is founded on the conviction that there are dangers equally real and potentially more fatal in the moral and spiritual realm. The watchman’s duty to give warning is based on the reality of the danger, not on the mood of those he has to warn.

TEXT: Ezekiel 4:1-8

TITLE: *THE UPCOMING SIEGE OF JERUSALEM*

BIG IDEA:

GOD HAS SET HIS FACE IN JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DURATION OF HER INIQUITIES

INTRODUCTION:

Following his commissioning, the ministry of Ezekiel opens with a series of action-sermons where the Lord uses drama to enact special sign-messages.

Daniel Block: Sign-acts are best interpreted as dramatic performances designed to visualize a message and in the process to enhance its persuasive force so that the observers' perceptions of a given situation might be changed and their beliefs and behavior modified.

The focus is on the upcoming siege of Jerusalem. Due to the nation's long history of iniquity and covenant-breaking, the patience of the Lord has now expired and judgment is on the horizon. Despite the Jewish exiles in Babylon clinging to unrealistic hopes of the Lord's persistent protection for Jerusalem, the pagan enemies will soon be victorious.

There are many difficulties surrounding the interpretation of some of the specific details in this passage. In particular there is much debate over the significance of the number of years cited here: 390 and then 40. But the overall impact of the message is clear. The nation will be held accountable for her sins.

Leslie Allen: Together the two signs function like a two-part oracle of judgment that is made up of both accusation and announcement of punishment. Accordingly, this sign relates not to the future but to the meaning of the past.

Craigie:

(a) In the immediate context of exile, the Jews had to cling to hope of some kind. The natural focus of such hope was the city of Jerusalem, from which they had been exiled; there, God's intimate presence had been known. But this source of hope was dashed by Ezekiel's action; if salvation were to be found, it would not be in Jerusalem, for God's face was steadfastly set against that city.

(b) As it would gradually become clear in the prophet's unfolding ministry, the reason for God's wrath against his own city was the evil of its inhabitants. If there was any hope at all for the future, it would only be found in turning from evil, for evil brought only siege and destruction. The faith of the Jews was being weaned gradually from its attachment to a particular place; the prophet was calling for a commitment to God, unlinked to a city and transcending Tel Abib, that was rooted in repentance and righteousness.

Christopher Wright: There are clearly three major acts in this drama, each with two or three internal scenes. The three acts are identified by the threefold initial command to take some object:

- *take a clay tablet (4:1);*
- *Take wheat and barley etc. (4:9);*
- *take a sharp sword (5:1).*

And the three acts relate, respectively, to

- the siege of Jerusalem (4:1–8),
- the suffering of the people in Jerusalem and in exile (4:9–17),
- and the final destruction of the city and the fate of its population (5:1–4).

Peter Pett: In this chapter we have first the depiction of the siege of Jerusalem in miniature (Ezekiel 4:1-3), then the duration of the iniquity of Israel and Judah which has brought this on them (Ezekiel 4:4-8), then the depiction of the coming famine conditions in Jerusalem and of their exile in ‘uncleanness’ (Ezekiel 4:9-17), and finally an acted out description of the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, whom the exiles probably looked back on with envy (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

I. (:1-3) THE SIGN OF THE BRICK AND THE IRON PLATE – GOD HAS SET HIS FACE IN JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM

A. (:1-2) The Sign of the Brick

1. (:1) Acquisition, Positioning and Inscription of the Sign

“Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you, and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem.”

Bruce Hurt: “Bricks” were not like the rectangular brick we encounter today. One ancient historian records “Let the bricks be two feet long, one foot broad, and four inches thick.” On a surface as large as this the whole siege might be easily portrayed. In Babylonia there was a lack of both timber and stone, and the thick clay deposited by the overflowing rivers was the only material adaptable to building.

2. (:2) Action Commanded

“Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps, and place battering rams against it all around.”

Lamar Cooper: In the first dramatic presentation, Ezekiel used a clay brick commonly used in building. Into the soft clay he drew the map of Jerusalem so that the completed object represented the city of Jerusalem (v. 1). Using the clay brick as his focal point, the prophet enacted a battle against it. He constructed a siege wall, a mound or rampart, set up military camps around it, and employed battering rams against it. Using an iron pan to represent an impenetrable barrier, he glared upon the city with the intensity and determination of a general leading an attack.

Daniel Block:

siege wall. In real life siege walls consisted either of a series of mounds or a continuous mound of rock or earth around the city from which the attacker could observe the movements of the defenders on and inside the walls. Ezekiel probably created his model walls by heaping up rows of sand or earth with his hands.

ramp. Since fortresses were usually located strategically at the tops of hills, hence inaccessible to offensive machines of war, attacking armies constructed huge inclines so battering rams could be positioned near the walls. These inclines were made of vast amounts of earth, rocks, and debris, which were carried in baskets and literally “poured” out.

army camps. Ezekiel’s use of the plural *maḥānôt*, “camps,” suggests several separate army camps or military divisions strategically positioned outside the city walls.

battering rams. Finally Ezekiel positions the battering rams. That these “siege engines” are first mentioned in the annals of Ashurbanipal suggests that the Assyrians may have invented them. Because of their weight and cumbersome design, battering rams were difficult to move over long distances. However, they were critical for conquering the walled cities of Palestine. The ram itself was rendered more effective for creating breaches in walls made of mud bricks by tipping it with metal.

B. (:3a) The Sign of the Iron Plate

1. Acquisition and Positioning of the Sign

*“Then get yourself an iron plate
and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city,”*

John Taylor: It seems more in keeping with the symbolism of Ezekiel as the Lord’s prophet that he was in fact representing Yahweh in this drama, and the iron wall stood for Yahweh’s determined hostility towards the holy city. It was God’s act to be bringing armies against Jerusalem; it was Jerusalem’s God who had rejected her and would soon bring her to the ground. In this way, not only the symbolical action but Ezekiel’s part in it became a sign for the house of Israel. This was one day going to happen.

David Thompson: That iron plate represented a total severance of God’s relationship with His people. God was cutting off a relationship with His own people. God was not tender to His people at this point; He was hardened to them because of their rebellion. This illustrated an “impenetrable barrier” between God and His own people. The setting of the face was a Divine glaring of God that expressed His anger. If God reaches this state concerning His own people, it is tragic news. It is deadly serious.

Feinberg: The iron pan was meant to indicate the impenetrable wall of the besieging army, to show the severity of the siege, as well as the impossibility of escape. A secondary thought may be the impregnable barrier between God and them because of their sin (see **Isa. 59:2**). Ezekiel was enjoined to set his face against the city to reveal

the determination of the invaders to capture the city. These symbolical actions were a sign of events surely to come to pass on the whole house of Israel.

2. Action Commanded

“and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it.”

Leslie Allen: After this representational assembly of a grim war game, Ezekiel was to use a utensil that was part of home cooking equipment and place it upright between the city and himself. It was a convex iron plate or griddle that was normally placed over the fire, with the edges resting on bricks surrounding the fire; cakes and bread were baked on it (see **M. Kellermann**, BRL 30, for description and illustration). The plate was to act as an iron wall and to be a figurative expression of the severance of normal relations between Jerusalem and the God whom the prophet represented. In the siege that it was to undergo, its fate was sealed: no help would be forthcoming from God. He had withdrawn his favor and hidden his face (cf. **7:22**). An iron curtain of alienation divided him from the city.

C. (:3b) The Significance of the Sign

“This is a sign to the house of Israel.”

Bruce Hurt: A "sign" generally describes something that points to or represents something larger or more important than itself. In the present context the "sign" represents a non-verbal symbol or signal which is meant to be a discernible indication of what is not itself directly perceptible (the exiles can neither see the city of Jerusalem or its destruction). In this case the visible drama was a foreshadowing of coming events in Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (cf **Isa 20:3**). We might say that Ezekiel was presenting a "preview of coming attractions".

Bruce Hurt: News of Ezekiel's strange action would have spread quickly through the community of Jewish exiles and they would have come to watch. The meaning of the display would not be too difficult to discern. Their beloved city, Jerusalem surrounded by siege-works certainly indicated that it would again be besieged by an enormously powerful army. Imagine what must have gone through the minds of the exiles. Surely, in this case the sign would be as impressive and perhaps even more so than any spoken utterance. Ezekiel's was demonstrating that "A picture is worth a thousand words!" because pictures convey strong, memorable images and pictures etched on bricks would not quickly fade away.

Leslie Allen: The scene to be enacted by the prophet is called a "*sign to the community of Israel*," that is, to those representatives of it who shared Ezekiel's exile, as comparison of **2:3; 3:1, 4, 7** with **3:11** shows. Only here in this series of five sign-acts does the term "sign" appear. The prophets typically engaged in symbolic acts, and they were particularly characteristic of Ezekiel's ministry (cf. **Zimmerli** 28–29). Their role was to reinforce the prophetic word of interpretation that accompanied them. Their precise intention is disputed. Did they actually create the future by prefiguring it (**G. von Rad**, OT Theology [New York: Harper, 1965] 2:96–97)? Or did they function as

“street theater,” as a teaching aid that dramatically visualized the oral message of the prophet (Lang, “Street Theater” 305)? Krüger (Geschichtskonzepte 118–19) has observed that these explanations need not be alternatives but may both be correct: the first relates the sign-act to the spectators before whom it is performed (cf. v 12), while the second relates it to the event symbolized. However, the view that the sign-act is to be distinguished from the oracle, inasmuch as it had special power bestowed upon it to shape the future, is based on its supposed development from acts of magic (cf. Fohrer, Symbolischen Handlungen 10, 47–55, 121–24). Such a developmental view is no longer in vogue among anthropologists . . . Sign and interpretation worked in mutual confirmation. If actions speak louder than words, here they were a megaphone for the prophetic words.

II. (:4-8) THE SIGN OF LYING ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT SIDES – THE DURATION OF JUDGMENT CORRESPONDS TO THE DURATION OF INIQUITY

A. (:4-5) Lying on the Left Side – Judgment Against Northern Kingdom

1. (:4) Symbolic Bearing of Judgment

“As for you, lie down on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it.”

2. (:5) Duration of Judgment

“For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.”

The natural reading of vv.4-6 would seem to suggest an emphasis first on the sins of the Northern Kingdom and then on the sins of the Southern Kingdom. However, an argument can also be made that the overall impact is to stress the culpability of the nation of Israel as a whole – both Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

Daniel Block: Moreover, whereas the name “*Israel*” occurs more than 180 times in the book, “*Judah*” appears only 15 times. In every instance where Judah is juxtaposed with “*Israel*,” the names are used **interchangeably**. Furthermore, whenever other sign-acts involve only “*Israel*,” the southern kingdom as the remnant of the original larger entity is in view. Finally, where the northern kingdom is contrasted with Judah, the name “*Israel*” is either avoided or defined more particularly. Since Ezekiel uses “*Israel*” and “*Judah*” interchangeably everywhere else, *bêt yisrā’ēl* should be understood similarly here. Accordingly, the 390-day period cannot signify the duration of the exile of the northern kingdom; it has to do with **the nation of Israel as a whole**.

There is debate whether the correct number is 390 days (with days representing years) or actually 190 days (per the Greek Old Testament). There is also debate whether the 40 days (representing years) of verse 6 run concurrently with the end of the 390 days or should be viewed as subsequent to the 390 days. That is just the start of the confusion.

From that point there is much speculation about the identification of the revealed timeline.

B. (:6) Lying on the Right Side – Judgment Against Southern Kingdom

1. Symbolic Bearing of Judgment

“When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah;”

2. Duration of Judgment

“I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.”

Lamar Cooper: Although no workable solution to the problem of a literal chronology of the day-years has come to light, a literal interpretation in principle is still preferable to a symbolic one. The basic principles of hermeneutics dictate that a passage be taken literally whenever possible. That the days represent years is clearly defined in **v. 6**. Since the text is about the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, the logical starting point for the 390 plus forty years would be the siege of the city in which Ezekiel was deported, namely 597 b.c. Calculating the 430 years from 597 b.c. would take the judgment of Judah down to the Maccabean revolt in 167 b.c. Caution should be exercised in drawing dogmatic conclusions from this fact.

Several additional facts also are definite regarding the passage.

- First, each day of Ezekiel’s drama represented a year in the life of sinful Israel or Judah (**v. 6**) and signified a time of discipline.
- Second, God was aware of sin in the lives of his people, and he was going to bring sin and sinner to a time of judgment.
- Third, the siege would initiate the judgment that would proceed until the fall of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon.
- Fourth, the consequences of God’s judgment are binding and inescapable (**v. 8**).

God’s judgment of sin is inevitable. He is longsuffering (**4:1–8**) and may wait for years, but ultimately he will dispense judgment. This judgment will include his people. Judah is a universal and timeless example of this principle (see **5:15**).

Daniel Block: Thus the two phases of Ezekiel’s sign-act, lying on his left and right sides, respectively, depict successive events: the long period of Israel’s apostasy, and the subsequent experience of the wrath of God. These two acts function as dramatic nonverbal accusation and announcement of judgment, respectively, corresponding to their verbal counterparts in prophetic judgment oracles. The reference to a forty-year exile speaks to the authenticity of **v. 6**, especially since elsewhere retrospective glances at the exile consistently recognize a seventy-year period for Judah.

Constable: It still remains difficult, however, to explain exactly which 390 and 40 years God had in mind. Perhaps they were the worst years of sin. In some way the length of the siege corresponded to the past years of Israel and Judah's sin.

Wiersbe: The Lord explained to Ezekiel that each day represented a year in the sinful history of the Jewish nation, and somehow he conveyed this fact to the people who watched him each day. But why did the Lord choose the numbers 390 and 40? Since one day was the equivalent of one year of Israel's rebellion, the Lord was undoubtedly looking back at the nation's past sins and not ahead at future disobedience. The forty years probably represented Israel's rebellion during their forty-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, but what is the starting point for the 390 years? The ministry of Ezekiel focused primarily on Jerusalem, the desecration of the temple by idolatry, and the departing of God's glory. It's likely that the 390-year period begins with Solomon's son Rehoboam who became king in 930 (**1 Kings 14:21ff**). When you add the year of the reigns of the kings of Judah from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, as recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, you have a total of 394 years. Since during three of the years of his reign Rehoboam walked with God (**2 Chron. 11:16-17**), we end up with a number very close to Ezekiel's 390 years.

However we calculate the mathematics of this sign, the message is clear: God had been long-suffering toward the sinful people of Judah, warning them and chastening them, but they would not remain true to Him. Some of their kings were very godly men and sought to bring the people back to God, but no sooner did these kings die than the people returned to idolatry. Eventually, there came a time when their sins caught up with them and God's patience had come to an end. God would rather see His land devastated, the city of Jerusalem ruined, His temple destroyed, and His people killed and exiled, than to have them give such a false witness to the Gentile nations. Judgment begins with the people of God, not with the godless pagans (**1 Peter 4:17-19**), and it behooves believers and congregations today to walk in the fear of the Lord.

MacArthur: It is not necessary to assume that Ezekiel was in the prone position all the time. It was doubtless part of each day, as his need for preparing food (**v. 9**) indicates.

C. (:7) Judicial Action from the Lord is Prepared

“Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and prophesy against it.”

D. (:8) No Escaping Divine Punishment

“Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, until you have completed the days of your siege.”

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel's body in this enactment prophecy represents the weight of Israel and Judah's sins. His sides represent the respective divisions of the total nation that must bear that weight, or punishment. Before the prophet started his enactment, he had once more to face the siege model he had built (**v. 7**). Then he had to bare his arm as an indication of readiness for action (cf. **Is. 52:10**), thus symbolizing God's readiness for action against the city. Next he had to prophesy (preach) against the city, warning it that its iniquities would result in its siege and capture. Finally, he allowed himself to be tied up again as God required (**v. 8**; cf. **3:25**; “restrain” should be “*tie up with cords*”) and began the long ordeal of lying on his side.

Daniel Block: By being tied up Ezekiel affirms nonverbally the unalterable quality of his prophecy. The prophet may not adjust his message by changing his position. What Yahweh's opening and closing of the prophet's mouth were to his oral declarations, the binding of his body was to his sign-acts. Ezekiel is not free to fabricate his own messages; Yahweh exercises absolute control over him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did God choose to communicate through such sign-messages?
- 2) Why did the Jews in exile have such difficulty accepting God's word of judgment?
- 3) How would the heart of Ezekiel have been impacted by acting out these dramas?
- 4) What is the primary application that you take away from these signs?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: God told him to take a clay tablet, that is, a flat block of moist clay not yet baked, and "portray" (draw) on it a map of Jerusalem. Clay tablets used for writing were almost never larger than a foot square, and this may have been the size of Ezekiel's tablet.

Presumably using clay and sticks, the prophet built replica siege works: ramps climbing to the tops of walls, close-by encampments for the soldiers besieging the city (who would always be on the lookout for any fleeing inhabitants or any relaxation of defenses), and battering rams to pound against the gates. Jerusalem, like most ancient major cities, was surrounded by a large double wall. The two solid segments, stone on the outside and brick or stone on the inside, were filled in the middle with tamped earth or rubble. The wall was as high as fifty feet at places and as wide as thirty, depending on the terrain and accessibility. Getting into a well-defended city was no easy matter for an enemy force. As a result, a common tactic of ancient warfare was to besiege a city so as to weaken its resistance gradually.

Ezekiel was told to add an iron plate (cooking pan; probably of the sort bread dough and other food was fried on) to the usual features of the model. The plate constituted a barrier between Ezekiel's face and the city. He thus symbolized God, who by "*hiding His face*" from His people, fulfilled covenant curse predictions against them (**Lev. 26:17; Deut. 31:17, 18; 32:20**). Ezekiel himself was also separated from the city and its sinfulness and rebellion by the plate, as a symbol of God's independence from its rebellious character. The whole enactment prophecy is then a "sign" to the Israelites

that God has rejected them and separated Himself from them. A bleak prediction indeed!

Ezekiel probably did all this in front of his house in the little exile village of Tel-Abib. As people would pass by they would see the model and could hardly help inquiring about it. Ezekiel would then explain what God had told him to do and what it meant. The message would be clear enough: Jerusalem's days were numbered. Since all the exiles had once lived, if only temporarily, in Jerusalem, this prediction would have a particularly powerful impact.

The purpose of God in this prophetic act was hardly limited to letting Ezekiel and his countrymen in on the future. More important was their need to see that God was not about to let the sins of the city He had chosen go unpunished. The wickedness of the people in the days of Zedekiah was just as bad as it had ever been (**2 Kin. 25:19–20**) and had not ended with the first exile. Therefore, God was about to “*cast His people from His sight.*” . . .

God's servants may have to undertake tasks involving a lot of tedium, patiently carrying out responsibilities less than entirely pleasant, regularly doing things they would much rather not have to be involved in. Preparing for a Sunday school class week after week, leading a Bible study year by year, visiting shut-ins steadily as time goes by, patiently shaping the behavior of and caring for children as the years come and go, laboring to bring about social change; these sorts of things are hardly always enjoyable.

Faithfulness involves sticking to tasks where the reward cannot necessarily be experienced right away. Loyal Christian servants may not see in this life the rewards of their steady labors, but we carry on because God's work is never done in vain, no matter how hard it may be (**1 Cor. 15:58**).

Lamar Cooper: The analysis of **chaps. 4–7** presented here recognizes five divisions: four prophetic dramatizations (**4:1–8; 4:9–17; 5:1–17; 6:1–14**) and a summary drama (**7:1–27**). **L. Boadt** has presented an alternative analysis of the chapters as comprising three symbolic actions followed by three judgment oracles. The symbolic actions involve a brick (**4:1–8**), a meal (**4:9–17**), and shaving (**5:1–4**). The judgment oracles are first against Jerusalem (**5:5–17**), then the mountains of Israel (**6:1–14**), and finally the whole land (**7:1–27**). Thus he sees them arranged climactically with increasing wrath. The symbolic actions introduce dramatically the judgments God was to bring against Israel and Judah (note “*the sin of the house of Israel*” three times, **4:4, 5, 6**). The themes of siege, famine, and violent death introduced in the instructions to the prophet also run through the judgment oracles. Most obvious is the occurrence of the terrible triplet “*plague, famine, and sword*” in each of the three oracles (**5:12, 17; 6:11–12; 7:15**). Also the cause for judgment introduced generally as “*sin*” in **chap. 4** is specified in **chaps. 5–7** as idolatry, violence, and rebellion against God's laws. Finally, variations of the divine formula “*you will know that I am the Lord*” occur ten times in **chaps. 5–7**, stressing the purpose for God's judgments.

Christopher Wright: So where, then, is Yahweh in Ezekiel's model? The prophet himself plays that role. He lifts the heavy iron pan (the broad, flat bread-making griddle), from his wife's kitchen and wields it high. Cheers perhaps greet the arrival of Yahweh to beat down his enemies. But no, Ezekiel crouches beside the city and places the iron griddle between his face and his model, with gestures and grimaces that clearly speak of hostility and attack. Slowly the shock sinks in. Yahweh is not inside the city defending it; Yahweh is outside the city attacking it! The little clay models around the city shrink into pathetic insignificance; it is Yahweh himself who is the real enemy.

Protests surround the silent actor at the monstrous charade and its unthinkable message, just as they had done when Jeremiah threatened the destruction of the city and temple a few years earlier. Had not Yahweh guaranteed to protect his own city? Had he not placed his own eternal name in the temple itself? Ezekiel gestures even more firmly with the iron griddle, perhaps placing it not only between himself and his model city, but holding it defiantly between his own face and those of the protesters. It was made of solid iron, impenetrable, implacable. Yahweh's anger could no longer be averted by protests or pleas. The so-called holy city would feel the iron judgment of the holy God. . .

What did these further forty days/years symbolize? To answer this we need to be aware of the range of meaning of the word translated sin. In Hebrew, *'āwôn*, can mean:

- (a) actual sin or iniquity committed;
- (b) the guilt of that sin; and also
- (c) the punishment meted out for it.

Probably, therefore, Ezekiel's forty days, equivalent to forty years, speak of the accepted round number figure for a **whole generation** (cf. the forty-year generation in the wilderness), namely, the generation that would suffer the exile as punishment for the accumulated sin of Israel. 'Thus the two phases of Ezekiel's sign-act, lying on his left and right sides, respectively, depict successive events: the long period of Israel's apostasy, and the subsequent experience of the wrath of God.' We might add that this makes the subtle use of Israel and Judah more explicable also. The 390 days represent the sin of the whole covenant people of Israel **without political distinctions**. But the generation that went into exile, like the forty years in the wilderness, was indeed predominantly the people of Judah. And Ezekiel, as one of those Judean exiles, certainly bore that punishment with them. . .

So, putting all the preceding discussion together, it seems that Ezekiel lay on his left side for a period of 390 days that symbolized almost four centuries of all Israel's national history since Solomon, characterized as a history of unremitting sin. This same message will be portrayed in a different form through the historical allegories and schematic survey of chapters **16; 20** and **23**. Then, during the final forty days, he also lay on his right side, finding some way of symbolizing that in that posture he represented Israel bearing its punishment in the form of the present experience of the exile of Judah—an exile that would last for the symbolic forty years of a whole generation.

For over a year, then, Ezekiel acted out his prostrate mime until its message was unmistakable, even if it was still unacceptable. Jerusalem, the clay model at the centre of his little domestic stage, would undergo a long and painful siege. This would be the culmination of centuries of sinful rebellion now being punished by Yahweh. It was indeed Yahweh whom the people were facing as the real enemy, no longer as defender and guarantor of their national security or covenantal privilege. And for those already in exile, and others who would join them soon, they would perish like the generation of the wilderness, a long, long way, in miles and in years, from the promised land.

Daniel Block: With respect to form, **Fohrer** has identified three distinctive elements in a typical report of a sign-act (or symbolic action, as he prefers to call it):

- (1) a command to execute it;
- (2) a report of its execution;
- (3) an interpretation of it.

Additional elements often included were

- (4) a reference to eyewitnesses;
- (5) a divine promise to carry out the event represented by the sign-act;
- (6) a clarification of the relationship between the dramatic presentation and the event represented.

The reports of Ezekiel's sign-acts are inconsistent even in their adherence to the three basic elements. Only twice is it reported that Ezekiel carried out the actions as he was instructed (**12:7; 24:18**). Only four acknowledge the reaction of the audience (**12:10; 21:12** [Eng. 7]; **24:19; 37:18**). Otherwise the reports tend to be limited to Yahweh's instructions to the prophet.

David Thompson: EZEKIEL WAS DIRECTED BY GOD TO DO SOMETHING PHYSICAL THAT BECAME A WARNING ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT GOD WOULD PHYSICALLY DO TO ISRAEL.

Ezekiel 4-24 gives a series of prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem. They are prophecies designed to predict "impending doom." Remember God had appointed Ezekiel to be the watchman over Israel and part of his responsibilities were to warn God's people about God's future judgments. Israel was living in disobedience to God and God will not tolerate that for long. Ezekiel's job was to confront her and warn her and one way to do that was as a physical example.

Now in this chapter there are four signs designed to reveal to God's people that because of their rebellion their captivity would not be short-lived and the destruction of their beloved city Jerusalem was guaranteed.

PROPHETIC SIGN #1 – The sign of the brick. **4:1-3**

PROPHETIC SIGN #2 – The sign of Ezekiel's physical position. **4:4-8**

PROPHETIC SIGN #3 – The sign of famine and unclean bread. **4:9-17**

TEXT: Ezekiel 4:9-17

TITLE: *FAMINE CONDITIONS OF JERUSALEM SIEGE – THE SIGN OF THE UNCLEAN FOOD*

BIG IDEA:

SINNERS CAN EXPECT GOD’S HORRIFYING JUDGMENT IN THE FORM OF EXTREME DEPRIVATION AND HUMILIATING DEFILEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

What should persistent sinners expect from a holy God? Despite His patience and long-suffering and mercy and lovingkindness, His justice cannot be denied. Here the horrifying conditions associated with the famine of the siege against Jerusalem are portrayed. Scarcity of food and water are combined with the shock factor of being forced to use excrement for cooking fuel. The anxiety and horror of the situation would be compounded by the knowledge of their own culpability in calling down upon themselves this judgment from God.

Iain Duguid: [Review] Ezekiel is to lie on his left side for 390 days, representing 390 years, bearing the guilt of the entire covenant community of Israel. The iniquity of the community is placed on him (4:4). During this period he symbolizes Israel’s long history of accumulated sin, which culminates in the siege and fall of Jerusalem, concretely depicted by eating siege rations throughout the 390 days (4:9). Then during the period of forty days, he represents the punishment of the Exile, which he depicts in terms of the symbolic figure of forty years. Just as Israel’s ancestors in the desert were a lost generation, spending forty years in the desert for their sin (Num. 14:34), so the exilic generation is condemned to a similar fate for the nation’s long history of sin.

Leslie Allen: The next symbolic action in the series of siege-related representations dramatizes the scarcity of food to be experienced by those beleaguered inside Jerusalem.

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel must add to his regimen of lying on his side the daily discipline of eating skimpy meals and drinking a meager amount of water. Again, these would be a public display.

Lamar Cooper: The drama of the unclean meal has three parts. First, the prophet is told to prepare the food to be cooked (vv. 9–11). Second, the prophet is to cook the meal but is granted a request that he not violate the laws of cleanliness (vv. 12–15). Third, there is an interpretation of the drama (vv. 16–17).

John Taylor: Each of the four actions described in 4:1–5:4 dealt with a different aspect of the disaster that would shortly befall Jerusalem.

- First came the fact of the siege (4:1–3),
- then the duration of the punishment of Israel and Judah (4:4–8),

- and then the famine conditions of the siege and of the exile (4:9–17).
- Last of all came the enacted oracle of the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (5:1–4).

Iain Duguid: Ezekiel’s sign-acts are not diagrams on overhead projector slides with which he helps the slow-witted capture a difficult theological idea. They are “affective aids,” aimed not at people’s eyes but at their hearts and wills, the seat of their “affections.” They are designed not merely to help people see the truth, but to **feel the truth**. In the same way as the sacraments are not merely visual aids to the gospel but are “signs and seals of the covenant of grace,” so also the sign-acts are given not so much to clarify the message of the prophet as to **drive it home to the people’s hearts**.

I. (:9-12) INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE PREPARATION OF THE UNCLEAN FOOD

A. (:9) Ingredients and Duration of the Meal

1. Ingredients

“But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself;”

Lamar Cooper: The mixture seems to portray a circumstance in which the people would mix anything edible due to the scarcity of the food.

Galen Doughty: He is not to eat normal food but special bread for which God gives him the recipe. He is to take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in a storage jar, meaning a pottery jar, and make bread from them. Wheat and barley were the two main grains grown in Israel and the Near East. Beans and lentils were legumes that are high in protein. Millet and spelt are two other grains that are lesser in quality than wheat and barley. Spelt was a form of rye and was often called the poor man’s wheat. Taken together the six ingredients God tells Ezekiel to use would have produced bread that had high protein and nutritional content.

[You can buy such bread today – called Ezekiel Bread –in some health food stores.]

2. Duration

“you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.”

John Taylor: This is not far short of starvation rations on any reckoning, and it seems incredible that Ezekiel could have lasted on it for over a year. On the other hand, it would not be out of harmony with our interpretation of this passage if we argued that this diet related only to his public demonstrative acts and if we at least allowed the possibility that he augmented it with other foods when nobody was looking!

Derek Thomas: Nebuchadnezzar’s final siege of Jerusalem (for Ezekiel’s compatriots still some four years away) was to last for two years. Interrupting as it did two years’

supply of harvest, as well as the possibility of cultivating the land close to the city, the ensuing famine brought the people of Jerusalem to the point of starvation: ‘*By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat*’ (2 Kings 25:3).

B. (:10-11) Amount of Food and Water

1. (:10) Amount of Food

“And your food which you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time.”

2. (:11) Amount of Water

“And the water you drink will be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time.”

MacArthur: Scarcity of food in the 18 month siege especially made necessary the mixing of all kinds of grain for bread. The “*twenty shekels*” would be about 8 ounces, while “*the sixth part of a hin*” would be less than a quart. There would be minimums for daily rations.

Lamar Cooper: The portion of food and water Ezekiel allowed himself was little more than starvation rations. The picture enacted by Ezekiel represented conditions during an actual siege. These actions reinforced the message of the previous dramas, the siege of the clay brick and the laying on his side to portray the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christopher Wright: Some think that this meagre meal was simply a symbolic act in the course of each day’s prone ‘besieging’, and that Ezekiel would have had other meals as normal. However, it seems much more likely that he was indeed subjected to this emphatic entering into the suffering of his people. As other prophets would testify, personal suffering as part of the delivery of God’s word was not unusual. Isaiah endured the shame of wandering around Jerusalem virtually naked to illustrate a point; Jeremiah suffered exclusion from all social intercourse; Hosea went through agonies of marital betrayal. As Ezekiel’s neighbours observed his daily ritual of pathetic precision, as they witnessed the agonizingly brief moment of eating and drinking, and as they then watched him grow daily weaker, thinner and possibly ridden with the ailments of malnutrition, they were being confronted with the most powerful prophetic word imaginable of what lay ahead for those left behind in Jerusalem. They could not have remained unmoved by it—whether moved to acceptance and repentance, or to argumentative disbelief. Only years later would the reports reach the exiles of the siege and suffering of Jerusalem when it happened and of the circumstances so well described in 4:16–17. And only then would the truth of Ezekiel’s costly self-sacrificial prophecy be vindicated.

C. (:12) Public Enactment Emphasizing Defilement Based on Manner of Baking

“And you shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over human dung.”

Leslie Allen: The prophet is given instructions as to how the siege food of vv 9–10 is to be baked. He is told that the baking process is to be carried out “*in public view.*” Evidently, it was customary to bake a barley cake, as distinct from one made from more expensive wheat, not in an oven or on a griddle but directly on hot stones (cf. **1 Kgs 19:6**) or in the hot embers of a fire (cf. the parallel cited by **Greenberg** 107). Dried animal dung could provide fuel for the fire, but here, to depict the rigors of the siege, evidently after the animals had been eaten for food, there is to be the revolting substitution of human excrement, which would be in direct contact with the food. Its uncleanness may be illustrated from the instructions for its disposal outside the camp and the divine warrant for them in **Deut 23:13–15 (12–14)**. Even worse siege conditions are envisioned in **2 Kgs 18:27 (= Isa 36:12)**, eating one’s own excrement.

Douglas Stuart: He was also told—at first and as a kind of test—to bake it by burning dried human waste as the heat source, something God knew would immediately offend Ezekiel’s priestly sensibilities in light of the Pentateuchal cleanliness laws. Thus we may be sure that God was not so much trying to get Ezekiel to violate his own priestly responsibilities as to be reminded of how many compromises of what is usual and normal would have to be made by those cooped up in Jerusalem under overwhelming enemy pressure. When Ezekiel protested the use of human waste as a fuel source (requiring, presumably, handling; v. 14), God graciously substituted what He had obviously planned all along, cow dung as cooking fuel. Cow dung was—and is—a common fuel in the Near East, and its use in cooking fires was, as far as we know, not unusual in any way, and not a violation of the orthodox Israelite cleanliness regulations.

Bruce Hurt: The process of baking in ashes was as old as the time of Abraham (**Ge 18:6**, cf **1Ki 19:6**), and continues in Arabia and Syria to the present day. The kneaded dough was rolled into thin flat cakes, and they were placed upon, or hung over, the hot wood embers of the hearth or oven. But in a besieged city the supply of wood for fuel soon fails and the inhabitants would be forced to dried animal dung and then to use of human excrement. The besieged Jews would be forced to use the dried contents of the cesspools of Jerusalem. All this “dung sign” drama was to be before the eyes of the exiles and to show the extreme degree of wretchedness to which the besieged city would be exposed.

Feinberg: The purpose of the sign was to show how Israel’s position as a separate, sanctified people would be destroyed. The horrors of the siege and exile could not be more vividly depicted. The state of exile itself was defiling, as seen in **Amos 7:17**. God wanted to impress them with the pollution and uncleanness of idolatrous worship and practices. Idolatry is so vile in God’s sight that nothing could be too polluted to portray its essential nature before a thrice holy God. . . . In summary, the purpose of all the acts in symbolic form was to impress the people with the coming famine during the siege of Jerusalem and the people’s subsequent pollution in exile among the heathen.

II. (:13-15) CONCESSION OF SUBSTITUTION OF COW DUNG FOR HUMAN DUNG TO MAINTAIN THE PURITY OF EZEKIEL

A. (:13) General Command

“Then the LORD said, ‘Thus shall the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I shall banish them.’”

Peter Pett: The eating of food in this way would not only indicate the coming siege, it would also act as a reminder that because of their rebelliousness His people would be driven from the land of their inheritance to live in foreign lands that were seen as unclean. This signified that they would no longer be enjoying in full God’s provision for them through His covenant. While they would still be His covenant people, and be expected to live under the terms of the covenant, a major part of the privilege would have been lost. They would no longer have their own land, and their own holy city and temple, and the privilege of living fully in ritual cleanness. They would be defiled until their period of punishment was over.

B. (:14) Personal Objection

“But I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth.’”

C. (:15) Divine Concession

“Then He said to me, ‘See, I shall give you cow’s dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread.’”

III. (:16-17) APPLICATION OF THE DRAMA TO THE UPCOMING SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

A. (:16-17a) Anxiety and Horror of Deprivation

*“Moreover, He said to me,
‘Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem,
and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety,
and drink water by measure and in horror,
because bread and water will be scarce;”*

Peter Pett: ‘The staff of bread.’ Compare **Ezekiel 5:16; Ezekiel 14:13**. To ‘break the staff of bread’ was to take away the provisions on which man depended for survival, the things on which he leaned. Thus ample provision in Jerusalem would cease and be replaced by shortage and famine, so that bread had to be measured out and eaten with careful consideration and discrimination, in order that it might be made to last, and water also would be given by measure, with dismay and astonishment at the shortage of it. Indeed they would reach a point when they both craved it, and lacked it, because the shortage was so great. And they would waste away because of their sinful ways and hearts.

B. (:17b) Humiliation and Dissipation of Corporate Culpability

“and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.”

MacArthur: They were soon to have neither bread nor water in any amount, and they were to grieve over the famine and their iniquity (cf. **Lv 26:21-26**).

Daniel Bock: if one treats this verse as the completion of the sentence begun in **v. 16a**, and one construes the intervening lines as a semipoetic aside. The result is a logical threefold statement of Yahweh's purpose:

- (1) to reduce the bread supply;
- (2) that each and every person be appalled (*nāšammû*); and
- (3) that the people succumb to the famine on account of their iniquity.

Lamar Cooper: Interpretation of this sign was not left to speculation. God specifically told Ezekiel that the meaning of his actions related to the severity of judgment. The rationing represented the interruption of the food and water supply to Jerusalem. Anxiety and despair were the natural reactions of those who lived in a city under siege. Their reaction to the sight of each other as they suffered starvation would be appalling (**v. 17**). The lessons were clear. Jerusalem was headed for judgment, and it would bring horrible conditions. The people would be filled with fear and despair when the siege began, and they would slowly waste away through starvation. Drastically reduced rations would take its toll on the population. Finally, all the judgments were to be understood as a direct result of the sins of the people. The interpretation of this text is not open to speculation. Sin pollutes the external environment and the lives of those who choose it. When God sends judgment, it affects the land as well as the people (**4:9–17; 6:1ff.**).

Christopher Wright: So Ezekiel's little daily ritual of half a loaf and a dung-baked barley cake, along with the physical toll on his own frame, spoke powerfully of two things: on the one hand, the siege rations that would soon be a matter of anxiety and despair among the inhabitants of Jerusalem as with horror they watched themselves wasting away during the siege (**4:16–17**); and on the other hand, the long misery of eating food in an unclean land that would be the lot of the exiles for many years to come.

Richard Baxter: To the wretchedness of physical privation there was to be added the consciousness of the sufferers that it was caused by their own evil deeds.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How good do you think God's provision of manna in the wilderness looks now in comparison to this subsistence diet representing the upcoming deprivation of famine?
- 2) How does sin lead to pollution and defilement in a body that should be the temple of the Holy Spirit?

3) What was God's reason for commanding the use of human excrement in the baking process and then relenting so quickly with the concession he made to Ezekiel?

4) Can you imagine the type of anxiety and horror the Jews in Jerusalem were about to experience as the famine days of the siege would be unleashed?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: There are two especially interesting lessons in all of this. One is the way that actions have power to draw attention to one's message. What Ezekiel does provides the effective framework for what he says. While enactment prophecy may not be an accepted mode of prophetic speech (preaching) today, there is still undeniably a connection between one's behavior and the convincingness of one's words. Those who advocate prayer had better do some. Those who preach evangelism should be about the business of evangelizing. Those who call for good works ought to glorify God with their own. And so on. The divine word still gains acceptance in part by its being heard from the lips of those who obey it as well as speak it.

Second, where nations are concerned, God's anger against iniquity may take the form of warfare. Of course, it could be argued that all wars have involved nations less than entirely righteous on both sides. But beyond this, we must recognize that sometimes the judgment of God is meted out in this life against an unrighteous nation by means of war. The substantial destruction of Germany and Japan during the Second World War, for example, can hardly be isolated from the sovereign controlling action of God. Aggressors and oppressors were vanquished because of their monstrous iniquity. This being the case in principle, it behooves the citizens of all nations to consider when confronted by an enemy whether or not their sins as a people have had anything to do with the distress they face.

Iain Duguid: Ezekiel's diet during this period has a twofold aspect: As indicated above, the rations are small and poor quality, symbolizing the siege diet of the people of Jerusalem. Moreover, Ezekiel is instructed to cook them in a ceremonially unclean way, symbolizing the defiled food that the Israelites will eat in exile (**Ezek. 4:13**). By this means, the twofold message of judgment is proclaimed on all Israel, both those who remain in Jerusalem and those who are in exile. Yet another aspect emerges, however, as the prophet protests the divine decree in **verse 14**. Ezekiel asserts that he has never consumed anything defiled, and the decree is promptly emended by the Lord to allow the prophet to maintain his ceremonial purity. Ezekiel thus stands as a picture of a **righteous remnant**: Though he is in exile, living among the nations just as the people of Israel will do, he nonetheless has managed to maintain his purity. Though the majority of the people may eat defiled food, through the grace of God and their commitment to him others will not.

Derek Thomas:

1. The real famine was a spiritual one

The downfall of Israel and Judah was due to the fact that they had refused the bread of life. During the wanderings in the wilderness God had fed them with manna from heaven, but even then he had cause to remind them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth (**Deut. 8:3**). It is the lesson which Jesus repeats during his own temptations in the wilderness (**Matt. 4:1–4**). The famine, which in itself was an indicator of cursing under the terms of the covenant (**Deut. 28:52–57**), was a reminder of their spiritual starvation. They had forgotten God.

2. The judgement is due to their sin

In what appears to be a summary of what the prophet might have said to any who enquired of him what he was doing, **Ezekiel 4:16–17** concludes with the words: '*because of their sin*'. Ever since the heady days of Solomon the nation had steadily declined in power and influence. Though periods of blessing can be discerned, in the main the history of God's people had been one of sinful neglect of God's ways. Israel's election had been a great blessing; it had also been a test—one which they had consummately failed. Consequently, God confirms the threat he had made in his covenant and Israel and Judah have no one to blame but themselves (cf. **Deut 8:18**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 5:1-17

TITLE: THE SIGN OF THE SHAVED HEAD AND DIVIDED HAIR

BIG IDEA:

CATASTROPHIC PUNISHMENT OF APOSTATE JERUSALEM EXECUTED BY THE ANGRY DIVINE JUDGE BEFORE A WATCHING WORLD

INTRODUCTION:

Privilege brings with it responsibility. The greater the light, the greater the accountability. Here the culpability of the privileged elect nation is exposed (especially focused on the abominations committed in the capital city of Jerusalem and its sacred temple). The wrath of God must be poured out in full measure by a zealous divine judge who wants the watching nations to see that He will not tolerate sin and unfaithfulness even among His covenant people. Still there is a glimmer of hope surrounding the remaining remnant. But there is no hope for those who want to maintain that God will spare Jerusalem from the ravages of divine punishment.

Leslie Allen: The last in the series of sign-acts concentrates on the grim fate of the people confined to Jerusalem, which they would undergo during and after the siege. The shift from the city, which featured in **4:1–3**, to its inhabitants has been facilitated by the symbolism of siege food in **4:9–12, 14–17** and by the explicit plural references in **4:16–17**. The symbolic action of shaving is a development of the metaphor of divine punishment in **Isa 7:20**, whereby Yahweh was to use Assyria as a razor that would shave off all bodily hair. The metaphor seems to mean that Ahaz would suffer the deep humiliation of being left with nothing (**R. E. Clements**, Isaiah 1–39 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 90; cf. **2 Sam 10:4–5**). . .

God does not cease to be the judge of the apostate and of the backsliding believer. Ezekiel’s later role as watchman certainly involved a call to repentance and so a desire to save the lost among the people of God. But God’s will to save in no way cancels out his moral necessity to judge, wherever evil exists among “*the community of Israel*.” “*Iniquity*” is still abhorrent to him. The vision of the divine judge must still grip those who hear it read, and Ezekiel’s call to announce punishment for rebels against the will of God still stands. God’s “severity” survives as a real deterrent, even when his “kindness” has come to prevail—“*kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off*” (**Rom 11:22**).

I. (:1-4) THE INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE SIGN OF THE SHAVED HEAD AND DIVIDED HAIR – THE PUNISHMENT OF JERUSALEM

A. (:1) Punishment of Jerusalem Acted Out

1. Shaving the Head

*“As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword;
take and use it as a barber's razor on your head and beard.”*

Lamar Cooper: Just as a razor cuts away hair from the face and head, so the invading armies would cut away the population from the land. Shaving the head was a serious matter for a priest (**Lev 19:27; 21:5**) or a Nazirite (**Num 6:5**) because hair was the sign of their consecration to God. For this reason the loss of Samson’s hair (**Judg 16:17**) was a tragic sin. Shaving the head normally was regarded as a sign of humiliation (**2 Sam 10:4–5**) or mourning (**Isa 15:2; Jer 41:5–6; 48:37; Ezek 9:3**). It also was practiced in pagan rituals for the dead.

Peter Pett: Shaving the head or beard was a sign of mourning (**Ezekiel 7:18; Isaiah 15:2; Isaiah 22:12; Jeremiah 48:37; Amos 8:10**), or even of disgrace (**2 Samuel 10:4**). It was also the sign of the end of a person’s separation to God (**Numbers 6:5; Numbers 6:18**). Ezekiel’s act in doing so was an indication that Jerusalem would be shorn, as a sign of disgrace, as a sign of mourning, and as a sign of the end of its separation to God.

MacArthur: The sign in shaving his hair illustrated the severe humiliation to come at the hand of enemies, emphasizing calamities to three segments of Jerusalem due to the Babylonian conquest.

2. Dividing the Hair

“Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair.”

Leslie Allen: As Ezekiel represented the divine punisher in **4:1–3**, so he does here, by doing the shaving (cf. **5:11**). But by being the one shaved, he assumes the role of the people in the city, as he represented them in **4:9–12, 14–17** (cf. **Friebel**, “Sign-Acts” 573).

B. (:2) Punishment of Jerusalem Takes Three Different Forms

1. Destruction Within the City

*“One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city,
when the days of the siege are completed.”*

2. Death in Fighting All Around the City

*“Then you shall take one third
and strike it with the sword all around the city,”*

3. Driven Into Exile – Dispersion among the Nations

*“and one third you shall scatter to the wind;
and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.”*

Iain Duguid: God’s judgment is not delivered in a haphazard fashion but is meticulously measured.

John Taylor: The symbolism is obvious: a third of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be destroyed within the city, a third would be killed by the sword in fighting around the city, and a third would be scattered among the nations and would continue to be harried by hostile forces. From among these survivors would emerge the handful of those who would be preserved.

Christopher Wright: But the symbolism of the sword adds another element that would eventually have become clear to the shocked onlookers. For this sword must be none other than the sword of Yahweh's anger. Ezekiel has changed identity again. No longer representing Yahweh alone besieging Jerusalem, no longer representing the Israelites alone—both the besieged and the exiled with their paltry and polluted diets, he now acts out both parts in a brilliant one-man double act. For the hand that wields the sword is the hand of Yahweh, but the body being shaved is the house of Israel. The hacked body of Ezekiel is Israel—Israel being shorn of its priestly role among the nations, Israel being shattered in the grief of national defeat, Israel being shamed before those nations among whom she should have shone (as the message of **5:5–17** makes clear). As Ezekiel's horrified neighbours stared at the apparition before them—this gaunt spectre of a starving man, shaved bald with his hair in piles at his feet, tears of pain stinging his eyes and blood trickling from gashes in his taut malnourished skin—they were looking into the mirror of their own future as a people.

C. (:3) Punishment of Jerusalem Will Leave a Small Remnant

*“Take also a few in number from them
and bind them in the edges of your robes.”*

Leslie Allen: A few hairs that belong to the last third are to be retrieved from the ground where they have fallen and carried safely in the loose end of Ezekiel's robe, which could be turned up and used as a bag (cf. **Hag 2:12** and in general **1 Sam 25:29**). But how safe are these individual hairs? Not very, for some of them are to be taken out and consigned to the fire of judgment that still burned on the brick. There is an ironic toying with the notion of hope of survival for a remnant. “It is ... aimed at the destruction of all hope of surviving the judgment with a whole skin” (**Eichrodt** 87; cf. **Friebel**, “Sign-Acts” 590–91; **Krüger**, *Geschichtskonzepte* 125).

Lamar Cooper: One final significant act was the placement of a few remaining hairs in the folds of his garment. This represented the remnant who were the hope of the future (**vv. 3–4**). This theme of a remnant was similar to that of Amos when he saw the remnant of Israel like the remains of a sheep in the mouth of a lion (**Amos 5:12**). The theme of a remnant appears in other Old Testament prophets as well (**Isa 6:13; 10:22; Jer 23:3; Zech 13:8–9**) and after the exile became the dominant theme in prophecy.

The few hairs that were preserved, like the scarlet cord in Rahab's window (**Josh 2:18, 21; 6:22–25**), were a sign of deliverance. They were like the fringes on the priests' garments (**Num 15:37–39**) that were to preserve the nation through a call to be obedient to the commands of God.

D. (:4) Punishment of Jerusalem will Extend to Exiles in Babylon

*“And take again some of them and throw them into the fire,
and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.”*

Leslie Allen: The last clause of the verse draws a more general conclusion. The fate of Jerusalem and those Judeans who were besieged within its walls had a representative value: it would be decisive for the covenant people as a whole. The initial fire would lead to a conflagration of judgment that was to engulf the whole community of Israel. For the already exiled members of the community to whom Ezekiel ministered, the fate of the citizens of Jerusalem would entail the extinction of hope.

Daniel Block: As a final act, Yahweh commands Ezekiel to take some of the hair he had tucked away and throw it into the fire. This action serves as a warning to complacent exiles. By tucking the remnants of hair away in his garment, Ezekiel had indeed announced that the future of God’s people lay with the exiles. However, simply to have survived the conflagration in the city, the sword of the enemy, and dispersion among the nations should not be interpreted as a guarantee of safety. The fire that had begun in Jerusalem would spread to the entire house of Israel, even to those in exile. As **Lev. 26:36–39** had predicted, the long arm of Yahweh’s wrath would extend far beyond the borders of his land. At this point the relevance of the sign-act for the prophet’s observers should have become apparent.

Feinberg: But even he remnant was to undergo further trial and ordeal. In **Jeremiah 40-44** can be found their trials in the land which took place even after the destruction of the city and the sanctuary; in this category are the difficulties after the assassination of Gedaliah by Ishmael and the descent into Egypt under Johanan. In short, the judgment reached the entire nation. What Ezekiel had done to his hair, God would do to the inhabitant of Jerusalem and Judah.

II. (:5-17) THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SIGN – THE CULPABILITY OF THE PRIVILEGED COVENANT NATION

A. (:5-6) Incomparable Privilege and Incomprehensible Rebellion

1. (:5) Incomparable Privilege

*“Thus says the Lord God, 'This is Jerusalem;
I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her.'”*

Leslie Allen: While the symbolic action of **4:4–5** had accused the covenant community as a whole of a long history of guilt, here there is a concentration on the sinful role of the capital. The accusation is accentuated by setting it against a background of privilege. Jerusalem’s wrongdoing is represented as failure to live up to responsibilities that went with such a privileged position.

Lamar Cooper: Jerusalem was set “*in the center of the nations*” (v. 5). Some would argue that this was a reference to an archaic persuasion that Jerusalem was the geographical center of the earth. For those in Ezekiel’s day this impression was true to some extent. Jerusalem lay in the center of various world empires that rose and fell in

the northern Mediterranean, Asia, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and North Africa. The land of Israel often was the battleground of those warring groups. Also because of its geographic location it was a trade and travel center. Today it is a center for three of the world's great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Israel and Jerusalem have been an amazing focal point theologically and politically for the last four thousand years. From **38:12** some believe that Ezekiel was referring to Jerusalem's central place in world affairs, calling it the "navel of the earth."

There is another aspect to the position of Jerusalem and Israel seen by Ezekiel. The phrase "*in the center of the nations*" (v. 5) is one that has overtones of God's elect purpose for Israel. Israel and especially Jerusalem was that "*place which the Lord shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there*" (**Deut 12:5**; cf. **Ps 48:1–14**). From the time they were constituted as a theocracy (**Exod 19:1–8**), there was a clear delineation of God's elect purpose for the nation (**Exod 19:5–6**) as the channel of his redemption. In this sense also Israel was set in the "*midst*" of the nations as a kingdom of priests, and thus they were supposed to be instruments of God's missionary purpose. But the nation dwelt on the privilege of being God's chosen people rather than on their responsibilities. The nationalistic spirit created an isolationism that can be seen in the example of Jonah.

Christopher Wright: vv. 5-17 – This section very obviously interprets and explains the preceding record of Ezekiel's actions during the year, leaving their meaning in no doubt at all. Reading it through as a whole presents the stark picture of the final destruction of Jerusalem, with accompanying horrors of famine-induced cannibalism, disease and slaughter, all of which are on the one hand the inescapable consequences of siege warfare in the ancient world and on the other hand the effect of the implacable punishment of Yahweh on his incorrigible people. From a literary point of view, it is uneven and involves several restarts and repetitions. For this reason some doubt whether it constitutes a single utterance given all at one time, namely at the ending of the acted siege. It may have been composed from recollections of the prophecies given as commentary on the acts themselves, especially that mentioned in **4:7**, unless one takes the view (as suggested above) that Ezekiel was silent throughout the whole sequence, so that even his 'prophesying' against Jerusalem in **4:7** was mimed. Or it may be that Ezekiel's original speech on the final day of his siege mime has been expanded by other oracles from later in his career. Whatever the detailed explanation of its rough structure, we may recognize three strong central threads running through it:

- the centrality of Jerusalem in the midst of the nations;
- the correspondingly worse nature of the sin of Jerusalem in comparison with the nations;
- and the public punishment of Jerusalem as a warning to the nations. . .

For Jerusalem or Israel to be in the **centre** of the nations, then, meant much more than a territorial grid-reference. It was a shorthand way of expressing all the universality of God's purposes among the nations that was bound up in the particularity of Israel's election. That is, if Israel were the hub at the centre of the wheel, it was for the sake of the spokes and the rim that they were there at all. For we may note that **5:5** is not in any

case simply a statement of natural fact. Jerusalem does not just happen to be at the centre as an accident of geography. No, it is in that position because of the divine will and action: Jerusalem, which I have set in the centre ... And if that implied a degree of exaltation as well, as it certainly does elsewhere, then the ultimate purpose of that was to bring glory and honour to Yahweh himself. So the centrality of Jerusalem is a statement about Israel's election. What follows shows that such a privilege was matched by enormous responsibility—a responsibility in which Israel had so horrendously failed as to put even their election in serious doubt.

2. (:6) Incomprehensible Rebellion

“But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.”

Christopher Wright: Israel's uniqueness in election exacerbated their uniqueness in disobedience. Thus, something which the psalmist celebrates as a mark of the distinction between Israel and the nations actually makes Israel's sin all the worse.

Daniel Block: Yahweh's expectations of his people are summarized in two key words: *mišpāṭîm* and *ḥuqqôt*. The first, from *šāpaṭ*, “to judge,” and usually rendered “judgments,” referred originally to legal verdicts by a judge, but with time was applied to customary and legislated regulations as well. The second derives from the verb *ḥāqaq*, “to engrave, incise,” suggesting formal unchangeable laws, decreed by a lawgiver and etched in rock or clay tablets. Together these terms constitute a standardized pair that occurs with great frequency in the Priestly and Deuteronomistic writings, and their distinctive nuances tend to merge.

The laws that the Israelites had violated were not simply statutes enacted by human courts or human rulers. The *mišpāṭîm* and *ḥuqqôt* represent Yahweh's **covenant stipulations** as outlined in the Priestly writings and expounded in Deuteronomy. According to **Deut. 4:7–8**, Israel's covenantal obligations to Yahweh were the envy of the nations; none of them had received such a just (*šaddîq*) set of laws from its god. However, instead of treasuring the revealed will of Yahweh as a sign of divine grace, Israel had adopted her neighbors' wicked patterns of behavior. Given Jerusalem's clear knowledge of the will of her God and the uniquely just nature of his ordinances, Ezekiel's characterization of his people as more wicked than the nations is justified. Instead of being a light to the world, by failing to live in the light of God's revelation, his chosen city had become the world's darkest blot.

B. (:7-8) Distinctive Disobedience and Divine Judgments

1. (:7) Accusation of Distinctive Disobedience Compared to Pagan Nations

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you, and have not walked in My statutes, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,'”

Daniel Block: The shift from third to second person of direct address in v. 7 signals the transition from indictment to announcement of judgment. . .

2. (:8) Announcement of Divine Judgments on the World Stage

“therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.’”

Douglas Stuart: Disobedience was exactly Jerusalem’s problem, as God’s words to Ezekiel make clear. Jerusalem was, in fact, more guilty than the pagan nations around it because Jerusalem knew God’s covenant (“*statutes ... judgments*”) and broke it anyway (v. 6). Moreover, their disobedience literally exceeded the pagans’, inasmuch as in certain ways by any measure they were worse than their nonbelieving neighbors. Even the pagans thought so (v. 7). Accordingly, it was appropriate that Jerusalem be punished openly and internationally, by the Babylonian siege and by exile to various nations, that is, “*in the sight of the nations*” (v. 8).

Leslie Allen: vv. 7-10 --The accusatory interpretation develops into a regular judgment oracle that moves from recapitulated accusation (v 7) to announcement of punishment (vv 8–10). Both elements are lavishly introduced by the messenger formula. . . A hinge between cause and effect, “*therefore,*” regularly links accusation and announcement of punishment in prophetic oracles of judgment, and the messenger formula also characteristically introduces the announcement of divine reprisal.

C. (:9-10) Unholy Abominations and Unspeakable Horrors

1. (:9) Unholy Abominations

“And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.”

2. (:10) Unspeakable Horrors

“Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you, and scatter all your remnant to every wind.”

Douglas Stuart: Among the extreme horrors attendant to the whole process would be the practice of cannibalism (v. 10), itself a predicted judgment for violating the covenant (**Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53–56**). So great were the abominations of the people of Jerusalem that this awful fate also awaited them as they slowly were starved by the surrounding armies. The Book of Lamentations describes in considerable detail the fact that all these judgments did indeed come to pass upon Jerusalem at the time of its long siege and subsequent fall to Babylon in 588–586 b.c. (**Lam. 1:7–14; 2:20–22; 4:4–10**; etc.).

D. (:11-12) Defiling the Temple and Diverse Punishments

1. (:11) Defiling the Temple

“So as I live,’ declares the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled

My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye shall have no pity and I will not spare.”

John Taylor: On top of disobedience and rebellion came the defilement of God’s sanctuary with detestable things and abominations. This is the first reference in Ezekiel to the corrupt practices which were being carried on in the temple between the captivity of Jehoiachin and the final destruction of the city in 587 bc. **Chapter 8** describes this in horrifying detail.

Iain Duguid: This covenant context is important because it demonstrates that the judgment that will befall Jerusalem is neither arbitrary nor unfair. The judgments coming on that city are not random afflictions thought up on the spur of the moment, as if God has lost his temper; they are the execution of the curses on the covenant breakers. Indeed, Israel has not merely failed to live up to God’s standards; they have not even lived up to the standards of the nations around them (**Ezek. 5:7**). Instead of being a light to the nations, they have led the nations further into the darkness. For this reason, God must act to judge. As in **Deuteronomy 13:9**, where Israelites were forbidden to show compassion toward even their nearest and dearest or to spare them if they were attempting to lead others into apostasy, so the Lord will not show pity or spare his beloved but rebellious people (**Ezek. 5:11**).

Leslie Allen: The definition of Jerusalem’s “*shocking practices*” or “*abominations*” (תועבת) reflects the term’s traditional links with impurity (see, e.g., **Lev 18:24–30**; **Deut 14:3**). In priestly thought the sins of the people had the effect of polluting the sanctuary with a miasma of uncleanness, which required removal by sacrifice to save the people from perishing (**Lev 15:31**; **16:19**; **Num 19:20**).

Lamar Cooper: Using another oath formula, “*as surely as I live*,” God swore by his own life that he would judge Israel (**v. 11**). Not only was Israel guilty of idolatry and its accompanying detestable practices, but they had brought this abominable worship into the temple of God in Jerusalem. This is the first reference in Ezekiel to the problem of the defilement of the temple, discussed more completely in **8:1–18**. Their unparalleled sin was the basis for unprecedented judgment. One-third were to be destroyed by plague and famine, one-third by the sword, and one-third scattered in every direction at the destruction of the nation (**v. 12**). These words of judgment are awesome when related to the declaration of **v. 5**, “*This is Jerusalem*,” and **v. 11**, “*I will not look on you with pity or spare you*.” The greatness of God’s love for his people demands a firm and severe response whenever that love is ignored or violated.

Daniel Block: The second major phase of this complex judgment speech opens abruptly with *Therefore* (*lākēn*). This opening links the following passage with the preceding and brings the series of four *lākēn* pronouncements to a climax. Unlike **vv. 8** and **10**, however, here *lākēn* lacks an antecedent rationale introduced by *ya’an*, “*because*.” Instead, the order of *ya’an* and *lākēn* is reversed. Custom and logic would have had **v. 11** constructed as follows: “*Because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your*

detestable and abominable practices, therefore, as I live—declares the Lord Yahweh—I myself will cut off. My eye will show no pity; nor will I spare.” Alternatively, on the analogy of **34:7–9**, after the opening *lākēn*, one might have expected a direct appeal for the attention of the audience, like “*Therefore, O Jerusalem, hear the word of Yahweh,*” followed first by a *ya ‘an* statement, then by a second *lākēn* announcement. Rhetorically the present construction thrusts the divine initiator of the impending judgments into the foreground and highlights the irrevocability of his resolve to punish Jerusalem for her wickedness.

2. (:12) Diverse Punishments

a. Punishment by Plague and Famine

*“One third of you will die by plague
or be consumed by famine among you,”*

b. Punishment by the Sword

“one third will fall by the sword around you,”

c. Punishment by Dispersal among the Nations

*“and one third I will scatter to every wind,
and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.”*

Daniel Block: The attention shifts momentarily from Yahweh’s disposition toward his agenda to the devastating effects of his actions.

Leslie Allen: The burning of one third of the cut hair “*inside the city*” (v 2) is interpreted as a metaphor for the rigors of a siege, specifically the fatal outbreak of plague and onset of famine (cf. **2 Kgs 25:3**). The slashing of the next third of the pile of hair with the sword “*around*” the model of the city is sufficiently clear as to need little explanation. It found fulfillment in a royal attempt to escape the besieged city (**2 Kgs 25:4–7**). The fate of the last pile of hair is simply repeated in v 12b from the end of v 2, with the necessary change of the first of the two verbs to the divine first person, to match the second verb. The change of person brings v 12b even closer to its prototype in **Lev 26:33a**. The divine curse for the people’s radical breach of Yahweh’s covenant with them was to come tragically true. The triple formula of fatalities caused by plague, famine, and sword in warfare was also used by Jeremiah (e.g., **Jer 21:13; 27:13**). It recurs in **Ezek 6:11, 12; 7:15**. The formula, which may have been borrowed from Jeremiah by Ezekiel, is used rather more freely by the latter (see **Illman**, OT Formulas 94–97).

E. (:13) Satisfying Divine Wrath and Speaking of Divine Vindication

1. Satisfying Divine Wrath

*“Thus My anger will be spent, and I will satisfy My wrath on them,
and I shall be appeased;”*

2. Speaking of Divine Vindication

“then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal

when I have spent My wrath upon them.”

Daniel Block: The final statement in **v. 13** is the key to the chapter, if not to Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry as a whole. Yahweh’s announcement of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the decimation of its population has been driven by his passion. The word *qin’â* occurs frequently in Ezekiel’s preaching. Rather than interpreting this term as “jealousy,” which is often associated with envy, one should understand *qin’â* to represent the fire of divine passion, Yahweh’s enthusiasm for his covenant relationship with Israel. He had not entered into this relationship lightly, and he cannot stand idly by while it is threatened. The intensity of his wrath at the defilement of his sanctuary and the repudiation of his will arises out of the profundity of his covenant love. Because he loves so deeply, he must respond vigorously. His relationship with his people has been violated.

Lamar Cooper: **vv. 13-17** -- The closing verses of **chap. 5** present one of the major themes of the book: **the nature and character of God**. Whether God acted in judgment or deliverance, his motive was redemptive and salvific. Ezekiel used four expressions in **v. 13** to suggest the fury of God that diminished with the exercise of his judgment. Ezekiel said his anger would “*cease*,” his wrath would “*subside*,” he would be “*avenged*,” and his wrath would be “*spent*.” Therefore God was zealous to judge the people and vindicate his holiness and righteousness. His zeal works two ways to promote redemption. It moves him to punish sin so people will know he is not indifferent to unrighteousness, and it moves him to redeem and restore a remnant lest the unbelieving nations should question his faithfulness.

F. (:14-15) Reviling Reproaches and Raging Rebukes

1. (:14) Reviling Reproaches

“Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by.”

Feinberg: God’s honor, flouted by the people in the sight of the nations, had to be vindicated before the eyes of those very nations. The prophet stressed zeal or jealousy as a determining motive in God’s action: to punish His people in order to reveal to them that He could not tolerate sin (**16:38, 42**), and to restore them so that the nations would not doubt His power (**36:5; 38:19; 39:25-29**). Then Israel would know by bitter experience that it was the Lord indeed who had spoken. They would have ample time to contemplate it when they became the taunt, reproach and instruction of all the nations. Israel, suffering for her sins under God’s righteous wrath, would be an object lesson to the nations. The heathen would be amazed because they had not seen a national deity so deal with a people who professed his worship (cf. **Deut. 28:37**).

2. (:15) Raging Rebukes

“So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you, when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath, and raging rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken.”

Daniel Block: Now the attention shifts away from Yahweh's emotional reaction to Jerusalem's infidelity, returning to the effects that his rage will have on the city: a complete reversal of fortunes. She who had previously enjoyed an honorific status among the nations would become a total ruin; instead of inspiring the nations, she would become an object of scorn and derision by all passersby. The list of expressions describing the observers' reaction reflects the richness of the Hebrew vocabulary of contempt.

David Thompson: Verse 15 says this judgment will specifically make a statement to the nations. It will be:

- 1) Israel is a reproach;
- 2) Israel is a reviling nation;
- 3) Israel is a warning to the nations;
- 4) Israel is an object of anger and wrath to the nations.

Matthew Henry: Those who will not observe the judgments of God's mouth shall not escape the judgments of his hand.

G. (:16-17) Deprivation by Famine and Destruction by Violent Means

1. (:16) Deprivation by Famine

“When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I shall send to destroy you, then I shall also intensify the famine upon you, and break the staff of bread.”

2. (:17) Destruction by Violent Means

“Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.”

Daniel Block: The finale to Ezekiel's first judgment speech approaches the demise of Jerusalem from a different angle, the means whereby Yahweh achieves his designs. **Vv. 16–17** catalogue a series of agents standing at Yahweh's disposal, ready to fulfill his missions of death. What distinguishes these calamities as divine agents is the presence of the verb *šillah*, with Yahweh as the subject. The intensive Piel carries the sense “to unleash, to loose.”

Peter Pett: The desolations were now spelled out. Firstly famine. This would be like hurtful arrows (**Deuteronomy 32:23**), arriving suddenly, destroying men when no one was near. And the famine would increase and get worse, and the provisions on which they had leant for so long would be taken from them. They would no longer have anything to depend on.

And, as was inevitable with such famine, starving evil beasts would seek human flesh in order to survive, resulting in many bereavements, and pestilence and blood would follow on people starved of nourishment. Note the combination of ‘pestilence and blood’. The two words in Hebrew are an alliteration, ‘*deber wa dam*’. Elsewhere

'blood' often signifies pestilence. Then on top of this will come the sword. Men of violence would take advantage of the weakness resulting from their parlous state. And all this would come on them because Yahweh had allowed it. It is Yahweh Who says so.

Famine, wild beasts, pestilence, sword, these types of the judgment of God are fairly common in Scripture. See especially '*God's four sore judgments*' (**Ezekiel 14:21**); '*God's seven times more plagues*' (**Leviticus 26:21-26**); see also **Deuteronomy 32:23-25**; **Revelation 6:8**. They are His 'reward' for covenant unfaithfulness.

Throughout this passage we are made aware of Ezekiel's profound sense of the holiness of God, of the awfulness and sublimity of the divine King, of the greatness of His glory, accentuated by his great vision, and of his awareness of the sacredness and authority of the Law, the divine instruction, so that all disobedience totally outraged him. It may be that we live in the age of mercy and abundant salvation, but we need to be aware that God has not changed. He still hates sin just as bitterly.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) By virtue of sovereign election, what responsibility must we as the privileged people of God assume with respect to the pursuit of holiness?
- 2) When have we been unrealistic in thinking that God is for us when we are rebelling against Him?
- 3) Why is God so zealous when it comes to executing judgment against His elect nation?
- 4) What impact did Israel's disobedience and subsequent judgment have on God's reputation among the nations?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Despite its fragmentary nature, on the basis of content, style, and formal literary indicators, **5:5-17** subdivides into two uneven primary parts and several secondary segments:

- a. The indictment of Jerusalem (**vv. 5-6**)
- b. Two announcements of judgment upon Jerusalem (**vv. 7-17**)
 - 1) The first announcement (**vv. 7-10**)
 - a) The initial accusation and sentence (**vv. 7-8**)

- b) The second accusation and sentence (vv. 9–10)
- 2) The second announcement (vv. 11–17)
 - a) The accusation (v. 11a)
 - b) The sentence (vv. 11b–17)
 - i. Yahweh’s attitude toward Jerusalem (vv. 11–13)
 - ii. Yahweh’s objective for Jerusalem (vv. 14–15)
 - iii. Yahweh’s agents of death in Jerusalem (vv. 16–17)

Douglas Stuart: Beginning at **verse 5** God explains through Ezekiel what significance these symbolic actions have in terms of prediction. At **verse 12** we actually read the meanings. Burning the hairs symbolized that there would be a group that would die from disease during and after the siege. Fever so often accompanies disease that the burning symbolism is highly appropriate. Cutting some hair with the sword symbolized that a group that would be killed by the soldiers of the Babylonian army, venting their pent-up frustration at the population that had held out so long against them. Such people would in many instances literally die by the sword. The others would be exiled (scattered “*to all the winds*”) just as the third group of hair was thrown to the wind. Exile was seen in ancient times as a fate from which one never returned, in the same way that hair scattered to the winds is virtually impossible to reclaim. But that wasn’t all! The small group spared so far in all this destruction would be further decimated (i.e., like the hair taken from the garment and burned) by famine, wild animals, disease, bloodshed, and more death (vv. 16–17). These latter miseries are also standard types of covenant curses associated in the Pentateuch with disobedience to God’s law (famine: **Lev. 26:26, 29**, etc.; wild animals: **Lev. 26:22, Deut. 32:24**; disease: **Deut. 28:21**, etc.; bloodshed: **Deut. 32:42**).

Christopher Wright: The verbal interpretation [vv. 5-17], however, does more than simply explain in words what was already fairly obvious from the mimes. It sets the whole scene of Israel’s judgment in the **context of the nations**. There was a wider perspective on events than the mime itself could portray, a perspective that went beyond Yahweh’s dealings with Israel alone. Yahweh had ‘set’ Jerusalem in the centre of the nations—her election therefore was of relevance to their destiny also. Jerusalem’s sin was all the more heinous because it was even worse than that of the nations who knew not Yahweh. And Jerusalem’s punishment would not merely ‘*teach Israel a lesson*’, but constitute a **major historical object lesson for the nations**. As a result of it, ‘*they will know that I the Lord have spoken*’ (13). They here means Israel, but as Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry matures, he anticipates that God’s ultimate purpose includes the nations, as well as Israel, coming to know that he, Yahweh, is truly God. That was not just Yahweh’s zeal, it was the burning passion of Ezekiel himself, and it is introduced, though without much development yet, in this, the very first prophetic speech to fall from his otherwise dumb lips.

David Thompson: GOD TOLD EZEKIEL TO CUT HIS HAIR AND BEARD TO SHOW ISRAEL THE HUMILIATION SHE WOULD EXPERIENCE BECAUSE OF THE HORRIFIC JUDGMENT OF GOD.

TEXT: Ezekiel 6:1-14

TITLE: KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

DIVINE JUDGMENT EXALTS THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD IN THE EYES OF BOTH THE JEWS IN ISRAEL AND THE EXILES DISPERSED AMONG THE NATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

What a horrifying picture – God setting His face in judgment against His own people and His holy city Jerusalem. It speaks to the level of abomination and depravity that characterized the sins of God’s elect nation. The folly of idolatry is once again exposed for its futility and impotence. The various types of judgment deployed by God cover every possibility – from warfare to sickness to famine and to any other affliction. But these severe judgments have a divine and redemptive purpose:

“thus they will know that I am the LORD.”

Leslie Allen: [Quoting] **Parunak** (“Structural Studies” 187) has drawn attention to the stylistic patterning that unites the oracles, an A B B’ A’ chiasmic arrangement in which A / A’ stand for cultic references within vv 1–7 and 13–14, and B / B’ represent references to human suffering in vv 8–10 and 11–12. One may also observe the use of כל תועבות *“all the abominations”* in vv 9 and 11 as a hinge that connects the two oracles.

Daniel Block: The boundaries of the present literary unit are set by the word-event formula, *wayēhî dēbar yhw̄h ’ēlay lē’ mōr*, “The word of Yahweh came to me saying,” which appears in 6:1 and in 7:1, as the opening to the next oracle. After the introduction the prophecy proper subdivides into two parts (6:2–10, 11–14), each of which commences with a hostile physical gesture and concludes with the recognition formula.

Lamar Cooper: The message of **Ezek 6** is transitional. It moves from the purely dramatic forms of the messages in **Ezek 4** and **5**, combines dramatic and vocal elements, and anticipates the visions and messages that follow. This message also contains a thematic transition from the sins of the nation in general (**chaps. 4–5**) to the mountains and high places and “*detestable practices*” (6:11), which were associated with pagan worship. Thus the focus of **chap. 6** is on the individual responsibility of the people and prepares the way for the subsequent spoken messages.

This drama has four divisions:

- First, the prophet is commanded to preach to the mountains of Israel (vv. 1–2).
- Second is a warning of approaching destruction of places of idolatry (vv. 3–7).
- Third, there is a brief interlude of hope—a repentant remnant will be preserved in exile (vv. 8–10).

- Fourth is a mocking lament of the devastation Israel's idolatry will have caused (vv. 11–14).

Merrill: **Judgment** is a pervasive theme of all the prophets of Israel, but none exceeds Ezekiel in the abundance and intensity of his messages of divine retribution. Moreover, none reiterates as much as Ezekiel the pedagogical purposes of the visitations of the Lord: *'that they [Israel and the nations] might know Yahweh.'* Judgment, then, is not only **retributive** but **redemptive**. God's purpose in judgment is not to destroy the peoples He has created but to bring them back into harmony with His creation purposes for them.

Christopher Wright: At this point in the book, the message is of unrelieved judgment and doom. In the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem, however, Ezekiel was told to address these same mountains again. This time, in **chapter 36**, his message is one of restoration. The hills of Judah will again be inhabited and prosperous. Both chapters, in their portrayal of judgment on the land and then of restoration to the land, strongly echo the language of **Leviticus 26**, which seems to have had a major influence on the theology and vocabulary of Ezekiel.

Peter Pett: *'And they shall know that I am Yahweh.'* This is the constant **refrain** in Ezekiel. This was God's purpose. That they might know Him for Who and What He was, One Who demanded obedience to His covenant, One Who demanded righteousness and holiness, One Who hated idolatry and what it did to His people, and yet as One Who in the end would show mercy on them, for that was why He had chosen Ezekiel as His prophet.

I. (:1-10) PRONOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT TEMPERED WITH REMNANT PROMISE

(:1) Revelation Pronouncement

"And the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

A. (:2-7) Pronouncement of Judgment

1. (:2-3a) Directed Against the Mountains

a. (:2) Command to the Prophet to Prophesy

"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say"

Leslie Allen: The target of the oracle is *"the mountains of Israel,"* a phrase that appears frequently in the book of Ezekiel and nowhere else. The term alludes to the land of Israel, partly as characteristically mountainous terrain and partly in differentiation from the monotonous Babylonian plain in which Ezekiel and his fellow exiles now lived. It expresses such nostalgia as a native of Switzerland feels who has to reside in Holland, or a Welshman who must live in East Anglia. It also expresses the loss of a grandeur that was the gift of God to his people (cf. **Vawter** 51). Yet the notion of majestic

privilege is here blatantly overridden by a message of judgment. For all its magnificence, the land must suffer as a result of Israel's sinning.

David Guzik: This prophecy was directed against the **mountains** because they helped define the geography of Israel, and more importantly, they were centers of idol worship – the infamous **high places** mentioned many times in the Old Testament.

b. (:3a) Command to the Mountains to Listen

*“Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord God!
Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills,
the ravines and the valleys:”*

Douglas Stuart: The fact that it was the majority view, however, in no way made idolatry right. It represented the most basic sort of covenant disobedience (**Ex. 20:3–5**) and required judgment. Because idolatry was practiced mostly on the hilltop shrines (the infamous “*high places*”) in Canaan (**1 Kin. 14:23; 2 Kin. 7:10**), it was appropriate for the Lord to instruct Ezekiel to face west toward the mountains of Israel in order to denounce Israel's idolatry and to predict desolation as a result of it (**v. 2**). His prophecy against the mountains (**v. 3ff.**) is thus a literary device (cf. **2 Sam. 1:19, 21, 25**) and not intended to suggest that the mountains themselves were guilty. The real guilty party was the idolaters themselves, not an aspect of the geography. Indeed, by including also the ravines and the valleys, the prophecy shows that Israel in general—meaning the nation as a whole—is to suffer destruction.

2. (:3b) Destructive in its Intent

*“Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword on you,
and I will destroy your high places.”*

Peter Pett: The invading armies would penetrate the mountains and hills and would destroy their high places, their incense altars and their idols, and would slay the worshippers around them and offer them in disdain to their gods who had been able to do nothing for them. These high places were the continual bane of the prophets and of the good kings of Israel and Judah. They had largely been Canaanite shrines and were so popular that few kings dared to touch them (the exceptions were Hezekiah and Josiah. But they were quickly restored once they had died). At them men often professed to worship Yahweh, but they incorporated naturism, and fertility rites, and idolatry, with all their sexual connotations. They represented at their best debased Yahwism and at their worst the full abominations of the Canaanites, including perverted sex and possibly child sacrifices and ancestor worship.

3. (:4-7a) Defiling and Desecrating in its Execution

a. (:4-5) Defiling and Desecrating Your Idolatrous Altars

*“So your altars will become desolate,
and your incense altars will be smashed;
and I shall make your slain fall in front of your idols.
I shall also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of*

*their idols;
and I shall scatter your bones around your altars.”*

Daniel Block: A more caustic comment on idolatry can scarcely be imagined. Yahweh’s treatment of these images will involve not only their “*smashing*” (*šābar*) and “*obliteration*” (*šābat*), but their exposure as powerless figments of the human imagination. The destruction of the images testifies to the deities’ impotence to defend themselves, and the slaughter of the devotees to the gods’ inability to defend their worshipers.

Bruce Hurt: As Babylon's stranglehold on Jerusalem tightened, people were starving, yet they continued to turn to idols for deliverance. So in this verse there is a bitter irony when God says that the very idols which you have bowed before to save you, will be the place where you shall be slain. God gives a clear indication that these empty, lifeless figures are impotent and devoid of saving power.

Alexander: The ‘*scattering of bones*’ is a phrase used for judgment in which uncleanness and shame are conveyed (cf. **Psalm 53:5; 141:7**). The bones would be those of the Israelites who had become engrossed in these pagan practices.

b. (:6-7a) Defiling and Desecrating Your Dwellings, Cities and High Places

*“In all your dwellings, cities will become waste and the high places will be desolate,
that your altars may become waste and desolate,
your idols may be broken and brought to an end,
your incense altars may be cut down,
and your works may be blotted out.
And the slain will fall among you,”*

Feinberg: Because the land had been defiled by idols, the idols themselves would now be defiled by the corpses of the worshipers, a retribution in kind. This would be the height of desecration, replacing the fragrance of incense with the odor of putrefaction.

Lamar Cooper: Judgment was described in graphic terms depicting the destruction of the sacrificial altars, incense altars, and idols (vv. 4, 6). Whereas these worship centers usually had animal bones scattered about, Ezekiel said, “*Your bones*” (v. 5) will be scattered around these pagan altars. Through the passage the emphasis shifted from the mountains, to the worship centers, and then to the people who were directly responsible. The message of judgment reaffirmed the sovereignty of God by his rejection of pagan worship.

4. (:7b) Recognition Formula

“and you will know that I am the LORD.”

Douglas Stuart: In other words, the Israelites would know that the Lord was the same Lord who had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, had brought them miraculously into the Promised Land, had defended them supernaturally from their foes, and, indeed, controlled the destinies of all nations. Israel had to a substantial degree forgotten just who their Lord was and desperately needed reminding.

B. (:8-10) Remnant Promise

1. (:8) Remnant Preserved but Dispersed

“However, I shall leave a remnant, for you will have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the countries.”

Douglas Stuart: Against this complete distortion of true religion that now dominated the practices of His own people, the Lord could only bring judgment. The “*adulterous heart*” (v. 9) that had led Israel to reject its covenant with God would have to learn its lesson. But even in the awful destruction that was coming, there would be some who would be spared, since God had long ago promised not to annihilate His people utterly (**Deut. 4:27–31**). And so here again He promises through Ezekiel that a remnant (vv. 8–9) would escape to witness the whole process of desolation and subsequent deliverance, and to realize that God did not take lightly His own commitment to enforce His covenant.

Peter Pett: God’s mercy still reached through His judgments. There would be those who survived, captives scattered among the countries, and then they would remember Yahweh and recognise what they have done to Him (see also **Ezekiel 12:16; Ezekiel 14:22**).

Daniel Block: Verses 8–10 function like a new scene in the prophecy, shifting the reader’s attention from the devastation on the “*mountains of Israel*” to the survivors scattered to the four winds. The tone also shifts inasmuch as this surviving remnant represents a minuscule but real glimmer of hope in a very dark world. But Yahweh continues to function as the primary actor.

2. (:9) Repentant and Remorseful

a. Owning Their Spiritual Adultery

“Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which played the harlot after their idols;”

Douglas Stuart: What **idolatry** most reveals about the people who practice it is not merely another faith, but also an actual lack of faith. Modern idolatry, like the ancient Israelite-Near Eastern kind, is essentially materialistic (**1 John 2:15-17; 5:21**). Instead of full reliance on God, while we may not deny His existence, we don't trust Him to take care of us materially. Thus we do everything we can to gain worldly possessions, to secure our future, to have a 'comfortable' retirement, to succeed in a competitive

world. With this comes the danger of 'losing our own souls' because we cannot serve God and money (**Matt. 6:24**). When we fail to trust God for our needs, we go far beyond the bounds of providing for our basic requirements and can thus trap ourselves in modern idolatry, which is nothing other than **materialism (1 Tim. 6:6-10)**.

b. Loathing Themselves

*“and they will loathe themselves in their own sight
for the evils which they have committed,
for all their abominations.”*

Galen Doughty: God says when the captives arrive at the nations to which God has sent them, namely Babylon, then they will remember the Lord. They will finally understand how rebellious they have been. Their "*adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me*" and their lust for their idols have grieved God. They will loathe themselves for all the evil they have done. God says at least some of the exiles will repent of their sin. Their guilt will not produce despair and doubt but godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Paul speaks of this kind of godly sorrow in **2 Corinthians 7**. Their sorrow over their sins will lead them back to God in repentance. That is exactly what happened with some of the exiles and out of them God preserved a remnant of his people with which he could start over and preserve until he could send their Messiah, Jesus, 500 years later.

3. (:10) Revering the True God

a. Recognition Formula

“Then they will know that I am the LORD;”

b. Basis for the Fear of God

“I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them.”

II. (:11-14) PUNISHMENT OF GOD’S COVENANT PEOPLE DESIGNED TO REINVIGORATE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

(:11a) Revelation Pronouncement

“Thus says the Lord God,

A. (:11b-12) Punishing God’s Covenant People

1. (:11b) Shocking Devastation Corresponds to Evil Abominations

“Clap your hand, stamp your foot, and say,

‘Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, ’”

Douglas Stuart: This is not intended to convey God’s delight at the misery His people would endure, but symbolically represents the sort of taunting rejoicing that Israel’s enemies would have at their downfall because of the nation’s idolatrous unfaithfulness. Ezekiel was later commanded to sing a number of taunt songs or mocking dirges against Israel’s foes (e.g., **chs. 27, 28, 31, and 32**), but here, since Israel itself had

become a foe of the Lord by its constant, repeated disobedience, it deserved a taunt of its own.

Galen Doughty: This behavior is not cheering for something but grieving over people or a situation. In context it sounds like these actions depict shock and great sadness. God tells Ezekiel to respond this way because of the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel. Here again Ezekiel emphasizes all of Israel and not just Judah. He is not prophesying against the north kingdom but the whole people of God.

Lamar Cooper: The prophet was told to clap his hands, stomp his feet, and cry, “*Alas*” as signs of excitement and emotion used to decry the abominations and idolatrous practices of the Jewish people (v. 11). While some have attributed these actions to malicious delight of the prophet at the prospect of severe judgment, the use of the term “*alas*” would suggest otherwise since it is a word of lamentation and judgment.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel’s gesticulatory performance is driven by two rhetorical goals: to capture the audience’s attention, and to convey the divine disposition toward his people. One can envision the prophet’s neighbors asking one another, “What is this man so upset about now?” But these are more than the antics of an entertainer (33:30–33). Ezekiel is playing the role of God, and as his audience observes him, they should imagine Yahweh clapping his hands, stomping his feet, and sighing in anger over all their evil abominations.

2. (:11c) Standard Catalog of Covenant Punishments
“which will fall by sword, famine, and plague!”

Douglas Stuart: These three miseries, that is, war, starvation, and disease, were three major kinds of covenant punishments. The three together were sometimes used by the prophets to convey the full range of punishments mentioned in **Leviticus 26** and **Deuteronomy 28–32** (cf. **2 Sam. 24:13; Jer. 27:13; 29:17**). God’s word to Ezekiel then elaborates on these three traditional punishments in a manner designed to give them even more of an impact: no matter where the Israelites are, one way or another they will die (v. 12). Even if they are not present at the siege inside Jerusalem, they will still meet their end. God’s anger at disobedience must be satisfied, and He promises that it will be. Some individuals might escape by His grace, but the nation in general must be annihilated.

3. (:12a) Slaying All Hope of Escaping Destruction
*“He who is far off will die by the plague,
and he who is near will fall by the sword,
and he who remains and is besieged will die by the famine.”*

Douglas Stuart: Perhaps the most intriguing theme of the passage is found in **verse 12**, where the inescapability of God’s judgment is made evident. Naturally, people a long distance from Jerusalem, or Judah, would tend to think of themselves as secure from any disaster that might befall that area as a result of the Babylonian invasion and siege.

Some actually inside Jerusalem might also have thought themselves to be protected, as they relied on the city's massive walls and extensive defense preparations to save them. But hope in human means of escape was useless in the face of divine wrath. The only means of escape from divine wrath is divine mercy. God Himself must make the rescue possible. Nothing human can be counted on. In Christ's death and resurrection this has indeed been accomplished. Whether people are "far off" or "near," they are still in danger of destruction unless they find forgiveness, and the only source of it is the grace of God as a result of trusting in Christ. That way alone, an otherwise inevitably desolate life, followed by an inevitable death, can be avoided. Hope in God is the human being's only true, fruitful hope.

4. (:12b) Spending Divine Wrath

"Thus shall I spend My wrath on them."

B. (:13-14) Reinvigorating the Knowledge of God

1. (:13a) Recognition Formula

"Then you will know that I am the LORD,"

2. (:13b) Exposing the Impotence of Their Idols

*"when their slain are among their idols around their altars,
on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green
tree, and under every leafy oak-- the places where they offered soothing
aroma to all their idols."*

3. (:14a) Executing Devastating Judgments

*"So throughout all their habitations I shall stretch out My hand against
them and make the land more desolate and waste than the wilderness
toward Diblah;"*

4. (:14b) Recognition Formula

"thus they will know that I am the LORD."

Taylor: The words typify Ezekiel's message and longing, that Yahweh may be known by all men, Israelite and non-Israelite, for what he is—the one true God, the God of the world, the God of history, the God who speaks and does not speak *in vain*.

Lamar Cooper: The point, of course, was that people will know him either through response to his loving attempts of salvation and fellowship or through judgment. God's preference, as that of the prophets, was the former.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can we more fully know Yahweh for who He is?

- 2) What does the characterization of Israel's sins as "abominations" to the Lord say about God's perspective towards idolatry?
- 3) Why such a variety of types of judgments used by the Lord?
- 4) If such severe judgment begins with the people of God, what type of warning should this be to unbelievers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY GOD WILL SET HIS FACE AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THEIR PROMISED LAND AND CAUSE HORRIBLE JUDGMENTS.

Now at this point God approaches this from another angle. There are basically three themes that Ezekiel develops in this chapter to show Israel why He would permit this:

THEME #1 – God will destroy His own people for their idolatry. 6:1-7

Now the phrase "*set your face toward*" something means to turn your face an attention toward some object with "hostile intentions." When God uses this phrase, it is not good. This phrase is used throughout the first 38 chapters in Ezekiel some 14 times (**Ezek. 4:3, 7; 6:2; 13:17; 14:8; 15:7, 7; 20:46; 21:2; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2**). It is often used when uttering some prophetic oracle against Israel.

So God says in **verses 4-7** that He would take four specific judgmental actions:

Judgmental Action #1 - God would smash the altars and lay dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of and around the smashed altars. **6:5**

God would sovereignly permit foreigners to come into the land to kill people and destroy their idols. When you see dead bodies lying around, you realize this is not a place of God's blessings.

Judgmental Action #2 - God would destroy houses and cities and make them desolate. **6:6a**

God would sovereignly permit foreign powers to come into their cities and homes and destroy them.

Judgmental Action #3 - God would blot out the idolatrous works of His people. **6:6b**
The Hebrew word "*blot out*" (*machah*) was the same term God used concerning the flood when He destroyed all living flesh as a punishment for evil (**Gen. 6:7; 7:4, 23**).

Judgmental Action #4 - God would slay many Jews and they would know He is

Jehovah. 6:7

When the property of God angers God to this level, it is over. People will be left saying God did it and nothing we could do could stop it.

THEME #2 – God will permit a remnant of His people to survive His destructive judgment. 6:8-10

As God is pronouncing these horrible judgments against His own people, He still demonstrates His amazing grace. He says in **verse 8** that He will permit a remnant of His people to escape judgment. This is pure grace. God has always preserved Israel even when she did not deserve to be preserved. Now this message would have resonated with Ezekiel's audience because they were part of the remnant who were permitted to escape. What God wanted them to do was remember why He permitted all of this to happen. He wanted His own people to admit their evil sin that had caused this. God wants His people to recognize their own depravity. He wants His people to recognize the hurt and anguish that they have caused Him because of their evil, abominable sin. God wants His people to realize that He does not permit horrible judgment to come against His people for no reason. He does not "inflict disaster" on His people for the fun of it. When He does this, it is exactly what His people deserve.

THEME #3 – God will track down all of His people for their evil abominations. 6:11-14

Some people think they can move to some remote spot and get away with their sin. Some think they can move to the Bahamas and forget about God. Some think they can go to Las Vegas where what happens there stays there and live life their own way without a care in the world. Some think they can just retire to some safe area and enjoy the good life and don't have to even think about God, His Word or will. Well, God says to His people **you can run but you cannot hide**. God tracks His people down.

Daniel Block: But the most important unifying feature is the oracle's obvious dependence on the covenant curses of **Lev. 26**. Although there are no direct quotations from this text, each segment is shot through with its distinctive vocabulary. The areas of influence may be grouped as follows:

1. Designations for pagan cultic objects: *bāmôt*, "high places" (vv. 3, 6; Lev. 26:30); *ḥammānīm*, "cultic installations" (vv. 4, 6; Lev. 26:30); *gillûlīm*, "idols" (vv. 4, 6, 13; Lev. 26:30); *pēgārīm*, "cadavers" (v. 5; Lev. 26:30); *rēaḥ niḥōaḥ*, "fragrance" (v. 13; Lev. 26:31).
2. Designations for the residence of the people: *ārīm*, "cities" (v. 6; Lev. 26:31).
3. Designations for Yahweh's action: *ḥēbī' ḥereb 'al*, "wield the sword against" (v. 3; Lev. 26:25); *nātan pēgārīm*, "place the corpses" (v. 5; Lev. 26:30); *nātan 'et-hā 'āreṣ šēmāmā ûmēšammā*, "make the land a total desolation" (v. 14; Lev. 26:32, *ḥāšimmōtī 'ānī 'et-hā 'āreṣ*). Note also the triple disasters of *ḥereb*, "sword," *rā 'āb*, "famine," *deber*, "plague" (vv. 11, 12; Lev. 26:25, 26 [the famine is described, not named]).
4. Designations for the effects of Yahweh's action: *šmm*, "to level" (v. 4, of altars; v. 6,

of high places, altars; **Lev. 26:31**, of sanctuaries, land); *horbâ*, “ruin” (v. 6 [*hrb* as a verb], of cities, altars; **Lev. 26:31**, of cities).

Daniel Block: The bad news continues, but the force of Ezekiel’s message should not be lost to the church of North America as it enters the twenty-first century.

First, this oracle offers vivid evidence of the impassioned side of God’s character. Twice this lengthy recitation of divine activity refers explicitly to Yahweh’s emotional state. On the one hand, he is heartbroken over the infidelity of his covenant people (v. 9); on the other, the fury of his judgment arises out of the depths of his anger over covenantal treachery. Yahweh is El Qanna, “*Impassioned God*.” He will not stand idly by while other gods vie for his people’s devotion and they in turn spurn his grace.

Second, it is possible to be sincere in one’s religious commitment, but to be sincerely in error. The investment of the Israelites in their cult (high places, altars, incense altars, idols, sacrifices) attests to the depths of their commitment to false gods. But idolatry is more than spiritual adultery; it represents devotion to futility. Other gods are but excrement, the figments of depraved human imagination. Anything, any ideology, that minimizes Yahweh’s claim on his people stands condemned. The course of human history is strewn with the shattered remains of human imagination, and the corpses of deluded idolaters.

Third, the Lord is faithful to his covenant, to the very letter! Far from responding to human rebellion impulsively or arbitrarily, he reacts predictably, in accordance with his righteous character, and in keeping with the terms of the covenant. For him to exercise judgment on his church or on humanity is not to betray his character but to affirm his unchanging nature. He is Yahweh; he has spoken; he acts accordingly.

Fourth, the Lord’s wrath is never so hot that it cancels out his grace. He may sweep across the landscape with his sword and visit the earth with manifold judgments, but he has always preserved for himself a remnant of those who would serve him. By his sovereign will and his eternal covenant he stops short of total annihilation.

Fifth, the oracle reminds all readers to look on themselves as God sees them. Despite our elevated status within creation as images of God (**Gen. 1:26–30; Ps. 8**), nothing within us warrants God’s love. The focus of some on innate human goodness and on the development of positive self-images is delusory. To be chosen as an object for divine grace does not reflect on the goodness of the individual but on the character of the living God, and nothing will provide more realism to one’s self-understanding than an encounter with him. In the face of his unblemished purity and holiness, his unswerving faithfulness, and his immeasurable grace, sinners begin to see sin for what it really is, an abominable evil that defiles their entire being. Apart from the recognition of our depravity, mercy has no room to work.

Matthew Henry: That which is threatened in this prophecy is the utter destruction of the idols and the idolaters, and both by the sword of war. God Himself is commander-in-chief of this expedition against the mountains of Israel..(for) the sword of the Chaldeans

(Babylonians) is at God's command, goes where He sends it, comes where He brings it, and lights as He directs it...God sometimes ruins idolatries even by the hands of idolaters, for such the Chaldeans themselves were... It is just with God to make that a desolation which we make an idol of; for he is a jealous God and will not bear a rival. If men do not, as they ought, destroy idolatry, God will, first or last, find out a way to do it. When Josiah had destroyed the high places, altars, and images, with the sword of justice, they set them up again; but God will now destroy them with the sword of war, and let us see who dares re-establish them. . .

Thus their idols should be polluted, and those places profaned by the dead bodies which they had had in veneration. If they will not defile the covering of their graven images, God will, (**Isa 30:22**). The throwing of the carcasses among them, as upon the dunghill, intimates that they were but dunghill-deities. Thus it was intimated that they were but dead things, unfit to be rivals with the living God; for the carcasses of dead men, that, like them, have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, were the fittest company for them. Thus the idols were upbraided (criticized severely & justifiably) with their inability to help their worshippers, and idolaters were upbraided with the folly of trusting in them; for (the implication of this verse is that the Jews) fell by the sword of the enemy when they were actually before their idols imploring their aid and putting themselves under their protection. (This is not without precedent in Scripture for we find that) Sennacherib was slain by his sons when he was worshipping in the house of his god. (Another reason) the slain men are cast before the idols (could be) to show that (the very reason that) they were slain was because they had worshipped those idols... (Therefore) let the survivors observe and take warning not to worship images...and know that God is the Lord, that the Lord He is God and He alone.

TEXT: Ezekiel 7:1-27

TITLE: FINALITY OF THE IMMINENT JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PROMISED IMMINENT AND COMPREHENSIVE JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH REPAYS SINFUL ABOMINATIONS WITH HORRIFIC AND INESCAPABLE ABOMINATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

The end has come, according to Ezekiel. There is no possibility of God relenting or showing pity. Any remaining false confidence and false hope on the part of the Jewish exiles should be destroyed by this account of the outpouring of God's wrath on His elect people and chosen city and even His holy temple. The Jews must now come to grips with the reality of knowing God as their Smiter.

Feinberg: This chapter, actually in the form of a **lamentation**, concludes the first extended message of the book. The frequent repetitions, which have puzzled some interpreters and self-styled emenders of the text, are intentional and emphasize the **certainty** of the coming calamity. The sentences are filled with deep emotion, and a note of **finality** runs through the entire passage.

Ralph Alexander: Its first thirteen verses contain four brief, intensive prophetic speeches in poetic form that emphasize the imminency and comprehensiveness of the coming judgment on all Judah. . .

- The first prophetic speech in this message (**vv. 1-4**) emphasizes the extent – “*the four corners of the land*” (**v. 2**) – of the judgment and its basis. . .
- The second oracle in this chapter [**vv. 5-9**] emphasizes the horror and surprise of the judgment as well as the person of the judge. . .
- The third oracle [**vv. 10-11**] focuses on the imminency, comprehensiveness, and readiness of judgment. The five-line poem (**v. 10**) underscores the nearness of the judgment. . .
- The last oracle [**vv. 12-13**] emphasized the permanency and quickness of the judgment.

Taylor: The fact that the message needed so much reiteration can only be understood against the background of popular belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem. Its destruction was inconceivable to the Israelite mind. As long as God was God, God's Temple and God's city would stand. This had been the message of Isaiah when kings of Judah had feared for the city's safety and were toying with the idea of turning to heathen armies for assistance. But now the situation was different. Isaiah's confidence could no longer be justified after 150 years of increasing apostasy. The people were living in the past, but God was judging the present. His verdict was that the end was imminent.

Allen: This is a frightening chapter. It consists of a group of poetic oracles intended to convince Ezekiel's fellow hostages in the Babylonian heartland that their hopes of returning soon to their homes and families in far-off Judah would not materialize.

Peter Pett: We must remember that when we read Ezekiel it is like reading a book of sermons. Sermons on the same theme may well be repetitive. But repetitiveness is a feature of ancient writings. Although having said all this we must remember that Ezekiel was not only preaching sermons he was bringing a revelation from God. The same theme continues. Jerusalem must be destroyed. Rather than being inviolate it would be made desolate. We must never presume on God. The message had to be repeated because they would not believe it. But the repetition was so that when it happened they would know that Yahweh Himself had determined it all along.

(:1) PRELUDE – ANNOUNCEMENT OF REVELATION

“Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

MacArthur: This lament (vv. 1-9) declared that the entire land of Israel was ripe for judgment. God’s patience had ended. The final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar was in view (586 B.C.).

Constable: The Lord's word came to Ezekiel again (cf. 6:1). This verse serves as a heading for the oracles that make up the rest of the chapter.

I. (:2-13) FOUR ORACLES OF IMMINENT, COMPREHENSIVE, HORRIFIC AND DESERVED JUDGMENT

A. (:2-4) Oracle #1 – Judgment is Near – Deserved Retribution for Abominations

1. (:2-3) Judgment is Coming Soon

a. (:2) Coming Soon to the Whole Land -- Judgment is Comprehensive

*“And you, son of man,
thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel,
'An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land.’”*

Matthew Henry: The ruin, as it shall be final, so it shall be total; no part of the land shall escape; no, not that which lies most remote. Such will the destruction of the world be; all these things shall be dissolved. Such will the destruction of sinners be; none can avoid it. Oh that the wickedness of the wicked might come to an end, before it bring them to an end!

b. (:3) Coming Soon Due to Abominations -- Judgment is Appropriate

*“Now the end is upon you,
and I shall send My anger against you;
I shall judge you according to your ways,
and I shall bring all your abominations upon you.”*

Lamar Cooper: He spoke as though it already had happened. This device was a way of proclaiming the absolute certainty of a future event.

2. (:4a) Judgment is Unrelenting Because it is Deserved

*“For My eye will have no pity on you, nor shall I spare you,
but I shall bring your ways upon you,
and your abominations will be among you;”*

Ralph Alexander: The Lord would not have pity on anyone. He would not spare them. Though his long-suffering, forbearance, and compassion had withheld discipline, such restraint would no longer continue.

3. (:4b) Recognition Refrain

“then you will know that I am the LORD!”

B. (:5-9) Oracle #2 – Judgment is Horrific – the Outpouring of Deserved Wrath

1. (:5-7) Imminent Horror

a. (:5) A Unique Disaster

*“Thus says the Lord God, 'A disaster, unique disaster,
behold it is coming!'”*

Lamar Cooper: This “unheard of” disaster was literally an “evil which is one” (Heb.), meaning a singular or unprecedented judgment. This was doubtless a reference to the destruction of the temple, which the Jews thought to be inviolable.

Daniel Block: vv. 5-9 -- The second blast of the trumpet is even more piercing than the first. By means of a series of fragmentary exclamations the prophet works his audience to a frenzy. Six different terms are heaped up to identify the calamity: *rā'â* (disaster / evil), *haqqēš* (the end), *haššēpîrâ* (the leash), *hā'ēt* (the time), *hayyôm* (the day), *mēhûmâ* (panic) instead of celebration on the mountains. Adding to the emotion is the sixfold repetition of the ominous *bā' / bā'â*, “It has arrived,” and the twofold insertion of *hinnēh*, “Look!”

b. (:6) A Great Awakening

*“An end is coming; the end has come!
It has awakened against you; behold, it has come!”*

Feinberg: Once more it was proclaimed that evil was definitely on the way. It was to be an unrelieved calamity, an unprecedented and unparalleled adversity, unique in character. In a beautiful play on words, impossible to reproduce in English, Ezekiel pictured the end as though it had been quiescent or asleep, but would be awakened and aroused to come against the people of the land of Israel.

c. (:7) A Tumult of Doom

“Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land.

*The time has come, the day is near –
tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains.”*

Wiersbe: In verses 7 and 10, the KJV has the phrase “*the morning is come,*” but both the NKJV and the NIV translate it “*doom has come.*” The Hebrew word means “*to plait, to braid,*” such as braiding a garland of flowers for the head, and it’s translated “*diadem*” in **Isaiah 28:5**. How do the translators get either “*morning*” or “*doom*” out of this word? Probably from the image of “that which comes around,” for a braided garland is the result of the weaving of flowers into a circle. “*Morning*” is that which comes around, day after day, and the doom of the Israelites had “*come around.*” They had “woven” their own shameful crown of sin when they could have worn a diadem of glory to the Lord.

2. (:8-9a) Imminent Wrath Due to Abominations

*“Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you,
and spend My anger against you,
judge you according to your ways,
and bring on you all your abominations.
And My eye will show no pity, nor will I spare.
I will repay you according to your ways,
while your abominations are in your midst;”*

3. (:9b) Recognition Refrain

“then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting.”

What a different characterization of the Lord than what the covenant nation had known previously (e.g. “*The Lord Who Provides*”, etc.).

Peter Pett: ‘*You will know that I am Yahweh the Smiter.*’ Previously stress is laid on their ‘*knowing Yahweh*’. Now they will know Him as the One Who smites those who do evil, the righteous One, the Judge.

C. (:10-11) Oracle #3 – Judgment is the Fruit of Arrogance – Image of the Budding Rod

“Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed. 11 Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their multitude, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them.”

Wiersbe: In their pride, they had cultivated a false confidence that the Lord would never allow His people to be exiled or His temple destroyed, but their sin had now “matured” and both were now about to happen. . . the rod is Nebuchadnezzar and the “blossoming” means that the time was ripe for God to punish the people. Violence in the land had grown into a rod of wickedness, and the people’s sins would find them out.

Feinberg: So great would be the slaughter that no one would survive to lament the dead.

Constable: This pericope may be one or two oracles (vv. 10-11, 12-13). The first two verses stress the imminence, comprehensiveness, and readiness of the judgment, and the last two its permanence and suddenness.

Peter Pett: the picture here is full of irony and is taken from that of Aaron's rod that budded which was 'a token against the children of rebellion' (Numbers 17:10). 'The day', the day of God's anger, is coming and it will be like that. It will be like a crown of doom coming on them from God. In the days of Aaron the rods represented the leaders of the people (Numbers 17:2-3). They represented their authority. But they did not blossom. They were not God's chosen one (Numbers 17:5). Now, however, their rod will blossom, God has chosen them, but He has chosen them for judgment. Their pride will produce its fruit. And that fruit will be violence, which will be a rod for the wicked, a rod which will destroy so that none of them remain, all the abundance of their possessions will be destroyed and their wealth will be taken away. Nothing will remain. They will no longer be eminent for eminency will no longer be among them. It will be the end of Judah as it is known, many will die and those who survive will have lost everything, possessions, wealth and status.

D. (:12-13) Oracle #4 – Judgment is the Economic Leveler -- Image of the Business Transaction (cf. Year of Jubilee)

“The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude. 13 Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.”

Wiersbe: With the Babylonian invasion imminent, the price of land would certainly drop and wealthy people could quickly increase their holdings, but there was no guarantee that they would hold what they purchased. Furthermore, the seller couldn't be sure that he would get his land back when the Year of Jubilee arrived.

Lamar Cooper: Buying and selling, like rejoicing and grieving, suggest activities of normal business, social, and personal life. Ezekiel announced the cessation of those normal activities (v. 11). Divine wrath wiped away all the regular elements of human stability. There also are overtones of the law of the Sabbath Year (Deut 15:1-2) and the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:1-6) in the passage. In the Sabbatical Year all slaves were set free, and in the Jubilee Year all property was restored to its original owner. Land was a sacred trust from God that the Hebrews had received at the conquest under Joshua. Therefore property was sold only in cases of extreme need. Such sales were regarded as temporary and redeemable transactions (v. 12). In the day of judgment envisioned by Ezekiel the seller would not recover his land, and the individual judgment of the coming bondage of the exile would not be reversed (v. 13). Material things will be of no value in a time of divine judgment. Unbridled materialism and secularism that divorces God from human society tends only to intensify judgment.

II. (14-27) FINALITY OF THE JUDGMENT

A. (:14-18) Total Destruction

1. (:14) No Fighting Back

*“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready,
but no one is going to the battle;
for My wrath is against all their multitude.”*

Constable: The last half of this chapter emphasizes the Judeans' reactions to the coming judgment.

2. (:15) No Escape

*“The sword is outside, and the plague and the famine are within.
He who is in the field will die by the sword;
famine and the plague will also consume those in the city.”*

Wiersbe: (vv. 14-15) -- God had made Ezekiel a watchman (3:17-21), and it was his responsibility to warn the people when danger was at hand. If an enemy army approached, the watchmen on the walls could blow their trumpets and summon the soldiers to man their posts and protect the city. But it was futile for the watchmen in Jerusalem to blow their trumpets because there was no Jewish army available and any resistance was futile. If the soldiers went outside the city into the country, they would be slain by the swords of the Babylonian army; and if the warriors stayed inside the city, they would die from famine and pestilence. Why risk your life in such a hopeless cause?

3. (:16-18) No Hope

*“Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like
doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity. 17
All hands will hang limp, and all knees will become like water. 18 And
they will gird themselves with sackcloth, and shuddering will overwhelm
them; and shame will be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads.”*

Daniel Block: In vv. 14–18 Ezekiel offers a picturesque description of the psychological impact of the day of Yahweh on the population. First, the people will be **paralyzed emotionally**. They have heard the sound of the watchman’s trumpet from the lookout tower, and they have responded by making the necessary preparations to defend the city; but when the moment for action arrives, they are immobilized. In the face of Yahweh’s vented anger they have no heart to defend themselves. . .

What the prophet seems to be envisaging is the total destruction of the towns and cities of Judah, forcing those who survive to seek refuge in the mountains. The sound of their mourning would resemble the plaintive cooing of ordinary pigeons.

Lamar Cooper: The people would respond like doves moaning in the valleys (v. 16). They also would seek remote hiding places to escape the invading armies. They would be overwhelmed with the terror, suffering, and shame brought upon them because of their inequities. “*Limp*” hands and “*weak*” knees describe a complete paralysis of strength and ability to resist the invading army (v. 17).

B. (:19-22) Total Futility

1. (:19) Futility of Materialism

“They shall fling their silver into the streets, and their gold shall become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their appetite, nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.”

MacArthur: vv.17-22 – This section described the mourning of the helpless and frightened people. In distress, they recognized the uselessness of the things in which they trusted. Their wealth provided nothing. Their “*silver and . . . gold*” (v. 19), their “*ornaments*” (v. 20) were as useless as the idols they made with them.

Wiersbe: The refugees couldn’t carry their wealth as they fled from Jerusalem, so they treated it like garbage and threw it into the streets.

2. (:20-21) Futility of Idolatrous Worship

“And they transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it; therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them. And I shall give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it.”

Lamar Cooper: a reference to the use of gold and silver to decorate places of worship (v. 20). Personal jewelry that was once given to adorn the tabernacle and the temple was being used to beautify pagan shrines. This wealth would be given to foreigners, a reference to the invading army who would take it as spoils of war.

3. (:22) Futility of False Confidence in Covenant Relationship

*“I shall also turn My face from them,
and they will profane My secret place;
then robbers will enter and profane it.”*

Feinberg: Verse 20 has been variously interpreted. One position takes the ornament to mean the silver and gold of the people of which they made their idols, as just noted. The other and better view understands Ezekiel to be speaking of the temple of the Lord. The very place God meant to be beautified, they had polluted with multiplied abominations which are described in 8:3-17. Since Israel had already profaned the temple of God, He saw no further purpose in keeping it from the desecration of the enemy. Thus the temple with all its sacred appointments was given over to the invading

army. But this act could never have transpired unless the Lord had deliberately removed His protection from His sanctuary. When the Lord turned His face away from Israel, the enemy was able to carry out its wicked devices. That which was profaned was not the temple treasure or the wealth of the land in general, but the holy of holies, the central and focal point of all Israel's worship. God has no desire to keep mere outward worship in operation as long as such worship is accompanied with and encrusted over by idolatries that profane the very essence of that worship. Therefore, we read repeatedly that all would be profaned.

C. (:23-27a) Total Chaos as Jerusalem Falls

1. (:23) Chaos of Captivity and Violence

*"Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes,
and the city is full of violence."*

MacArthur: Ezekiel is to perform another emblematic act of captivity (c. Jer 27:2; Na 3:10).

2. (:24) Chaos of Foreign Occupation and Humiliation

*"Therefore, I shall bring the worst of the nations,
and they will possess their houses.
I shall also make the pride of the strong ones cease,
and their holy places will be profaned."*

3. (:25) Chaos of Unmitigated Anguish

"When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none."

4. (:26a) Chaos of Compounded Disaster and Uncertainty

"Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will be added to rumor;"

Peter Pett: *'Mischief upon mischief.'* An endless chain of problems and suffering and misery and heartache. And to top it all constant rumours of worse to come, and of what was to happen to them. But they would have nowhere to turn. There would be no message from their religious or civic leaders, no vision from the prophet, no guidance from the priest, no counsel from the elders (see **Amos 3:5-7** and contrast **Jeremiah 18:18**). This would be because these have nothing worthwhile to offer. They would have no solution (in contrast with Jeremiah and Ezekiel). They themselves would be equally totally bewildered and without explanation, and have no message from God. They had been too involved in the abomination of idolatry, in polluting the house of Yahweh (**2 Chronicles 36:14**).

5. (:26b) Chaos of Religious Disintegration

*"then they will seek a vision from a prophet,
but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders."*

6. (:27a) Chaos of Political Disintegration

"The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror,

and the hands of the people of the land will tremble.”

Wiersbe: Not only would there be religious chaos, but the political system would fall apart.

Jamieson: Clothing is designed to keep off shame; but in this case shame shall be the clothing.

D. (:27b) Total Payback for Sinful Conduct

*“According to their conduct I shall deal with them,
and by their judgments I shall judge them.”*

Charles Dyer: God again said their punishment would be *according to their conduct* (a standard mentioned five times in **chap. 7** [vv. 3-4, 8-9, 27]).

E. (:27c) Recognition Refrain

“And they will know that I am the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why so much use of repetition by the prophet Ezekiel?
- 2) What ties chapter 7 closely together with chapter 6?
- 3) Are we taking sin as seriously as God takes sin?
- 4) Given that this chapter speaks to the imminent judgment coming upon Jerusalem in 586 B.C., what relevance does it have to end time judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: The expression Therefore (‘*al-kēn*) in **v. 20c** signals a turning point in the oracle. In **vv. 21–24** Ezekiel focuses on the nature of Yahweh’s reaction to this iniquitous situation. Four specific actions are identified. First, Yahweh will make the gold and silver odious to those who have misused it. How this will be done is not specified, but the result is clear. Objects that had previously been the source of pride will be repulsive. As for the idols on which so much hope had been built, they will be powerless to stay Yahweh’s hand.

21–24 Second, Yahweh will personally deliver the precious metals and other property into the hands of the most ruthless enemies. The character of these agents of divine fury

is reflected in the four expressions used to identify them in vv. 21–24.

(1) foreigners. Hazzārîm normally denotes “aliens, strangers.” In the present context (v. 21), however, the persons referred to are not simply outsiders; they are hostile despoilers of Jerusalem’s treasures.¹²⁵ Indeed, Ezekiel may have been using zārîm in the sense of its Akkadian cognate zā’îru, “enemy.”¹²⁶ (

2) the most wicked people on earth. riš’ê hā’āreš (v. 21) expresses the superlative degree.¹²⁷

(3) vandals. pārišîm (v. 22) derives from a root meaning “to break through.” In 18:10 a pāriš is defined as one who sheds blood.¹²⁸

(4) the most evil of nations. rā’ê gōyim in v. 24 corresponds to riš’ê hā’āreš in v. 21. With hindsight the reader knows that Ezekiel is describing the Babylonians. The fearful picture of the invaders painted here matches the prediction in Deut. 28:49–57 perfectly. The objects of delight and worship will be desecrated (ḥillēl) and confiscated by these ancient “Vikings” as spoils (baz) and plunder (šālāl) of war. V. 24 notes that they will seize the houses as well.

22 Third, Yahweh will permit the invaders to desecrate the land. The pain in Yahweh’s heart is apparent, as he turns his face¹²⁹ away from them, giving them free rein to enter and desecrate his treasured place. Targum’s interpretation of šepûnî as “the land in which my Presence dwells” respects the feminine suffixes in the next clause, though they may also refer to the city of Jerusalem. The land too must fall victim to the wrath of God, not because of any fault of its own but for the evil of its inhabitants. Like the contaminated silver and gold, contact with the foreigners will defile the land.

23 Fourth, Yahweh will permit the population to be led away into exile. This point is made indirectly, the prophet deviating from the pattern of assertions with Yahweh as the subject, to an appeal to the enemies to forge the instruments of captivity. chain. The word rattôq is a hapax derived from the root rātaq, “to bind.” In Nah. 3:10 this word describes the treatment of prisoners of war, in this instance consisting of persons from the upper class. The “chain” would have been used to tie the captives together to form a long train headed for exile.¹³⁰ As Yahweh’s spokesman, Ezekiel is hereby calling on the enemy to make the appropriate preparations. Although Ezekiel has previously spoken of pēlîtim, “fugitives,” and of Yahweh banishing (hiddîaḥ) them among the nations (4:13), this is the most explicit prediction so far of the fate awaiting the population.

The reason for this treatment is described in v. 23b by means of two uneven parallel lines, which echo and expand on Gen. 6:11. Now the reader learns of another ground for judgment. To the cultic abominations directly offensive to God, the people have added social crimes directed against those created in his image. Two expressions describe this brutality. The first, judicial murders (mišpāt dāmîm), occurs only here.¹³¹ With support from the use of mišpāḥîm, the phrase is best understood as “murderous judicial decisions,” rather than “crimes of violence.” The second, violence (ḥāmās), is a general term for violent actions.¹³² As 19:3, 6; 22:6, 27 suggest, these crimes were characteristic especially of the community leaders, who hold the lives of ordinary folk in their hands.¹³³ These are

the very crimes against humanity for which Habakkuk had condemned Babylon (Hab. 2:8, 11, 17). The land has been defiled not only by idolatry but also by the blood of innocent victims.

24 Fifth, Yahweh will break the power of the strong and desecrate their holy places. The expression pride of the mighty (gě'ôn 'azzîm) occurs only here, though it does resemble gě'ôn 'uzzām, “the pride of their strength,” which occurs five times in the book.¹³⁵ Here the strong are closely associated with sacred sites, that is, the pagan cult sites, suggesting that the religious institutions had been developed to support the power of a special class. The strange vocalization of mēqadēšêhem may represent a deliberate garbling of miqdēšêhem by the Masoretes to highlight that these are aberrant installations, not sanctioned by Yahweh.¹³⁶ By the time Yahweh is through, not a trace will be left of the abominable pagan cults.

David Thompson: The people of God saw themselves as invincible. They thought God is our God. Jerusalem is the city of God and the temple is the Temple of God and it will always stand. Doesn't matter how we live or respond to God's Word, we have nothing to worry about.

See, we tend to think that God always owes us grace, mercy and forgiveness. After all, we have never received the full consequences of any of our sins at any time. But this text warns God's own people that He will not put up with stubborn, arrogant, unrepentant sin. If one breaks the heart of God and persists in loving sin and not loathing sin (6:7), God will do something about it.

There is a scary prediction in Scripture that shows up time and time again of a ferocious judgment of God that will bring total disaster and fearful judgments on this earth because it refuses to turn from evil abominations and turn to Him. There are predictions that God will send a horrible judgment on Israel, which is worse than any judgment she has ever seen. The reason is because she will not turn from her sin and turn to Him.

GOD REVEALS TO EZEKIEL AND TO HIS PEOPLE THAT HE IS AUTHORIZING THE DOOM OF THE END AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE BECAUSE OF HER ARROGANT, UNREPENTANT REFUSAL TO DEAL WITH ABOMINABLE SIN.

Biblical prophecy has both near and far application. What all people need to realize is that God's judgments coming in the future are as certain as those that have been carried out in the past. People would be very wise to take notice of what God has done literally in the past because there is a major prediction of a horrific judgment coming in the future.

At the time Ezekiel made this prophecy, Babylon was on the verge of invading the land of Israel. This invasion was fully authorized by God. But there are things in this prophecy that have not yet been fulfilled, which would indicate that there is another day of judgment coming that will fulfill every bit of what is predicted here.

THEME #1 – What God’s end judgment will cause to happen to His own people. 7:4-19

There are twelve descriptions of things that God will permit to happen to His own people that do not in any way display any blessing or grace.

Description #1 - God’s end judgment will not show any pity on His people. **7:4a**
Just think of this. This is a sober and scary thought.

Description #2 - God’s end judgment will not spare His people. **7:4b**
When God sends judgment men, women, children are the recipients of it.

Description #3 - God’s end judgment will punish His people for their abominations. **7:4c**

When God’s people are being judged by God, they know it. They know they have refused to deal with their sin. This is important because what is revealed here is that this judgment is perfectly just and right.

Description #4 – God’s end judgment will be a unique disaster against His own people. **7:5**

The noun disaster is singular, which means this will be a major disaster aimed at His own people that is unlike any they have ever experienced.

Description #5 - God’s end judgment will be an end judgment against His own people. **7:6**

There is one final end judgment that is coming against His people. It is the judgment of all judgments.

Description #6 - God’s end judgment is a doom judgment that ends all joy. **7:7**

Now in Ezekiel’s mind the doom judgment had come. There is no joyous light at the end of this tunnel. For Israel, at this point, it is too late. **Moshe Greenberg** said a doom judgment is “a fatal sentence” judgment (Ezekiel, 1-20, p. 48).

Description #7 - God’s end judgment is an anger wrath judgment against His own people. **7:8**

What has prompted God to do this is all of her abominations that has pushed the limits and turned grace to anger.

Description #8 - God’s end judgment shows no pity for His own people. **7:9**

His people will know that He is the One doing this and they will admit that the reason He is doing this is because they deserve this because of their abominations. God says in this verse “I” am smiting My own people.” There is a new name for God given in this verse: “YHWH Makkeh” which means I am the LORD who strikes and smites. Now when God’s anger reaches a point that He no longer will pity His people, the way He treats His people changes from that which sympathizes to that which strikes.

Description #9 - God's end judgment is a doom judgment because of arrogance. **7:10**
The sin started like most sins do, as a small shoot. But it had budded into a full-grown arrogant pursuit of evil. Sin was no longer shamefully locked up in a closet, but was arrogantly out in the open. The word "arrogance" (*zadon*) describes a person who will not humble himself to listen to God and His Word. He will not listen to God-honoring counsel, but arrogantly and defiantly lives his own way. These kinds of people deserve God's judgment.

Description #10 - God's end judgment will be a violent inescapable judgment. **7:11**
One commentator said if any believer hardens himself in his sin, he/she will not escape the judgment of God. It will hit and it will hit hard. The wickedness of His own people has prompted this judgment. When God sends it, no one will escape or remain, including wealthy, eminent people. This will be a violent and bloody judgment.

Description #11 - God's end judgment will destroy the buyer and the seller. **7:12-13**
Does not matter if one is rich or poor, those persisting in iniquity will not escape. They will all experience the judgmental wrath of God and money won't buy one out of it.

Description #12 - God's end judgment will not be stopped by a military defense. **7:14-19**

One may think I'll escape God's judgment. I'll build some bunker and hide in it. God says I will track you down.

The blowing of the trumpet (**verse 14**) had specific significance for Israel. It often meant that it signaled the fact that God would fight for Israel. Here it signifies that God is against Israel.

Now we suspect that this moment coincides with the seventh trumpet judgment in **Revelation 11:15ff**, which is clearly connected to Israel and the Antichrist. This seventh trumpet judgment contains the 7 bowl of wrath judgments which features horrible things that lead to the battle of Armageddon. As **Ezekiel 7:16** reveals, there will be very few survivors. Those who are survivors will have fled to the mountains.

God's people will call upon God for help, but it won't work. What people are up against is the wrath of God. God will use the "sword" and "famine" and "plagues" to kill people (**7:15**). Even if someone escapes and makes it to some mountain spot, they will be like a defenseless dove and "all" will be mourning over their sin (**7:16**). This is so sad. Had they mourned over their sin before this judgment hit, God would have been gracious.

Verse 17 says their hands will hang limp and their knees will be like water. Many commentators suggest that things will be so fearful that this literally is a reference to people losing bladder and urinary control. They will be so scared they will lose their ability to control bodily functions. These were once people so proud and so upstanding; but not when this judgment hits. God will bring them down and break them down.

They will be wearing sackcloth as a sign of mourning and they will be shaking because they will be overwhelmed with what is happening (v. 18). Their heads will be shaved and they will be totally humiliated. The people will be ashamed and their money won't mean a thing because it cannot buy them out of this judgment (v. 19).

THEME #2 – What God's end judgment will cause to happen because of His Temple. 7:20-27

God's people have made a mockery of Temple worship. Many churches today are making a mockery of Church worship. They are turning it into something detestable in the sight of God. According to **verse 20**, God's temple was transformed by the people into an idolatrous place. The people were so proud that they actually changed sacred things into detestable idolatrous things. So in **verses 21-27**, God says what He will. He describes nine actions He will take:

Action #1 - God will authorize wicked foreigners to plunder and profane His Temple. **7:21**

Action #2 - God will turn His face from favoring Israel. **7:22a**

Action #3 - God will permit robbers to enter and profane His most holy place. **7:22b**

Action #4 - God will cause violent bloody crimes to link together like a chain from the Temple to the Land. **7:23**

Action #5 - God will bring the worst of nations to possess their houses and places of worship. **7:24**

God will allow proud, arrogant people to dominate His own people. Wicked, evil, God-mocking, Christ-rejecting people will dominate His own people.

Action #6 - God will not permit any peace to exist with His people. **7:25**
They will seek to have a peaceful relationship with God, but will not find it.

Action #7 - God will send disaster after disaster against His own people. **7:26a**
Horrible rumors will be added to horrible rumors and they all come true.

Action #8 - God will remove anyone who can communicate God's truth. **7:26b**
There will be priests and elders, but no one who actually knows the Word of God. God will remove any who can actually communicate truth. They will seek some priest or elder who can give them counsel as to what they need to do, but they will not find one who knows the Word. This is what is happening today in many churches. They are run by leaders who don't know God's Word.

Action #9 - God will cause political leaders to mourn and be horrified. **7:27**

TEXT: Ezekiel 8:1-18

TITLE: *VISIONS OF TEMPLE POLLUTION LEADING TO JUDGMENT*

BIG IDEA:

IDOLATROUS ABOMINATIONS POLLUTING THE TEMPLE AROUSE DIVINE JEALOUSY AND DISGUST

INTRODUCTION:

Chapters 8-11 form our next unit of revelation in the book of Ezekiel. A series of visions captures the depravity of the idolatrous abominations defiling worship in the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord's jealousy is directed towards these unfaithful covenant breakers and His disgust is directed towards the detestable practices that He allows Ezekiel to witness. The end result will be the departure of the glory of God from the temple and the execution of promised judgments on Jerusalem.

Charles Dyer: The vision recorded in **chapters 8-11** is a single unit. Yet four specific sections are within it. Ezekiel was first confronted with the wickedness of the people in the temple (**chap. 8**); then he was shown the slaughter of the people of Jerusalem (**chap. 9**). Jerusalem was so wicked that God's glory departed from the temple (**chap. 10**), and as it left the city, judgment was pronounced on her rulers (**chap. 11**).

Peter Pett: In this chapter Ezekiel is transported in Spirit to Jerusalem and shown many of the abominations which would result in judgment. . . The abominations seen include an abominable image, probably Canaanite (**Ezekiel 8:3-5**), a secret chamber of idolatrous representations, possibly Egyptian (**Ezekiel 8:6-12**), weeping for Tammuz (previously Dumuzi, the Sumerian god of vegetation who was lord of the underworld - **Ezekiel 8:13-15**) and sun worship (**Ezekiel 8:16-18**).

Christopher Wright: Ezekiel is unsurpassed in the range of vocabulary and imagery he uses to portray the sheer repugnance of Israel's active rejection of Yahweh and their wallowing in every kind of religious paganism and social corruption. After this vision he had, as it were, seen it with his own eyes, and from Yahweh's point of view. Secondly, it accounts for the strong emphasis on 'theodicy' in the preaching of Ezekiel. Theodicy means 'providing justification for the actions of God'. It seems that Ezekiel faced the constant challenge of fellow exiles that God was behaving unfairly, the punishment was too severe, they did not really deserve all this, and so on. Ezekiel knew differently. The judgment of God was both fully deserved and long overdue and he could now give the detailed reasons why.

Feinberg: The purpose of the visions of **chapter 8** was twofold: to show the Jews in Babylon the righteous judgment of God upon His people for their sins and to forewarn that continuance in these outrages would result in a final and complete exile of Israel from the promised land. The present chapter amplifies the reason for the threatenings found in **7:20-22**.

I. (:1-4) DIVINE JEALOUSY DIRECTED TOWARDS DISLOYAL PEOPLE – MAIN VISION OF THE GLOWING GLORY OF THE JEALOUS GOD OF ISRAEL

A. (:1) Divine Intervention

“And it came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell on me there.”

Douglas Stuart: Precisely fourteen months after the first vision (**1:2**), that is, 592 b.c., Ezekiel received a vision while at home in Tel-Abib, with leaders (“elders”) from the exiled community present (**v. 1**).

B. (:2) Divine Appearance

“Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal.”

C. (:3) Divine Transportation

“And He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located.”

Peter Pett: ‘*The image of jealousy.*’ This was some prominent religious artefact with idolatrous connections which stood outside the northern gate, which provoked Yahweh to ‘jealousy’, that is to a righteous concern in respect of His covenant relationship with Israel. It not only dishonoured Him but destroyed His relationship with His people, for its earthy worship was in direct contrast with the spiritual relationship He wanted with them. It may have been a wooden asherah-image representing the Canaanite goddess (see **2 Kings 21:7**, compare **2 Kings 23:6**, but it may have been subsequently replaced), or it may have been a figured slab engraved with mythological and cultic scenes, as witnessed at excavations at Gozan and Carchemish.

Charles Dyer: As Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem (cf. **3:14; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5**) his physical body remained in Babylon. The elders seated before him did not see the theophany of God.

Douglas Stuart: There were three gates from the outer to the inner court of the Jerusalem temple. They faced north, east, and south. The northern gate was the one used by the king and was thus perhaps the most prominent. At that gate was some kind of idol, which Ezekiel here calls the “*image of jealousy*,” that is, a rival to Yahweh (**v. 3**). It may have been something like the image of the goddess Asherah that had stood in the temple during the days of Manasseh (**2 Kin. 23:6**) or perhaps a sculpture of an

angel guarding the doorway. We do not know, but it is obvious that it had become during the first temple's latter days an object of worship contrary to the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 20:4–5).

D. (:4) Divine Glory

“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.”

Constable: Ezekiel had another vision of God. The description of God is the same as what the prophet wrote that he saw by the river Chebar (1:27). The description of God stresses His **holiness**.

John Taylor: It is remarkable that, despite all the corruptions that existed, Ezekiel should say that the glory of the God of Israel was there (4). It was as if he wanted to throw into sharp relief the difference between the God who belonged there and the deviations which were practised there, so making the crimes all the more heinous. Perhaps he was also trying to say that God would stay with his people until the very last moment of their rejection of him.

Peter Pett: This was in stark contrast to the image of jealousy outside the gate. The presence of the glory of God (revealed in fire - compare **Ezekiel 8:2**) vividly contrasted the abominable activities of Israel with the purity and holiness of their Creator-God. It also contrasted the living, moving God with the static lifeless image. God had not yet deserted His Temple. That was to come. But these events explain why He did so. We too must choose between the indwelling in power of the Holy Spirit, or looking off to lesser gods, to the idols of Mammon, Sex, and bawdy Entertainment.

Christopher Wright: This is now his third direct encounter with this spectacular phenomenon, so he has no difficulty recognizing it and naming it directly for what it is. Here in Jerusalem, of course, is where the glory of Yahweh ought to be—in Yahweh's own temple and city and land. However, everything else that Ezekiel is about to see will contradict, challenge and repel the glory of Yahweh. So this opening welcome, as it were, by the divine host is a poignant prelude to his tragic exit. The whole account in **chapters 8–11** is connected together by the theme of the slow departure of the glory of Yahweh, by several stages, from the temple and the city that bore his name (see 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:23).

II. (:5-16) DIVINE DISGUST DIRECTED TOWARDS DETESTABLE PRACTICES -- SERIES OF FOUR VISIONS OF DISTURBING ABOMINATIONS

A. (:5-6) Vision #1 – The Idol Provoking Jealousy – Just Outside the Temple Gate

1. (:5) Desecration of the Temple by the Idol Provoking Jealousy

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, raise your eyes, now, toward the north.’ So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of

the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.”

Constable: At the Lord's command, Ezekiel looked north from where he was in his vision and saw the idol that provoked the Lord to jealousy north of the north entrance into the inner court of the temple near the bronze altar of burnt offerings. Many expositors believe that this may have been an image of Asherah because King Manasseh had erected such an idol and then destroyed it (**2 Kings 21:3, 7; 2 Chron. 33:15**), and King Josiah had destroyed a later rebuilt version of it (**2 Kings 23:6**). The people could have raised it up again after Josiah's death.

Christopher Wright: The sin of the world generates God's grief and anger. It is the sin of God's own people that produces God's jealousy. When we profess loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, to whose self-giving love we owe our salvation, but then live lives that are absorbed with the priorities and idolatries of the world around us, there is something detestable, ungrateful and treacherous about that. To go on doing so blatantly and without repentance is evidence of a state of heart and mind that incurs serious warnings as much in the New Testament as in the Old. Significantly Paul warns Christians against the temptations of sexual sin and debauchery with much the same abhorrence as Ezekiel had for the depraved cult of Asherah. He also uses temple imagery to sharpen his point. And he is not afraid to affirm the threat of God's jealousy. We need to heed such sobering warnings, especially in the midst of current moral laxness in Christian culture.

Derek Thomas: God demands of Israel exclusive devotion, the jealous love for which marriage is a type and symbol. His people are to love him with all their heart, soul, strength and mind. Not to do so is spiritual adultery. It is a jealousy which seeks to protect a relationship and which expects loyalty in that relationship.

2. (:6) Divine Distancing as a Result of Abominations

*“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, that I should be far from My sanctuary?
But yet you will see still greater abominations.’”*

Ralph Alexander: This conclusion emphasizes the progressing severity of Judah's idolatry (vv. 6, 13, 15).

Lamar Cooper: The things Ezekiel saw were “*utterly detestable*” to God (v. 6; cf. vv. 9–10, 13, 15, 17). The use of first person by the voice and the reference to “*my sanctuary*” suggest that the speaker was God. A more serious or devastating evaluation is unimaginable than to have one's behavior judged “*detestable*” by the Lord of life. Yahweh was alienated from his house of worship by the inclusion of objects and elements of worship that strictly were forbidden. Such pagan practices in the temple complex were antithetical to the purity of worship God demanded. God is a jealous God who accepts no rival (**Exod 20:5**). To allow idolatry to continue in the temple area was a direct challenge to his authority and the veracity of his word.

**B. (:7-13) Vision #2 – Animal Worship --
Secretive Cultic Worship of Animals by the Elders**

1. (:7-10) Carved Images of Animals

- a. (:7) Peephole
*“Then He brought me to the entrance of the court,
and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall.”*
- b. (:8) Entranceway
*“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, now dig through the wall.’
So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.”*
- c. (:9) Investigation
*“And He said to me, ‘Go in and see the wicked abominations that
they are committing here.’”*
- d. (:10) Images
*“So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping
things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the
house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.”*

2. (:11-13) Censers with Cloud of Incense

- a. (:11) Exposure of the Corrupt Leaders
*“And standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house
of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among
them, each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of
the cloud of incense rising.”*

Constable: Some commentators believed that the gods ("idols") they were worshipping were Egyptian, in view of what these gods were, and since the men were worshipping in secret. Some of Judah's leaders advocated reliance on Egypt. If they were Egyptian gods, it was ironic that 70 elders of Israel had earlier confirmed the Mosaic Covenant after God delivered them from bondage to the gods of Egypt (**Exod. 24:1, 9**). Now Israel's leaders appear to have been appealing to those same gods for help against the Babylonians.

Ralph Alexander: The elders sitting before Ezekiel were the leaders of the Judean exiles in Babylonia who had already been deported from Judah in the captivities of Daniel (605 B.C.) and Jehoiachin (597 B.C.).

Lamar Cooper: In the midst of the group was Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan (v. 11). Shaphan may have been the same person who was Josiah's secretary of state (see **2 Kgs 22:8–14; 2 Chr 34:15–21; Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10; 40:5, 9, 11; 41:2; 43:6**). If so, his brother Ahikam also defended Jeremiah (**Jer 26:24**). For such a one to be found leading this apostate group bears testimony to the rapid degeneration of worship in Israel after Josiah's death.

With this kind of corrupt spiritual leadership one can imagine the severe decline of spiritual purity and faithfulness to Yahweh among the general populace. Everyone was participating in worship of these false gods (v. 11). Leaders who were supposed to guide the people faithfully to serve Yahweh led them instead into apostate idolatrous worship.

b. (:12) Exposure of Their Corrupt Theology

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.’”

Ralph Alexander: These leaders rationalized their activities by declaring that God did not see them nor was he present anymore. He had forsaken the land as demonstrated by the deportations of 605 B.C. and 597 B.C. (v. 12). They denied the existence of God in direct opposition to his name: *“the one who always is.”* They negated his omnipresence and omniscience, choosing to exchange *“the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like . . . birds and animals and reptiles”* (Rom 1:23). In saying that God had forsaken the land, the elders repudiated his faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant, his love for his chosen people, and his immutability. With this kind of rationalization, they permitted themselves to do anything they desired. If God did not exist, then no one need care about him.

Daniel Block: The irony of the people’s rationalization of their actions is obvious. On the one hand, what the men in this dark room are saying about Yahweh is in fact false about him, but it is true of the images before which they stand. What distinguishes Yahweh from all other gods is his ability to see (Deut. 4:28; Ps. 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Isa. 44:12–20), and this vision affirms that his sight penetrates the innermost recesses of the temple and the darkest corners of human hearts. On the other hand, the statement that Yahweh has abandoned his land is in fact false, but it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. He has not yet abdicated his throne in Jerusalem, but the die has been cast. Before this vision is over, the prophet will have witnessed his departure. Consequently, with their rationalization, the paganized elders have justified their behavior and become spokesmen for the principal theme of the vision as a whole.

c. (:13) Escalation of Visions of Depravity

“And He said to me, ‘Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing.’”

**C. (:14-15) Vision #3 – Nature Worship –
Women Weeping for Tammuz = Pagan Fertility Deity**

1. (:14) Example of Pagan Nature Worship

“Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.”

Constable: "*Tammuz*" was an ancient Sumerian, and then Akkadian fertility deity, the husband and brother of Ishtar. The Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations preceded the Babylonian civilization in Mesopotamia. Tammuz had ties to the Canaanite Baal and the Greek Adonis and Aphrodite gods.

Cooper: After the exile the Hebrew calendar included a month called Tammuz, the fourth month (June/July). This was the time for grapes to be harvested. The preservation of the name Tammuz in the calendar suggests the impact this form of pagan worship had on Jewish life and worship, both during and after the exile.

MacArthur: Yet a greater abomination than the secret cult was Israel's engaging in the Babylonian worship of Tammuz or Dumuzi (Duzu), beloved of Ishtar, the god of spring vegetation. Vegetation burned in the summer, died in the winter, and came to life in the spring. The women mourned over the god's demise in July and longed for his revival. The fourth month of the Hebrew calendar still bears the name Tammuz. With the worship of this idol were connected the basest immoralities.

Christopher Wright: What was so offensive about this particular form of idolatry was, first of all, that a cult of the dead was going on in the temple of the living God. In the place where the Lord and giver of life was to be celebrated, women were involved in a mourning ritual for a dead hero of pagan mythology. What made it more pointed still, secondly, was that it was a Babylonian hero at that! Ezekiel would soon have to report to Judean exiles amid the paganism of Babylon that a Babylonian cult figure was being pined for in the heart of Jerusalem—in the very temple itself. Thirdly, if the Tammuz cult did have connections with the fertility cults of dying and reviving vegetation, then Yahweh was being further robbed of his rightful place as the Lord of land, life, the seasons, and all fertility—human, animal and vegetable. Such cults were entirely contrary to the celebration and affirmation of **Deuteronomy 26:1–15**, which binds together the sovereignty of Yahweh in redemptive promise and historical fulfillment on the one hand with his control over all the processes and bounty of nature on the other. Instead, such a cult seeks to control nature through sympathetic magic and mourning rites, one of the marks of a paganized worldview which is still very much alive and well in the world today.

2. (:15) Escalation of Visions of Depravity

"And He said to me, 'Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these.'"

Feinberg: With the worship of this god in ancient times were connected the basest immoralities. With the greatest of abandon women gave themselves up to most shameful practices. Idolatry and immorality are inseparable twins throughout the history of the world. How much baser could the people of God become? But Ezekiel was immediately informed that he would witness yet greater abominations than these.

D. (:16) Vision #4 – Sun Worship in the Inner Court Showing Contempt for God

“Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.”

Chisholm: Worship of the sun was widespread in the ancient Near East and was deeply rooted in Canaan. In Israelite thought the sun was a member of the 'host of heaven,' which was viewed as the Lord's heavenly assembly (compare **Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 23:5** with **1 Kings 22:19**). This may explain why these men could worship the sun in the Lord's temple.

John Day: The sun would thus have to be considered part of the host of heaven, subordinate to Yahweh. As such one might argue that the worship of the sun in Yahweh's temple would have been seen by those who participated in it as, so to speak, all 'part of the package', just as Catholics would regard veneration (not worship) of Mary as not being incompatible with worship of Christ.

Peter Pett: ‘About five and twenty.’ This may be a hint that we are to see here representatives of the twenty four courses of priest plus the high priest. The inner court was mainly restricted to the priesthood. Furthermore five is the number of covenant. Thus five squared may depict them as representatives of the whole covenant community, which makes their crime even greater.

Lamar Cooper: First, if these men were not priests, they had violated a holy area restricted to the priesthood. If they were priests, then their sin was all the more reprehensible because they were responsible for guarding the temple against defilement. Second, they were practicing idolatrous sun worship in one of the holiest precincts of the temple complex. Their location between the porch and the altar would have placed them directly in front of the entrance of the temple sanctuary (v. 16). Worship of the sun was one of the evil practices introduced by Manasseh (**2 Kgs 21:5**).

III. (:17-18) CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE HOUSE OF JUDAH AND THE UNRELENTING WRATH OF GOD

A. (:17) Cause = Abominations of the House of Judah

“And He said to me, ‘Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.’”

Peter Pett: ‘And lo, they put the branch to their nose.’ Putting a slip or branch to the nose was possibly part of the ritual practice of sun worship. Pictorial designs on some Assyrian reliefs show people holding branches to their noses in reverence and worship. But the emphasis of its mention here suggests a little more than just an ordinary act of

worship. It suggests something that could be seen as especially insulting to Yahweh. Possibly it suggested that the Sun god, and not Yahweh, was responsible for the benefits of creation and was the source of life. Compare how the *'planting with pleasant plants and setting with strange slips'* is connected with the Asherim and sun-images in **Isaiah 17:8; Isaiah 17:10-11**.

MacArthur: The meaning is uncertain, but it seems to have been some act of contempt toward God.

Lamar Cooper: The phrase *"putting the branch to their nose!"* (v. 17) probably was a popular saying that meant their actions were an insult to God. While some have tried to interpret this phrase in light of some obscure cultic practice, it probably has more to do with a failure to follow God's commands, the equivalent of thumbing their noses at God.

Christopher Wright: Ezekiel's guide brings the tour to a close by pointing out that although what he has shown Ezekiel is primarily a sample of ritual offences in the temple itself, that is not the full catalogue of the sins of Jerusalem, by any means. Their sin is far from merely religious—even though we must avoid thinking of anything as 'merely religious' in the context of the ancient world. As pointed out above, these particular idolatrous forms of worship had strong links with other realities of life—sexual, political, agricultural, international. Their offensiveness lay in parcelling out such areas to other deities rather than recognizing the authority and claim of Yahweh over all of them. No, the sin of Israel moves beyond idolatry in the temple and encompasses the whole social realm.

B. (:18) Effect = Unrelenting Wrath of God

"Therefore, I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Ezekiel experience so many visions of the glory of God?
- 2) When we are contemplating sinning, do we remember that God is a jealous God?
- 3) Why this pattern of the progressive level of depravity for the abominations viewed by Ezekiel?
- 4) What triggers the negation of God's pity and compassion?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Iain Duguid: In four brief scenes, then, Ezekiel has been shown the comprehensive nature of the sins of Jerusalem. Their sin extends from outside the city gate to the inner courtyard of the temple itself. It involves both men and women, even the seventy elders, symbolic of the leadership of the whole people. It includes idolatry imported from all sorts of surrounding nations (Canaan, Egypt, and Babylon) and involving all kinds of gods (male and female human figures, animal figures, and stellar bodies). This is a unified, universalized religion, the ultimate multi-faith worship service. From the Lord's perspective, however, the picture is one of abomination piled on abomination.

Daniel Block: Each scene is presented in a stereotypical pattern, containing most or all of the following elements:

- a. A notice of the divine transportation of the prophet
- b. A notice of the new venue
- c. An announcement of the prophet's perception with *hinnēh*
- d. A description of the sight observed
- e. Yahweh's exclamation to Ezekiel, "Look ..." introduced with "and he said to me"
- f. A statement of the provocative significance of the actions
- g. A transitional comment that greater abominations are still to come

Ralph Alexander: The vision's primary thrust was to make known the cause of the coming judgment on Jerusalem, the political and the religious capital of Judah and the center of all activity in the nation. The political rulers, the prophets, and the priests were to lead Judah in her holy ways. In this vision Ezekiel saw the contrast between God's glory in the sanctuary (vv. 2-3) and the extreme moral and spiritual corruption of the nation's leadership. The latter was the main cause for God's judgment on Jerusalem. In **chapter 8** the abominable idolatry practiced by Judah's leaders in the temple precinct was exposed. **Chapters 9-11** depict the judgment of a holy God on the unholy perversion described in **chapter 8**. Progressively God's glory was removed from Jerusalem and Judah. Appointed men were sent to pour out fiery judgment on this wicked idolatry and its proponents. The Judean leaders were singled out for special condemnation in **11:14-21**, but the faithful remnant who repented of their sinful ways were marked for protection (**9:4**) and reassured of ultimate restoration and cleansing (**11:14-21**).

Wiersbe: Ezekiel had seen only a part of the evidence that the people in Jerusalem had abandoned themselves to idolatry. He had seen an idol in the temple, defiling the very precincts and yet being worshiped by people who also claimed to worship the Lord, as though Jehovah were one God among many, not the Lord of lords. Then he saw the leaders secretly worshiping false gods in the temple. After that, everything was out in the open: the women weeping for Tammuz, and the priests/elders bowing down to the sun. In God's sight, these things were abominable and detestable and they provoked

Him to anger. Except for the faithful remnant, the Jewish people no longer feared God or cared about pleasing Him.

David Thompson: What actually happens here is that Ezekiel is transported by God to the Temple in Jerusalem to actually see the evil idolatry that would cause God to remove Himself from His own temple. What Ezekiel is permitted to see is unbelievable. In a modern dispensation we would say he was permitted to see what was really happening behind scenes in Church.

What we learn here is this: GOD WILL REMOVE HIS PRESENCE AND POWER AND BLESSINGS AND WILL POUR OUT SEVERE JUDGMENT ON HIS IDOLATROUS PEOPLE, BUT HE WILL PROTECT AND RESTORE AND BLESS THOSE WHO TURN FROM THEIR SIN AND ARE FAITHFUL TO HIM.

HORRIBLE EVIL #1 – Ezekiel sees a specific hand-carved idol sitting to the north of the altar Gate. **8:5-6**

The text does not say what idol he saw, but many believe that this was one of the Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility that was set up in the Temple by Manasseh (**II Kings 21:7; II Chron. 33:7, 15**).

Now because of this, God was keeping “*far from My sanctuary.*” Those words “*far from*” are words that imply more than just physical distance. It refers to a total alienation. Because of Israel’s idolatry, God must alienate Himself from His people and His own place of worship.

Now God says to Ezekiel that this is abominable. God considered this to be a “*great abomination.*” But then at the end of **verse 6**, he says, “*you will see greater abominations.*” Having an idol in the Temple of God is about as bad as it can get, but it gets even worse.

HORRIBLE EVIL #2 – Ezekiel sees the leaders of the Temple actually participating in evil, idolatrous ceremonies. **8:7-13**

God brought Ezekiel to the entrance of the court and he saw a hole in the wall (**8:7**). God told Ezekiel to dig through it and when he did he came to some secret entrance of some secret place of evil worship (**8:8**). These were places the average person did not see.

In **verse 9**, God told him to go in and take a look at the wicked abominations that he would see. So Ezekiel did and he saw the following sights:

(Reality #1) - He saw every form of creeping things and beast and detestable things that were carved as Idols all over the walls. **8:10**

There were figures of detestable animals like that mentioned in **Leviticus 11:10-42** and apparently these idolatrous figurines were viewed as some deity.

(Reality #2) - He saw 70 elders of the House of Israel with Jaazaniah and all of them had censers of incense and they were raising it in some form of worship to these idols.

8:11

When he went in behind these closed doors, he saw an idolatrous worship right in progress. He saw 70 elders whom he knew, who were the religious leaders of Israel, and they were participating in an idolatrous worship that was leading Israel into this corrupt system of religion. These leaders were responsible for God's judgment upon His own people. This horrible idolatry was specifically forbidden by God in **Deuteronomy 4:17-18**. God said it was a corrupt and detestable thing to do to worship these false deities.

(Reality #3) - He saw each elder worshipping carved idols and blaming it on God. **8:12**

Apparently each elder had his own idolatrous little room. They had their own little private chamber where they could indulge themselves in idolatrous, evil, abominable worship. The leaders were not blaming their evil sin as the problem, they were basically arrogantly saying God does not see us anymore and God has forsaken us so we will worship these idols. Well it is obvious that God does see what is happening and Ezekiel is there seeing it, too. These leaders should have been telling the people to humble themselves before God and He will once again restore them. But instead they are worshipping idols.

But if that is not enough, in **verse 13** God says I will show you worse evil than even this. It must be bad to be worse than religious leaders worshipping idols.

HORRIBLE EVIL #3 – Ezekiel sees the women sitting at the Temple weeping over Tammuz. **8:14-15**

Tammuz, the Babylonian “Dumuzi,” was a mythological god of spring vegetation. In the mythological story, Tammuz dies and goes to Hades and revives again and comes back every spring. This crazy false religious cult eventually went to Greece and was given a new name “Adonis.” Wailing for Tammuz was a Babylonian ritual that actually mourned over a supposed mythological deity Tammuz, who had died and gone to the underworld. The weeping was so that he would return from the dead and cause the vegetation to grow again. Along with this wailing were immoral, vile, licentious and lude conduct. God's women were doing this. So here were supposedly the Hebrew women of God sitting at the entrance to the Temple of God and they were weeping and wanting a mythological deity to return from the dead. These are the women of God who are slapping God in His face right at His Temple. This was a horrible thing for Ezekiel to see, but in verse 15 God says you will see worse than this. In fact, the activity described in the next verse is the worst of all the abominations.

HORRIBLE EVIL #4 – Ezekiel sees 25 men in the inner court bowing down and worshipping facing east. **8:16**

Ezekiel is now brought to a place “*between the porch and the altar.*” This was a special area where the priests went to pray to God on a fast day and it was a special, sanctified

place within the inner court. In this final vision, Ezekiel saw 25 men with their backs turned away from the Temple and almost an Islamic idolatry they were prostrate on the ground facing east, which is the direction of the sun.

Sun worship ceremonies are still in existence. People sing hymns to the sun; they dance to the sun; and at night they are immoral in honor of the sun. Sun worship is still practiced by heathens, but here it was being practiced by the leaders of Israel. They were so corrupt that they would not even bow before the True God of Israel.

Twenty-five is a favorite number seen by **Ezekiel–8:16; 11:1; 40:1, 13, 29**. If you are going to worship some idol, you will have to turn your back to God. The moment you do that, you are in serious trouble. The point here is that you have 70 elders secretly inside privately involved in idol worship and you have 25 more men outside openly involved in idol worship. What a disgrace. What a disgrace.

What even makes this ever more shameful is that Ezekiel knew many of these guys by name. In fact, one of them is executed and Ezekiel names him in **Ezekiel 11:13**. These were people in the sacred places physically worshipping false gods. These were people that Ezekiel thought were really right with God and really concerned about true worship. He had no idea that these men were involved in such evil.

I would be willing to say that if God were to permit us to see what is really going on behind the scenes in some people's lives, it would make us sick. They really aren't dedicated to God and His Word. They do not care at all what God's Word says. That is what Ezekiel saw. In **verses 17-18**, God says because of their evil there will be the following results:

Result #1 - Their evil is what is causing Me to fill their land with violence. **8:17a**

Result #2 - Their evil is repeatedly provoking and angering God. **8:17b**
The idea of putting a twig to their nose is the idea of turning up their nose to the Word of God.

Result #3 - Their evil will cause God to pour out His wrath. **8:18a**

Result #4 - Their evil will cause God to show no pity. **8:18b**
God will not look favorably on them with His eyes and He will not listen to their prayers with His ears.

If God's people pursue idolatry, it will not end well. God will allow horrible things to happen to His own people.

Douglas Stuart: There are two things about Ezekiel's vision of the temple that ought especially to be a lesson to us. First, it was Israelites who were doing all the "abominations" he viewed. It was foolish enough that any people should worship idols and nature. But for Israelites, who had known the true God and had access to His truth

via His gracious covenant with them, such practices were simply atrocious. Yet it is a fact that knowing the truth does not prevent people from ignoring or abandoning it (cf. **Rom. 1:21–22**) to their own detriment. People are capable of throwing away the only truth that could save them in favor of a lie that appeals to their tastes or habits. Second, they thought they could get away with what they were doing because God was limited in His power (v. 12). They underestimated God, somewhat in the same way that people today take the approach that they may do as they please, since God does not exist, or care, or have the power to call them into judgment. Were they naive? Yes. Were they degenerate? Of course. Were they unusual? Unfortunately, no. Nothing they did is all that different from the foolish practices people are capable of in our own day and in our own society—thinking themselves smart all the while they are foolishly practicing what to God are abominations.

TEXT: Ezekiel 9:1-11

TITLE: *DESTRUCTION OR DELIVERANCE?
EXECUTION OF PERVERSE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM*

BIG IDEA:
THE MARK OF GOD DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN JUDGMENT AND PRESERVATION

INTRODUCTION:

The visions of the abominations in **chapter 8** naturally lead to the execution of God's justice in **chapter 9**. Here we see the tension between the vast majority of ungodly who must be slain indiscriminately (no matter the age or sex) and the small remnant that is marked out for preservation by the pre-incarnate Christ. God's patience and long-suffering have limits. There comes a time when the wrath of God will be poured out against the ungodly. Here we see that judgment begins at the household of God.

Peter Pett: The chapter reminds us of the Angel of Death at the Exodus (**chapter 12**) and the destroying Angel of Yahweh in **2 Samuel 24:16-17**; **1 Chronicles 21:15-27**. See also **2 Chronicles 32:21**; **Isaiah 37:36**; **Amos 9:1**. While refined the idea was not new. . .

As we review these chapters that we have been considering we should recognise their primary message, the seriousness of sin and rebellion against God. The end of an era had been reached. In spite of all the efforts of the prophets, and the pleadings and constant demonstrations of the mercy of God, the people had remained hardhearted. Indeed they had become even more hardhearted. And in the end sin must be accounted for. God is longsuffering, but even that longsuffering will one day come to an end. And then there is nothing but judgment for the unrepentant. That is what had happened here. We too must recognise that to go on sinning deliberately is a very serious matter. One day God's longsuffering with us will also cease.

Daniel Block: But this chapter also anticipates events still to come. Most notably, by introducing the glory of Yahweh in **v. 3** the editor has not only set the stage for the departure of the glory (which takes up most of **ch. 10**), but has also intentionally coordinated the themes of divine judgment and divine abandonment. A second link is provided by the man dressed in linen. To be sure, his role changes—from agent of life (**ch. 9**), marking all who are to be spared, to agent of death, pouring the coals of divine wrath upon the city (**10:2**)—but the fact that one person should perform both tasks highlights the interrelation between these chapters.

Derek Thomas: Ezekiel has been taken from the banks of the Kebar River in Babylon to the temple in Jerusalem, where he has been shown how far the Israelites have fallen from the true faith. Their worship has become thoroughly idolatrous. God's patience has now run out. Executioners have done their work, first amongst the elders and then

in the city itself. They have shown no pity. The Day of Judgement has arrived. And what a day it is! Ezekiel has prophesied the death of Judah; this has been Judah's obituary— in advance! When a newspaper mischievously published in advance an obituary of Mark Twain, he wrote in the paper the following day, 'The news of my death was an exaggeration.' Judah's obituary is no exaggeration. The fall of Israel in the eighth century B.C. and that of Judah in the sixth century B.C. are both foretastes of the coming of another day. John saw this day and warned of it: '*If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*' (**Rev. 20:15**).

I. (:1-2) SUMMONS OF THE SUPERNATURAL AGENTS – BOTH FOR DESTRUCTION AND FOR MERCY

A. (:1) Summons Directed to Armed Executioners

"Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, 'Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.'"

Douglas Stuart: "Those who have charge over the city" (v. 1) are Jerusalem's guardian angels. The fact that they are called "men" in **verse 2** is merely typical of the language of angelic visions. Not only people (**Heb. 1:14**) but nations (**Daniel 10**) and cities have angels that are, as it were, assigned to them by God. Angels do not, of course, have any authority of their own; they simply do what God wants done. So these angels in charge of Jerusalem are a means by which God may choose to impose His will on the city's populace. Here their presence foreshadows the coming brutal invasion of the city after the siege will end in 586 b.c. (**2 Chr. 36:17, 19; Lam. 1:15; 2:3–8**), so they appear as destroying warriors with battle weapons (v. 2; cf. **Rev. 9:14–15**). The seventh angel, however, has a different task. His dress is linen, typical of angels not on bloody assignments (e.g., **Ezek. 10:6–7; Dan. 12:6–7**), indicating his heavenly origin (cf. **Ezek. 44:17–18; Rev. 19:8, 14**). His task will depart significantly from that of the six others, as we learn in **verses 4 and 11**.

Feinberg: These men were equipped with slaughter weapons, that is, maces or battle-axes.

B. (:2) Response to the Summons

1. Six Armed Heavenly Men Arrive

"And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand;"

Peter Pett: Seven heavenly 'men' now entered the temple area, six equipped for destruction and one for mercy (compare **Revelation 8:2; Revelation 8:6**). In all Near Eastern nations seven was the number of divine perfection and completeness. These men were thus seen as complete for the divine task in hand. The fact that they came from a northerly direction was probably either to indicate the direction from which judgment was coming, or to confirm that they came from the heavenly dwelling place of God (see on **Ezekiel 1:4**). They entered by the way where the women were weeping

for Tammuz (**Ezekiel 8:14**), and the image of jealousy had its place (**Ezekiel 8:5**). They saw enough to stir their righteous anger.

2. One Unarmed Linen-clad Heavenly Man Arrives

*“and among them was a certain man clothed in linen
with a writing case at his loins.”*

Cooper: This writing kit usually was made from an animal horn. It had a palette with a slot for pens and a hollow place for two kinds of ink, usually black and red. Professional scribes usually carried this kind of equipment.

Block: *Linen* was the fabric used for the dress of priests (**Exod. 28:29–42**) and angelic beings (**Dan. 10:5; 12:6–7**), two classes of beings directly involved in divine service.

MacArthur: “*six men*” -- Angels can appear like men when ministering on earth (cf. **Ge 18:1; Da 9:20-23**). “*a certain man*” – He was superior to the others. Linen indicates high rank (cf. **Da 10:5; 12:6**). Perhaps this was the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ. He had all the instruments of an oriental scribe to carry out His task (**vv. 4, 11**).

3. Position Themselves Beside the Bronze Altar

“And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.”

David Thompson: They came from a direction of the “*upper gate*” and they stood at the bronze altar. That altar should have been the place where people went to deal with their sin. That altar was the place where those animals were sacrificed as a means of atonement for sin. It is clear that these people were not dealing with their sin. So that same altar that offered grace would now become the very spot that would authorize judgment.

Feinberg: The inkhorn may well remind us of the book of life (see **Exodus 32:32; Ps. 69:28; 139:16; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3**).

II. (:3-7) SPARING VS SLAYING COMMISSIONED

A. (:3-4) Sparing Commissioned

1. (:3) Engagement with the Linen-clad Heavenly Man

a. Departure of the Glory of God to the Threshold of the Temple

*“Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub
on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple.”*

Peter Pett: The movement of ‘*the glory of God*’ is also very significant. Being ‘*on the cherub*’ referred to the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh on which was the throne of Yahweh overseen by cherubim. In the past the glory of God had regularly covered the Ark and the Tabernacle (**Exodus 40:34-35**), and in vision Ezekiel had seen this as transportable as we have seen earlier, with the living creatures bearing it. But the latter have not yet been identified as cherubim. But now He leaves His throne in the sanctuary

and moves to the threshold of the temple. He is at this point deliberately rejecting the temple and all it means. He is about to depart.

Daniel Block: Being of priestly descent, Ezekiel was undoubtedly familiar with the images of the cherubim in the temple. Apparently this vision offered him an opportunity that was impossible in real life—a look into the inner sanctum of the divine palace, the holy of holies. There he observes the glory of Yahweh rise from its throne, above the ark of the covenant, and move to the threshold of the temple. For Ezekiel the movement of the divine glory would have had ominous significance. It signaled Yahweh's suspension of rule and raised the possibility of his departure from the city. The people's accusation/rationalization that Yahweh has abandoned them is about to be fulfilled, and when that happens there will be no hope. By inserting this observation here the author has intentionally correlated Yahweh's departure with the judgment of Jerusalem.

MacArthur: The glory of God departs before the destruction of the city and temple. The gradual departure of God from His temple is depicted in stages: the glory resides in the temple's Most Holy Place, between the wings of the cherubs, on each side of the ark of the covenant over the mercy seat, then leaves to the front door (**9:3; 10:4**), later to the E gate by the outer wall (**10:18, 19**), and finally to the Mt. of Olives to the E, having fully departed (**11:22, 23**). The glory will return in the future kingdom of Messiah (**43:2-7**).

Wiersbe: It's interesting that the glory of God should be associated with the judgment of a polluted city, but it is for His glory that God judges sin. It is also for His glory that God graciously saves those who put their trust in Him.

b. Directive to the Linen-clad Heavenly Man

*“And He called to the man clothed in linen
at whose loins was the writing case.”*

Constable: Some expositors believed that this individual was the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, because of his prominence among these messengers and because of what he did (cf. **10:2, 6-7**). There is no way to prove or disprove this theory. Most interpreters believe he was an angel.

Leslie Allen: The second part of the main narrative begins, like the first, with a divine cry, now addressed to the seventh, linen-clad angel. The initial role of this angel and the function of his writing kit are revealed. He is to use his pen and ink to mark with a cross those who are to be exempted from the general destruction of the population of Jerusalem. The mark, like the sign put on Cain in **Gen 4:15**, has a protective significance. It is literally the letter tau or “t,” which in the old Hebrew script was written in the form of a cross or plus sign. . .

The notion of sparing any comes as a surprise after the categorical divine statement of **8:18**. The earlier part of the book has already displayed variety in the negative prospects of the Judeans, sometimes implying complete destruction within the land, sometimes permitting for some a short lease on life before death strikes (**5:2, 12**), and

sometimes envisioning exile as a limbo where surviving sinners mourn over their sins (6:9). The sparing of 5:3 has an ironic ring in its context. In the next chapter, 12:16 accords with 6:9, while 14:22 is similar; in 21:8–9 (3–4) both innocent and guilty are to be killed. The present passage is striking in that it straightforwardly implies the presence of innocent people in the capital, who were to be spared; perhaps 14:12–20 aligns with it. Different pastoral needs among Ezekiel’s fellow prisoners of war presumably shaped these different prophetic responses. The small number of the survivors may be gauged from the proportion of one angel devoted to exemption and six to destruction. His unsummoned appearance in v 2, after the summons to the executioners in v 1, suggests his relatively minor role, at least in his task as a scribe. The survivors serve to enhance the sinful status of their fellow citizens and so the fairness of divine punishment, inasmuch as they voice God’s own dismay at the cultic aberrations.

2. (:4) Excluding the Righteous from Judgment by Marking Them

“And the LORD said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.’”

Peter Pett: The mark on their foreheads was an X (the ancient form of the letter tau). Compare **Job 31:35** where it represented a signature. It was sometimes used by the scribes at Qumran to indicate points of importance in their scrolls such as Messianic passages. We may well see in it a remarkable precursor to the sign of the cross. These men were ‘signed’ by God, marked as belonging to Him. They were engraved on the palms of His hands (**Isaiah 49:16**). In all His wrath against sin He was faithful to His covenant with those who still trusted Him, with the righteous.

David Guzik: “*put a mark on the foreheads*” --

i. “Like the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites’ houses on the night of the Passover (**Exod. 12**) and the scarlet cord in Rahab’s window (**Josh. 2:18–21; 6:22–25**), it was a sign of hope.” (**Block**)

ii. “There is a prophetic significance in the Hebrew word for the mark. It is the Hebrew letter T (Tau), which at that time was written as a cross. Without being superstitious we can rejoice in this anticipation of salvation through the death of Christ on the cross.” (**Wright**)

iii. **Revelation 7:3** later describes God’s servants again being sealed on their foreheads. **Revelation 13:16** (and several other passages) also describe a later Satanic counterfeit of this mark, identifying allegiance to Satan and his false messiah.

iv. “This is in allusion to the ancient every-where-used custom of setting marks on servants and slaves, to distinguish them from others. It was also common for the worshippers of particular idols to have their idol’s *mark* upon their *foreheads, arms, &c.*” (**Clarke**)

Douglas Stuart: What is important to remember about the marking process is its relationship to the doctrine of individual responsibility so strongly asserted in the book (cf. **ch. 3**). While God may judge nations, cities, cultures, etc. as a group, He is not an arbitrary, unfair judge. Those who have turned against the evils of their own people will be spared by God's judgment, even if from an earthly point of view they may be caught up in the fate of the corporate entity to which they belong. . . in Ezekiel's Jerusalem, corrupt as the city was, the righteous were still to remain faithful and not give up or give in to the practices and ideals of the surrounding culture.

MacArthur: Since God's departure removed all protection and gave the people over to destruction, it was necessary for the angelic scribe (Angel of the Lord) to mark for God's preservation the righteous who had been faithful to Him. Those left unmarked were subject to death in Babylon's siege (**v. 5**). The mark was the indication of God's elect, identified personally by the pre-incarnate Christ. He was marking the elect (cf. **Ex 12:7**). **Malachi 1:16-18** indicates a similar idea. Cf. **Rev 7:3; 9:4**. The marked ones were penitent and were identified for protection. Here was a respite of grace for the remnant. The rest were to be killed (**vv. 5-7**).

Feinberg: Grief is always the portion of those who know the Lord in an evil day. The marked ones were penitent and faithful at a time of widespread departure from the will of the Lord.

John Taylor: It is worth noting that the procedure for inflicting God's punishment was selective, in keeping with the principle of **18:4**, '*the soul that sins shall die*'. The basis for exemption from the slaughter was the individual's deep concern (who sigh and groan, **4**) over the city's apostasy. This was what Amos had looked for among the luxury-loving revellers of Jerusalem and Samaria whom he castigated with his tongue. Their most guilty sin was that they '*did not grieve over the ruin of Joseph*' (**Amos 6:6**). In both cases the criterion that was needed was not strictly a religious quality, like faith, or an outward act, like sacrifice, but an **affair of the heart**—a passionate concern for God and for his people. Failing that, there was no mark, and judgment followed just as surely as it had done for the households that lacked the blood on the doorposts on the night of the first Passover. There was no other exemption: age and sex did not enter into it (**6**): only the mark would save.

Jamaal Delbridge: The mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry in verse four speaks to the individuals who have the seal of the Holy Spirit of promise (**Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30; II Corinthians 1:21-22; II Timothy 2:19, Revelation 7:3-4**) in their foreheads who are written in the Lambs book of Life by the blessed Messiah who is the man clothed in linen that has the writer's inkhorn to write the names in heaven.

<https://justifiedbychristalone.com/2011/06/03/a-study-of-ezekiel-9-verses-1-to-11/>

B. (:5-7) Slaying Commissioned

1. (:5) Mobilizing the Executioners

“But to the others He said in my hearing, ‘Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare.’”

Douglas Stuart: The rest of the populace would be destroyed (v. 5), including women and children. Total elimination of the population is associated with Old Testament holy war (**Deut. 20**), which is a divine war of extermination of a wicked society in which the human soldiers are merely agents of God’s wrath. Thus the implication for Ezekiel and his eventual audience was clear: The coming destruction represented God’s condemnation, not just a political-military success for the Babylonians in Palestine.

2. (:6) Making No Exceptions for the Unmarked

“Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.’ So they started with the elders who were before the temple.”

Peter Pett: ‘Then they began at the old men (elders) who were before the house.’ These would be the five and twenty who represented the priesthood, worshippers of the sun (**Ezekiel 8:16**). They were the most guilty because of their closeness to the sanctuary. These men who had had the most holy privileges had betrayed their trust.

Galen Doughty: God is judging his people according to their hearts. Just because someone is a Jew does not guarantee their safety. The condition of their heart towards God is what will determine whether they are saved in the destruction of Jerusalem. What Ezekiel sees is a vision of God's angels slaughtering the unfaithful people of Jerusalem. Historically the Babylonian army was the instrument of God's judgment upon Judah. Ezekiel shows us that the Babylonians would have never been able to attack and destroy Jerusalem and kill so many Jews unless God beforehand had determined their fate. His justice will be done.

Lamar Cooper: Those judged by the executioners were from five all-inclusive groups: the old men, the young men, the maidens, the women, and the children (**Ezek 9:6**). Judgment of the guilty was indiscriminate. God plays no favorites and gives no exemptions. Divine justice is served by the fact that no one who is guilty will be spared (**9:5–6**). Judgment not only included God’s own people; it began in his sanctuary (**9:6**). Those who are leaders are not exempt from the holy standard of God’s Word. They are even more responsible and will incur more severe punishment for leading others astray (cf. **Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2; Heb 13:17**).

3. (:7) Stacking the Slain in the Temple Courts

“And He said to them, ‘Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!’ Thus they went out and struck down the people in the city.”

Lamar Cooper: Normally a corpse was not allowed in the sanctuary because a dead body was considered unclean. Since the temple already had been defiled by the

worshippers seen in **Ezek 8**, the angel-executioners were told to “*defile the temple*” and to “*fill the courts with the slain*” (v. 7). Justice was more important than ritual purity.

III. (:8-11) SLAUGHTER JUSTIFIED

A. (:8) Protest of Ezekiel

“Then it came about as they were striking and I alone was left, that I fell on my face and cried out saying, ‘Alas, Lord God! Art Thou destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Thy wrath on Jerusalem?’”

John Taylor: For all Ezekiel’s outward appearance of severity, beneath the hard shell there was a heart that felt deeply for and with his people. He did not relish the message of judgment that he had to give, still less the reality that followed when the message was rejected.

B. (:9-10) Perspective of the Lord

1. (:9) Causes of Provocation

a. Great Iniquity

“Then He said to me, ‘The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great,’”

b. Social and Moral Perversion

“and the land is filled with blood, and the city is full of perversion;”

c. Theological Perversion

“for they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!’”

Ralph Alexander: Violence and spiritual perversion had filled the land because the people had forgotten God’s character, assuming that he did not see what they were doing because he had deserted them. They denied God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and faithfulness.

Leslie Allen: The prophet’s protest provides an opportunity for a powerful justification of the destruction at the close of the chapter. “Ezekiel prays, but the answer is in effect: Too late! Sin has reached its full measure” (**Blenkinsopp** 59). The mercilessness of v 5 is grounded in a fresh statement of the human guilt that must meet with retribution. The guilt is not expressed in terms of the religious sins of **chap. 8** that were summarized in **9:4**, though they are obviously included in its characterization as “*quite considerable*.” Here the point is being made that the guilt relates not only to Israel’s **worship** but also to their **way of life**. This other side of their guilt, which was briefly mentioned in **8:17**, is now amplified. Jerusalem, as representative of the nation, must suffer for the social sins to be found both in the country at large and in the capital. The charges align with Jeremiah’s denunciation of Jehoiakim (**Jer 22:13–19**; cf. **Lam 4:13**) and also with Ezekiel’s post-587 comprehensive description of the final kings who

abused human rights in Jerusalem and of royal officials who did the same both in Jerusalem and in Judah (22:25, 27, 29). The description of objective guilt is reinforced by one of a subjective attitude that repudiated Yahweh's claim on their lives as no longer valid. The double description of the wicked in Ps 94:5–7 is remarkably similar, though it lacks the pointed reference to the defeat of 597:

*“Your people, Yahweh, they crush,
and your inheritance they afflict.
Widow and resident alien they kill,
and orphans they murder.
They say, ‘Yah does not see,
the God of Jacob does not realize.’”*

2. (:10) Corresponding Judgment without Pity

“But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare, but I shall bring their conduct upon their heads.”

Lamar Cooper: In response to Ezekiel's plea for mercy, God reminded him that there was a just and equitable basis for the punishment he had witnessed. Their sin (v. 9), literally “wickedness,” was great, the land was filled with violence and bloodshed, and the city was filled with injustice. Therefore there would be no relaxation of judgment (v. 10).

Derek Thomas: John Stott is of the opinion that the statement, ‘God's patience runs out,’ is not appropriate to God. Speaking of the prophets of the exile and their use of the language of provocation, he says, ‘They did not mean that Yahweh was irritated or exasperated, or that Israel's behaviour had been so “provocative” that his patience had run out. No, the language of provocation expresses the inevitable reaction of God's perfect nature to evil. It indicates that there is within God a holy intolerance of idolatry, immorality and injustice’ (*Cross of Christ*, p. 124). But this is, I think, a mistaken interpretation of the word ‘patience’. God's ‘patience’ is his slowness to anger. It is not limitless. The fact that it runs out does not necessarily imply a loss of control.

C. (:11) Performance Report by Linen-clad Angel

“Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, ‘I have done just as Thou hast commanded me.’”

Galen Doughty: God's justice has been pronounced and carried out in the spiritual realm. Now all that remains is for that justice to be carried out in history. By his vision Ezekiel is telling the elders Jerusalem is doomed as are its people. Nothing the Jews do will stop God from carrying out his just and righteous sentence on the Jews for their sin. The official theology is exposed as a deception and a trap.

Iain Duguid: Yet at this critical juncture, precisely when it appears that all hope is gone, suddenly the priestly figure with the writing kit reappears, saying, “I have done as you commanded” (9:11). His appearance also answers Ezekiel's question concerning the

remnant, for he stands mute testimony to the Lord's purpose to save those who sigh and mourn over the abominations of Jerusalem. We are not told how many he has marked—indeed, we are not even told that he has marked any—yet his presence acts to mitigate slightly the awful severity of the judgment, just as the rainbow of **1:28** tempers slightly the coming windstorm of God's wrath. As at the time of the Exodus, there is shelter from God's destruction for those who are willing to take refuge in the appointed sign. But on this occasion, it seems that those being saved will indeed be few.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the significance of the writing case carried by the heavenly linen-clad man?
- 2) When (under what circumstances) does the Lord shut off His pity and compassion?
- 3) What parallels in Scripture do you find for this mark on the forehead? Are you marked for salvation?
- 4) Why aren't women or children spared from this slaughter?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Christopher Wright: The glory lifts and moves just a little to the east, to the threshold of the temple. Apart from making it very clear who it is who is issuing the commands to the angelic executioners gathered close by, this ominous moment is the first stage in its withdrawal from the city, which will be complete by **11:23**. The glory of God, which is leaving because it has been so irretrievably offended by the sin of Israel, is now defended in three ways.

a. The glory of God defended by the protection of the repentant (9:4)

Part of the glory of Yahweh as God is his commitment to utter righteousness and justice. His exaltation and his holiness are demonstrated precisely in those aspects of his character. It was this conviction which led Abraham to intercede for Sodom on the basis of the affirmation '*Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*' The same conviction underlies Ezekiel's exclamation in **9:8**. God's judgment will be horrendously effective, just as it has been utterly deserved and long overdue. But it will also be **discriminating**. God sees and knows the response of every individual human heart and he will distinguish the repentant from the unrepentant. This fundamental truth, which still lies at the heart of the rationale for all evangelism, exercised the mind of Ezekiel greatly, and in later chapters he will devote much energy to arguing the case for it with the

exiles and seeking to persuade them to join the protected camp of the repentant, even in their present circumstances.

b. The glory of God defended by the destruction of the wicked (9:5–7)

Here, however, it is vitally important that we take note, theologically and missiologically, that the glory of God, which pervades this awful scene even as it slowly moves away from it (cf. **10:4–5**), is fully manifested both in the protection and salvation of repentant saints and in the ultimate judgment and destruction of unrepentant sinners. We can praise him for the former, even if, like Ezekiel, we can only fall in trembling intercession in response to the latter.

c. The glory of God defended by the intercession of the prophet (9:8–10; 11:13)

Ezekiel's words in **9:8**, however, are not, strictly speaking, intercession—except by implication. Rather, they are a challenging question to God about his intentions. And the focus is specifically on the entire remnant of Israel. Ever since the great pre-exilic prophets had begun to predict the judgment and destruction of Israel as fulfillment of God's covenant threats, they had also built in a word of hope through the concept of 'a remnant'. Some see this already in Amos, but it certainly becomes a major part of Isaiah's message, to the extent that he named one of his sons '*Shear-Jashub*'—'*a remnant will return*'. In the mind of the prophets, then, the future hopes of Israel thus came to focus on this remnant that would survive the purging fires of judgment and carry forward God's longstanding promise for Israel and the nations.

But now in his vision Ezekiel is witnessing what looks like a final wiping out even of that remnant. Ezekiel may not yet have come to identify the exiles (including himself, of course), with the remnant spoken of by earlier prophets. Like the rest of the exiles in those early years he would probably still have thought that the future lay with some group in Jerusalem. It would take a while for the message of **Jeremiah 24** to sink in, in which Jeremiah identified the exiles as the '*good figs*' who would inherit God's future for his people. So Ezekiel's agonized challenge to God effectively means, 'God, is this really the end for all your purpose for Israel? If you now destroy even this remnant left in Jerusalem, will there really be nobody left at all to carry on God's wider purpose through Israel for the nations?' How could the mission of Israel to bring blessing to the nations, by bringing the knowledge of Yahweh to them, be fulfilled if Israel itself were annihilated? The latter dimension of his question is not explicit in his cry, but it certainly exercised his thinking a lot, as we shall see in later chapters.

David Thompson: Ezekiel had been given a tour of what religious leaders were doing in the Temple. They were involved in evil and idolatrous behavior. These were the religious leaders of Israel who behind the scenes were living lives that were totally and completely involved in evil.

They thought they were getting away with their “secret sin” so God says in this chapter, I will not put up with that. In fact, I will put a stop to it and the way I will do that is through some ferocious judgment. . .

BECAUSE GOD’S OWN PEOPLE REFUSED TO TURN FROM THEIR EVIL SIN, GOD PERSONALLY COMMANDS A DESTRUCTIVE JUDGMENT TO COME AGAINST THEM.

PART #1 – God commands that judgment come against His own people. **9:1-7a**

PART #2 – God’s agents carry out judgment against His own people. **9:6h-7**

PART #3 – God explains to Ezekiel why He is judging His own people. **9:8-10**

So God takes the time to show Ezekiel why He is doing that:

Reason #1 - Because the iniquity of Israel and Judah has reached a very great level. **9:9a**

Sin was so rampant that God had to destroy His own people.

Reason #2 - Because the land is filled with blood. **9:9b**

What this means is that the city that was supposed to be a sacred city for the worship of God had become a totally lawless city known for lawless activity. There was no sense of justice anymore.

Reason #3 - Because the city is full of perversion. **9:9c**

There are perverted things that people do that will cause God to send His wrath judgment.

Reason #4 - Because of their heretical theological belief. **9:9d**

PART #4 – God’s special man clothed in linen reports to God that he did what He commanded. **9:11**

Chuck Smith: Judgment must come, judgment will come. Where will you be when the wrath of God begins to be poured out?

1. Do you sigh for all of the iniquity that fills our land?
 - a. The violence, murder, adultery, the blasphemous language.
 - b. Or do you watch it on T.V. and rather enjoy seeing it portrayed?
2. Have you been crying out to God because of all of the abominations that fill the land?
 - a. Have you been on your face before the Lord weeping because of the iniquity in the land, or has your pursuit of your own pleasure given you a careless disregard of the abounding evil?
3. Those who sighed over the conditions, and cried out to God because of their great concern over the abominations, were the ones that the Lord marked for protection from the judgment of the Lord.

TEXT: Ezekiel 10:1-22

TITLE: *VISION OF GOD'S GLORY DEPARTING FROM THE TEMPLE*

BIG IDEA:

JERUSALEM WILL BE JUDGED BY FIRE AFTER THE GLORY OF GOD DEPARTS FROM THE TEMPLE

INTRODUCTION:

The imminent judgment upon Jerusalem (to be burned with fire by the Babylonian troops) was directly tied to the retreat of the Glory of God from His residence in the temple sanctuary. Apostate worship had been exposed. The abominations of idolatry had been exposed. Now genuine worship was no longer possible in the temple as God's presence was withdrawn. The role of the cherubim is highlighted in supporting the movement of God's chariot-throne. Everything in this vision is cloaked in the awesomeness of the cloud surrounding God's Glory. The Angel of the Lord (the linen-clad man) received the coals of fire and prepares to execute God's fiery judgment.

Feinberg: The basic truth of the chapter is that God controls all the forces of judgment that He employs.

David Thompson: Visions are trying to describe events and people that are often beyond our ability to rationally understand. It is why God gave his prophets visions full of **symbolic language** in order to at least communicate his truth to us about things for which we often have no frame of reference. How does one describe the glory and throne of God? Ezekiel described it as a sapphire throne above a great expanse resting on the great cherubim who had wings and fiery wheels and four faces. That seems just as good as any description! We have to remember however, this is how God chose to reveal himself to his prophet and to us. What Ezekiel saw was guided by the Spirit of God and his revelation. Within the confines of his vision this is a true representation of God and his throne.

Lamar Cooper: **Chapter 10** has four scenes. First, the man in white was commanded to take coals from between the cherubim (**10:1–2**). Second, the glory of God moved to the threshold and paused while fire purged the city (**10:3–8**). Third, the cherubim were described (**10:9–17**). Fourth, the glory of God moved to a position above the cherubim and with them to the east gate (**10:18–22**). **H. Parunak** has argued that the two-stage movement of the glory of God is the focus of two chiasms in **chap. 10**. The first stage is the center of a chiasm comprising **vv. 1–7**, marked by the repeated references to taking fire “*from among the cherubim*” in **vv. 2** and **6–7**. The second stage is the center of a chiasm comprising **vv. 8–22**, marked by descriptions of the cherubim in **vv. 8–17** and **20–22**.

Wiersbe: Ezekiel was learning that the most important part of the nation's life was to magnify the glory of God. The presence of God in the sanctuary was a great privilege

for the people of Israel, but it was also a great responsibility. The glory of God cannot dwell with the sins of God's people, so it was necessary for the glory to leave, and the sanctuary and the people to be judged.

I. (:1-2) FIRST COMMAND FROM THE THRONE OF THE GLORY OF GOD: EXECUTE JUDGMENT – TAKE AND SCATTER COALS OF FIRE OF JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM

A. (:1) The Vision of the Glorious Throne above the Cherubim

“Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them.”

B. (:2) The Command to Execute Judgment by Fire upon Jerusalem

*“And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said,
'Enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim,
and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim,
and scatter them over the city.'
And he entered in my sight.”*

Constable: He was then to scatter the coals over the city symbolizing its judgment and cleansing (**Gen. 19:24; Ps. 18:10-15; Isa. 6:6; 33:14; Rev. 8:5**).

David Guzik: Previously we read that Jerusalem would be judged by siege, slaughter, famine, and disease. Now we learn that Jerusalem will also be burnt, and the fire comes *from the throne and glory of God itself*; the **coals of fire** come **from among the cherubim**.

John Taylor: In Ezekiel's mind, Jerusalem was going to be treated in the same way as Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:24**).

David Thompson: Now **coals of fire** are used as a metaphor for several things:

- 1) Coals of fire for destruction;
- 2) Coals of fire for purification—fire purifies Isaiah's unclean lips (**Is. 6:6-7**);
- 3) Coals of fire for conviction—when we do good things, we heap coals of fire on the heads of people;
- 4) Coals of fire for consecration—O.T. sacrifices consecrated God's people using coals.

These are not blessing coals, so when the man takes these coals into his hand, serious judgment is on the way.

Wiersbe: Not only would the city be visited by famine, pestilence, and sword, but it would be burned by the Babylonian army. This was not a fire of purification, such as Isaiah experienced (**Isa. 6:5-7**), but a fire of condemnation (**2 Kings 25:8-9**).

Douglas Stuart: In **verse 1** Ezekiel's description focuses temporarily on the sapphire-like throne above the cherubim (cf. **1:26**), which is the point from which God could be heard speaking to the angel in linen. This figure had completed the task of sparing the righteous (**9:4**) and now is assigned an opposite sort of job—bringing God's judgment fire on the city. A raging fire was visible in the midst of the cherubim, as if the chariot were itself made of fire, which is at least how it appeared (**1:4**; cf. **2 Kin. 2:11**). This fire would constitute not just any fire but the very fire of God, since the chariot was God's own. Fire in the Bible is often a symbol of God's judgment against wickedness (**Gen. 19:24; Deut. 28:24; 32:22; Amos 1-2**), and thus the scattering of coals of fire over Jerusalem would symbolize divine destructive wrath.

II. (:3-8) SECOND COMMAND FROM THE THRONE OF THE GLORY OF GOD: EXECUTE JUDGMENT – TAKE AND SCATTER COALS OF FIRE OF JUDGMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM

A. (:3-5) The Vision of the Glory of the Lord Retreating to the Threshold of the Temple

1. (:3) Vision Focusing on the Cherubim Serving the Glory of God

“Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court.”

2. (:4) Vision Focusing on the Movement of the Glory of the Lord

“Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD.”

3. (:5) Vision Focusing on the Awesome Sound of the Almighty in Motion

“Moreover, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks.”

Peter Pett: The sound of the wings of the cherubim was clearly also awesome (compare **Ezekiel 1:24**). It filled the whole house even to the outer court. And it was powerful and strong like the voice of the Almighty. In both cases the mention of the sound of their wings is connected with the actual voice of Yahweh being heard.

Lamar Cooper: **Craigie** sees two new perspectives added by these verses. First, the judgment of God cannot be distinguished from the glory of God. The presence of the glory of God demands purity and purging to produce holiness. Fire represented this twofold character of purification and purging by God. The same fire from God that purified the mouth of Isaiah (**Isa 6:6**) and brought destruction to Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 19:24**) would now purge the city in judgment. Second, judgment of the temple and Jerusalem was marked by the departure of God. The most severe aspect of God's

judgment was his absence from among his people. Of course, God's presence had never been confined to the temple. Rather, the temple was where he made himself known in blessing and received the worship of his people (see **1 Kgs 8:27–53**).

B. (:6-8) The Command to Execute Judgment by Fire upon Jerusalem

1. (:6) Preparation for Angel of the Lord to Receive the Coals of Fire

“And it came about when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, ‘Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim,’ he entered and stood beside a wheel.”

2. (:7-8) Role of the Cherub in Distributing the Coals of Fire

“Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took some and put it into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took it and went out. And the cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.”

Iain Duguid: After the priestly figure departs to carry out the Lord's bidding, there follows a renewed description of the divine chariot with its supernatural attendants. The lengths to which the prophet goes to describe the vision of the divine glory may seem redundant to us, but they serve to underline its status as the central feature of the whole temple vision. What Ezekiel sees is exactly the same vision as he saw in **chapter 1** (in Babylonia!), but here in the temple context, certain features snap into sharper focus. In the building filled with representations of cherubim, it becomes clear to the prophet that the “*living creatures*” he saw in **chapter 1** are themselves cherubim.

III. (:9-17) DESCRIPTION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHARIOT-THRONE WHEELS – INTEGRALLY LINKED TO THE CHERUBIM – DESIGNED TO TRANSPORT THE GLORY OF GOD

A. (:9-14) Description of the Chariot Wheels / Cherubim

1. (:9) Connection between the Gleaming Wheels and the Cherubim

“Then I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone.”

MacArthur: **vv. 9-17** – This whole section is similar to **1:4-21**. Four wheels on God's chariot mingled with the 4 angels (cf. **1:15-21**) coordinated with each other in precision, and each with a different one of the cherubim. All looked so much alike that it was as if one wheel blended entirely with another (**v. 10**). As their appearance was so unified, their action was in unison, and instant (**v. 11**). The cherubim had bodies like men and their chariot wheels were full of eyes denoting full perception both to see the sinners and their fitting judgment. The color Tarshish, or beryl, is a sparkling yellow or gold.

2. (:10) Integration of the Four Wheels

“And as for their appearance, all four of them had the same likeness, as if one wheel were within another wheel.”

3. (:11) Unison of Movement

“When they moved, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went; but they followed in the direction which they faced, without turning as they went.”

Feinberg: The wheels followed not some outside force but were guided by an inner impulse from the Lord transmitted to the cherubim. They moved in the direction that the front of the chariot pointed with unity of purpose and oneness of goal (cf. **1:12, 17**). . . Cherubim and wheels worked in unison; all moved in view of the anticipated departure of the Shekinah glory (see **v. 18**). Unity of action and performance is emphasized by the response to the directing spirit of the living creature.

4. (:12) Universal Vision

“And their whole body, their backs, their hands, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around, the wheels belonging to all four of them.”

Daniel Block: **v. 12** is particularly confusing, as images of **wheels** seem to merge with images of **cherubim**.

5. (:13) Whirling Wheels

“The wheels were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels.”

David Thompson: The Hebrew word “whirling” (*hagalgal*) means revolving or rolling. They were actually given a name that Ezekiel heard. These wheels were actually named for their function. The naming of these wheels seems to be suggestive of the fact that the glory of God was about to “whirl out of His temple.” These wheels are not in a park or rest mode, they are ready to move.

6. (:14) Four Faces

“And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of a cherub, the second face was the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.”

David Thompson: Each cherub had the face of a cherub, a man, a lion and an eagle. We may recall that earlier in chapter 1 the four faces were man, lion, bull and eagle (**1:10**). Obviously in this listing the bull is missing and the cherub face has replaced it.

Now some have suggested that the reason for this is due to the fact that a scribe copying the text made a mistake. Others have suggested that the face of the cherub is the face of the bull.

However, we think there is an explanation that is very explainable. Each face represents a judgment that God authorizes against Israel to be carried out using these high-ranking angelic beings. When the living beings show up in Revelation they are down to one

face, not four. The reason here for the change is that judgment number 1 of the 4 is now in progress.

In other words, this is the moment when Babylon is authorized by God to destroy His Temple, Jerusalem and His people. **Judgment #1 is now in operation**, which is the powerful bull judgment and there are three more to go after this.

Actually as we are here tonight, there is only one more to go. We believe things are shaping up for the final judgment.

B. (:15-17) Function of the Chariot Wheels / Cherubim

1. (:15) Repetition of the Same Vision from Earlier

“Then the cherubim rose up.

They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar.”

2. (:16) Coordination in Movement of the Wheels and the Cherubim

“Now when the cherubim moved, the wheels would go beside them; also when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them.”

3. (:17) Animation of the Movement via the Spirit of Living Beings

“When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still; and when they rose up, the wheels would rise with them; for the spirit of the living beings was in them.”

IV. (:18-22) VISION OF THE GLORY OF GOD DEPARTING FROM THE TEMPLE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CHERUBIM

A. (:18-19) Testimony to the Departure of the Glory of God

1. (:18) Retreating from the Threshold of the Temple

“Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.”

Leslie Allen: The basic narrative is now resumed from v 7. It records a second stage in the departure of the glory of Yahweh, after the first in v 4a. The empty throne to which Ezekiel drew attention in v 1 is empty no longer. God’s “tabernacling presence” is over. It is replaced by his presence in a theophany of judgment. The cherubim function no longer simply as guardians of the fire beneath the throne but as bearers of the throne of v 1. The “*glory of Yahweh*” is here a reference to the resplendent divine figure of 1:28, as it clearly was in v 4 and also in 9:3. However, 8:4 seems to use it more generally of the total revelation of Yahweh on his mobile throne borne by living beings or cherubim, as in the earlier 3:12, to which reference is made in 8:4.

Daniel Block: Having completed the descriptive aside concerning the chariot and its cherubic bearers, the primary narrative resumes with the announcement of the second phase of Yahweh’s staged departure from the temple. The prophet watches as

the *kābôd* rises from the threshold, moves to the spot where the throne-chariot is parked, and comes to rest above the cherubim. With their divine cargo in place, the cherubim lift off and taxi to the east gate of the temple, presumably the gate of the outer court. All the while the prophet is able to observe the glory of the God of Israel hovering over the cherubim, waiting for its final ride.

2. (:19) Hovering over the Entrance of the East Gate

“When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house. And the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.”

Constable: God had warned His people that He would remove the glory of His presence from them if they departed from His will (cf. Deut. 31:17; 1 Sam. 4:21; Hos. 9:12). One of the greatest blessings that Christians enjoy is that God has promised never to withdraw His indwelling presence from our bodies, His present temples (**Matt. 28:20; cf. John 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:19**).

Galen Doughty: Ezekiel now sees the glory of the Lord depart from over the threshold of the temple and stop. Then God's glory moved again. It rose up and stopped above the east gate of the temple, which by New Testament times was called the **Golden Gate**. Jewish tradition says the Messiah will enter into the temple via the Golden Gate when he comes in power on the Mount of Olives ala **Zechariah 14**. Also in Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple in **chapters 40-44** God reenters the temple by the **east gate**. It is the direction of the sunrise over the Mount of Olives.

Derek Thomas: At the close of this description God's glory, which had briefly lifted away from the chariot (**10:4**), now rejoins the chariot (**10:18**) and the entire glory-chariot makes its way to the east gate of the temple, the very edge of the entire temple complex (**10:19**), ready to depart altogether (which it does in **11:23**).

B. (:20-22) Testimony to the Reality of the Involvement of the Cherubim

1. (:20) Same Living Beings as Seen Earlier

“These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim.”

Constable: Ezekiel explained that the cherubim were the same creatures that he had formerly called living beings in his description of his earlier vision (**1:5**). Why did Ezekiel not call them cherubim in **chapter 1**? Perhaps this vision of Solomon's temple, which contained representations of cherubim (**Exod. 25:18-20; 1 Kings 6:29, 35; 7:29, 36**), helped Ezekiel identify the living creatures that he had seen before.

2. (:21-22a) Same Appearance as to Their Faces, Wings and Hands

“Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and beneath their wings was the form of human hands. As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose

appearance I had seen by the river Chebar.”

3. (:22b) Same Purpose and Direction

“Each one went straight ahead.”

Feinberg: The final word is that every cherub went straight forward, thus proclaiming the impossibility of thwarting or frustrating the plans of God. They kept their object and mission undeviatingly before them at all times.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In light of this passage, how precious is God’s promise to believers today that the indwelling Holy Spirit will never leave the temple of our body?
- 2) Why did the departure from the temple and the city take place in graduated stages rather than just in one fell swoop?
- 3) Why the close repetition between this image and what Ezekiel had seen earlier by the river Chebar?
- 4) What type of warning should the unrepentant take from the application of the coals of fire to the city of Jerusalem – almost after the analogy of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dyer: God would not share His dwelling place with other 'gods,' and the sanctuary had been polluted with idolatry. God's worship center at Shiloh was removed shortly after His glory had departed from it (**1 Sam. 4:1-4, 10-11, 19-23; Jer. 7:12-14**); and the same fate awaited the Jerusalem temple.

Feinberg: Like Sodom and Gomorrah of old, the city was to be destroyed by fire. Vastly different from the fire on the altar, which bespeaks God’s proffered grace (**Lev. 6:12-13**), were the coals of fire in the hands of the Man clothed in linen (see **Isa. 33:14**). In **Isaiah 6** the coals were for the purification of the prophet; here they were for the destruction of the wicked. Where evil is concerned, it is true that “*our God is a consuming fire*” as stated in **Hebrews 12:29**.

David Guzik: This was the *cloud of glory*, seen often in the Old and New Testaments, sometimes called the cloud of *Shekinah* glory. It is hard to *define* the glory of God; we

could call it the radiant outshining of His character and presence. Here it was given some visible representation in **the cloud**.

- This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (**Exodus 13:21-22**).
- This is the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from (**Exodus 16:10**).
- This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (**Exodus 19:9, 24:15-18, Numbers 11:25, 12:5, 16:42**).
- This is the cloud that stood by the door of the Tabernacle (**Exodus 33:9-10**).
- This is the cloud from which God appeared to the High Priest in the Holy Place inside the veil (**Leviticus 16:2**).
- This is the cloud that so filled the temple when Solomon dedicated it that the priests could not continue to serve (**1 Kings 8:1-11**).
- This is the cloud of Ezekiel's vision, filling the temple of God with the brightness of His glory (**Ezekiel 10:4**).
- This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 1:35**).
- This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (**Luke 9:34-35**).
- This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at His ascension (**Acts 1:9**).
- This is the cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth (**Luke 21:27, Revelation 1:7**).

David Thompson: Ezekiel got to see one of the most depressing things that anyone can ever see and that is the glory of God leaves His property. In **Chapter 8**, Ezekiel is taken to Jerusalem to the Temple to see the evil, the immorality and idolatry. It leaves His Temple and it leaves Jerusalem. Make no mistake about this, Ezekiel actually saw this. In fact, twice in this chapter he specifically says, "*I looked, and behold*" (**10:1, 9**).

There is a very important lesson to learn from this text:

WHEN GOD'S PRESENCE AND GLORY LEAVES HIS PEOPLE AND PROPERTY, IT MEANS HE IS AUTHORIZING HORRIBLE JUDGMENTS TO COME AGAINST HIS PEOPLE AND HIS PROPERTY.

Now the average person who was in Jerusalem had no idea what was happening in the unseen world. They had no idea that these cherubim were even there. They certainly had no idea that God's glory was present in the Temple and in the city; but they would certainly understand it when it was gone.

It is like the churches today. Jesus Christ specifically says that He watches over every church. It is also stated in **Revelation 2-3** that there are angels connected to the various churches. Now most people never know this or sense this and certainly don't see this. But believe me they are there. If Jesus Christ decides to remove the candlestick of a church so that it no longer shines forth His glory, people will soon realize that. God can and will authorize the destruction of His own property if His people do not deal with

their sin and rebellion. God can bless and God can curse. When God gets angry at His people, He may use His angelic forces to corral human forces to punish His people.

Douglas Stuart: It is noteworthy that the throne-chariot, bearing the glory of God, came to Ezekiel in exile but departed from Jerusalem. The presence of God is a sign of His favor (**Deut. 4:29, 31**) whereas the absence of God is a sign of His rejection (**Deut. 31:17, 18**). The passage symbolizes the fact that it is exiles to whom God has entrusted continuation of true religion and a right relationship with Himself. Those remaining in Jerusalem could not be trusted. They had proved themselves unworthy and unreliable, having failed to learn any lesson from the invasion and Exile of 598 b.c. After the period of the Exile was complete, it would be returning Exiles like Zerubbabel and Jeshua (**Hag. 1:15; Zech. 3–4**) or later, Ezra and Nehemiah, who would help restore orthodox faith and practice to Judah—not the “*people of the land*” who had never been taken into exile and had thus stayed in Judah all along. Just as the same burning coals that symbolized the purity of God’s presence at the throne chariot could also be used as a means of destruction for the city in the early part of the vision of **chapter 10**, the same people sent into exile could later be the ones who preserved true worship, having been purified in their faith by the ordeals they underwent.

TEXT: Ezekiel 11:1-25

TITLE: FINAL DEPARTURE OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

AS THE GLORY OF THE LORD DEPARTS JERUSALEM, EZEKIEL'S VISION CONCLUDES WITH WORDS OF JUDGMENT AND OF MERCY

INTRODUCTION:

God constantly proclaims a message of both **Judgment** and **Mercy** – as he does here in the conclusion of Ezekiel's vision. At the crux always lies the pathway of **Repentance**. The holiness and justice of God demand accountability for sin. The abominations and iniquities of God's elect nation have already been documented. The smug arrogance of those who have not yet experienced the severity of God's judgment clouds their perspective and emboldens them to actually mock what God is doing. Yet God's covenant commitment and kingdom plans cannot be thwarted. He will convert men's hearts, regenerate them and eventually fulfill His New Covenant promises of restoration and blessing for His chosen people. But for now, the glory of the Lord must depart from the city of Jerusalem. This is a monumentally sad event for the nation.

Leslie Allen: The narrative about the departing glory is interrupted by an independent visionary experience in vv 1–13, which in turn is supplemented with a positive message in vv 14–21.

Douglas Stuart: In **chapter 11**, Ezekiel is commanded to preach two messages: one of doom, the other of deliverance. To the leaders of Jerusalem, some of whom are mentioned by name in **verses 1–13**, he is required to prophesy that some will be killed and others exiled as a result of their willful disobedience of God's commandments. To the Diaspora, on the other hand, those who are already in exile and longing for the Lord's favor, he can announce a message of hope for return to the land of Canaan and enjoyment once again of God's mercy and protection (vv. 14–25).

This message was exactly the opposite of what Jerusalem's leaders considered appropriate. They saw the exiles as unfortunate victims of their own bad luck and poor judgment for having somehow gotten exiled instead of having been spared as the present leaders had been. Of course, the present leaders could hardly be expected to exercise the best judgment; they were mostly inferior leaders who had been left behind by the Babylonians in 598 b.c. when the best of the leadership was taken captive and deported. But in their self-importance they seem to have considered themselves somehow the favored few, who, feeling secure in their wisdom and in the upgrading of the city's fortifications that had undoubtedly taken place in the latter years of Zedekiah's reign, believed that Jerusalem could hold out against any foe.

I. (:1-13) PRONOUNCING JUDGMENT UPON THE ARROGANT JEWISH LEADERS REMAINING IN JERUSALEM

A. (:1-4) Targeting the Wicked Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem

1. (:1) Identifying the Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem

a. Positioned to View the Leaders

“Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the LORD's house which faced eastward.”

b. Prominent Leaders Singled Out

“And behold, there were twenty-five men at the entrance of the gate, and among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people.”

2. (:2-3) Indicting Them for Their Evil and Arrogant Counsel

a. (:2) Source of Evil Advice

“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city,’ ”

b. (:3) Shamelessness of Arrogant Smugness

“who say, ‘Is not the time near to build houses? This city is the pot and we are the flesh.’ ”

Daniel Block: Despite these ambiguities, within the context of this prophecy the most likely sense intended by the quotation seems to be, *“There is no need at the present time to worry about building houses.”* The statement reflects a **complacency** and **smugness** characteristic of those who think they have everything under control. . .

This pot is Jerusalem, offering security to those inside, particularly the nouveaux nobles represented by *’ānaḥnû*, “we.” Accordingly, at this point the contrast is not between the status of the upper crust and the average citizens (whom they exploit), but between this new class of leaders and those who had been carried off into exile. The new rulers are the prime cuts of meat, supposedly invulnerable within the city walls, as opposed to those who have been discarded as waste (cf. v. 15) and obviously no longer enjoy the protection of God.

Derek Thomas: They believed that they were ‘the favoured few’. Confident that the city was invincible, they boasted openly about their building programme: ‘Will it not soon be time to build houses?’, adding an odd-sounding expression: ‘This city is a cooking pot, and we are the meat’ (11:3).

This appears to mean that, just as meat belongs in a cooking pot, so they belonged in Jerusalem. It is an arrogant claim, as God later remarks: they will be hurled out of the pot (11:11). The arrogance and self-confidence of this remark are further exemplified in the fact that the people of Jerusalem had by now grown openly cynical of their blood-brothers and sisters in exile, claiming that the land belonged to them only (11:15).

Leslie Allen: It must be Yahweh who speaks, in view of the divine commission to prophesy in v 4. A general characterization of the men is given, citing their involvement in morally evil projects. The first phrase, “*making iniquitous plans,*” and the subsequent mention of “*evil*” seem to be deliberate echoes of Mic 2:1. Their policy is explained by a resolution in v 3a, which is supported by a metaphorical saying in v 3b. The resolution has been variously interpreted (see Zimmerli 258). The initial echo of the accusation in Mic 2:1–2 provides the clue: there the evil schemes of the powerful were to seize the houses of others, which they coveted (Ohnesorge, *Jahwe gestaltet* 69; cf. Fuhs 60; Fohrer 60; Greenberg 187). These city planners had no scruples in attaining their selfish ends, as the more specific accusation in v 6 will reveal. Their illegal seizure of the property of other citizens made it unnecessary to engage in further building. The epigram in v 3b is harder to interpret. The immediate context and the denial of the validity of the saying in v 11 (cf. v 7) make it clear that a positive, smugly reassuring comment is being made. One can imagine it being said with a knowing grin. The imagery is used differently in 24:3–11, as a metaphor of judgment relating to the siege of Jerusalem: Yahweh would make it hot for the citizens of Jerusalem! Here the thought may be that the caldron protects its contents from the fire (Keil 145; Bertholet [1897] 61). It is more likely, in the light of v 7, that there is an implicit contrast between meat, which corresponds to the best cuts of meat and choicest bones in 24:1 that are put into the caldron, and offal that has no right in the pot (Greenberg 187). The plotters are contrasting themselves with their victims, whose rights to live in the city they have denied.

Douglas Stuart: Their byword was the enigmatic saying of verse 3, which seems to be a boast of some sort, an arrogant expression of confidence that they, as the new overlords of the city and territory, had now been given “*the land as a possession*” (v. 15) and that it would never be taken away from them. The Hebrew wording of their boast is difficult to understand. It says literally, “*Not build houses near? It is the pot, we are the meat!*” The English translations all attempt to smooth out this terse aphorism, but its exact sense must remain a matter of conjecture. Perhaps it implies that the people could go ahead to build, that is, making long-term plans (cf. Jer. 32:6–15) because they belonged in Jerusalem like meat in a cooking pot whereas the exiles were like the entrails, hooves, etc. of an animal—discarded as unfit to go into the pot for cooking.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel was told these men were “*plotting evil*” and giving “*wicked advice*” in Jerusalem (v. 2). As leaders they were responsible for the moral, social, and spiritual direction of the people. God gave Ezekiel two illustrations of their bad counsel. First, “*Will it not soon be time to build houses?*” (v. 3). As translated in the NIV the phrase suggests that the crisis would soon pass and life would return to normal. It is also possible that this was a denial of the crisis and should be translated, “The time (of destruction) is not near; let us build houses.” Another possibility is that it is a reference to house-building in the exile. Thus the phrase would mean, “The time is not near to build houses (in exile).” Still another interpretation is that it may have been a declaration of defiance against Babylon. The meaning would be, “It is not time to build houses (but time to prepare for battle).” Of the possible interpretations this last one seems to fit the context best.

The second phrase, “*This city is a cooking pot, and we are the meat*” (v. 3), is equally enigmatic. At face value it seems to be a reference to the judgment of Judah, but the context suggests the opposite. Most interpreters agree that the cooking pot, a clay vessel for cooking food, was used to protect the choice meats from the fire while being prepared. The city, with its walls and fortifications, was the protection of the people from the “fire” of Babylon’s armies. This interpretation fits the statement in v. 11 that the “*city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be the meat in it.*” If true, this meant they were relying on the inviolability and military fortifications of Jerusalem for their security and protection. This was a condemnation of the misplaced trust because Judah should have relied on God. We are to trust God and not our own ability or understanding (11:1–3; cf. **Prov 3:5–7**). He will direct our lives and give us the keys for knowing and doing his will (**Rom 12:1–8**).

Peter Pett: But the central point is the same in all views. That they were being presumptuous, that they were relying on the fallacy of the inviolability of Jerusalem, that they were exalting themselves, and that they were ignoring Yahweh’s words through His prophets. They were frighteningly blind to their own failures and self-satisfied in spite of their iniquitous behaviour.

3. (:4) Imploring Ezekiel to Condemn Them

“Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy!”

Lamar Cooper: The verb form (related to *nābî*, “prophet”) was used twice for emphasis and to stress the urgency of the assignment.

Leslie Allen: The citation of the proud claims of the powerful elite has launched a disputation to which Yahweh will give a vigorous and reasoned response. The quotation also constitutes an accusation that triggers an oracle of judgment. Ezekiel is commissioned to transmit the oracle.

Daniel Block: It was the leaders’ erroneous interpretation of their status in Jerusalem and presumably with God (cf. vv. 14–21) that provoked a response from Yahweh.

B. (:5-12) Testifying against the Wicked Leaders Remaining in Jerusalem

1. (:5-6) Exposure of Their Wicked Thoughts and Harmful Effects

“Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, ‘Say, Thus says the LORD, So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts. 6 You have multiplied your slain in this city, filling its streets with them.’”

Constable: Ezekiel was to prophesy against these leaders. The Spirit came upon him and instructed him to tell them that the Lord knew what they were thinking (cf. **2:2; 3:24; 13:1-3; 2 Pet. 1:21**). God always knows what His people are thinking (cf. **Ps. 139:1-6; Dan. 2:30; Acts 1:24**). In this case their thinking was in rebellion against

what He, through Jeremiah, had told them to do. Furthermore, they had slain many innocent people in Jerusalem by perverting justice and taking advantage of the weak.

MacArthur: Leaders who misled Israel by inciting false expectations of a victorious defense, rather than peaceful surrender, were responsible for the deadly results. Many people died in resisting Babylon.

Leslie Allen: The mention of Yahweh's knowledge of the officials' schemes and feelings of security serves to express their responsibility to a higher, moral power.

*Sheol and Abaddon are visible to Yahweh:
how much more human minds! (Prov 15:11)*

Here the term for “minds” is **רוח**, the very word used earlier in the verse for the prophetic spirit. There seems to be a conscious polarization between the two mainsprings of speech, the human spirit that expresses itself in self-assured statements of abuse of power and the divine spirit that finds expression in criticizing and countermanding the schemes of its human counterpart. The officials are strikingly addressed as “*community of Israel*”: as officials of the people, they act as representatives. The vocative has an ironic ring. They were certainly not living up to their responsibilities as members of God's covenant people.

The role of **v 6** is to dispute the thesis propounded by the city leaders. It cannot be valid, because the activity that underlies the thesis is morally wrong. Lives as well as houses were involved in the real estate deals implied in **v 3a**, just as the disposal of Naboth's vineyard was facilitated by his assassination in the name of legality (**1 Kgs 21:1–16**). In this case, however, not an individual but large numbers had suffered. **Eissfeldt** (Studies 77–81) showed that **הלל** “slain” relates not only to the war dead but also to civilians who wrongfully lost their lives by murder or political execution (cf. **Deut 21:1–6; Jer 41:9**). . . In terms of an oracle of judgment, **v 6** functions as accusation, while in terms of the disputation, it gives reasons for denying the validity of the initial thesis.

Daniel Block: Yahweh's verbal response to the quotation is divided formally into two parts, each introduced by the **citation formula** (**vv. 5, 7**). The function of the first is not to attack the logic of the leaders' thesis but to challenge its basis: their conduct has violated Yahweh's laws so flagrantly that they have no grounds whatsoever for their confidence in their security and their invulnerability. The dispute bifurcates here.

First, Yahweh declares that his gaze penetrates the human mind, and that he is aware of the motives underlying the leaders' smugness. As in **v. 3**, the verb *'āmar*, normally rendered “to speak,” here describes the cognitive function that precedes decision and action, hence “to consider, to reflect, to think over.” This interpretation is confirmed by the following reference to *ma'ālôt rūhākem*, “the thoughts that arise in your mind.” This expression involves a clever play on *rūah*, which now appears for the third time in this text, and with a third significance. Whereas in **v. 1** the *rūah* had functioned as the

agency of conveyance, and in v. 5a as the agency of inspiration, now the word denotes the seat or organ of mental activity, and serves as a variant for *lēb*, “heart, mind,” which occurs in v. 19. But the point of v. 5b is that Yahweh is aware of the **motives** of the leadership in Jerusalem without their mouths even opening to declare them.

Second, Yahweh charges the leaders of the people with a crime that disqualifies them from any claims to protection: they have filled the city with corpses. Although the designation for the victims, *ḥālālīm*, usually has military overtones, the word is not restricted to those fallen in battle, as Eissfeldt has demonstrated. It also denotes victims of judicial murder, that is, those who have been sentenced to death by corrupt courts. But exploitative rulers do not need to wait for court decisions to perform their deadly acts. They may simply eliminate any who stand in their way. This problem is illustrated in 19:3, 6, where kings are charged with devouring humans, and in 22:27, which explicitly compares Jerusalem’s officials (*šārīm*) to ravenous wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood, and destroying life in their ruthless quest for gain. Far from being the special objects of divine protection within the walls of Jerusalem, these rulers have become the targets of his ire.

Wiersbe: The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy against those evil leaders and point out that they weren’t the meat – they were the butchers! They had killed innocent people in Jerusalem and stolen their possessions, and even if the leaders weren’t slain in Jerusalem, they would not escape judgment. They might flee the city, but the Babylonians would catch them at the border, pass sentence on them, and kill them; that is exactly what happened (2 Kings 25:18-21; Jer. 39:1-7; 52:1-11, 24-27). Then the Jewish officials would learn too late that Jehovah alone is Lord of heaven and earth.

2. (:7-12) Expectation of Punishment

a. (:7-8) Destined for Destruction

1) (:7) Removed from the Protection of the Pot

*“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,
‘Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of the city
are the flesh,
and this city is the pot; but I shall bring you out of it.’”*

Douglas Stuart: Verses 6 and 7 are predictive. The policies of the city’s leaders have made it inevitable that large-scale slaughter of the remaining populace will take place. And the leaders, so secure that Jerusalem is for them a safe haven, will not be able to stay in the city but will be taken out by the enemy and killed (v. 9). This prediction was fulfilled in 586 b.c. at Riblah in Hamath (west Syria) when the city’s leaders were killed in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (2 Kin. 25:18–21). The very sword (warfare) that they feared in verse 8 would come upon them in verse 10. The city would not be a refuge (v. 11), but they would be, as it were, thrown out of the pot as meat unfit to eat.

Why? Because of disobedience. In virtually every generation of ancient Israel, orthodox Yahwism, the true revealed religion of the Mosaic covenant, was ignored by a majority

of people. Much as in America today, true devotion to God was practiced by only a minority. The “*customs of the Gentiles*” (v. 12) prevailed. Those included materialistic idolatry, exploitation of the poor, ritual sex as a part of worship, and so on (cf. 2 Kin. 23).

Daniel Block: vv. 7-11 -- The commencement of Yahweh’s counter thesis is signaled by *lākēn*, “*Therefore*,” in v. 7. The refutation of the leaders’ claims consists of two parts (vv. 7–10 and 11–12), each of which concludes with the **recognition formula**. The first of these is divided further into two equal parts (both twenty-one words) by the signatory formula *nē’um ’ādōnāy yhwh*, “*the declaration of the Lord Yahweh*,” at the end of v. 8. The unexpected insertion of the formula in the middle of a speech reinforces Ezekiel’s claim to inspiration (v. 5) and emphasizes that the word he declares bears the signature of Yahweh himself.

2) (:8) Relegated to Death by Sword

“You have feared a sword; so I will bring a sword upon you, ’ the Lord God declares.”

b. (:9-10) Delivered over to Slaughter by Foreigners

1) (:9) Chased out of Jerusalem

“And I shall bring you out of the midst of the city, and I shall deliver you into the hands of strangers and execute judgments against you.”

2) (:10a) Caught and Slaughtered

“You will fall by the sword. I shall judge you to the border of Israel;”

3) (:10b) **Recognition Refrain**

“so you shall know that I am the LORD.”

Leslie Allen: The oppressors’ membership in the community of Israel (v 5) would not save them from a judicial death in Israel. They would suffer the punishment meted out by the God of the land (cf. 6:7, 11–14). The recognition formula in v 10b turns the oracle of judgment into a divine-proof saying. The punishment would be a means to a particular end, the proof of the moral authority of Yahweh, willfully overlooked before his forceful intervention into Judean affairs

c. (:11-12) Deserving of Judgment

1) (:11) No Refuge

“This city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be flesh in the midst of it, but I shall judge you to the border of Israel.”

2) (:12a) **Recognition Refrain**

“Thus you will know that I am the LORD;”

Peter Pett: The result of what was to happen to them would bring home to them that Yahweh was not there to be trifled with. They would know that He *was* Yahweh. He was their covenant God, the One Who was there, the One Who controlled their destiny.

3) (:12b) No Different from Surrounding Pagans

“for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed My ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you.”

Derek Thomas: 2 Reasons for Judgment:

1. They had disobeyed God --

Sin is lawlessness and lawlessness is sin (**1 John 3:4**). God has laid down what he expects of those whom he has created; sin is man’s rebellion against these laws. “The plain truth is”, wrote **Bishop Ryle** at the end of the last century, “that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity.”

2. They had also become worldly --

They had adopted the lifestyle of the ‘*Gentiles*’ (*‘the nations’*, **11:12**). God’s people are called to be different. They were meant by their lifestyle to be set apart from the other nations. They were to be holy (**Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26**). But it was manifestly obvious that they were no different at all! They had assimilated the gods of the Gentiles. They behaved like pagans; they were pagans! Since they had abandoned his covenant, God was about to leave them.

C. (:13) Traumatized by the Death of Pelatiah

1. Statement of the Death

“Now it came about as I prophesied, that Pelatiah son of Benaiah died.”

This is a **transition verse**. It serves as the epilogue to the previous section and the introduction to **vv. 14-21**.

Daniel Block: The epilogic conclusion to this literary unit reminds the reader of the visionary context within which this disputation with the leaders of Jerusalem transpires. Even as Ezekiel is prophesying, Pelatiah dies. The prophet immediately grasps the significance of this event: the man’s decease functions as a down payment or deposit of the fate of the leaders announced in the speech.

Douglas Stuart: Arrogance, self-confidence, and willful disobedience are the triple sins of the non-exiled Judeans described in this passage. Each of these sins by itself is dangerous, but together they cry out for the wrath of God to be imposed upon the nation. That the leaders are mentioned by name is no accident. Large groups always have leaders, people who function as the catalysts for the actions and perspectives of a class or category. For a society to be so led astray, as the society of ancient Judah was, that it would neither expect nor fear the coming judgment of God, it had to give a lot of credence to its leaders. Yet all societies tend to do exactly that: they allow to rise to

leadership the sorts of people who reflect, appeal to, and will carry out the values and expectations of the majority. The passage thus is not just about corrupt leaders but is about them as reflections of and manifestations of a corrupt society. That is why Ezekiel can discern in the death of one the coming death of all.

As for arrogance and self-confidence, it is remarkable how often such attitudes are found in people least qualified in actual fact to hold them. The truly skillful, able, gifted person is free to be humble and to acknowledge the grace of God in his or her accomplishments. As for disobedience, it is the foolish, not the wise, who fail to learn from the punishments of the past. Ezekiel's contemporaries in Jerusalem saw no danger in disobedience to the divine covenant. They obviously could not imagine themselves getting into trouble for what they were doing. Underestimating the power of God to enforce His Law, they became the objects of the enforcement! But disobedience to divine commands never goes unnoticed.

David Guzik: Ezekiel asked God the same question he asked earlier in the vision (**Ezekiel 9:8**). Stunned by the depth and the breadth of God's judgments, he wondered if *any* would remain.

2. Wrestling with the Significance of the Death

"Then I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Alas, Lord God! Wilt Thou bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?'"

II. (:14-21) PROMISING FUTURE REGATHERING AND RESTORATION OF THE REGENERATE REMNANT DESPITE THEIR PRESENT EXILE IN BABYLON

A. (:14-16) Special Protection for the Exiles Despite Their Humiliation

"Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,"

Leslie Allen: vv. 14-21 -- The anguished prayer of v 13 echoes down the years. This next oracle is meant to serve as a virtual reply. It has an independent, non-visionary agenda, as its separate message-reception formula in v 14 attests, but it functions here as a literary answer that honors the spirit of Ezekiel's petition.

1. (:15) Exiles Scorned

"Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD; this land has been given us as a possession.'"

Douglas Stuart: As far as we can tell, it would have been the farthest thing from Ezekiel's mind, and certainly as well from the minds of his fellow Israelites in exile, that they might be the ones to re-inhabit Jerusalem and Judah and prosper again there as a people. If any group could survive all the coming miseries at the hands of the Lord and His human agents of punishment, the Babylonians, surely it would have to be some

of the people who were left in Judah and Jerusalem, not yet scattered among the nations by the awful punishment of exile. There seemed to be no likelihood that people deported and resettled throughout the seemingly all-powerful Babylonian Empire, hundreds of miles from home, second-class citizens in the places where they now lived, stripped of all political influence, could ever hope to return from exile and repopulate the holy nation.

This passage thus represents an **ironic reversal**: the promise of death and exile to those who have escaped it, and the promise of life and a return home to those facing death in exile. Such ironic reversals are common in Old Testament literature (e.g., the story of Joseph's rising from slavery to international power, the protection of Moses within Pharaoh's household, the choosing of David over his brothers) and the New Testament as well ("*The first shall be last, and the last shall be first*" [Matt. 19:30]).

Galen Doughty: The residents of Jerusalem show by their speech they have become **paganized**. Pagan religions believed that the gods were territorial and only had power in their own territory. That is why pagan nations wanted to expand their territory by conquest because then they expanded their god's territory as well. Ezekiel has already shown through his visions that the glory and presence of the Lord is not limited to the land of Israel. He is in Babylon too because he is the Creator of all lands and nations. The prophets helped to expand Israel's understanding of God beyond a localized deity to the Creator of all. The idolatrous Jews in Jerusalem thought God still protected them and would show them favor and because the Jews in Babylon were far away from God's land they were now beyond his reach and under the gods of Babylon. Their view of God was way too small and God sent Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Habakkuk to correct it and give them the larger understanding of who God is and Israel as his people.

2. (:16) Exiles Sheltered

"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God, Though I had removed them far away among the nations, and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.'"

B. (:17-20) Secure Future for the Repentant Remnant

1. (:17) Regathered to Possess the Promised Land

"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'I shall gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel.'"

Leslie Allen: V 17 has a change of perspective: the exiles, who are the real recipients of the oracle as a whole, are now addressed. Yahweh's personal intention was to return them to their homeland. In so doing, it is implied, he would act as their *gō.ēl* or redeemer, and claim back the land for his people (**Liwak**, "Probleme" 118–19). What Ezekiel could not do for his family (v 15a), Yahweh himself would undertake for his people. The beginning of the message, v 15a, had raised hopes for the exiles that

redemption was part of God's continuing purposes for Israel, which he would accomplish as the spiritual patron of the exiles.

2. (:18) Repented

“When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it.”

Douglas Stuart: Arrogantly critical of those in exile, the present citizenry of Jerusalem wanted nothing to do with the exiles, mistakenly assuming that fortune had smiled upon them so that they had escaped the first exile. But God had other plans. No matter how distant or how widely dispersed His people were, He would bring them home (**vv. 16–17**; cf. **Joel 3:6–8**), and it would be they who would rid Jerusalem and Judah of the idolatry and religious heterodoxy practiced there (**v. 18**). This is exactly what happened historically. When the Jews began to return from captivity after the decree of Cyrus in 539 b.c. (**Ezra 1, 3**) they found Jerusalem to be continuing in the corrupt practices and false religion that had caused the Lord to abandon it in the first place. As late as the time of Ezra (**Ezra 6–10**) and Nehemiah, that is, 458–420 b.c., Jews returning to Zion from exile were correcting abuses and reestablishing righteous religion and obedience to the Mosaic Law. It turned out to be the exiles who, after living in pagan lands so long, came back pure enough to clean up Jerusalem (**v. 18**). God had shown them in exile how offensive full-blown pagan idolatry really was (**Deut. 4:27–28**), and in their distress they had repented and converted to true worship of the Lord (**vv. 19–20**, fulfilling **Deut. 4:29–30**), something those who had lived all along in the Holy City had never humbled themselves to do.

Ezekiel had learned what may be considered a key message of the book: **he and people of like mind were at the center of God's will even though their circumstances made them seem like castaways and a bunch of nobodies.** The leaders of Jerusalem, on the other hand, looked to the casual observer as if they had it made and could expect to enjoy a long and prosperous life in the capital of Judah. In reality, they were the castaways! Their days were numbered, and in a few short years the horrible miseries of siege and bloody defeat predicted in **chapters 4–7** would come upon them.

3. (:19-20) Regenerated – Blessings of the New Covenant

a. (:19) New Heart

“And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,”

b. (:20a) New Commitment

“that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them.”

Leslie Allen: The second aspect of fellowship that Yahweh and his people would enjoy was to be in terms of **general obedience to his will.** Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were aware that the radical deviation of late preexilic Israel from Yahweh's revealed will

required an equally radical solution. Ultimately what needed to be removed lay not outside them, as in v 18, but inside, and only God could do that. The heart stands for the will: Israel's hearts had been hard and wanton (2:4; 3:7; 6:9). "Stone hearts" refer to that which is unconscious, immobile, and so unresponsive to God (cf. Exod 15:16; 1 Sam 25:37). By contrast, "hearts of flesh" relate to that which is tender, yielding, and responsive. What was needed was a transformation wrought by God, replacing unresponsiveness with a new compliance to the will of God. This compliance meant obedience to the Torah, the revelation of Yahweh's will for Israel. God had to break in, to do "what the law could not do ..., in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled" (Rom 8:3-4). The old divine standards were to continue (cf. 20:11, 19), and the human condition was to be **eschatologically changed** to rise to their sublime level. "The same law by which the people were judged becomes the law to which they were saved" (Raitt, *Theology of Exile* 182). If v 19 represents a removal of Israel's former unreceptive hearts, v 20a corrects the disobedience deplored in 5:6-7.

c. (:20b) New Relationship

"Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God."

Leslie Allen: The old covenant formulation of Yahweh's commitment to his people in Exod 6:6-8 is here revived and made the object of hope. The motif of God's claim on his people has been incorporated into this re-presentation of his initial pledge of divine patronage. The intrusion does not jar, for the divine claim was to be facilitated by divine enabling.

C. (:21) Severe Retribution for the Unrepentant

"But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I shall bring their conduct down on their heads," declares the Lord God.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel saw a new day when God's covenant people would again be in the land, devoted only to the Lord and enjoying fellowship with him (v. 20; cf. 14:11 and note there). After the exile when many Jews returned to a restored province of Judah in fulfillment of prophecy (Ezra 1:1), they were careful to avoid idolatry (Ezra 4:1-3; 6:19-21; Neh 8-10). Nevertheless, their obedience was not complete (Ezra 9:1-2, 10-15; 10:15, 44; Neh 5:1-9; 13:7-29), nor was their experience of promised blessings (Ezra 9:8-9; Neh 9:32-37). Thus the radical spiritual transformation of the people and the associated physical blessings promised in this and other prophecies of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 34:20-31; 36:24-38; 37:15-28) await fulfillment in a future messianic age. Such promises, however, would be only for those who would receive the new heart and spirit by faith (18:31). Those who refused would be judged and eliminated (11:21). The remnant would be made up of those who repented and returned to the standard of the single heart (cf. 34:17-22). Single-hearted devotion is what God expects from us. Whenever we fail to give him our single-hearted commitment, we invite the chastening of God.

III. (:22-25) PICTURING THE FINAL REMOVAL OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD OUT OF JERUSALEM TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES AS THE VISION CONCLUDES

A. (:22-23) Final Removal of the Glory of the Lord from Jerusalem

1. (:22) Glory of the Lord Taking Off

“Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.”

2. (:23) Glory of the Lord Relocating to the Mount of Olives

“And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.”

Douglas Stuart: Now it was time for God symbolically to abandon His headquarters. The throne-chariot, conveyed by the cherubim, took off (v. 22) and could be seen by Ezekiel clearly outside the city limits (v. 23). This was a sign that the rejection of wicked Jerusalem had finally come to pass. Ezekiel felt himself brought back home to Mesopotamia (Chaldea) and the vision was over (v. 24). The faithful prophet then relayed to all who would listen what he had seen (v. 25).

B. (:24-25) Final Conclusion to the Vision of Ezekiel

1. (:24a) Return of Ezekiel

“And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea.”

2. (:24b) Retirement of the Vision

“So the vision that I had seen left me.”

3. (:25) Retelling the Prophetic Vision to the Exiles

“Then I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.”

Leslie Allen: vv. 24-25 -- As in 3:14-15, the close of the vision is marked by the spirit’s transportation of Ezekiel back to the settlement where he lived with his fellow exiles. Here, however, v 24b serves to confirm that his visionary experience had occurred in a trancelike state, unlike the vision of chaps. 1-3. Taylor (113) and Greenberg (191) have compared the “rising” of the vision with the ascent of the divine figure at the close of a theophany (Gen 17:22; 35:13). The elders have been waiting for an oracle (8:1). They now receive it in their capacity as “exiles,” as representatives of the exilic community. The prophet returns to consciousness of his natural surroundings and of his mission. The elders heard in the telling of the vision the chilling message of Yahweh’s indictment and final judgment of the city to which they had been hoping to return and resume their normal lives.

David Guzik: Ezekiel wasn’t given this message for his own amazement, but to instruct and warn the people and elders of Israel. They were perhaps shocked at the depths of Jerusalem’s depravity, the severity of the coming judgment, and the promised departure of God’s glory.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of false hope and arrogant presumption characterize groups of religious people today who commit evil and yet still cling to the false confidence that God is on their side?
- 2) Why did Ezekiel identify with the exiles in Babylon rather than with the outspoken leaders remaining back in Jerusalem?
- 3) What details in this text would lead you to think that God still has an eschatological plan for the physical nation of Israel?
- 4) How does the divine principle – “*the first shall be last and the last first*” – play itself out in this context?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block:

Structure of vv.1-13

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| a. Preamble | (v. 1) |
| b. The thesis | (vv. 2–3) |
| (1) Introduction | (v. 2) |
| (2) The quotation | (v. 3) |
| c. The refutation | (vv. 4–6) |
| (1) Introduction | (vv. 4–5a) |
| (2) The dispute | (vv. 5b–6) |
| d. The counterthesis | (vv. 7–12) |
| (a) The first refutation | (vv. 7–10) |
| (b) The second refutation | (vv. 11–12) |
| e. Epilogue | (v. 13) |

Structure of vv. 14-21

- a. Preamble (v. 14)
- b. The thesis (v. 15)
 - (1) Introduction (v. 15a)
 - (2) The quotation (v. 15b)
- c. The refutation (v. 16)
 - (1) The affirmation (v. 16a)
 - (2) The dispute (v. 16b)
- d. The counterthesis (vv. 17–20)
 - (1) The promise of a new exodus (v. 17)

- (2) The promise of a new land (v. 18)
- (3) The promise of a new covenant (vv. 19–20)
- e. Epilogue (v. 21).

John Taylor: Before the glory of the Lord finally departs from Jerusalem, Ezekiel has two messages to pass on, one relating to the prospects of the people in Jerusalem (**11:1–13**) and the other to those already in exile with him (**11:14–21**). The first of these is addressed to a political group who are accused of advocating policies harmful to Jerusalem (**2**). What their policy actually was is dependent upon the translation given to **verse 3**, which will be discussed below, but they were either a militant war-party who were calling for every effort to repel the Babylonian armies, or they were disregarding Ezekiel’s warnings of judgment to come and were serenely confident that all would be well. To these the prophet foretold death by the sword outside the protective walls of the city (**10f.**).

Leslie Allen: The supplementing of the vision with a parallel vision in **11:1–13** provides an opportunity to emphasize the social side of the wrongdoing committed in Jerusalem alongside the cultic sins (cf. **8:17; 9:9**) and also to tie the angelic judgment of **chaps. 9–10** to earthly actualities. The reiteration of the prophet’s reaction of despair (**11:12**; cf. **9:8**) triggers the incorporation of a nonvisionary oracle of hope, a different hope that replaces the lost hope of the sparing of Jerusalem. We are reminded of the deliberate supplementing of oracles of judgment with oracles of salvation later in the book, notably in **chap. 20**. The intended readers of the book are deported Judeans living in the post-587 period of exile, who looked back to a past judgment. For such, the saga of Yahweh’s dealings with his people could be brought up to date. They had a God-given “*future and a hope*” (**Jer 29:11**)—and even a present experience of his limited presence. Ahead lay a prospect of much greater fellowship with him and an eschatological enjoyment of the promises of **Exod 6:6–8**. Lest the recipients of such promises—involving a second exodus, return to the promised land, and inner renewal—act irresponsibly, they are reminded, rather as in **3:16b–21**, that if judgment is past, it is not a thing of the past. In a relative sense judgment looms over the heirs of promise, so that hope ever contains a purifying factor (cf. **1 John 3:3**). The echoing of **9:6** in **1 Pet 4:17**, “*For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God,*” widens the issue to the suffering of believers in the eschatological tribulation, but in its own way it wants to affirm their obligation to “*do good*” (**1 Pet 4:19**).

Douglas Stuart: How easy it is for any of us to forget that God has made foolish the wisdom of this world (**1 Cor. 1:20**). He has put down the proud and mighty and exalted the lowly (**Luke 1:51–52**). We are inclined to choose our leaders and those to whom we give respect because of their obvious position and prestige. To almost any of us, those Jerusalemites that Ezekiel saw in his temple vision would have seemed, as they seemed to themselves, the favored ones of God, the people blessed and called to be in charge. But God design was otherwise. Those who looked foolish, who were at the low end of things—the Judean exiles in Babylon—were the ones God had in mind to exalt. Of course their exaltation was dependent on their repentance and turning to God, but this

was beginning to happen as the exiles saw the enormity of their plight and realized that their only hope was in the Lord.

God doesn't work much with proud people, but with the humble He does great things. From the proud of Jerusalem He departed with His glory. To the humble of the Exile He promised a great future. Which kind of group would we have tended to want to be a part of in Ezekiel's day? Which sort of group are we among right now?

Daniel Block: vv. 9-10 -- With a single blow this statement demolishes two pillars upon which the people in Jerusalem were basing their security. On the one hand, the entire refutation emphasizes Yahweh's role as Judge of Israel, who issues the sentence and who appoints the executioners. He will turn their judicial decisions on their own heads. They may not count on his protective patronage when the agents of judgment arrive. On the other hand, the location of the judgment is specified. In both rebuttals (**vv. 10, 11**)

Yahweh emphasizes that his judgment would fall on the leaders on Israelite territory (*'al-gēbûl yiśrā'ēl*). In its most concrete sense *gēbûl* denotes a boundary marker. By extension, however, it refers to defined territory within borders, and may be employed synonymously with *'eres*, "land," as in **Mic. 5:5** and **Isa. 60:18**. Ezekiel's use of *gēbûl yiśrā'ēl*, rather than his conventional *'admat yiśrā'ēl*, "land of Israel" (cf. **7:2**), appears deliberate. In syncretistic pagan fashion, the Israelites had come to base their security automatically on their residence within their divinely allotted territory (cf. **vv. 14-17**). Because it was also recognized as the property of Yahweh, it came under his protection and was therefore inviolable to outsiders. Yahweh's interests were not restricted to the temple, or even to the city of Jerusalem. By repeating "*on the territory of Israel*," however, he emphasizes that even if the Israelites should escape the carnage within the city as it falls to the enemy, the leaders' Waterloo will occur within the homeland. Those who find security in the pot will discover that the significance of the vessel has not only been transformed but it is actually larger than they had realized. But this is not the only lesson they will learn. According to the last line of **v. 10**, when the sword comes they will also gain a new recognition of the activity and identity of Yahweh.

11-12 The second refutation begins by reiterating that in the future the city will not function as a place of refuge for the leaders. Jerusalem will be no protective crock, but the very pot in which they are cooked. Their victims may be the stew today, but the speakers of the quotation will suffer that fate tomorrow. Then they will acknowledge Yahweh, against whom they have rebelled. . .

vv. 17-20 -- Viewed as a whole, Ezekiel's counterthesis provides a remarkably comprehensive summary of the nature and effects of Israel's restoration. In so doing, it highlights the fact that the exiles' deliverance will involve much more than merely reversing the effects of the judgment; it will mean the undoing of their past, including the causes that precipitated the judgment, and the establishment of an entirely new order. The promises also stress that just as the judgment had been the work of Yahweh himself, so the deliverance will be the result of his own direct intervention on their

behalf. Vv. 17–20 announce five fundamental changes in Israel’s relationship with their land and with their God. The order in which they are presented is both logical and chronological.

17 New Exodus. The first step in Israel’s renewal is the restoration of the ruptured territory-people relationship. This involves two stages: the mustering of the dispersed exiles, and their return to their homeland. . .

18 New Land. Like the territory that the Israelites had originally wrested from the Canaanites, the land to which the regathered exiles would return had become a polluted land—defiled by centuries of detestable (*šiqqûšîm*) and abominable (*tô ‘ăbôt*) conduct, not by pagans but by the Israelites themselves. Whereas Yahweh promised to deliver his people himself, responsibility for ridding the land of its contaminants was left with the people. . .

19–20 New Covenant. Although these verses open with a promise of a heart/mind transplant, the syntactical construction makes clear that the true goal is the reinstatement of Yahweh’s covenant with his people. But the prerequisite for such an event is a fundamental reconstitution of the people.

Ezekiel expands on Jeremiah’s words further by describing the renewal in terms of a heart transplant. The expression “*stony heart*” (*lēb hā’eben*) concretizes the disposition of the Israelites, previously described as “*hard-hearted*” (*hizqê lēb*, 2:4) and “*stubborn-hearted*” (*qěšê lēb*, 3:7). The only solution for people like this is radical surgery, the removal of the defective and fossilized organ and its replacement with a sensitive and responsive heart, “*a heart of flesh*” (*lēb bāsār*). The goal of this operation is defined in v. 20: faithfulness to Yahweh expressed in wholehearted obedience to his covenant. As in 5:6–7, the decrees (*huqqôt*) and the laws (*mišpāṭîm*) represent the totality of the divine will laid out in the covenant stipulations.

The good news for the exiles reaches a climax in v. 20b with a formal announcement of Yahweh’s renewal of his covenant with his people. The term *bērît* is absent, but in the declaration *They will become my people, and I will become their God*, the reader is introduced for the first time to what is generally known as “**the covenant formula.**” Derived from ancient legal terminology, specifically the marriage ceremony, this formula expresses a relationship of commitment and intimacy.

David Thompson: CORRUPT RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS WERE THE CAUSE OF GOD’S GLORY LEAVING HIS LAND, BUT GOD WILL ALWAYS CARE FOR AND BLESS THOSE WHO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO HIM AND ONE DAY HIS GLORY WILL RETURN AND ISRAEL WILL BE FULLY RESTORED TO HER LAND.

As **chapter 10** ended, we saw the glory of God getting ready to leave Jerusalem. In this chapter it does leave. There are three main parts to this chapter.

PART #1 – Ezekiel is brought to the east gate of the Temple to see the corrupt leaders and God’s future destructive judgment. **11:1-13**

PART #2 – Ezekiel is given a promise of future national restoration and blessing.
11:14-21

PART #3 – Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord leaving the city. **11:22-25**

TEXT: Ezekiel 12:1-20

TITLE: *POPPING THE BALLOON OF FALSE OPTIMISM*

BIG IDEA:

KING ZEDEKIAH AND THE JEWS STILL IN JERUSALEM SHOULD FEAR IMMINENT DEPORTATION

- **IT IS CERTAIN**
- **IT WILL BE DEVASTATING**

INTRODUCTION:

Much false confidence and false optimism and arrogance can be traced to what seems to be a delay in God's guillotine of judgment executing the condemned. Those Jews who remained in Jerusalem along with King Zedekiah did not believe Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies of imminent deportation. They looked with derision at those exiles already dispersed into Babylon. They imagined that their connection to God's sacred city and His holy temple would spare them such humiliation and defeat. But these two sign-dramas acted out by Ezekiel at the command of the Lord were designed to pop their balloon of false optimism and force them to face the coming harsh reality of deportation. Deportation is both certain and it will be devastating.

Keil: The purpose of the whole [section (**chs. 12—19**)] is to show the worthlessness of this false confidence, and to affirm the certainty and irresistibility of the predicted destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, in the hope of awakening the rebellious and hardened generation to that thorough repentance, without which it was impossible that peace and prosperity could ever be enjoyed.

Feinberg: **Chapters 4—11** have repeatedly shown the certainty of Jerusalem's destruction; **chapters 12—19** present the necessity for it. The emphasis in these chapters is the moral cause of the exile.

Daniel Block: The boundaries of this literary unit are set by the word-event formula in **v. 1** and a complex version of the recognition formula in **vv. 15—16**. The break after **v. 16** is reinforced by a new word-event formula in **v. 17**.

Douglas Stuart: In **chapter 12** the topic is deportation, both its inevitability and its proximity in time. Not only will the survivors of siege in the city be taken into exile, but this whole disastrous sequence of events is near at hand! Every generation realizes that sometime in the future, wars or disasters are going to take place. Ezekiel's generation, like others, had the sense that peace would not prevail forever. They knew something about history and realized that good times tend eventually to give way to bad times. But every generation hopes that it will be later, not sooner, that things get worse. Everyone wishes that the inevitable hard times will not come until he or she is off the scene. . .

But the deportation of Jerusalem wasn't going to wait. It could not be delayed by anyone other than God, and through Ezekiel He makes clear in this chapter that the nation must prepare for the inevitable.

Derek Thomas: The ritual has all been about Israel's *'prince'* (King Zedekiah, the current, and last, monarch of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar's 'puppet' following the surrender of Jehoiachin), together with the people of Jerusalem who survive the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar; they will be taken into captivity (**12:10**). What Ezekiel has performed is a *'sign'* of this deportation (**12:11**).

The whole pathetic story is recalled in **2 Kings 25**, where Zedekiah made an attempt to leave at night, disguised so as not to be seen. The Babylonians captured him and he was led away to Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters. There his sons, together with seventy other leaders of Jerusalem, were executed before him. Zedekiah was blinded and led off to Babylon where, following a period in prison, he too was executed (**Jer. 52:7–11**). Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled. And it was only four years away (c. 588 B.C.). Those deluding themselves that these events were far away were entirely wrong.

I. (:1-16) SIGN-DRAMA #1 = CARRYING PACKED LUGGAGE INTO CAPTIVITY – DEPORTATION IS CERTAIN

A. (:1-7) The Command

1. (:1) Introductory Refrain

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

2. (:2) Receptivity to the Prophecy Impacted by Rebellious Heart

*“Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a **rebellious house**.”*

MacArthur: “**rebellious house**” -- The message of Ezekiel was addressed to his fellow exiles who were as hardened as those still in Jerusalem. They were so intent on a quick return to Jerusalem, that they would not accept his message of Jerusalem's destruction.

Iain Duguid: This saying of **12:2** underlies the sign-acts that follow it. This section is made up of a sign-act of exile (**12:3–7**), the interpretation of this sign-act (**12:8–17**), and a second sign-act of fear and trembling (**12:18–20**). The dominant motif throughout is of **looking** and **not seeing**. Repeatedly, Ezekiel is instructed to carry out his actions “*as they watch*” (*le'ênêhem*, seven times in **12:3–7**). His actions are not particularly obscure, depicting as they do an event in which the exiles had all personally taken part. Yet the result of his actions, noted by the Lord in **verse 8**, is not dawning comprehension on the part of the exiles but inability to understand. They ask him: “*What are you doing?*” Nor does the second sign-act make things clearer to them. Though they have seen with their eyes what he has done, they still do not get the message.

Daniel Block: These statements appear to draw on a well-known proverb to highlight the fundamental problem of Ezekiel's audience: they refuse to respond to external stimuli. Although the motif of dulled sensory organs seems to have been a prominent element in prophetic preaching, the present formulation seems to have been influenced by **Jer. 5:21b** in particular, since, except for the infinitives in the middle, the construction is identical. Indeed, Jeremiah had employed the saying to explain both the people's senselessness (**v. 21a**) and their stubborn rebellion (**vv. 22–28**). But the rhetorical function of the proverb is not limited to linking this accusation with previous prophecies; it also introduces the *Leitmotif* of this passage. Unlike earlier texts, which had focused on having ears but not hearing (**2:7; 3:27**), here the issue is having eyes but not seeing.

Ezekiel does not elaborate on the way the exiles demonstrated their rebellion or their obtuseness. Was it their fundamental refusal to acknowledge Yahweh's redemptive and covenantal activity on their behalf (see **Deut. 29:1–12** [Eng. **2–13**])? Was it their unwillingness to accept the conquest of Jerusalem in 598/597 B.C. and their own deportation as acts of divine judgment on them? Were they expecting an early reversal of their misfortune? Had they heard of Zedekiah's revolts against Nebuchadnezzar, and were they now anticipating the imminent liberation of Jerusalem and the call for them to return (see **Jer. 27:16; 28:3–4; 29:31**)? Or was this comment provoked by the rejection of Ezekiel's own message, both the visual performances (**chs. 4–5**) and the oral pronouncements? Perhaps all of these played a part.

John Taylor: Jesus' use of the **parabolic method** of teaching is further indication of the principle that in God's service the preacher's knowledge that his words will be ignored is never to be used as an excuse for not uttering the words (cf. **Matt. 13:13–15; Mark 8:18; John 12:37–41**). Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, had to be reminded that it was always possible that some would understand, and in this he may be regarded as the exemplar for all Christian workers in seemingly impossible situations or in singularly unfruitful spheres of service. There must always be the element of perhaps they will in such a ministry. And even though the result may still be negative, the obligation to speak is still there, if only to justify the hearer's condemnation.

3. (:3-6) Details of the Command to Act Out the Sign-Drama

a. (:3) Overview: Show Everyone Preparations Must be Made for Deportation

*“Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a **rebellious house**.”*

Daniel Block: The article in question is illustrated in a series of neo-Assyrian monumental reliefs that portray captives being led away in procession with large bags slung over their shoulders. The packs were made either of durable cloth or skin, and loaded with such bare necessities for survival during the long trek as could be salvaged from the ruins of a conquered city.

b. (:4) Two Stages: Daytime and Nighttime Scenes

“And bring your baggage out by day in their sight, as baggage for exile. Then you will go out at evening in their sight, as those going into exile.”

Leslie Allen: Further unfolding of the symbolic procedure now appears. It is to fall into two stages, and it is reaffirmed that in both stages Ezekiel is to make himself a public spectacle. As the first stage, he is ostentatiously to carry out his pack during the day. The second stage is the enacting of the start of the actual trek into exile, in the evening, no less conspicuously.

c. (:5) Digging an Exit Hole – Desperation and Secrecy

“Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it.”

d. (:6) Additional Details of This Sign-Drama

“Load the baggage on your shoulder in their sight, and carry it out in the dark. You shall cover your face so that you cannot see the land, for I have set you as a sign to the house of Israel.”

Constable: He was to dig a hole in the sun-dried mud brick wall of his house (Heb. *qir*), perhaps the wall around the courtyard of his house, as the people watched, and pass through it. This unusual method of departure pictured desperation and secrecy. He should load his baggage on his shoulder and carry it away as night set in. He was also to cover his face so he could not see the land. This may represent the inability of the exiles to see their land any more or his shame at having to depart or his attempt to conceal himself from the enemy. He was to do all this because God was using him as a lesson to the Jews.

David Guzik: Ezekiel was also to act out a person desperately escaping from a city under siege. These also could end up as exiles, leaving with their face covered in shame (cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground).

Peter Pett: The houses in Babylonia would be made of sun-dried brick which, with some effort, would not be difficult to hack through, removing the bricks in order to make a way through. The covering of the face was probably to indicate that he was not expecting to see his homeland again so that he could not bear to look at the ground as he left (see **Ezekiel 12:11**), and it may possibly have also been intended to indicate secrecy and disguise.

4. (:7) Obedience to the Command

“And I did so, as I had been commanded.

By day I brought out my baggage like the baggage of an exile.

Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands;

I went out in the dark and carried the baggage on my shoulder in their sight.”

B. (:8-16) The Interpretation – Clearly Applied to King Zedekiah and His People

1. (:8) Introductory Refrain

“And in the morning the word of the LORD came to me, saying,”

2. (:9) Receptivity to the Prophecy Impacted by Rebellious Heart

*“Son of man, has not the house of Israel, **the rebellious house**, said to you, 'What are you doing?’”*

3. (:10-14) Clear Explanation

a. (:10) Sign-drama Applies to King Zedekiah and His People

“Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem, as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.’”

Feinberg: The prince, specifically, was Zedekiah. The subject of the message was King Zedekiah, who was always spoken of by Ezekiel as prince, never king. Jehoiachin was regarded as the true king (**Ezekiel 17:13**)...In ration tablets found by archaeologists in Babylon, Jehoiachin was still referred to as the king of Judah.

Douglas Stuart: Thus Ezekiel’s “burden” (v. 10), that is, prophecy, pointed to the fact that both king and people would be taken prisoner, the government and the resident citizenry being, for all practical purposes, eliminated. The end of the nation of Judea as an independent state was at hand.

Iain Duguid: Though the imagery is complex, the essential message seems reasonably straightforward. Not only will there be a further exile, bringing out those still remaining in Jerusalem and Judah, but this anti-exodus will center on the person of the prince, Zedekiah. His personal transgressions have not yet been the object of Ezekiel’s prophecies (though they will be later on, e.g., in **Ezek. 17** and **19**). Here he is in view primarily as the representative of the people. Because he shares their inability to see the coming judgment, that judgment will take the form of no longer being able to see the land, that is, he will never return from exile

Daniel Block: On the basis of content, one may divide the address into two parts, the first focusing on the fate of the Jerusalemites from the perspective of their own experience (**vv. 10b–12**), and the second (**vv. 13–14**) highlighting the involvement of Yahweh. . .

This juxtaposing of king and nation reflects the ancient Near Eastern view of kingship, according to which the king’s role extended beyond conducting wars and administering justice. He modeled the ideals of the citizenry and embodied their collective honor and aspirations. As the king went, so went the nation. Consequently, the capture of the king becomes a symbol of the captivity of the nation. Ezekiel’s identification of the king and his people with the knapsack portrays them as so much baggage that must be removed

from the house. That being the case, the prophet himself must represent God, who, as will be seen in v. 13, deliberately lays a snare for his victim.

b. (:11) Certainty of Deportation

*“Say, ‘I am a sign to you.
As I have done, so it will be done to them;
they will go into exile, into captivity.’”*

c. (:12-14) Specific Details Applied to King Zedekiah

1) (:12) His Departure

*“And the prince who is among them will load his baggage
on his shoulder in the dark and go out.
They will dig a hole through the wall to bring it out.
He will cover his face so that he cannot see the land with
his eyes.”*

Peter Pett: Breaking through the wall indicated the extremity they would have come to. It was an ignominious flight. The gates would be heavily guarded by the enemy. See **2 Kings 25:4-6; Jeremiah 39:4-5; Jeremiah 52:7-8** for its fulfillment.

2) (:13) His Capture and Captivity in Babylon

*“I shall also spread My net over him, and he will be
caught in My snare. And I shall bring him to Babylon in
the land of the Chaldeans; yet he will not see it, though he
will die there.”*

Constable: Ezekiel was to explain to his audience that he was a sign to them of others who would go into captivity. He was not representing his fellow exiles who would leave Babylon and return to Judea. He represented what Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem would do. Zedekiah would try to escape under cover of darkness through a hole in a wall with his face covered to make himself unrecognizable (cf. **2 Kings 25:4-6; Jer. 39:4-5; 52:7-8**).

Nevertheless the Lord would snare Zedekiah like a bird in a net and would bring him to Babylon. Ancient art pictured deities as hunting and snaring their enemies. Yet Zedekiah would not see the land of Babylon even though he would die there (cf. **2 Kings 25:5, 7; Jer. 39:6-7; 52:8, 10-11**).

Josephus wrote that Zedekiah heard about this prophecy by Ezekiel but did not believe it because it seemed to contradict Jeremiah's prophecy about what would happen to him. This apparent contradiction was the reason Zedekiah gave for rejecting both prophecies. Both prophecies proved true: the Chaldeans took Zedekiah to Babylon, but he never saw the country because Nebuchadnezzar blinded him at Riblah.

3) (:14) His Supporters Dealt With

“And I shall scatter to every wind all who are around

*him, his helpers and all his troops;
and I shall draw out a sword after them.”*

MacArthur: God’s hand was to be with the enemy as His rod of correction, with only a few left.

4. (:15-16) Divine Purpose

a. (:15a) Recognition Refrain

“So they will know that I am the LORD”

b. (:15b) Devastation of the Dispersion

*“when I scatter them among the nations,
and spread them among the countries.”*

c. (:16a) Testimony of the Remnant

*“But I shall spare a few of them from the sword, the famine, and
the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations among the
nations where they go,”*

Alexander: The deportations were designed to show the deportees that the Lord was the faithful, loving, and powerful God over Israel they should return to. Lest the foreign nations misunderstand Judah's dispersion, God had the exiles testify that their abominations precipitated the deportations. In this way the nations would realize that the Lord was holy, righteous, and cared for his people, Israel. He was not one who allowed them to be conquered because he did not care. This latter notion was very common in the ancient Near East. Each nation was uniquely related to its patron deity. If a nation was defeated in battle or decimated by famine and disease, this meant its god was weak and incapable of protecting and caring for its people. To prevent such a misconception, the Lord would send a remnant of Jews among the nations to witness that they were in exile only because of their own iniquity, not because of the Lord's failure.

Daniel Block: In an unexpected turn Yahweh holds out a glimmer of hope. The triad of divine agents, sword, famine, and plague, will take their horrendous toll, but Yahweh will personally intervene to rescue a remnant. The statement makes no allowance for any personal merit behind God’s saving action. On the contrary, those few that are spared experience this reprieve that they might publicly acknowledge their abominable past. In so doing, two purposes will have been served: Yahweh will be vindicated for his harsh treatment of his people, and the people will demonstrate that the problem described in the accusation has been answered. They not only recognize the character of Yahweh; they also acknowledge their own sin.

d. (:16b) Recognition Refrain

“and may know that I am the LORD.”

II. (:17-20) SIGN-DRAMA #2 = EATING AND DRINKING IN FEAR AND ANXIETY – DEPORTATION WILL BE DESERVED AND DEVASTATING

A. (:17-18) The Command

1. (:17) Introductory Refrain

“Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

2. (:18) Details of the Command

*“Son of man, eat your bread with trembling,
and drink your water with quivering and anxiety.”*

Wiersbe: He was illustrating the tragic condition of the people in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. They would have very little food and would eat it with fear and trembling because it might well be their last meal.

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel is commanded to represent them by acting out that foreboding in an exaggerated physical counterpart, a pitiable trembling that presumably showed itself in spilling his drink and missing his mouth with his food.

B. (:19-20) The Interpretation

1. (:19-20a) Reason for Fear and Anxiety

a. (:19) Deserved Violent Retribution

“Then say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel, They will eat their bread with anxiety and drink their water with horror, because their land will be stripped of its fulness on account of the violence of all who live in it.'”

b. (:20a) Devastation of the Cities and the Land

*“And the inhabited cities will be laid waste,
and the land will be a desolation.”*

Iain Duguid: To this initial sign-act and interpretation, a further one is then added: Ezekiel is to eat and drink with trembling and shuddering, depicting the anxiety that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah will feel. The violence with which they have filled the land will return on their own heads, with the towns being destroyed and the land devastated. This time, however, those emerging from the devastation with a knowledge of the Lord’s preeminence are not those in Judah but “*the people of the land*” (v. 19), that is, the exiles. The land of Judah and all who remain in it are doomed. They are not to be the objects of envy, as the exiles must have been tempted to view them, but rather of horror and pity. At the same time, those whom the inhabitants of Judah would have regarded as landless unfortunates will turn out to be the inheritors of the land (11:16–17).

God is not impotent even in the face of ears that will not hear and eyes that will not see; one way or another, he will get his message through. The exiles will come to see that they indeed are the fortunate ones who have escaped the total judgment of God on his

rebellious people. But in order for them to receive their inheritance in the land, God must first of all act in judgment on those who remain. It is this unpalatable truth that they are so reluctant to see.

Daniel Block: In previous reports of sign-acts the prophet's role in the performances has alternated between representing God and representing the objects of his wrath. This time his identification with the victims is unequivocal. Like the performance of a professional actor, Ezekiel's dramatization would have been passionate. After all, he is a priest and the inhabitants of Jerusalem are his fellow Israelites. Nevertheless, the prophet's personal emotional reaction to his message is irrelevant. At issue is the passion of the One who had commissioned him to execute this drama, and the response of the audience when the events it portended would occur. The conclusion affirms that when the inhabited cities lie in ruins and the land itself is wasted, then they (the exiles) will acknowledge the person and presence of Yahweh.

2. (:20b) Recognition Refrain

"So you will know that I am the LORD."

Douglas Stuart: The present passage is made up of two distinct revelatory messages to Ezekiel, **verses 17–20** and **verses 21–28**. The first message calls for fear on the part of the people of Jerusalem and Judah (called Israel here again) since in fact the doom of the land is about to take place. The second message confirms that the punishment will come soon, rather than in some future time and to some distant generation of Israelites.

John Taylor: The sufferings that the population will have to undergo are attributed directly to the sufferings which they have inflicted on others. Violence breeds violence. If anyone dares to question his fate, the answer will be found within himself. Human perversity often imagines that, given reasonable luck, it is possible to sin with impunity. Ezekiel declares that in this instance at least oppression will get its due reward. In so doing God will show himself righteous, and the sinner will at last realize that I am the Lord (20).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why must the certainty and inescapability of the coming deportation be emphasized so dramatically?
- 2) What type of false optimism and false confidence and arrogance do we see today on the part of those who mock the reality of the judgment associated with the promised Second Coming of the Messiah?
- 3) What message was the Lord communicating to the surrounding nations?

4) How did the Lord reinforce the culpability of the nation for its coming devastating judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: **12:1–20** constitutes a literary unit consisting of two divine commands to engage in sign-acts, together with statements of their interpretation. Each has its own introductory formula of the prophet's reception of a divine message, in vv **1** and **17**. Indeed, the two elements of command and interpretation in the first case are demarcated as separate, but consecutive events by a message-reception formula in v **8**, rather like that in **24:20**, after **24:15**. The literary form of prophetic signs and their meaning enveloped within a divine speech was encountered earlier in **3:24b–5:17** (cf. **Zimmerli** 156–57). Within this unit the second case, in vv **17–20**, follows the pattern that appears there. The first case, in vv **1–16**, diverges from that pattern in two ways. First, the sequence of divine command and interpretation is interrupted in v **7** by a narrative report of Ezekiel's performance of the command, as in **24:18**. Second, use is made in vv **9–11** of a question-and-answer format to link the command and the interpretation.

The unit may be outlined as follows:

12:1–16	The sign of deportation
12:2–6	Explanation and instructions
12:7	Ezekiel's enactment of the sign
12:8–16	Interpretation
12:17–20	The sign of a meal consumed with anxiety
12:18	Instructions
12:19–20	Interpretation

Alexander: YAHWEH'S REPLY TO THE INVALID HOPES OF THE ISRAELITES CHS. 12—19

The exiles had not grasped the serious consequences of Ezekiel's warnings. They still hoped for an early return to Palestine, for they viewed the continued preservation of Jerusalem and Judah as signs of security. After all, Jerusalem was the eternal city. They presented several reasons for their hope and security—as well as their objections to Ezekiel's warning—in **chapters 12—19**.

- First, if judgment was to come, it would not be in their lifetime, as Ezekiel had declared (**ch. 12**).
- Second, Ezekiel was only one of many prophets. Most prophets and prophetesses announced hope and reasons for optimism. Why should the people listen to Ezekiel (**ch. 13**)?

- Third, the leaders in Judah were ultimately responsible. If there were to be any judgment, it would be on them, not the exiles (**ch. 14**).
- Fourth, if real danger of judgment should exist, then they would only have to find some righteous man to intercede for them before God. Thus they would be delivered (**ch. 14**).
- Fifth, how could Ezekiel possibly believe that God would judge his own chosen people? He would not do that (**chs. 15—16**).
- Sixth, it would not be fair for God to judge anyone for his forefathers' sins. The people thought Ezekiel was saying that God did judge one for his forefather's sins (**ch. 17**).
- Seventh, if judgment was really coming, then there was nothing they could do to stop it; for they would be paying for their fathers' sins. It would not make any difference if they repented (**ch. 18**).
- Eighth, Zedekiah, the contemporary ruler of Judah, could be trusted. He would throw off the yoke of Babylonia (**ch. 19**).

David Thompson: In **chapters 4-11**, Ezekiel's job had been to show the people why God was going to destroy Jerusalem. These people were a rebellious people and they were not willing to accept the fact that God would do anything negative to them. **Dr. Charles Dyer**, who has written a good commentary on Ezekiel, called **chapters 12-19** of Ezekiel "*The Futility of False Optimism*" (Ezekiel, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 1249).

God's people had become delusional. They thought God would just put up with their struggles and sins forever. God says I am about to bring this all crashing down. Now we can live our spiritual lives in a fog if we want to, thinking that God will tolerate our rebellion forever. We can assume that God will never stop us dead in our tracks but will just put up with our rebellion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ezekiel was sent to warn of this very kind of thinking.

As we begin this chapter, we need to see the end of the chapter (**Ez. 12:27**). What happens in this chapter was something Ezekiel was prophesying about not only for the immediate, but also for the distant future. The specific information given in this chapter certainly had some immediate application and warning to the exiles, but the ultimate fulfillment of everything predicted to happen has not yet occurred. What we see here is this:

GOD DEMANDED THAT EZEKIEL PHYSICALLY ILLUSTRATE TO ISRAEL THAT HIS DEVASTATING JUDGMENT WOULD COME AGAINST JERUSALEM THAT WILL FULFILL EVERY SINGLE JUDGMENT PREDICTION AND WHEN

IT DOES, ONLY A FEW JEWS WILL BE SPARED AND ALL WILL KNOW THIS WAS A JUDGMENT OF GOD.

Lamar Cooper: Brownlee has argued that Ezekiel was presenting a reversal of Joshua's seven stages in the conquest of Canaan by presenting seven stages in the loss of the land. Joshua's stages included:

- invading the land (Josh 3–4),
- laying siege to Jericho (Josh 6:1–14),
- the celebration at Gilgal (Josh 5:10–12),
- the panic of the Canaanites (Josh 5:1),
- the destruction of the Canaanites (Josh 8–11),
- the rejoicing of Israel (Josh 10:22–27),
- and Israel's possessing the land (Josh 11:23; 1 Kgs 8:56).

Contrast this with Ezekiel's inclusion of:

- a settled people fleeing (Ezek 12:1–14, 19b–20),
- Israel under siege in Jerusalem (4:1–3),
- Israel starved in Jerusalem (4:9–16; 5:10),
- Israel panicked (4:16; 7:26–27; 12:17–19a),
- Israel destroyed and expelled from the land (5:1–12),
- Israel's enemies rejoicing (6:11–12),
- and decadence ending with the loss of the land (7:1–9).

Steven Lawson: A Certain Promise of Coming Judgment

Directed to Jews who remained in Jerusalem after first deportation. By outward appearances it was a time of prosperity. They were still in the Promised Land. They were still worshiping in the temple. It seemed like the blessing of God still rested on them. But they had become just like the world. They compromised the Word of God and corrupted the truth of God. They listened to the false prophets who said "Peace, peace" when there was no peace. Turned the place of worship into a place of worldliness. Blurred the lines of distinction between right and wrong; between truth and falsehood. Their worship became dead ritual; no relationship with the Lord; the external without the internal.

Difficult message for Ezekiel to bring. Pronouncement of judgment on the people of God.

Fourfold Promise of Judgment:

- I. vv. 1-16 First Promise of Judgment
- II. vv. 17-20 Second Promise
- III. vv. 21-25 Third Promise
- IV. vv. 26-28 Fourth Promise

"the Word of the Lord came to me saying" – introduces each section – we see it repeated 5 times;

First deportation six years earlier

You have not repented; therefore promise of judgment; Israel seems to just yawn in the face of the message of the prophets; turned a deaf ear to the message

God's description of His people = rebellious house – as they come into the temple to worship; spiritually blind and deaf; unbelieving and disobedient

God now has the prophet act out the message to them; Pack a bag for exile = taken off into captivity like a prisoner; do this in broad daylight in the sight of the people; Maybe then they will finally get it – spoken sarcastically.

Vs. 5ff – Dig a hole – crawl through it; keeps becoming even more strange; veil your eyes with baggage on your shoulder; crowd of watching onlookers growing

Vs. 8ff – What is the meaning and significance of all of this? Ezekiel had obeyed without even understanding.

Vs. 10ff – *burden* refers to the message coming through the prophet; a heavy message pressing down; True legal King was Jehoiachin – he had been removed and was now in exile; Zedekiah was like a prince who had stepped into the central role; very religious people but rebellious; acting out a foreshadowing of their real experience; another wave of Babylonian intruders who will surround the holy city and deport the people; Zedekiah will try to escape in the middle of the night and save his own skin in very selfish manner; he will have his eyes put out and become blind

Vs. 13ff – *My net* and *my snare* are instruments of Babylonian army used by the Lord to accomplish His purposes; impossible to run away from the Lord (like Jonah); Chaldeans now have conquered Babylon and rule there; **vs. 15** – *sword* is Babylonian army as well; Lord will bring about His Word; nothing intrinsically better about those whom God chose to graciously spare; Progression: Sword bringing about famine bringing about rats that bring pestilence

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=103009918550>

TEXT: Ezekiel 12:21-28

TITLE: *HOW LONG? WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF . . . ?*

BIG IDEA:

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY SILENCES ANY MOCKING OF DELAY IN GOD'S TIMETABLE

INTRODUCTION:

Scoffers have always made fun of God's prophetic word – charging God with long delays in fulfillment – essentially mocking the veracity of God's promises. But God is neither threatened or amused by such arrogant challenges. He continues to sovereignly direct the course of history according to His timetable and faithfully executes every threat of judgment and pledge of blessing. Examining His track record in the past gives us confidence that He will continue to fulfill every prophecy that still remains.

The Apostle Peter exposed the mockers who continue to operate in these last days of the Church Age:

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation . . . But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness . . .” (2 Peter 3:3-9)

This approach to God's promise of coming judgment is nothing new. It began back in the Garden where the serpent contradicted God's warning of death for disobedience. Ezekiel dealt with the same mentality back in his day. The false prophets were painting a pleasant picture of peace and prosperity when God had promised impending doom. Ezekiel pointed to the near term fulfillment of prophecy as the compelling vindication of the faithfulness of God to His promises. We can point back to that historical example as we respond to the critics of today who would like to imagine that they are not accountable to the God who is sending Jesus Christ back to judge the living and the dead.

Morgan: The heart of man, set upon evil courses, constantly adopts one of these two expedients to comfort itself. Either it mocks at the prophetic word, or says that fulfillment is postponed.

Douglas Stuart: It might seem that we could hardly blame people for wondering why it had taken so long for the prophets' words to come true if they were really speaking for God. This skepticism had a point. But we cannot ultimately sympathize with them because in fact they were severely underestimating and misunderstanding the power of God to do what He was doing. They mistook His mercy and patience for His inability

or disinterest. He was waiting, giving them another chance, calling them to change. They were taking it all as evidence that He was not a force to be reckoned with.

Daniel Block: **Ezekiel 12:21–25** is the first of a couplet of prophecies closely related in both substance and form. Each is a short disputation oracle dealing with popular cynicism arising out of apparent nonfulfillment of prophetic pronouncements. The limits of this unit are set by the word-event formula in v. 21 and the signatory formula at the end of v. 25. Within this framework the passage follows the normal pattern of a disputation speech.

TWO DIVINE MUZZLINGS OF THE MOCKERS OF GOD’S PROMISES OF JUDGMENT

God exercises incredible forbearance in allowing false prophets to propagate their messages of deceit. But there comes a time when He dramatically intervenes to shut up the mockers and scoffers and vindicate the truthfulness of His Word.

I. (:21-25) FIRST DIVINE MUZZLING – DIRECTED AGAINST THE SPECIFIC PROVERB MOCKING THE CERTAINTY OF GOD’S PROMISE OF JUDGMENT

A. (:21) Introductory Refrain -- Authoritative Source of the Refutation

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying”

B. (:22) Arrogant Sarcasm of the Specific Proverb Mocking God’s Promise of Judgment

“Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying,”

Expectation of a proverb = it should hold true (except for the isolate exception);
We are talking about what God says about His own people and His own land;
certainly He should be on target regarding what he says on this subject

They had come up with a short, pithy, witty expression to mock God

1. Charging God with Delayed Promises – Unexpected / Incomprehensible

“The days are long”

2. Charging God with False Promises

“and every vision fails”

MacArthur: Delay had given the people the false impression that the stroke of judgment would never come. In fact, a saying had become popular, no doubt developed by false prophets who caused the people to reject Ezekiel’s visions and prophecies.

Peter Pett: The proverb is literally, ‘*The days, they lengthen and every vision, it dies.*’ The point being made is that time goes by but none of the prophecies come to fulfillment. Thus when the people hear a prophecy they shrug their shoulders and say, ‘it has never happened, it will not happen now.’ Proverbs can be very valuable, but they can become stilted and meaningless, resulting in apathy.

C. (:23-25) Almighty Sentence of Imminent Fulfillment

1. Nullifying the Mocking Proverb

“Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God, ‘I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel.’”

2. No More Delay in Fulfillment of God’s Prophecy

“But say to them, ‘The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision.’”

3. No More False Promises of Peace and Security

“For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.”

Peter Pett: The great problem for Israel was that of conflicting voices. There were the prophets who prophesied peace and security, words pleasing to men’s ears (**Jeremiah 28:2-4; Jeremiah 28:11**). And there were those like Jeremiah and Ezekiel who spoke dire warnings of what was shortly to come. And the people as a whole preferred the former.

But now, said Yahweh, this would cease. Once the horror came on them, prophecies of peace and security would be in vain. They would be obviously untrue. Those who spoke with meaningless promises, and flattered with pleasant words through divination, would be shown up and would cease. For what Yahweh had said, He would do. He had spoken, and He would bring it about. Indeed in the very days of Ezekiel’s listeners all he had warned about would come about. Yahweh would perform it.

4. Near-Term, Complete, Certain Fulfillment of Every Promise

“For I the Lord will speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it,’ declares the Lord God.”

MacArthur: “*in your days*” – The prophet is explicit about the present time for fulfillment, i.e., in their lifetime.

II. (:26-28) SECOND DIVINE MUZZLING – DIRECTED AGAINST THE GENERAL CONSENSUS MOCKING THE NEARNESS OF GOD’S PROMISE OF JUDGMENT

A. (:26) Introductory Refrain -- Authoritative Source of the Refutation

“Furthermore, the word of the Lord came to me, saying”

Daniel Block: Rather than challenging a proverb circulating in Jerusalem, this address appears to be directed at the exiles who have become disillusioned with Ezekiel. But the problem here differs slightly from the issue addressed in the previous text. Whereas the Jerusalemites had charged the prophets with uttering empty and powerless words, Ezekiel's fellow exiles seem to have dismissed his utterances as of no consequence to them. The quotation is cast in the form of two chiasmatically structured cola, both of which raise the issue of the remoteness of the fulfillment of the divine pronouncements. This renders them both unverifiable and irrelevant for the present generation. Which predictions are envisioned here are not specified, but they probably involved Ezekiel's announcements of Jerusalem's imminent fall. The cynical response of the exilic community demonstrates that they were as much a part of this rebellious household of Israel as were their compatriots back home.

B. (:27) Arrogant Sarcasm of the General Consensus Mocking God's Promise of Judgment

"Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies of times far off.'"

C. (:28) Almighty Sentence of Imminent Fulfillment

"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God,'"

1. No More Delay (from human perspective; there was never any delay according to God's timetable)

"None of My words will be delayed any longer."

2. Imminent and Complete Fulfillment

"'Whatever word I speak will be performed.' declares the Lord God."

Douglas Stuart: People always manage to come up with excuses for not taking God's Word seriously. They remain unconvinced of what it says, either because it can't be proved to their satisfaction (e.g., prophecies don't come true fast enough), or because they think it can't apply to them, or because they don't trust the one who speaks the Word, or whatever. Rebelliousness (v. 25) can take many forms, some of them even quite pious ("How do I know which preacher to believe, which church is right?"). In Ezekiel's day it was "How do I know which prophet is correct (v. 24), which prophecy applies to me (v. 27)?" A true commitment to God does not allow such convenient shrugging off of duty and faith. If God is God, His Word is true. If He has said it, it will come to pass (v. 28). We can never hide behind "timing" or "interpretational problems" or any other device to avoid taking seriously God's commands and promises. God does what He says He will do.

Iain Duguid: The Lord's commitment to fulfill whatever he has spoken (12:25, 28) brings us to the crux of the issue between the true and the false prophets—the source of their words. Not every word spoken by someone claiming to be a prophet would be fulfilled, for not all spoke the word of the Lord. In order for every prophetic word to be

fulfilled, it was necessary that judgment should come to silence the self-proclaimed prophets. This idea, mentioned in passing in **12:24**, is unfolded throughout **chapter 13** in two halves that show considerable symmetry. Ezekiel first addresses the false prophets (“*the prophets of Israel*,” **13:1–16**) and then the false prophetesses (“*the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imagination*,” **13:17–23**).

Daniel Block: The certainty of the fulfillment of the divine word is based on the person and character of God. The challenges of arrogant and rebellious people will not change the fact that when God speaks he acts. Within a few years of this utterance the cynics would be silenced by the terrible truth of his word.

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Prophecy --True and False -- Ezekiel 12:21–14:11 contains five prophecies that reflect Ezekiel’s conflict with others in the professional prophetic guild. The boundaries of the larger unit are roughly set by the references to the *māšāl*, “*figurative word*” (**12:22; 14:8**), although the meaning of this word is not uniform in each context. This complex of oracles divides into three subunits dealing in order with

- (1) popular cynicism toward the office (**12:21–28**),
- (2) the professional abuse of the office (**13:1–23**), and
- (3) the fate of false claimants to the office and those who find support in them (**14:1–11**).

Each of these subunits displays a pattern of “gemination.” In (1) and (2) the paired subsections are framed by their own introductory and concluding formulae.¹ In (3) the second subsection (**14:9–11**) lacks the introductory formula, but it is marked by the recognition formula at the end of **14:8**.

JFB: The infidel scoff, that the threatened judgment was so long in coming, it would not come at all, had by frequent repetition come to be a “proverb” with them. This skeptical habit contemporary prophets testify to (Jer 17:15; 20:7; Zep 1:12). Ezekiel, at the Chebar, thus sympathizes with Jeremiah and strengthens his testimony at Jerusalem. The tendency to the same scoff showed itself in earlier times, but had not then developed into a settled “proverb” (Isa 5:19; Am 5:18). It shall again be the characteristic of the last times, when “faith” shall be regarded as an antiquated thing (Lu 18:8), seeing that it remains stationary, whereas worldly arts and sciences progress, and when the “continuance of all things from creation” will be the argument against the possibility of their being suddenly brought to a standstill by the coming of the Lord (Isa 66:5; 2Pe 3:3, 4). The very long-suffering of God, which ought to lead men to repentance, is made an argument against His word (Ec 8:11; Am 6:3).

Feinberg: In the two messages of verses 21-28 appear the reasons why the people had

disbelieved the prophecies of Ezekiel. The first is in verse 22: delay gave the impression that the stroke would never come. The second is in verse 27: delay led those who apparently believed the prophecies to feel that the hour of calamity was far off. The answer of God in both cases was: every vision would be fulfilled, and the time would not be deferred any longer. . . After the exile of King Jehoiachin many may have believed that conditions would get no worse. And all the while the mercy and patience of God were waiting for their faith in Him and His promises. But to the carnal eye and mind prophecy had failed; it was ineffective and failed of fulfillment. Ezekiel began to prophesy (1:1-2) in the fifth year of his captivity, but it was not until the twelfth year (33:21) that word reached him by messenger that Jerusalem had actually fallen. It was in the intervening years that skepticism had a good opportunity to fasten itself upon the hearts of the people.

Ralph H. Alexander: Their outlook presumed on God's grace, long-suffering and forbearance. It showed an unbelief in God's immutability and the trustworthiness of his word as revealed in the Scriptures. It was only because of his grace that God had not disciplined Israel sooner. He had waited so Israel might change her mind and return to him. Instead, the people had strayed further, living in the fantasy of security when judgment was imminent. The people falsely believed that there would be a long time of peace ahead (v. 22). . . Judgment on Jerusalem would bring the false visions and deceptive divinations, by which the false prophets continually sought to encourage unscriptural ways, to an abrupt halt (v. 24).

Wiersbe: The Lord made it clear that Ezekiel's words would be fulfilled very soon. *"The word which I have spoken shall be done"* (Ezek. 12:28). Six years later, the Babylonian army breached the walls of Jerusalem and Ezekiel's predictions came true. How tragic it is when people deliberately ignore or reject the dependable Word of God and put their faith in the empty but soothing words of false religious leaders!

Derek Thomas: These two responses more or less summarize the reaction given to the Word of God by many today. Some are quite open in their hostility to it. They look around and suggest that the Bible has no relevance to their way of life. Its warnings and threats are rejected. Others are loath to be so openly hostile. They give lip-service to the truthfulness of what the Bible says. But they are careful not to believe it in such a way that it affects the way they live. They keep its teachings at arm's length. They are not prepared to reject it entirely; they dismiss the Bible by giving it faint praise. Of the two conditions, the latter is probably the worst.

But is it fair that the Israelites should have to suffer this way? That is a question to which the next two chapters will respond. In case some of Ezekiel's listeners might be entertaining the idea that God's ways were in some sense in violation of what they deserved, Ezekiel underlines the false prophecy and idolatry that pervaded their lives.

TEXT: Ezekiel 13:1-23

TITLE: BOTH MALE AND FEMALE FALSE PROPHETS CONDEMNED

BIG IDEA:

FALSE PROPHETS AND PRACTITIONERS OF THE OCCULT MUST BE CONDEMNED FOR THEIR LIES AND EMPTY PROMISES THAT ORIGINATE FROM THEIR OWN CRYSTAL BALL

INTRODUCTION:

Ezekiel had just finished refuting the false claims of those who either denied the certainty of coming judgment or its soon arrival. Now he turns his attention at the direction of God to condemning the actual false prophets and female practitioners of the occult for counterfeiting the truth. They had not been sent by God and did not speak with His authority. Their false messages of hope and peace were a product of their own imagination and inspiration. They had done great damage by leading people astray and God's judgment on them would be violent and severe.

Constable: This chapter follows quite naturally from the previous one. There God corrected the mistaken views of His people, and here He rebuked those who were responsible for those views. In this section, God pronounced judgment on the false prophets who were responsible for the Jews' false sense of security (cf. **12:21-28; Jer. 14:14; 23**). He dealt with two groups of false prophets in this chapter: the males (**vv. 1-16**) and the females (**vv. 17-23**).

Peter Pett: Ezekiel has depicted the failure of the leaders of the people, the princes, the priests and the elders. Now he turns his attention on '*the prophets*', probably the cult prophets. They too have failed Israel. These men had been appointed by, and attached to, the temple, or to other recognised sanctuaries, who paid their wages (compare **Zechariah 11:12**), and they were supposed to have some gift of divine inspiration. Many had gone into exile with the others. But Ezekiel is to point out that they really speak their own ideas, and not Yahweh's, for they say only what men want to hear. They are not opening themselves to the inspiration of Yahweh in accordance with His teachings and with His word. The denunciation is then also applied to the prophetesses who use doubtful means to establish their ideas (**Ezekiel 13:17-23**).

Wiersbe: Ezekiel had answered the shallow selfish thinking of the exiles and the people in Jerusalem, but now he attacked the source of their blind optimism: the messages of the false prophets.

Daniel Block: Although both groups, the male and female prophets, oppose the ministry to which God has called Ezekiel, the oracles incorporated in this single literary unit are obviously not identical twins. They address two sides of a single issue facing the prophet: how to counteract the influence among the Israelites of charlatans, false claimants to the prophetic office. The male prophets contradict Ezekiel's message of

inevitable national judgment with false messages of hope. Their female counterparts undermine his mission of announcing life to the righteous and death to the wicked (unless they turn from their wickedness) by killing those who should not die and keeping alive those who should not live (v. 19).

I. (:1-16) CONDEMNATION OF MALE FALSE PROPHETS

A. (:1-7) Promote Lies Rather Than Proclaim Truth

1. (:1-5) Promote Their Own Independent Visions

a. (:1-2) Counterfeit the Word of God with Independent Visions

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 ‘Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, Listen to the word of the LORD!’”

Peter Pett: Note Ezekiel’s continuing emphasis on the word of Yahweh coming to him. We can tend to forget that he was under the constraint of silence all this time and could only speak when he had a word from Yahweh. But when Yahweh came to him he had to speak. This was the difference between him and the false prophets he was speaking about. He was constrained to speak because of Yahweh’s Spirit working within him. In the words of **Amos 3:8**, *‘the Lord Yahweh has spoken who can but prophesy?’*

David Thompson: These false religious leaders were inventing things and saying they were inspired by God. They were making this up. They were telling people God gave them some extra Biblical revelation when in fact they invented it in their own minds. Their words and their messages came out of their own hearts and minds, not out of God’s Word.

Wiersbe: Four times in this paragraph God declares that the false prophets saw vanity (nothingness) and spoke lies. God hadn’t called them (**Jer. 23:21-22**) and God didn’t give them their messages, yet they claimed to be His prophets. They spoke out of their own imaginations and their *“inspiration”* was self-induced. He compared them to foxes and to workmen who failed to build something that would last.

b. (:3) Lack Genuine Spiritual Insight

“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.’”

c. (:4-5) Operate as Selfish Parasites Rather than Courageous Edifiers

“O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD.”

Peter Pett: The picture is a vivid one of foxes running around in the ruins of a city. They build their dens in the ruins, and forage and scavenge, but they do nothing about the

state of the city. So it is with these prophets. They have ignored the gaps in the understanding of the people, and have not built them up ready for what is coming, for they have not seen it themselves. Nor have they caused them to physically strengthen the walls of the city by their warnings. Instead of ‘rebuilding the walls and filling in the gaps’, by preparing the people for the coming ‘day of Yahweh’ about to fall on them, they are like foxes who make comfortable holes for themselves in the ruins and scurry around building nothing, scavenging for what they can find, making false promises that will not be fulfilled. They are nothing but parasites.

David Guzik: These self-proclaimed prophets also lacked courage. Trained and courageous soldiers rush **into the gaps** along the line of battle. The false prophets did not have the courage to stand and strengthen Israel in the time of crisis.

2. (:6-7) Promote False Hope

a. (:6) Despite No Divine Authority

“They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, ‘The LORD declares,’ when the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word.”

Peter Pett: The false prophets have given people false hope with false visions and lying divination. The word for ‘divination’ is regularly used in a bad sense of using false means to obtain ‘divine’ guidance (**Ezekiel 21:21-22; 2 Kings 17:7; Jeremiah 14:14; Numbers 22:7; Numbers 23:23; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 15:23**), usually through special techniques such as familiar spirits, worked up trances, examining entrails of a sacrifice and throwing sand on the ground. But the fact that here it is called ‘lying divination’ seems to contrast it with the true reception of prophetic truth by men like Ezekiel (never directly called divination), obtained directly through Yahweh.

The result of the false visions and lying divination is that the people are deceived and expectant of something that will never materialise, will never ‘be confirmed’ by fulfilment.

b. (:7) Despite Relying on Lies

“Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, ‘The LORD declares,’ but it is not I who have spoken?”

B. (:8-16) Indicted by the Supreme Judge Who Executes His Wrath

1. (:8-9) Permanent Rejection from Covenant Blessing

a. (:8-9a) Opposed by God

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord God. So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations.”

They love popularity and acceptance; but they have made God their enemy.

Constable: The Lord told these false prophets that He opposed them for what they had done. He would act against them by removing them from positions of influence among His people, depriving them of the rights of citizenship in Israel (cf. **Ezra 2:62; Luke 10:20; Rev. 3:5; 20:15**), and preventing them from returning to the Promised Land. They had failed as "watchmen" over the house of Israel (cf. **3:16-21**). The fulfillment of these judgments would prove to them that Yahweh was Lord (cf. **Exod. 7:5**).

b. (:9b) Outcasts from the Community of God's People

1) No Place in Leadership

"They will have no place in the council of My people,"

Lamar Cooper: The phrase "*counsel of my people*" probably refers to places of leadership and may be compared to the counsel of the elders (**Ps 107:32**; cf. **Ps 111:1**).

2) No Place in Membership of Covenant Community

"nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel,"

3) No Place in Residence in Promised Land

"nor will they enter the land of Israel,"

Peter Pett: The denunciation of the prophets for speaking empty words and 'seeing' what is vain, and 'seeing' what is false and 'divining lies' (compare **Ezekiel 13:7**), putting forth fabrications as an oracle from Yahweh, has brought on them the enmity of Yahweh. They have brought on themselves exclusion from the leadership of Israel, which they no doubt coveted, exclusion from the roll of those who are full members of the house of Israel, a blow to their self-respect and hopes, and exclusion from the land of Israel, that is, final exclusion from the recognised benefits of the covenant. For being blotted out of 'the roll of Israel' compare **Exodus 32:32-33**. This also will demonstrate that God is truly the Lord Yahweh, with all that that means.

Daniel Block: These three punishments strike at the heart of what it meant to be an Israelite.

c. (:9c) Recognition Refrain

"that you may know that I am the Lord God."

2. (:10-12) Phony Façade that Misleads the People

a. (:10) Whitewashing Critical Defects

1) Deception by Contradicting the Truth

"It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace."

Morgan: That is the essence of false prophesying. Men, who have no Divine message, but pose as though they had, seek to find favour with those to whom they speak, and so agree with them in their desires and policies.

2) Deception by Covering up the Truth

*“And when anyone builds a wall,
behold, they plaster it over with whitewash;”*

Constable: The metaphorical interpretation, which most commentators took, and which I prefer, understands God to be saying that these false prophets were putting a good front on the situation in Jerusalem, saying peace rather than judgment was coming. They were compounding Israel's difficulties by hiding problems that needed to be exposed and corrected. Ezekiel was to tell them that invasion would come, like a rainstorm with hailstones and violent winds, and that their facade of a future for the people would then come crashing down (cf. **Matt. 7:24-29**).

Peter Pett: The word for *whitewash* comes from a root meaning to talk nonsense. Some in Israel have built up for themselves ideas, empty hopes, which are the equivalent of a flimsy wall which will not stand the test (compare **Ezekiel 13:5** and **Ezekiel 13:16**) and the prophets contribute to their folly by whitewashing it to hide the cracks. What they speak is nonsense. They declare peace, but there will be no peace. They promise safety and prosperity for Jerusalem when there will be no safety or prosperity. Thus they lead the people astray.

b. (:11) Wiped out by God's Violent Judgment

*“so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall.
A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall;
and a violent wind will break out.”*

David Thompson: Their messages had no substance to them. They did not make the people strong. They put religious whitewash on the wall but when the storm came there was no strength and the people realized it was all a show (**v. 11-12**).

c. (:12) Without Any Explanation for Their Falsehoods

*“Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked,
‘Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?’”*

Daniel Block: The message is clear. An attractive external appearance is no substitute for intrinsic soundness. The prophets have been daubing plaster over a society that is fundamentally corrupt. Instead of exposing its decadence, with their reassurances of “peace,” they have created a false sense of optimism and well-being. No amount of plaster can defend the house against the impending storm. When the test comes, neither society nor prophecy will survive.

3. (:13-14) Precarious Lack of Substance Leading to Sudden Destruction

a. (:13) Violent Divine Assault

*“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘I will make a violent wind
break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding
rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath.’”*

Feinberg: When God signified in verse 13 the threefold judgment that awaited them, namely, the stormy wind, the overflowing shower and great hailstones, He specified that each would be accompanied by His wrath and anger. When the wall would be utterly flattened and its foundation uncovered, the wicked prophets would be buried in the ruins. By divine justice they would be undone by their own godless doings, and there would be a complete annihilation of the false spiritual structure they had erected. Finally, Ezekiel laid aside the use of figures and pointed out the false prophets as those who had been doing the disastrous plastering he had mentioned.

b. (:14a) Total Destruction

“So I shall tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst.”

c. (:14b) Recognition Refrain

“And you will know that I am the LORD.”

4. (:15-16) Punished by God’s Wrath

a. (:15) Stripping Away All Pretenses

“Thus I shall spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I shall say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers are gone,’”

b. (:16) Exposing False Promises of Peace

“along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’ declares the Lord God.”

Daniel Block: These verses represent an addendum, reiterating the role of Yahweh and clarifying his intentions. In the judgment Yahweh’s wrath toward the wall (Israel) and its plasterers (the prophets) will be fully vented. The oracle reaches its climax with Yahweh, the judge and executioner, announcing in direct speech the total achievement of his objectives: No more wall and no more plasterers! Those who had pacified the people with empty utterances of well-being will themselves meet a devastating end. Unlike their fraudulent pronouncements, Ezekiel’s oracle is sealed with the authentic signature of Yahweh.

III. (:17-23) CONDEMNATION OF FEMALE FALSE PROPHETESSES

A. (:17-19) Exposing Their Occult Practices

1. (:17) Misdirected Authority

“Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration.”

Daniel Block: Although a limited number of oracles directed at women are found in the OT, the present prophecy against female false prophets has no equal.

David Guzik: Examples in Scriptures of women prophets:

- Miriam, the sister of Moses (**Exodus 15:20, Numbers 12:2**).
- Deborah (**Judges 4:4**).
- Huldah (**2 Kings 22:14**).
- The wife of Isaiah (**Isaiah 8:3**).
- Noadiah, a false prophetess (**Nehemiah 6:14**).
- Anna, the daughter of Phanuel (**Luke 2:36**).
- The four daughters of Philip (**Acts 21:9**).

2. (:18) Malevolent Intent

a. Prophecy against Them

“Prophecy against them, 18 and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’”

b. Proclaim Woe against Them

“Woe to the women who sew magic bands on all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature to hunt down lives!”

Lamar Cooper: The activities attributed to these women suggest that they were more like witches or sorcerers than prophets [cf. **1 Sam. 28:7**].

Peter Pett: Those being prophesied against clearly participated in magic practises. The passage is difficult to translate simply because we do not know enough about magic practises in ancient Palestine. In Babylonia the magical binding of the wrists is witnessed, the purpose of which was to ‘enforce’ the binding power of a spell or incantation. That may well be what is in mind here. The ‘shrouds’ are long pieces of cloth that went over the head and reached down to the ground, covering the person from head to foot. They were used in order to ‘hunt persons’. Possibly the purpose of these was to enable the person so covered to reach out magically through spells or curses, while insulated against the natural world, to cause harm to their enemies. Perhaps it was to give the illusion of astral travel, the body supposed to disappear while under the shroud, and travelling magically to do its evil work on the enemy. Alternately it may be that the shrouds were impregnated with magic and thrown over the victim, or over some effigy or object belonging to him, ‘imprisoning’ him within the spell.

Wiersbe: They practiced the magical arts they had probably earned in Babylon, all of which were forbidden to the Jews (**Deut. 18:9-14**). They manufactured magic charms that people could wear on various parts of the body and thus ward off evil. They also told fortunes and enticed people to buy their services. Like the false prophets, they were using the crisis situation for personal gain and preying on the fears of the people.

c. Prosecute Their Guilt and Evil Intentions

“Will you hunt down the lives of My people,

but preserve the lives of others for yourselves?”

3. (:19) Mercenary Motivation

“And for handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies.”

Lamar Cooper: By their forbidden activities in Israel they profaned God for a “*few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread*” (v. 19), which was the price of their services. Perhaps in addition to promises of peace their lies consisted of predicting death for some and life for others regardless of guilt or innocence. Thus they “disheartened the righteous” and “encouraged the wicked,” enticing both to trust in them and their magic rather than in God and the words of his prophets. But God warned these false prophetesses that he was going to take away their clients (v. 21), an obvious reference to the captivity. He said, “*You will no longer practice divination*” (v. 23), meaning his judgment on Judah would put them out of business.

B. (:20-23) Opposing Their Harmful Impact on God’s People

1. (:20-21) Rendering Them Impotent

a. (:20) Counteracting Occult Practices

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against your magic bands by which you hunt lives there as birds, and I will tear them off your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds.’”

b. (:21a) Protecting God’s Covenant People

“I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted;”

Constable: The Lord promised to oppose their practice of using magic bands to hunt down innocent lives. He would tear these bands from their arms and release the people that these false prophetesses had snared like birds. He would also tear off the veils they used to hunt the innocent and free those whom they had hunted down. These women were using some sort of magic to control people. Then these false prophetesses would know that the Lord was God.

c. (:21b) Recognition Refrain

“and you will know that I am the LORD.”

2. (:22-23) Removing Their Platform

a. (:22) Exposing Their Negative Impact

1) Negative Impact on the Righteous

“Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief,”

2) Negative Impact on the Wicked

“but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life,”

b. (:23a) Emancipating God’s People

1) Stopping the False Female Prophets

“therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination,”

Douglas Stuart: Modern-day fortune tellers are rather similar to the women described in this passage. Fortune tellers, interestingly, are usually women, and they tend to dress in a rather elaborate manner, often wearing clothing or jewelry associated with the occult arts, comparable to the 'muffs' on the prophetesses in ancient Israel (v. 18). They tend to give their advice in darkened rooms, where the attitude of the inquirer is influenced in an eerie way, and this corresponds to the veil put over the inquirer in Ezekiel's description (v. 18). They are paid for what they do, just as the ancient women were (v. 19), and their advice is always dangerous (v. 19) because it leads people astray from the truth of God, that truth being the only way to live and not die eternally. They are frauds, who envision 'lies' (NKJV, 'futility,' v. 23) because their predictions are fabrications made up from their own minds (v. 17), just as was done in Ezekiel's time.

Feinberg: What is unmistakable is that they degraded the name of the Lord by linking it with superstitions and magical practices.

2) Saving God’s Covenant People

“and I will deliver My people out of your hand.”

MacArthur: Certainly this was true in the restoration after the 70 years in Babylon, but will be fully true in Messiah’s kingdom. God’s true promise will bring an end to sorcery and false prophecy (cf. **Mic. 3:6, 7; Zec. 13:1-6**).

Douglas Stuart: The ultimate judgment for such phonies and deceivers was death and destruction, just as it was for all the other evildoers in Jerusalem (cf. also **Lev. 20:27**), and the death penalty was also reserved for those who visited such false prophets seeking information (**Lev. 20:6**). These capital punishments are not mentioned in the present passage because they were so obvious that they required no statement. What instead was predicted was the end of witchcraft, so that God’s people could be free from its “snare” (vv. 20–21). These women practitioners of the occult had corrupted the nation. Their advice discouraged good people and encouraged wicked people (v. 22), and the nation needed rescue from them (v. 23).

c. (:23b) Recognition Refrain

“Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

Peter Pett: So God was building up a picture as to why Jerusalem had to be destroyed. He had outlined the detail of the different forms of idol worship going on in Jerusalem

(**Ezekiel 8:5-18**) and its surrounds (**Ezekiel 6:1-7**), which involved both priesthood (**Ezekiel 8:16**) and laity, with its resulting descent into all kinds of wickedness, He had described the evil ways of the civil leaders, with the resulting violence (**Ezekiel 11:1-13**), and now He had demonstrated the evil of the false prophets, and the wicked practises of the prophetesses. The whole city was a mass of wickedness, ripe for judgment.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you identify a false prophet in today's evangelical culture?
- 2) What type of false promises and false optimism are promoted by false teachers today?
- 3) How would you compare the activities of present-day fortune-tellers to the occult practices of Ezekiel's time?
- 4) What different metaphors are used to describe the false prophets and what can you learn from each of these metaphors?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: The four sections of prophecy that are found in **chapters 13 and 14** all give further, specific evidence of the ways in which God's coming judgment against His people is justified by their ongoing rebel lion against Him. Undoubtedly some among Ezekiel's fellow exiles and many left still in Jerusalem doubted that the first exile—the one in which Ezekiel had been taken—and a coming exile, if there was to be one, could be fair to the nation. Most Israelites of the time may have seen themselves as innocent, accidental, unfortunate victims of the tyrannical Babylonian Empire's gobbling up territory to feed its voracious appetite for supremacy in the Fertile Crescent. It was apparently not widely believed in Judah that the nation deserved what had happened or was about to happen to it. Accordingly, through Ezekiel, God reviewed the corruption of true religion in the life of His people and effectively provided an argument that would silence honest criticism: the people were so wayward that their destruction was inevitable if God was to be true to His covenantal promise to punish those who broke His law.

Daniel Block: Structurally, both panels follow the same basic outline:

<u>Element</u>	<u>Panel I</u>	<u>Panel II</u>
a. Preamble	vv. 2–3a	vv. 17–18a
b. The charges against the prophets	vv. 3b–7	vv. 18b–19

- c. The announcements of judgment **vv. 8–16** **vv. 20–23**
- (1) The first announcement **vv. 8–9** **vv. 20–21**
- (2) The second announcement **vv. 10–16** **vv. 22–23**

Lamar Cooper: A review of the characteristics of false prophets and prophetesses as presented by Ezekiel helps to show how these men and women led a whole nation astray. This passage stands out in the Old Testament as one clear description of the characteristics of these false prophets and prophetesses and of the jealousy and compassion God feels for his people when they are being led astray (note the repeated “*my people*” throughout **chaps. 13–14**). This is a message that needs to be reviewed in every generation because everyone is vulnerable to the leadership of those who claim to have a word from God but who in fact have none.

These false representatives of God exhibited at least ten negative characteristics.

- First, they spoke out of their own will, not God’s will (**vv. 1–3, 17**).
- Second, they made the people a prey instead of performing a ministry for them (**v. 4**). They scavenged among ruined lives for personal gain and self-gratification.
- Third, they had no crisis ministry (**v. 5**). They could not strengthen the breaks in the walls (i.e., people or nations) or fortify broken lives.
- Fourth, they claimed their revelations were divine to deceive their followers (**vv. 6–7**) and easily deceived others because they were deceived themselves.
- Fifth, they failed to stand against sin (**vv. 6–9**) and declared an empty message without truth.
- Sixth, they preached a message of peace, prosperity, and safety in the face of imminent judgment (**vv. 10–12**) because they failed to relate the consequences of sin.
- Seventh, their ministry provoked the wrath of God and invited his judgment (**vv. 13–16**).
- Eighth, they often used false methods and occult practices to legitimize their work and control their victims (**vv. 17–21**).
- Ninth, they encouraged iniquity by word and personal example (**vv. 22–23**).
- Tenth, they set up the worst idols, their own self-will (**14:1–7**).

Through their methods, messages, and ministries these men and women led the nation to believe that those in Babylon would soon be returned and Israel restored. They condemned Ezekiel and Jeremiah as troublemakers. Instead of impending judgment they preached peace, prosperity, freedom, and a do-as-you-please (really a do-as-we-please) philosophy that kept the people under their control. They appealed to what the people wanted to hear as a means of maintaining control. All this sounds uncomfortably familiar when applied to many self-styled “prophets” today. In days of moral crisis there are always those who seek personal profit by establishing counterfeit ministries, who preach man-made systems instead of divine truth, proclaim peace instead of repentance, use materialistic methods, and set up idols in human hearts (**14:1–11**).

David Thompson: We are living in an age of religious deception. Various religions, various denominations, various ministries and televangelists have duped people out of millions of dollars and duped people into believing lies.

When Jesus was here on earth, He warned His own disciples to see to it that no one misleads them or deceives them because many will try (i.e. **Matt. 24:4-5**). He specifically warned that there are many “*false prophets*” who are religious frauds. They come looking the part of one of the sheep, but in fact they are wolves (**Matt. 7:15-16**).

There are actually two different kinds of false prophets. There are those who represent false deities and those who speak things that are false, saying their messages are from God.

One of the things that many of these wolves say is that they get revelatory visions or revelatory messages from God. This is claimed by the Mormons, the Muslims, Seventh-Day Adventists and some Catholics. This is claimed by many Pentecostals and those in the Charismatic movement. They all claim God told them something beyond the Bible. They are all false and they are corrupt and they will suffer the judgment of God.

This kind of thing is not new to us; this was happening back in the days of Ezekiel. There were men and women who were claiming they were prophets of God, when in fact they weren't. They were telling Israel that they knew God and His Word and they were telling them things that weren't true. In fact, they were dangerous and demonic, which is specifically stated in **verse 6**.

Now the real prophet of God was Ezekiel and God wanted him to point this out to the people of God. This data, as **verse 1** says, came to Ezekiel by “*the word of the LORD.*” This is not Ezekiel coming up with some scheme or message to preach; this business came to him directly from God. What God wants Ezekiel to do here is easy to see:

GOD TOLD EZEKIEL TO PROCLAIM THE TRUTH ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS AND PROPHETESSES BY PROPHECYING AGAINST THEM AND PROCLAIMING WHAT GOD WILL DO TO THEM.

Daniel Block: Throughout history God's people have been plagued by charlatans of many sorts. **Ezek. 13:1-16** serves as a warning to all who would claim to be spokespersons for the living God by identifying the marks of a counterfeit.

First, counterfeits characteristically claim divine authority, even when they speak only from their own inspiration. The frauds of Ezekiel's day claimed to have had visions, but had seen nothing. Their perspective toward, their analysis of, and their solutions for the crisis facing the nation were simply private opinion, politically motivated to gain the approval of the audience. Expert training, oratorical gifts, a charismatic personality, and a wealth of experience may qualify one to stand behind a university lectern or political podium, or to perform on the theatrical stage, but these aptitudes alone do not authorize one to stand behind the pulpit. The message of those who claim to speak for God must

have his signature. This will be true of our proclamation only to the extent that we declare the message of God revealed in the Scriptures: sola Scriptura!

Second, counterfeits characteristically proclaim messages that people want to hear, especially when the truth is painful. For the exiles and the Jerusalemites no word would have been more welcome but at the same time more deadly than to hear that all was well. Neither the community nor individuals in moral and spiritual decline are served by reassurances of well-being. For many the illusion becomes the reality, and they live in the never-never land of “All is well” even when nothing is. Such an audience will applaud a messenger for the palatability of his or her utterance, not for its truthfulness.

Third, counterfeits characteristically are more interested in their own status than in the welfare of the community. Ezekiel compares false prophets with jackals, scavenging among the ruins for personal advantage, capitalizing on the calamity of others. Frauds assume no responsibility for the fate of the people; they look out only for themselves.

Fourth, the utterances of counterfeits characteristically die with them. Being deficient in authority and integrity, their words also lack effective power. The rapidity with which humanly devised panaceas for the ills of society succeed one another in our day is an embarrassing witness to their impotence. Only the word of the Lord endures (**Isa. 40:7–8**) and achieves its life-giving objectives (**Isa. 55:10–11**).

Fifth, counterfeits characteristically stand under the judgment of God. For one who is self-inspired to claim to speak for God is the height of arrogance, and to seduce gullible people with flattering words is utter folly. But God is not mocked. What leaders in particular sow, that they reap.

TEXT: Ezekiel 14:1-11

TITLE: *HYOCRITICAL IDOLATROUS ELDERS DENOUNCED*

BIG IDEA:

HIDDEN IDOLATRY PROVES TO BE A STUMBLING BLOCK FOR SIN AND A RED FLAG IN TERMS OF DIVINE CONFRONTATION AND CONDEMNATION

INTRODUCTION:

Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. These respected Jewish elders living in exile with Ezekiel in Babylon appear to approach the prophet with a sincere interest in obtaining counsel from the Lord. How shocked they must have been to see the Lord's confrontational response. These idolatrous leaders were just as whitewashed as the defective walls of chapter 13. The authoritative word from the Lord exposes their hypocrisy and threatens them with judgment if they refuse to repent.

Ralph Alexander: These leaders of the people outwardly sought God's will by coming to Ezekiel, a true spokesman for the Lord, to inquire about his messages. At the same time, however, they inwardly were exalting idols on the throne of their hearts as the real gods of their lives (**vv. 3-4, 7**). Theirs was a fickle, twofold allegiance. Their lust for idols led to the elders' stumbling into sin. Their outward rebellion against God, their practice of pagan rituals, and their refusal to keep the Mosaic covenant showed their inward worship of these false gods.

Charles Dyer: The idolatry in Jerusalem was openly displayed (**chap. 8**), but the idolatry in Babylon was more subtle – it was internal rather than external. Like stumbling blocks, this idolatry would cause the people to fall.

I. (:1-5) EXPOSING IDOLATRY IN THE HEART AS THE SOURCE OF EXTERNAL SIN

A. (:1-3) Outwardly Sincere Seekers Can Have Inwardly Idolatrous Hearts

1. (:1-2) Apparent Interest in the Word of the Lord

- a. (:1) Jewish Leaders in Babylon Seek the Word of the Lord from Ezekiel

“Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.”

Daniel Block: some crisis appears to have driven them to seek another word from God through him.

- b. (:2) Word of the Lord Revealed to Ezekiel

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Feinberg: Their thoughts were occupied with idol worship; they were enamored of idolatry, and their affections were centered on worthless vanities. Since they were so hypocritical, God asked whether He should allow Himself to be inquired of them at all.

2. (:3) Hypocritical Paradox of Idolaters Seeking Counsel from the Lord

a. Characterization as Inward Idolaters and Outward Sinners

“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity.”

Leslie Allen: These individuals had forfeited any claim they had to a favorable response from Yahweh. They are judged to be halfhearted in their loyalty to him. God could read minds (**Ps 7:10[9]; Jer 11:20**), and he found inconsistency between their outward recourse to a Yahwistic prophet and their inner disposition.

Daniel Block: What kinds of idolatrous commitments Yahweh has in mind is not clear. Perhaps the exiles had become enamored with the Babylonian practices all around them. More likely, they were inwardly longing for the idolatrous observances (such as had been portrayed in **ch. 8**) they had left behind in Judah. Though separated physically from their homeland, they had not yet been weaned of the syncretistic ways that had precipitated their present lot. These pagan commitments remain the most serious obstacle to divine favor.

John Taylor: Note the contemptible *these men*. The charge against them is that they have been infected by their Babylonian environment and the attractions of its idolatrous religion. Nothing had changed outwardly in their allegiance to the Lord, but they had taken idols into their hearts and in so doing they had put in front of their own faces the stumbling-block which would cause them to fall into iniquity. The phrase, *the stumbling block of their iniquity*, is peculiar to Ezekiel (**7:19; 14:3, 4, 7; 18:30; 44:12**) and usually refers to idols which the prophet recognized as being supremely ‘*the occasion of sin*’ for his people. The Lord demands an exclusive allegiance, inwardly as well as outwardly, from his people, and those who consult him or pray to him when they cherish other gods in their hearts will not be heard (cf. **Ps. 66:18**).

b. Counsel from the Lord Probably Not Appropriate

“Should I be consulted by them at all?”

MacArthur: These leaders came insincerely seeking God’s counsel (**v. 3; cf Ps 66:18**), as God reveals to the prophet, who thus saw through their façade and indicted them for determining to pursue their evil way and defy God’s will. False prophets of **chap. 13** were thriving, as the civil leaders and populace whom they represented set a welcoming climate and inclination for the delusions.

Daniel Block: Accordingly, the elders had come to Ezekiel as a fortune-teller; he would inform them of Yahweh’s perspective on their present exilic situation and the fate of

their nation back home. Perhaps he could even force Yahweh's hand to act quickly on their behalf. The delegates appear to have been serious, considering themselves still to be the people of Yahweh. In spite of their syncretistic and overtly idolatrous disposition, however, they were oblivious to the fundamental incongruity of their presence before a prophet of Yahweh. They seemed unaware that Yahweh tolerated no rivals, and that he was under no obligation to respond to any who are determined to keep one foot planted in each of the two worlds—Yahwism and paganism.

Poole: Can these men seriously consult me? Is it fit I should give counsel to obstinate, resolved sinners, who come to inquire, but will not hearken? Should I help them in their distress, who depend on idols which I hate?"

B. (:4-5) The Stumbling Block of Idolatry Must be Denounced by the Authoritative Word of the Lord

"Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,'"

1. (:4a) Idolatry in the Heart Leads to Outward Iniquity

"Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity,"

2. (:4b) Inquiring of the Lord Demands the Denouncing of Idolatry

"and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols,"

Daniel Block: The covenant Lord has been affronted first by their apostasy, and now by their insincerity. All he can see is the multitudes of idols on their minds; Yahweh's response bypasses their concerns altogether.

3. (:5) Indictment Intended to Recapture Hearts and Restore the Relationship

"in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols."

Lamar Cooper: A group of elders or leaders of Israel came to Ezekiel for instruction (v. 1). These leaders already had demonstrated a halfhearted piety. They prayed for deliverance from Babylon but were not ready to give God his rightful place in their hearts. They had adopted Babylonian values, goals, and standards but still considered themselves worshipers of Yahweh. So God asked, *"Should I let them inquire of me at all?"* (v. 3).

These leaders served the worst idols, the idols of their minds (v. 4). Their thoughts were under pagan control, so they were open to all forms of apostate practices. The same word used here for idols (*gillûlîm*) is also in 6:4–6, 9, 13, where they are characterized as *"dung pellets."* Such sin was grounds for excluding a person from the community of worship because it was a spiritual *"stumbling block"* (v. 4).

Daniel Block: For Israel idolatry signified defection from the covenant God. Yahweh finds the exiles' internalized idolatry as alienating as the overt pagan practices being conducted back home in the temple by the Jerusalemites (cf. **8:6**).

II. (:6-11) URGING REPENTANCE TO ESCAPE JUDGMENT

A. (:6) Call for Drastic Repentance

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.’”

B. (:7-8) Condemnation of the Inquiring Idolaters

1. (:7) Divine Confrontation

“For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person.”

Leslie Allen: The appeal of v 6 is grounded in the reason of vv 7–8. The specific announcement of punishment elaborated in these verses was meant to serve as a deterrent upon the people at large and to make them think twice about their leaning toward pagan religion.

Charles Dyer: Verse 7 is identical to verse 4b except that in verse 7 the warning applied also to any alien living in Israel.

Anton Pearson: Note Ezekiel's care for the resident aliens (**22:7, 29; 47:22, 23**). The proselyte enjoyed equal rights under the law and faced equal penalty (**Lev 17:8, 10, 13; 20:2**).

2. (:8a) Divine Opposition and Judgment

“And I shall set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I shall cut him off from among My people.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh will make Israel an example of the fate of idolaters who fall into the hands of God. Ezekiel expresses this notion with two words: I will make him a sign and a proverb. The first, 'ôt, “sign,” denotes an event or object intended to communicate a message or to motivate behavior. It is usually associated with attesting signs, designed to legitimize a person or to promote faith in God. But when used negatively, an 'ôt serves as a warning to onlookers (e.g., **Num. 17:10 [Eng. 17:10]**). In this instance Israel's fate will provide evidence of God's disposition toward idolaters, and motivate observers to recognize his presence and activity. . .

He would make Israel a “proverb” (*māšāl*) and a byword (*šēnînâ*) among all peoples by cutting the nation off from the land and casting his temple out of his sight. The response

of passersby will be astonishment (*šāmēm*), hissing (*šāraq*), and puzzlement over Yahweh's treatment of his own covenant people.

3. (:8b) Recognition Refrain

“So you will know that I am the LORD.”

Daniel Block: The prospects for the people who have approached Ezekiel for a word from God are frightening. Not only has the bond between them and the land been severed; now they are threatened with an ultimate and final break with their God. Ironically, then they will finally acknowledge the person and presence of Yahweh. Still, the previous call for repentance has left the door open to a better fate. The doom of those who remain in Jerusalem is sealed, but if the exiles turn their faces toward Yahweh alone, and abandon their own forms of idolatry, they may escape his fury. They still have the choice—they may acknowledge Yahweh on his terms voluntarily now, or be forced to do so involuntarily on that great and terrible day.

C. (:9) Culpability of the False Prophets

“But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the LORD, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel.”

MacArthur: God will deceive (entice) a false prophet only in a qualified sense. When one willfully rejects His Word, He places a resulting cloud of darkness, or permits it to continue, hiding the truth so that the person is deceived by his own obstinate self-will. This fits with the same principle as when God give up Israel to evil statutes (**20:25, 26**), counsel that they insist on as they spurn His Word (**20:24, 26**). When people refuse the truth, He lets them seek after their own inclinations and gives them over to falsehood (**20:39**). This is the wrath of abandonment noted in **Ro 1:18-32** (cf. **1Ki 22:20-23; 2Th 2:11**).

Leslie Allen: A related case needed to be included in the ruling. What if a prophet gave a favorable response to such an offender? Human nature being what it is, a prophet might be misled into so doing, as one who “lets himself be induced by the wish to please, or by a calculated compromise ... treating his client's deadly crime as if it were a venial weakness” (**Eichrodt** 183).

Charles Dyer: The best illustration of Ezekiel's meaning is the story of God's letting false prophets deceive Ahab, to bring him to his death (**1 Kings 22:19-23**).

John Taylor: On the face of it, the lying prophets were producing words that they knew would please: they were prophesying ‘*out of their own minds*’. But in the deepest sense, it was the Lord who was responsible for the chain reaction which showed itself in such behaviour. They had succumbed to spiritual blindness and so the lies they uttered were all part of God's judgment upon them.

Feinberg: Just as God is impartial in His offers of grace, mercy and love, so is He no respecter of persons in judgment. Inquirer and false prophet would suffer the same punishment, for they were alike guilty. The responsibility was mutual. They would bear the punishment of their iniquity, that is, the Lord would allow them to be duped by the prophets from whom they sought smooth messages.

Anton Pearson: In ancient thought, secondary causes were often overlooked, and events attributed directly to the work of the Lord. See **Amos 3:6; Isa 45:7.**

G. R. Beasley-Murray: Some interpret the “*deception*” of a prophet by Yahweh as an instance of the OT overlooking of secondary causes: i.e. the deceived state of the prophet is due to his own perversion of conscience, but since the consequences of sin, equally with the moral law, are of God’s ordering, one may say that the deception is brought about by God. Cf. **Ezk. 3:20; 1 Ki 22:21f.**

D. (:10-11) Considerations of Divine Judgment

1. (:10) Same Judgment for the Idolater and the False Prophet

*“And they will bear the punishment of their iniquity;
as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be.”*

2. (:11a) Solidarity and Sanctification are the Behavior-Oriented Goals

*“in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me
and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions.”*

3. (:11b) Securing the Covenant Bond is the Ultimate Relationship Goal

*“Thus they will be My people,
and I shall be their God,’ declares the Lord God.”*

Peter Pett: God’s purpose behind all this, both in what He allowed, and in the judgment He brought on those who continued in sin and idolatry, was in the end for the sake of His true people. He was wooing them and teaching them lessons by His judgments so that they would learn their lesson and once and for all turn their back on idolatry and look to Him. Then He would be their God, and they would truly be His people. This in the end lay behind all the judgments pronounced by Ezekiel. In the end their aim was mercy on those who would respond.

Daniel Block: This verse serves not only to declare Yahweh’s purpose in his judgment, but also to offer a splendid ray of hope for the future. Although Yahweh must deal harshly with his people, his objectives are redemptive. The point is made with two negative statements and one positive declaration. First, Yahweh’s desire is for a people who will never stray from him again. The word *tā’â* derives from the realm of animal husbandry but is also applied to persons who are lost. Ethically it means to abandon the prescribed covenantal path. Second, he desires a nation that is cleansed from all of its rebellious acts (*pěša’îm*). These include the idolatry and the bloodshed that pollute them, as well as the general disregard for the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Third, Yahweh will renew the covenant bond. The covenant formula with

which this oracle concludes offers the brightest ray of hope. The rupture between deity and nation caused by Israel's sin and completed by its judgment will be reversed. The nation in exile will become the people of God once again. With the closing signatory formula, Yahweh places his imprimatur on the entire oracle as delivered by Ezekiel. The disaster is imminent and will not be revoked; but the future restoration of the nation is equally secure.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage teach that idolatry is essentially more a matter of the mind and heart than of just external behavior?
- 2) How is our present Christian culture tempted to adopt syncretistic mindsets and practices?
- 3) In what sense is God involved in the deception described in verse 9?
- 4) Why does God temper His messages of judgment with a call to repentance and glimmers of hope for the future?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: Idolatry was the standard method of religion in ancient times. Ancient peoples believed that any depiction of a thing somehow partook of the essence of that thing, no matter how crude or artificial the depiction might be. A picture of a tree contained part of the essence of the tree; a statue of a god contained part of the essence of that god. Where that statue was, the god was of necessity at least partly present. Anything offered to a god's statue was offered directly to the god.

This sort of thinking, now called prelogical, was nevertheless pervasive among ancient peoples. Moreover, along with idolatry went a whole system of beliefs and practices. Materialism, for example, was commonly a part of idolatry since idols were understood to want and accept any food or money offered to them and to be bound to repay the generous worshiper with prosperity. In reality, of course, the food or money went to the idol's priests, but the worshipers believed that the idol benefited and repaid in kind. Thus, in a general sense, idolatry was a system of serving one's own selfish interests by partaking in an appealing, ritualistic, but not genuine or true, religious practice.

This was what even the leaders of the exiled community in the early 580s were doing, and thus God through Ezekiel denounces their folly. The elders had probably come on the occasion described in these verses to consult Ezekiel or to ask him questions about

one of the prophecies (vv. 1, 3). While they were at his home, God, who “*looks on the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7), gave Ezekiel a message for them exposing their real motives and attitudes. The diagnosis: **idolatry**! The prophet had already reported to many of these same people about the abominable idolatry he had seen practiced by the community leaders in Jerusalem (11:25, cf. ch. 8). Now his own associates were found guilty of a form of the same violation. Such a sin risked God’s cutting off His word from them (v. 3). The Lord could not ignore this sort of abomination that their attitudes represented. He could not simply continue revealing Himself to those who were flirting with disobedience to a basic provision of His covenant (Ex. 20:4–5).

Iain Duguid: The people in exile are equally implicated in this half-heartedness. They may not have given in to the flagrant idolatry going on in Jerusalem, but there was a more subtle form of assault that had affected even those in exile with the prophet in Babylon. They found themselves living in a broken and fallen world, where their regular experience was of dislocation and disorientation, where things were falling apart, where the center could not hold, and where life did not seem to make sense. The temptation they faced was to turn to the idols of this world as a means of, if not making sense out of the world, at least of numbing the pain.

Those who feel abandoned by God find that the pull of seeking out other gods increases, other gods whom they think can deliver the sense of security and significance they seek. If the Lord cannot deliver, why not try Marduk or one of the other Babylonian gods? Their hearts are torn between two loyalties, and they are attracted by the blessings that the idols seem to promise, the greener grass they offer, the more powerful magic they seem to contain.

The result is that all of the exiles have, in their hearts, deserted the Lord for their idols (14:5). Such people—whether native-born Israelite or proselyte (14:7) -- should not expect to receive a word of divine guidance through the prophet. God is not deceived by the orthodoxy of their outward behavior, for he looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Instead, the Lord will answer them himself (Ezek. 14:7), by direct action rather than through a prophet. Do they want a word from the Lord? The Lord will demonstrate his attitude toward them by making them “*an example and a byword*” (14:8). Just as Lot’s wife has become a proverbial example of the dangers of looking back, so they too will become a “*byword*,” a proverbial warning of the dangers of divided loyalties.

The judgment with which they are threatened is being “*cut ... off from [the Lord’s] people*” (14:8). This punishment has often been interpreted as a form of excommunication; however, in view of the divine destruction threatened on a prophet in the following verse, the death penalty is more likely indicated here. In any case, it is doubtful that the people would have seen a big distinction between the two fates as we do. In either case, the sinner would be excised from the covenant community, from the realm of life, and sent out into the realm of death, like the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement.

A similar judgment would apply to any prophet who attempted to provide an oracle for them. There were clearly other prophets present in exile apart from Ezekiel, and the temptation to go shopping around for a more favorable word was significant. Yet any such word would be no true word from the Lord, but rather a deceiving word sent as a judgment on the compromising prophet and people alike (14:9). Those who sought false gods rather than the true God would find what they sought—lies in place of the truth. Those who attempted to counteract God’s will by speaking when he had not spoken would find that they were doing nothing other than God’s will, confirming the guilty ones in their guilt.

Yet the fact that they are unwittingly doing the sovereign will of God in no way exempts the prophet, as secondary cause, from responsibility for his own words. In **Deuteronomy 13:1–5** both elements are brought together: the will of the Lord to test the people (v. 3), and the will of the prophet to lead the people astray from the way of Yahweh (v. 5). If the people refuse to listen to God’s prophets who tell them the truth, the Lord will bring judgment on the people by giving them lying prophets, who will tell them what they want to hear. . .

Much of the counseling within the church of our day fails to recognize the key significance of the idolatries that remain within our hearts. On the one hand, there is a moralizing approach that focuses purely on the level of behavior. This approach says, “Your problem is that your anger (or lust, or worry, or whatever) is sin. Repent and change your behavior! If you would just do what is right, then good feelings will follow.” The problem with this approach is that in focusing on behavior it doesn’t go deep enough. It doesn’t recognize the reason for the behavior: the idols and false beliefs that are driving it. The reason why this particular person sins in this particular way is because there are idols and false beliefs in his or her life that say, “By doing this, you will gain what is really important and meaningful in life.”

On the other hand, there is a psychologizing approach to counseling that says, “Your basic problem is that you don’t see that God loves you and accepts you just as you are. If you could just feel good about yourself, right actions will follow.” This approach focuses on the feelings rather than the behavior, but still doesn’t go deep enough. It doesn’t recognize that behind the bad feelings lies an idolatry, a belief that “even if God loves me, yet while I don’t have this, I’m not a worthwhile person.” Both approaches fail to see the sin behind the sin, the fundamental issue of idolatry.

A better approach is to recognize that driving both our behaviors and our feelings are deep-seated heart idolatries. Our fundamental problem lies in looking to something besides God for our happiness. This is not a new observation. The church father **Tertullian** put it this way:

“The principle crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry. For, although each single fault retains its own proper feature, although it is destined to judgment under its own proper name also, yet it is marked off under the general account of

idolatry Thus it comes to pass, that in idolatry all crimes are detected and in all crimes idolatry.”

What does Tertullian mean by that? He goes on to explain that all murder is idolatry since the motive for killing is ultimately that something is loved more than God—yet in turn all idolatry is murder for it incurs one’s own death. Similarly all idolatry is also adultery because it is unfaithfulness to the truth and to God, while adultery is idolatry because it flows from the inordinate desire for a person or for a sensation, a desire stronger than our love for God and our desire to obey his law.

Idolatry, then, is simply the desire for something other than God at the center of our lives as our guiding star, the source of meaning in our life. As such, idolatry is the sin behind every sin, the life-lie that drives all of our choices and values. The object of that idolatry varies from person to person. There are probably as many different idols as there are human beings. However, the fact that we have idols is an inescapable truth. Our hearts are, in Calvin’s vivid image, factories that mass-produce idols.

Derek Thomas: Occasionally God is represented as leading people into some **delusions**. Speaking of false prophets, God says, *‘And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the Lord have enticed that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel. They will bear their guilt ...’* (14:9–10 cf. 1 Kings 22:22–23; 2 Chron. 18:21–22; Jer. 20:7).

Several matters come into focus.

1. God is never the author of sin

This principle must always be kept at the forefront of every discussion of providence and sin.

2. God’s providence is ‘the determinative principle for all human plans and works’

This passage in Ezekiel teaches us, so Calvin assures us, ‘that neither impostures nor deceptions arise without God’s permission’. If we find this difficult to grasp, he adds: *‘Soberly, therefore, and reverently must we judge of God’s works, and especially of his secret counsels.’*

3. It is not God himself who actually performs the deception

God, in his sovereign control of all things, *‘sends forth Satan to fill them with his lies’*. God himself cannot deceive: *‘God is not a man, that he should lie’* (Num. 23:19). *‘He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie ...’* (1 Sam. 15:29). *‘God is truthful’* (John 3:33; cf. Rom. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:13; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 1 John 1:5).

4. This is not a mere permission

In the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, God does not merely permit it to happen: *‘But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go’* (Exod. 4:21). The psalmist speaks of those whose *‘hearts he turned to hate his people’* (Ps. 105:25). Likewise God sends the Assyrians against Israel with the express command *‘to seize loot and snatch*

plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets' (**Isa. 10:6**). 'From this,' comments Calvin, 'it appears that they had been impelled by God's sure determination.' Thus God 'directs his voice to them but in order that they may become even more blind; he sets forth doctrine but so that they may grow even more stupid; he employs a remedy but so that they may not be healed.' Jesus indicated that his parables had a similar purpose (**Matt. 13:11**).

5. The sinner is still responsible for his sin

'*They will bear their guilt'* (**14:10**). God's use of means to execute his overall plan and purpose in no way reduces human responsibility. The prophets are never forced contrary to their inclination to deceive. 'However much obscurity there may be in the Word, there is still always enough light to convict the conscience of the wicked.' So why are these prophets not converted? Calvin cites Augustine and says, 'God could ... turn the will of evil men to good because he is almighty. Obviously he could. Why, then, does he not? Because he wills otherwise. Why he wills otherwise rests with him.'

David Thompson: What most people don't realize is that when false religions and false religious teachers flourish, it is a judgment of God. God can actually orchestrate it so that His own people can be dominated by false religion. A land that was once blessed by God can become a land cursed by God. That is true for Israel and that is true for us. .

So here is what we have here. We have elders who are totally committed to idolatrous things with hearts full of evil and lives involved in depravity going to God presenting to Ezekiel the idea that we want to inquire data from God. We want God to speak to us and bless us. Well Ezekiel was about to speak to them all right, but he would give them another message. What God says is this:

BECAUSE MY OWN PEOPLE, INCLUDING MY LEADERS, ARE
CONSISTENTLY INVOLVED IN IDOLATRY AND INIQUITY, I WILL SEND
FALSE PROPHETS AND DESTRUCTIVE JUDGMENT.

Because of abominable sin that is not faced, God will send deceptive and destructive prophets to lead people away from truth. **14:4-11**

There are two main messages that God gives to Ezekiel.

Message #1 - If My people do not turn from their sin to Me, I will block them from having a relationship with Me and will cause them to be estranged from Me. **14:4-6**

God is saying that when any Israelite comes to Him with idolatry in his heart, God will deal with it. God says I will answer, but it will not be pleasant and the reason I will answer in such a negative way is to recapture the hearts of My people. It is amazing that in **verse 6** God offers His grace. He says to Israel repent and turn away from idols and abominations. If any nation or person wants a relationship with God in which He will answer and bless them that is what they must do. In any dispensation this is true.

Message #2 - If My people put idols before Me, I will set My face against them and cause deceptive prophets to lead them to destruction. **14:7-11**

There are thousands of churches today that are not telling God's people the truth. There are thousands of churches to which people go who are not really interested in a life that puts God first. Ministers are telling them that they are okay in their sin and that God loves them. What those people do not realize is that they are heading to serious judgment and the false teachers are being used by God to send them there.

TEXT: Ezekiel 14:12-23

TITLE: IMPOSSIBILITY OF JERUSALEM SURVIVING DIVINE PUNISHMENT

BIG IDEA:

JERUSALEM CANNOT ESCAPE JUDGMENT EVEN IF THE MOST RIGHTEOUS MEN INTERCEDE

INTRODUCTION:

Context: God promising to bring 4 judgments upon Jerusalem – even the intercession of the most godly men could not avert that judgment; yet we want to learn from the example of these 3 men whom God picked out to emphasize their loyalty and righteousness. Remember that the context in **Ezekiel 14** is not that of personal salvation – but we can speak to that by way of application:

EVEN THE MOST RIGHTEOUS OF MEN CANNOT JUSTIFY THE UNGODLY (BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN SIN) – ONLY THE PERFECT SON OF GOD CAN JUSTIFY THE UNGODLY

- All of us are bankrupt of any righteousness of our own in God's sight that would justify us

“there is none righteous, no not one”

“all of our righteousness is as filthy rags”

- We need the righteousness of God applied to our account by personal faith
- You cannot rely on any godly association with family, friends, churches, prayers, etc.

- Jesus Christ alone is our righteousness – able to justify the ungodly

- Having received God's righteousness we can now perform good works that glorify God – We should now be examples of loyalty and righteousness to others

Leslie Allen: How could one entertain theological rationalizations of deliverance in a situation that pointed so clearly to God's punitive hand at work?

Douglas Stuart: In ancient Israel, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, it was apparently rather common for people to think in terms both of guilt by association and righteousness by association. Ezekiel already had been called on to denounce guilt by association and to proclaim the principle of individual responsibility (**3:16–21**, etc.). Now he must expose the parallel folly of righteousness by association. . . They presumed that because Jerusalem and Judah still had in them good people (and they surely did in the person of such prophets as Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Obadiah, for example, or such godly people as Baruch, Jeremiah's disciple and supporter) that God would never bring Himself to give the nation totally over to its enemies. Many probably had already concluded that the exile of 598 b.c. was the worst thing that would happen to Judah and that the little state had nowhere to go but up from now on.

Had they considered the stories of people like Noah and Job more sensibly, they might not have been so sanguine about Judah's chances. After all, Noah's righteousness did not prevent the extinction of his generation. And Job's goodness covered not even his close associates (**Job 42:7–8**), let alone his original family. Abraham's intercession for Sodom proved ultimately futile, as well. And the righteousness of Josiah could not sustain Judah beyond the time of his own death.

At any rate, the passage effectively drums in the point that Judah was beyond saving in the early 580s.

Iain Duguid: This section of Ezekiel's prophecy focuses on the **inevitability** and **justice** of God's decision to destroy Jerusalem. The oracle begins by introducing a hypothetical country that is unfaithful to the Lord. The implied universality of the principle is an important element supporting the justice of God's actions: The rules are the same for any nation and have not been applied unfairly to Israel. However, behind the implied universality, the actual reference is clearly to Israel, for the phrase "*by being unfaithful*" (**Ezek. 14:13**) refers elsewhere to a breach of a covenant relationship. This may be through marital infidelity (**Num. 5:12, 27**), misappropriation of an object belonging by rights to the Lord, as in the case of Achan (**Josh. 7:1**), or other action that violates the covenant between God and his people (e.g., **Lev. 26:40; Ezek. 17:20**). Such a breach of the covenant inevitably brings on the offending nation (i.e., Israel) the curses attached to the covenant in **Leviticus 26**.

I. (:12-20) INEVITABILITY OF JERUSALEM'S DEMISE – FOUR ARGUMENTS BASED ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT TO PROVE JERUSALEM CANNOT SURVIVE

A. (:12-14) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Famine

"Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

Leslie Allen: In the light of the contemporary references in the second half of the oracle, vv 21–23, the intention is to dismiss an expectation that the people of Jerusalem would survive the crisis that threatened them. The argument is presented four times in parallel, slightly different terms, like four heavy hammer blows that crash down on a precious object and smash it to smithereens. This argument is not directed specifically at the historical situation; it stands detached and relates to a hypothetical case that is transparent enough to let the exiles to whom the message is addressed (vv 22–23) realize its import. Each of the four presentations of the case has three sections:

- a basic **hypothesis** of (human sin and) divine judgment,
- **development** of the hypothesis,
- and a **categorical conclusion** that in three out of the four instances is emphasized by a divine oath (**Schulz, Todesrecht 180**).

1. (:13) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Famine

"Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness,

*and I stretch out My hand against it,
destroy its supply of bread,
send famine against it,
and cut off from it both man and beast,”*

2. (:14) Impossibility of Deliverance --

Three OT Examples of Loyalty and Righteousness –

Even the Most Righteous of Men Cannot Justify the Ungodly

*“even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst,
by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,’ declares
the Lord God.”*

What can we learn from these three godly examples?

NOAH – LOYALTY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS WHILE PROCLAIMING GOD’S COMING JUDGMENT TO AN UNGODLY WORLD AND GRACIOUS OFFER OF DELIVERANCE – BUT NO ESCAPE APART FROM REPENTANCE

a. Danger He Faced = Wrath of God poured out in worldwide flood; Pressure and Persecution from a corrupt and wicked society

b. Deliverance God Provided = Ark of Salvation

- exclusive path of salvation
- urgency to enter the ark before God shut the door

c. Devotion to God in Loyalty and Righteousness Exemplified

- fellowship with God
- family leadership
- bold testimony – continued to preach to those around him
- hero of faith – took a long time to prepare the ark; had never seen a worldwide flood
- hard worker – labored for many years to build the ark

Gen. 6:8-9 *“Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord . . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.”*

7:1 *“for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.”*

Heb 11:7 *“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”*

2 Pet 2:5 *“and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly”*

DANIEL – LOYALTY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS WHILE FAITHFULLY MAINTAINING A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUE GOD IN THE MIDST OF THE PRESSURES OF EXILE IN A FOREIGN LAND

a. Danger He Faced = Lion's Den for unwillingness to worship the king; Envy and Jealousy of king's counselors who were trying to incriminate Daniel

b. Deliverance God Provided = Shut the mouths of the lions

c. Devotion to God in Loyalty and Righteousness Exemplified

- Maintained personal physical discipline – did not eat the unhealthy foods
- Maintained personal spiritual discipline -- Practiced daily devotions – prayer and worship
- Maintained walk of separation from sin and idolatry – No compromise
- Grew in Wisdom and Knowledge
- Blessed with Administrative Skill

Known for his wisdom (**Ezek. 28:3**) “*you are wiser than Daniel*”

Dan. 6:26-28 “*I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. And His dominion will be forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*”

JOB – LOYALTY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS WHILE ENDURING THE EXTREMES OF SEVERE SUFFERING THAT MIGHT SEEM INCONSISTENT WITH THE GOODNESS AND FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

a. Danger He Faced = Direct Attack by Satan to try to make him renounce his allegiance to God; Coupled with unwise counsel from his wife and friends who wrongly interpreted his sufferings as evidence of sin and God's displeasure

b. Deliverance God Provided = Endurance and Subsequent Blessing

c. Devotion to God in Loyalty and Righteousness Exemplified

Job 1:1 “*that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil*”

(**1:8** – testimony of God to Satan about Job's character)

1:21-22 “*Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*”

2:3 “*And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.*”

2:10 “*Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?*”
34:5 “*For Job has said, ‘I am righteous, but God has taken away my right’*”

James 5:10-11 “*As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.*”

Leslie Allen: The insistence that such moral heroes could save no one but themselves seems to be attacking a counterclaim made by the exiles, appealing to a solidarity of virtue that could outweigh the liability of sinners to punishment. Abraham’s plea that Sodom be spared if fifty or even ten good persons could be found there (**Gen 18:22–33**) presupposes such a beneficial solidarity, and the Decalogue (**Exod 20:5**; cf. **34:7**; **Deut 5:10**) reinforces it. Here the oracle simply rules such a possibility out of court, as inappropriate at this juncture of Israel’s history. The ensuing verses repeat the basic “no” again and again. Ezekiel’s message is that “there are no party tickets to deliverance” (**Taylor** 128). In God’s name the prophet sized up the situation and categorically denied such a soft option; in the three remaining cases the denial is reinforced by a divine oath. A straight and inevitable line led from sin to punishment, and no reprieve was possible for Jerusalem and Judah. The political inevitability of the fall of Jerusalem was matched by a theological inevitability. Discussion of other possibilities was a monstrous irrelevance, like that of the theological society in hell to which the bishop belonged in **C. S. Lewis’s** *The Great Divorce*.

B. (:15-16) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Wild Beasts

1. (:15) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Wild Beasts

“If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts,”

2. (:16) Impossibility of Deliverance

“‘though these three men were in its midst, as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate.’”

C. (:17-18) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by the Sword

1. (:17) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Famine

“Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’”

2. (:18) Impossibility of Deliverance

“‘even though these three men were in its midst, as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered.’”

D. (:19-20) Argument Based on Divine Punishment by Plague

1. (:19) Illustration of Divine Punishment by Plague

“Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it, to cut off man and beast from it,”

2. (:20) Impossibility of Deliverance

“even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.’”

II. (:21-23) JUSTICE OF JERUSALEM’S DEMISE – JUSTIFICATION OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM

A. (:21) Unleashing of a Variety of Divine Judgments

“For thus says the Lord God, ‘How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!’”

Iain Duguid: The repetition of the four cases in which the sentence and the outcome are the same, while only the form of the judgment is different, underlines the inevitability of Jerusalem’s destruction (14:21). Her situation is worse on two counts than that of the hypothetical land of 14:12–20. Not only does she lack such righteous men as Noah, Daniel, and Job, but in addition she is faced with not one kind of judgment but all four at once. The statement *“How much worse will it be ...”* is obvious; the inevitable outcome to be expected is that none can survive.

B. (:22a-23a) Unrighteous Survivors Prove the Lord’s Case

“Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it. Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions,”

Iain Duguid: Yet the next verse introduces a surprising twist. Indeed, unexpectedly, some will survive the catastrophe. There will be sons and daughters brought out of the ruins (14:22). Their survival, however, is not due to their own righteousness or to the righteousness of relatives imputed to them. Indeed, they are not *“saved”* (*nāṣal*) from the city but *“brought out”* (Hophal of *yāṣā’*) from it, a term that focuses on them as prisoners of war rather than trophies of grace. The purpose of saving this remnant is not for their sake but to *“console”* those already in exile by allowing them to see the extent of Jerusalem’s depravity. When the exiles see the impious behavior of this *“unspiritual remnant,”* then they will know that the Lord has not acted without cause (14:23). **Justice** will not only be done; it will be seen to have been done. Every mouth will be stopped by a recognition of just how bad Jerusalem had become, and therefore how clearly God had no other choice but to act.

John Taylor: At first sight it is hard to imagine how the sight of evil men suffering punishment will *console* you (av *comfort*). The word is an unusual one. At its heart, the Hebrew root *nāḥam* means ‘to breathe a deep breath’. In the form in which it is used here, traditionally translated by the words ‘comfort’ and ‘console’, it means to soothe, to calm down, to cause someone to breathe slowly and deeply. Such comfort is imparted by bringing good news (as in **Isa. 40:1**) or by giving adequate reasons to explain what would otherwise be disturbing (as here). As **Snaith** has pointed out, the word in Hebrew means not to comfort in sorrow, but to comfort out of sorrow, i.e. to bring new facts to bear upon a situation so that the hearer’s attitude of mind is changed. It is with this very purpose in view that the unrighteous survivors of Jerusalem’s overthrow were to be allowed to escape. Only then would the embittered exiles see the justice of it all.

C. (:23b) Ultimate Vindication for the Lord

*“for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it,”
declares the Lord God.”*

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel, like Jeremiah (**Jer 44:27ff.**) and Amos (**Amos 9:8, 11–15**), spoke of total annihilation but also predicted the survival of a small remnant (**Ezek 14:22**). The appearance of the remnant would be a cause for consolation (cf. **11:14–20** in response to **11:13**). The comfort would not come “*in the midst*” of judgment but “*out of*” (v. **22**) or “*by*” it. Encountering the wickedness of those who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 b.c. would enable the exiles to see that judgment had been deserved and necessary to produce a righteous remnant (v. **23**). The older captives would take comfort in this fact since it would teach them that by loyalty to him they could escape a similar fate. Comfort would come only after judgment had been fully exercised.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why were the exiles so concerned about the fate of those remaining in Jerusalem?
- 2) What do each of these three OT figures add to the argument that Ezekiel is making?
- 3) How does this account by way of application magnify the doctrine of justification by faith?
- 4) How does a small surviving remnant help to vindicate the Lord’s justice in judging Jerusalem?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: The two oracles of **14:12–23** and **15:1–8**, each introduced by its own messenger-reception formula, belong together as a literary unit. **Mosis** (263 n. 155), **Fuhs** (79), and **Brownlee** (214) have drawn attention to their common terminological framework, set in a **chiastic order**: the infringing of Yahweh's rights (מעל מעל) at **14:13; 15:8b** and the desolation of the land at **14:15–16; 15:8a**. This deliberate inclusion brackets together two messages that at their conclusions are both concerned with the fate of the residents of Jerusalem (**14:21–23; 15:6–8**). That the oracles originated separately and were subsequently joined at a literary stage is indicated by the different focus, on survival in the first and on extermination in the second, as in the two oracles of **chap. 6**.

Daniel Block: Two principal lessons on the ways of God stand out from this text. First, within the Lord's economy **each person is responsible for his or her own welfare**. Children may not bank on the piety of parents for salvation; nor may a community find a lightning rod against divine fury in the presence of one or two righteous persons. However, there is hope and mercy for all who are righteous by God's standards, even for those who appear to be outsiders to the community of faith.

Second, **the Lord is just in all his ways**. The carnal mind struggles with the justice of God in the face of human tragedy, but the eyes of faith will recognize behind all tragedies the hand of God. When all the evidence is in, his people will recognize that he does not operate arbitrarily or without cause. His actions are always according to his immutable principles of justice and righteousness. Accordingly, if people experience his wrath, it is because the wages of sin is death.

John Taylor: These verses are an answer to the objections of those who say that God will not be as ruthless in his judgment as prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel were saying he would be, because he cannot afford to ignore the righteousness of some of his godly people. To do so, they claim, would make God unjust. God would surely spare his people out of respect for the prayers and the piety of the minority of faithful men who staked their all upon him. This attitude is nothing less than using the saints as an insurance policy to cover the sinners. It has been a human failing in every generation. A community is a trifle embarrassed to have a saint among its number, but it derives a sense of security from his presence, rather like the possession of a religious lucky charm. A family with no pretensions to spirituality is often glad to have a minister of religion in one of its branches, however far removed. Ezekiel's message is that there are no party tickets to deliverance. The righteous man saves no-one but himself.

The message is worked out in two stages. First, in **verses 12–20**, the **general principle** is stated that if and when God sends one of his four judgments (famine, evil beasts, the sword and pestilence) upon a land, not even the presence of three super-saints like Noah, Daniel and Job will save anyone but themselves. Then **this principle is applied**, in **verses 21–23**, to Jerusalem. Much less will the righteous be able to save the wicked when God's judgment falls upon the holy city. But if a handful of survivors are spared,

it will not be that they are righteous and have saved themselves. They will be allowed to go away into exile so that those already there may see their ways and their doings (22) and realize how utterly justified God was in his judgments.

Ralph Alexander: As the elders listened to Ezekiel's call to repentance (vv. 1-11), some might have thought of Abraham's request (Gen 18) that God deliver Sodom if a sufficient number of righteous people were found there. Perhaps the Lord would do the same now for Jerusalem. Could his impending judgment on Jerusalem be diverted if some well-known righteous man or men could be found? Some immediately thought of Daniel, their contemporary, who was ministering before Nebuchadnezzar in the city of Babylon.

God's reply was negative. Jerusalem was more culpable than Sodom. . .

God would send his four severe judgments (sword, famine, beasts, and diseases) against Jerusalem. But to vindicate his justice before the exiles, the Lord would spare a small remnant of unrepentant Hebrews and send them into exile in Babylonia (v. 22). . . When these unrighteous people would go into exile in Babylonia, the exiles already in Babylonia would observe their deeds and see how wicked that Judeans had become. Through this the exiles would be consoled that God was perfectly just in his judgment on Jerusalem (vv. 22-23). As the exiles saw that the Judge of all the earth did right (Gen 18:25), they would be comforted in their sorrow over what had happened to Jerusalem.

Charles Dyer: Some have felt that the "*conduct and actions*" Ezekiel was referring to were the righteous deeds of this remnant which prompted God to spare them. But Ezekiel was probably referring to the wicked ways of the captives. The word for "*conduct*" (*derek*) was used 35 times in Ezekiel's book to refer to the people's evil actions (cf. 3:18-19; 7:3-4, 8-9, 27; 11:21; 13:22; 14:22-23; 16:27, 43, 47 [twice], 61; 18:23, 25, 29-30; 20:30, 43-44; 22:31; 23:31; 24:14; 33:8-9, 11, 17, 20; 36:17, 19, 31-32). The word for "*actions*" (*'alilot*) is used 8 times in the book to refer to the sinful deeds of Israel (14:22-23; 20:43-44; 21:24; 24:14; 36:7, 19). These two words occur together 7 times, and in every occurrence the words convey sinful actions.

TEXT: Ezekiel 15:1-8

TITLE: PARABLE OF THE WORTHLESS VINE

BIG IDEA:

JERUSALEM AS THE WORTHLESS VINE CAN'T ESCAPE THE CONSUMING FIRE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: This is the first in a series of three parables designed to impress on the overly optimistic exiles that there was no possibility that Jerusalem would escape destruction (cf. **chs. 16—17**).

David Thompson: In the next three chapters, God has Ezekiel tell His people three parables designed to communicate the truth to them in a pictorial way:

- 1) The parable of the unfruitful vine (**15:1-8**);
- 2) The parable of the unfaithful wife (**16:1-63**);
- 3) The parable of the two eagles (**17:1-10**).

These parables are not nice little earthly stories designed to warm the heart. These are parables designed to warn and inform a rebellious people that they are useless, immoral and doomed.

This parable communicates a very simple message – but one that the Jewish exiles have been resisting. Despite all of her covenant privileges, Jerusalem is headed for certain and imminent destruction. God's hand of judgment will not be removed and the pagan forces will return to burn the city and finish the deportation program. This judgment is deserved and inescapable.

Block: This oracle disputes Israel's false claims to security based on their being the royal vine, the privileged people of God.

Peter Pett: In the past Israel was likened to a vine that should have been fruitful, but sadly revealed itself as a wild vine (see **Genesis 49:22; Deuteronomy 32:32; Psalms 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1**). This is the end of the process.

Lamar Cooper: Jerusalem was the vine that God had consigned to the "fire" of judgment, a reference to the coming Babylonian destruction. While Jerusalem was only charred in the earlier invasions, the coming judgment was to be decisive. The city and its people would be severely punished for their unfaithfulness and treachery (**v. 8**).

John Taylor: Implicit in the parable is the prophet's response to those who imagined that Israel, as the vine of the Lord's planting, was indestructible. Cut down she might be, they thought, but it was only a temporary setback: before long the stock would shoot

again and Israel would flourish as she had done in days gone by. Such naive optimism was the object of Ezekiel's incessant condemnation. Israel and Jerusalem were finished.

Leslie Allen: As **Wevers** (117) has stated, though he still wrongly calls the vine's uselessness the point of the analogy and the burning an incidental element (118), "The real comparison is: as the wood of the vine is good for nothing but fuel, so Jerusalem is fit only for the fire." It is debatable what links the prophet's analogy has with the regular covenant metaphor of Israel as the grapevine, which earlier prophets used negatively, in criticism of the nation's purely economic success (**Hos 10:1**) or of its poor vintage in terms of social ethics (**Isa 5:1-7**) or of its religious degeneration (**Jer 2:21**). Here nothing is said about fruit or lack of it. Instead, the focus is on a stage after the grapes have been harvested, when the branches that have fruited are pruned away. The most one can say is that the present analogy is ironic, in its concentration on a negative element of viticulture that did not otherwise feature in theological metaphors. The precise focus is on Yahweh's purpose for the residents of Jerusalem, who stand as representatives of the people of God. A parallel is drawn between the grapevine prunings and the role destined for the capital.

I. (:1-5) ALLEGORY OF THE WORTHLESS VINE

"Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

A. (:2-3) Relative Intrinsic Worthlessness of Vines = Not Good for Much Except Burning

1. (:2) Compared to the Superior Wood from Other Trees

"Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?"

David Guzik: It's interesting to consider that nowhere in **Ezekiel 15** is there mention of *fruit*, either in the presence or absence of it. This was a dramatic way Ezekiel communicated that at this point in Israel's history, there was absolutely no fruit to speak of. It was a non-issue.

2. (:3) Compared to its Lack of Utility

"Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?"

Feinberg: Because the vine is crooked, it cannot be used for building. Because it burns so rapidly, it is of little value for fuel. Because it is soft, it cannot be employed where anything needs to hang on it.

B. (:4-5) Reduced Value After Burning = Good for Nothing

1. (:4) Combined Fires Degrade its Value

"If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends, and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?"

David Thompson: So it is with Israel. The whole nation was charred by sin and not useful for anything. The image of being burned at both ends and in the middle is an image of total judgment throughout the entire Promised Land. God’s judgment would hit at both ends and also in the middle. No one would be unscathed.

Douglas Stuart: Northern Israel was already “burned up” by the Assyrian invasion and exile of 722 b.c. Most of Judah and many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were “burned up” by the Babylonian invasion and exile of 598 b.c., the one in which Ezekiel had been taken. What was left in Jerusalem could be compared with a mostly burned grapevine. If an unburned vine has no use, a mostly burned one certainly has none (v. 5). Jerusalem is not only like a grapevine destined for fire (v. 6) but like a charred portion of a vine that did not get completely consumed in the first fire (598 b.c.) but will be consumed totally when thrown into a second fire (586 b.c.), that is, the second Babylonian invasion and exile. In this manner God will have rejected His people (“*set My face against them*”) because of their unfaithfulness (v. 7) as manifested in the many evils identified in earlier chapters of the book.

2. (:5) Consuming Fire Eliminates any Possible Utility

“Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything.

How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!”

II. (:6-8) APPLICATION TO FIERY JUDGMENT UPON JERUSALEM

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:6-7a) Divine Decision to Consume Jerusalem with Fiery Judgment is Final

1. (:6) Jerusalem Destined to be the Fuel for God’s Fiery Judgment

*“As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest,
which I have given to the fire for fuel,
so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;”*

2. (:7a) No Possibility of Escape

“and I set My face against them.

Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them.”

Alexander: Just as the vine was unsuitable for anything but burning, so Israel was only suitable for the burning fire of God's judgment.

David Guzik: In the strongest terms, God promised to oppose the people of Jerusalem with His very presence.

B. (:7b) Divine Vindication for Unleashing Wrath

*“Then you will know that I am the LORD,
when I set My face against them.”*

Daniel Block: According to this verse, Yahweh’s hostility toward Jerusalem has reached its limit. He must pour out his fury on the city. As in **14:22–23**, the survivors may not treat their escape as a sign of his goodwill. His face is set against them as well, and the fire of his fury will inevitably catch up with them and consume them. The escapees will continue their apostasy, and Yahweh’s wrath will continue to hound them. The concluding recognition formula declares that when this happens, the present exiles will recognize in the destruction of Jerusalem a manifestation of Yahweh, who has set his face against his own people.

C. (:8) Desolation Due to the Nation’s Persistent Unfaithfulness

“Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,” declares the Lord God.”

Iain Duguid: **Ezekiel 15** is a brief parable, a pictorial story with a sting in the tail; the interpretation of the parable that the prophet adds develops the message of **chapter 14** concerning the **inevitability** of Jerusalem’s destruction. The link with the preceding section is apparent in the concluding verse (**15:8**), which picks up the idea of a land acting unfaithfully (*mā’al ma’al*; **14:13**), that is, breaching the covenant relationship, and consequently becoming desolate (*šemāmâ*; **14:16**). This acts as a kind of *inclusio*, rounding off this section (**14:12–15:8**) with its focus on Jerusalem’s forthcoming annihilation.

Feinberg: It is clear from **Matthew 21:33–41** and other passages that God desires fruit. This is spiritual fruit, fruit of the spiritual life. Instead, God finds sour grapes or none at all. Unless men come into vital relationship with the true vine [cf. **John 15:1**], there can be no fruit. The vital link must be formed by faith.

Poole: Not one single trespass, but they have been so perpetually trespassing that it seemed a continued act, and all done with greatest aggravation.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you summarize the main point of this parable?
- 2) What does the previous context in **Chap. 14** contribute to our understanding of the interpretation of this parable?
- 3) If it is such a devastating thing for God to set His face against someone, how much more a blessing to those who are enjoying God’s favor?
- 4) How does this imagery of judgment by fire act as a foretaste of end times judgment by God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: These three “parables” answered the complaints of the people that God had rejected His people and was breaking His own covenant. False prophets in both Jerusalem and Babylon were building up the confidence of the people by telling them that the Lord would never allow Jerusalem and the temple to fall into the defiled hands of the Gentiles (**Jer. 29:20-32**). After all, Israel was Jehovah’s special vine, planted by Him in the Promised Land. The nation was married to Jehovah in a divine covenant, and He would never divorce her. But even more, didn’t the Lord promise David an endless dynasty? (**2 Sam. 7**) The Davidic dynasty was like a tall sturdy cedar tree that could never be felled by the Gentiles. Ezekiel used these same three images to teach the nation that the Lord was judging His people because He did have these special relationships to them! Privilege brings responsibility, and responsibility brings accountability.

David Thompson: Asaph in **Psalm 80:8-12** speaks of Israel as the vine and God protecting and blessing her. Most people believed they could live life their way and indulge in anything they so desired and be fully blessed by God. So God raised up Ezekiel to tell them no you aren’t right with God and you are heading to serious consequences.

GOD GIVES EZEKIEL A PARABLE OF THE VINE TO SHOW ISRAEL THAT SHE IS FRUITLESS AND USELESS AND HEADING TO JUDGMENT.

Now one thing we will observe from this parable is that God will interpret it. This is not a license to allegorically or metaphorically interpret the Bible. If in fact it is a parable or an allegory, the text typically reveals it and often reveals the interpretation of it. . .

The vine metaphor is a metaphor often used of Israel (i.e. **Hosea 10:1**). Israel should have been a nation blessed of God. She should have been the most productive fruit-producing nation in the world. She should have been drawing her life from God and the Word of God. Had she done that she would have been fruitful. But because of her rebellion and sin, she is anything but that. . .

Several Applications we may make from this chapter:

- 1) The purpose of God judging His people is so that they will know He is God and respond to Him.
- 2) Whatever God does in judgment is always just and right.
- 3) Religious frauds make a living telling people what they want to hear, not what God’s Word actually says.

- 4) Persistent Unfaithfulness will catch up to a person because God will cause them to reap what they have sown.
- 5) It was false religious leaders who led God's people away from truth and into judgment.
- 6) God gives His people time to turn from their rebellion and if they refuse, He will set His face against them.

Douglas Stuart: The allegory thus functions as a prediction of desolation, fulfilling the desolation curses of the Mosaic covenant (**Lev. 26:32–35, 43; Deut. 29:23**). It had a particularly literal fulfillment of a sort as well in that the invading Babylonians practiced a scorched earth policy, burning whatever they could to destroy their enemy's possessions, especially within their cities (**2 Chr. 36:10**). Since such burning of cities had been common since the time of the Israelite invasion of Canaan in Joshua's day (e.g., **Josh. 6:24; 8:19; 11:11**), few in Ezekiel's audience could have missed an allusion to Jerusalem in the allegory of the vine. Jerusalem's full desolation was indeed near.

Iain Duguid: Yet does Ezekiel's message not also invite the hearer to ask the question: "If those remaining in the land are the prunings, is there still a true vine, a real Israel, somewhere else—perhaps even among the exiles?" This fits with Ezekiel's insistence in **Ezekiel 11** that God's presence is no longer in Jerusalem but among the exiles. In contrast to the insistence of those left in the land that they were the choice portion, chosen to inherit the land (**11:3, 15**), they are actually the part destined for burning, while the remnant exists among those in exile (**11:7–12, 15–16**).

Daniel Block: Although the burden of this oracle is to reinforce the message of **14:12–23**, two specific implications of the metaphor deserve notice.

First, the claim to divine election is no substitute for covenant faithfulness. This oracle disputes Israel's false claims to security based on their being the royal vine, the privileged people of God. However, they must respond to the call to this high role with willing obedience to the divine King who has called them to himself. Grace places high demands on its recipients, and unless one matches one's claims with adherence to his will, one may well wake up one day to the reality that far from being his or her protector and patron, God has actually become the adversary.

Second, the judgment visited upon those who do not match profession with faithfulness is severe. In obvious dependence on this text, Jesus warns his disciples of the fate of useless branches: "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. ... Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned*" (**John 15:1–2a, 6**, NRSV). The call to vine status is a call to bearing the fruit of obedience to the covenant Lord (cf. **John 15:8–17**).

Derek Thomas: A gigantic golden vine decorated the temple gates and had grape clusters over six feet long. It was a reminder that Israel was the true vine that God had taken out of Egypt and planted in a choice land (**Ps. 80:8–14; Isa. 3:14; 5:1–7**). No fewer than five parables of Jesus relate to the figure of a vine: the fig in the vineyard (**Luke 13:6–9**); the labourers in the vineyard (**Matt. 20:1–16**); new wine in old wineskins (**Matt. 9:17**); the two sons (**Matt. 21:28–32**); and the wicked tenants (**Matt. 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–11; Luke 20:9–18**). Of even greater significance is Jesus' own allusion to himself as the true vine (**John 15:1–7**). Despite the cultivation Israel had received as God's vine, they had produced only bitter fruit and were now fit only to be cut down and burned (**John 15:6**).

Ezekiel puts it even more bluntly. Instead of comparing Israel to the grapes themselves, he points out the wood of the vine. Apart from the fact that it is not producing any fruit, the vine itself has no value except for firewood, and even then its value is limited (**15:4**). Following the devastation of the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 722 B.C. and the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 605 and 598 B.C., 'Israel' was already similar to a piece of charred wood (**15:5**). If the wood of a vine is too pliable even to be made into a peg (**15:3**), a half-burnt piece of vine has no use whatsoever. Soon the fire will rekindle (in the third Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) and the rest of the wood will be consumed (**15:7**). The allegory (for the use of the word 'allegory', see **17:2**) was particularly apt for the Babylonians did practise a scorched-earth policy, burning everything in the city once it had been plundered of its treasures (**2 Chron. 36:19**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 16:1-63

TITLE: ROLLER COASTER STORY OF UNFAITHFUL JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:

DESPITE UNPRECEDENTED ABOMINATIONS, PRIVILEGED BUT UNFAITHFUL JERUSALEM WILL BE RESTORED TO COVENANT SECURITY AFTER APPROPRIATE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

The guilt of Jerusalem is set against the backdrop of her privileged adoption as God's chosen nation. The metaphor of unfaithful harlotry is contrasted with the faithfulness of God in establishing a covenant relationship and exalting Jerusalem to royal status. The severity of the abominations committed by Jerusalem surpass those committed by Samaria and Sodom. Appropriate judgment must be rendered as Jerusalem bears her shame and disgrace. However, the story does not end there. God will eventually restore Jerusalem and graciously forgive her under the blessings of the New Covenant.

Lamar Cooper: This chapter is the longest single prophetic message in the Book of Ezekiel, sixty-three verses, beginning with the revelation formula in **16:1**. It follows logically after the declaration of uselessness and consequent judgment in chap. 15, since it graphically portrays the cause for Yahweh's anger. The vine had not just failed to produce good fruit; it had produced vile, disgusting fruit. This prophetic oracle is a parable about a despised orphan who became the wife of the king, then gave away all his gifts to become a harlot. A figurative biography of Israel, it is a parable about grace and ingratitude, of God's love spurned and his riches squandered. As such, it is reminiscent of the story of Hosea and Gomer (**Hos 1-3**). The chapter has six divisions:

- the orphan who became a queen (**16:1-14**);
- the queen who became a harlot (**16:15-34**);
- the harlot who became a convict (**16:35-43**);
- the convict who became a proverb (**16:44-52**);
- the convict and her companions who repented (**16:53-58**);
- and the convict who was saved, cleansed, and restored (**16:59-63**).

Douglas Stuart: Prostitution (**harlotry**) is the most frequent metaphor in the allegory, and by it Jerusalem's unfaithfulness to the Lord is compared to a prostitute's unfaithfulness, which of course occurs repeatedly and over a long term. Another common metaphor in the allegory is that of **nakedness**, and not just here, but often in the prophetic books. "*Naked*" and "*exile*" are basically the same word in Hebrew. Exile means exposing, taking away from protection or covering, and that also is what nakedness is, so the idea of nakedness became for the prophets a common way of talking about the coming exile.

Constable: It carries forward the guilt of Jerusalem described in the preceding chapter. In form it is a *rib* (lawsuit) oracle. God's chosen people were not only a vine that was

good for nothing (ch. 15), but they had produced disgusting fruit (**ch. 16**). The Lord compared Jerusalem (a synecdoche for Israel) to a despised orphan who had become the beautiful wife of a king but had abandoned her privileges to become an insatiable prostitute (cf. **Hos. 1—3**).

Feinberg: Here, in the longest chapter in Ezekiel, the story is told in detail in all its sordid, loathsome character, so that God's infinite abhorrence of Israel's sin may be clearly seen. According to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the Mishna, the chapter was not to be read nor translated in public.

I. (:1-14) RAGS TO RICHES – JERUSALEM REJECTED AT BIRTH BUT ELEVATED TO BEAUTIFUL QUEEN

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

MacArthur: in **16:4-14** we see the history of Israel from her conception to her glory under Solomon.

A. (:2-5) Unwanted and Uncared for at Birth

1. (:2) Tone of Indictment

“Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations,”

2. (:3-5) Background of Paganism and Abandonment

a. (:3) Negative Origins Associated with Paganism

“and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem, Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.’”

MacArthur: These names identified the resident of Canaan who occupied the land when Abraham migrated there (cf. **Ge 12:5, 6**). Jerusalem had the same moral character as the rest of Canaan.

Constable: Canaan was the place of Jerusalem's origin and birth, a land notorious for its depravity. Thus it was understandable that the Israelites would tend toward idolatry.

Peter Pett: There are a number of points here. One is that neither Jerusalem nor Israel were in fact as racially pure as they thought. They were of mongrel descent. Israel did in fact include Canaanites, Amorites and Hittites in their ancestry, for such would be among the servants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and among the mixed multitude that became a part of Israel at the exodus and at Sinai, and this was added to by intermarriage contrary to God's command (**Deuteronomy 7:3**). And the suggestion is that this was now coming out in their behaviour.

The second is that they had become like those that they had lived amongst. They had been established in the land of the Canaanites and had aped the Canaanites, Amorites

and Hittites in the land, who had ‘fathered’ and ‘mothered’ them. That was why they were behaving as they were.

The third was that Jerusalem itself was a city of bastard descent, a city of mixed race, and those races evil. In the wider meaning of the terms the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem were Canaanites and Amorites, and were associated with the Amorites and Hittites as dwellers in the mountains (**Numbers 13:29**), and they lived among the Israelites, no doubt being forced to submit to the covenant with Yahweh after the capture of the city by David.

Thus Israel’s professed purity was a farce. There was nothing in their background to make them especially attractive. Anything they had was because of God’s goodness to them.

b. (:4-5) Negative Treatment Leading to Abandonment

*“As for your birth, **on the day you were born** your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths.*

*No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred **on the day you were born.**”*

Constable: Yahweh personified Jerusalem as a woman (cf. **Isa. 1:21**), and he related her history as a parable (allegory). In this parable, "Jerusalem" represents the people of Jerusalem (a metonymy), but it is the people of Jerusalem throughout Israel's history that are particularly in view. Some interpreters take Jerusalem as representing Israel as a nation. Others believe Jerusalem identifies the city that is only similar to the nation in its history and conduct. I think it is best to understand "Jerusalem" as **describing the city** for three reasons:

- First, the Lord compared Jerusalem to two other cities, Samaria and Sodom (**vv. 44-56, 61**).
- Second, everything the prophet said about Jerusalem fits the city, its history and inhabitants.
- Third, the purpose of the parable was to convince the Jews in exile that the city of Jerusalem, specifically, would experience destruction because of the sins of its people. The purpose of the story was to show the exiles that the destruction of Jerusalem that Ezekiel predicted was well deserved so they would believe that God would destroy it.

Block: Cutting the cord, washing, rubbing down with salt, and clothing the newborn were also customary legal acts of legitimation. In the neglect and abandonment of the infant in the open field, the parent legally relinquished all rights to and responsibilities for the child.

Leslie Allen: The oracle moves from place of birth to circumstances of birth, which are equally inauspicious. The passage is framed by an inclusion, “*on the day you were born.*”

B. (:6-14) Rescued, Embraced, Exalted and Revered

1. (:6-7) Rescued

a. (:6) Rescued from Death to Live

“When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!'”

Constable: The Lord had compassion on Jerusalem in her helpless and undesirable condition and took care of her so she survived. The city remained as an unwanted child until, at the Lord's direction, David captured it from the Jebusites and made it the capital of his kingdom (**2 Sam. 5:6-10**).

Leslie Allen: Yahweh intervenes for good, rescuing this “little savage” (**Eichrodt** 205) from certain death and ordaining for her abundant life. God’s seeing, here and also in **v 8**, reverses the lack of a kindly “eye” in **v 5**. Now at last the baby finds kindness and help. The gory mess in which the newborn was left to wallow has the connotation of **ritual uncleanness**, like that of menstrual blood (**Lev 12:2–8**; cf. **Luke 2:22–24**). The divine decree of empowerment to live and grow, despite such an encumbrance, is reminiscent of the command to be fruitful and multiply in the priestly account of creation (**Gen 1:22, 28**; ורבו “*and multiply*” corresponding to ורבי “*and grow*” here), which in turn is invoked upon Jacob (**Gen 28:3; 35:11**; cf. **17:2, 6**). **Malul** (JSOT 46 [1990] 111–13) has observed that the Akkadian equivalent of the causative form of the verb חיה “*live,*” bulluṭum “*keep alive,*” has the connotation of **adoption**; it is sometimes accompanied by rubbum “*raise,*” which accords with the intransitive verb רבה “*grow*” used two times here. Moreover, to adopt a newborn child while still *ina mēšu* “in its amniotic fluid” or *ina mēšu u dāmēšu* “in its amniotic fluid and birth blood” meant that the baby could not be reclaimed by its natural parents (**Malul**, JSOT 46 [1990] 108–9, 111, 123 n. 86).

The comparison with “*a plant of the countryside*” (שדה) ironically echoes the baby’s abandonment in the countryside (שדה) in **v 5**: where death lurked for the human outcast, paradoxically an opportunity for life was wrested. Yahweh’s passing by hardly alludes to the tradition of God’s finding Israel in the wilderness (**Hos 9:10; Deut 32:10**; cf. **Jer 31:2; Krüger**, Geschichtskonzepte 184). The divine intervention, preparing and preserving it for its destiny, refers to Yahweh’s providential watching over the pagan city-state.

Iain Duguid: Into that situation of helplessness and hopelessness, however, came God’s intervention. Passing by this sorry spectacle, he spoke his life-giving word, causing her to live and thrive like a plant of the field. To adopt our idiom, she grew like a weed. The

word of the Lord was all it took to turn the field from a place of death (**Ezek. 16:5**) to a place of life (**16:7**).

Derek Thomas: It was the words, ‘*I said to you, “Live”*’ (**16:6**) that God used to convert the Puritan **Thomas Goodwin**, the leader of the Dissenting group within the Westminster Assembly and a prominent member of the Savoy Assembly of Congregational elders. Having been brought under conviction of sin by a sermon preached at a funeral, he confessed that he ‘saw no way to escape: but together with the sight of all this sinfulness, hell opened his mouth upon me, threatening to devour and destroy me ...’ A few hours later, God gave him a ‘speedy word’ from **Ezekiel 16:6**: ‘*I said unto you, “Live.”*’ **Goodwin** testifies of the occasion: ‘So God was pleased on the sudden, and as it were in an instant, to alter the whole of his former dispensation towards me ... as he created the world and the matter of all things by a word, so he created and put a new life and spirit into my soul ...’

b. (:7) Rescued from Vulnerability to Mature

“I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall, and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.”

Peter Pett: The idea of **nakedness** not only suggests **need** but also **sinfulness**. When Adam and Eve had sinned they ‘*knew that they were naked*’ (**Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:10**). They were exposed in all their sinfulness and weakness. Nakedness regularly pictures abject need and sinfulness (**2 Chronicles 28:19; Isaiah 20:3-4; Lamentations 1:8; Ezekiel 23:29; Hosea 2:3; Micah 1:8; Nahum 3:5**).

David Guzik: According to **Block**, **your hair grew** refers to the metaphorical young woman’s pubic hair. “With the passing of the age of innocence and the arrival of sexual maturity, nakedness assumes moral overtones. Whereas the earlier nakedness had made the foundling vulnerable to the elements and marauding animals, now she stands exposed to dangers of a different sort.”

2. (:8) Embraced – Covenant Relationship

“Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord God.”

Daniel Block: Second, Yahweh saves the woman’s purity and marries her. Before anyone takes advantage of her, the same traveler passes by a second time and recognizes her sexual ripeness: the time for lovemaking (‘*ēt dōdīm*’) had arrived.

MacArthur: Spreading the “*skirt*” was a custom of espousal (cf. **Ru 3:9**) and indicates that God entered into a covenant with the young nation at Mt. Sinai (cf **Ex 19:5-8**).

Making a covenant signifies marriage, the figure of God's relation to Israel (cf. **Jer 2:2; 3:1ff.; Hos 2:2-23**).

3. (:9-13) Exalted -- Greatness of Her Exaltation and Beauty

- a. (:9) Cleansed and Anointed
"Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil."
- b. (:10) Clothed in Royal Garments
"I also clothed you with embroidered cloth, and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk."
- c. (:11-12) Crowned with Expensive Adornments
"And I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. 12 I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head."
- d. (:13) Conclusion: Pampered and Promoted in Every Way Possible
"Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty."

4. (:14) Revered – for the Greatness of Her Fame and Glory

"Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord God."

MacArthur: The nation was truly a trophy of God's grace (cf. Dt 7:6-8). The presence and glory of the Lord provided Jerusalem with beauty and prominence.

Constable: She had the best jewelry and clothes. She also ate the best food. In other words, the love of her husband knew no bounds. She became very beautiful and even qualified as royalty; she became a royal city that was home to the Davidic dynasty of kings. Other nations even commented on her beauty since it was so extraordinary because of the grace the Lord had bestowed on her (**1 Kings 10; 1 Chron. 14:17; Lam. 2:15**).

Daniel Block: These lavish provisions portray a husband whose love for his wife knows no bounds. The account reaches its climax in the notice of the stunning effects of his kindness: Jerusalem has become a beautiful queen.

The **superlative magnificence of her beauty** is highlighted in four ways:

- (a) the employment of the idiom *bim 'ōd mē'ōd* (lit. "with muchness,

muchness”);

(b) the use of analogy—she achieved the rank of royalty;

(c) the reference to her reputation—she became famous (*šēm*) for her beauty among all the surrounding nations;

(d) the description of her beauty as *kālil*, “total, perfect.”

But this remarkable rags-to-riches story ends with an extremely important reminder: Jerusalem’s beauty was not innate—it was a gift, graciously bestowed (*śîm*) on her by Yahweh, and reflective of his own splendor (*hādār*). She had become his trophy of grace, a glorious witness of the power of his love, a showcase of divine splendor.

II. (:15-34) ROYALTY TO HARLOTRY -- JERUSALEM FORSAKING ROYALTY TO ACT THE HARLOT

A. (:15-25) Rejecting God in Favor of Pagan Idolatry

1. (:15-19) Converting God’s Gifts into Tools for Harlotry

a. (:15) Motivated by Pride and Popularity

“But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing.”

David Guzik: This **pride** was the root of Israel’s decline. They forgot that they were nothing when God found them and that He had bestowed their beauty upon them. Brought to beauty by God’s blessing, they **trusted** in the blessing God gave instead of in God Himself.

Leslie Allen: There is a new independence, a wrongful self-confidence that leads to the transfer of her sexual vigor (vv 7–8) to the street. The false trust in her beauty means that the “gift replaces the giver” (**Zimmerli** 342; cf. **33:13**).

Lamar Cooper: This Cinderella story turned tragic because Israel’s repayment for God’s love and care was betrayal. The girl once left for dead, who was nurtured to maturity and who became the bride of her benefactor, also became unfaithful.

b. (:16) Converted Your Royal Garments

“And you took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors, and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen.”

c. (:17) Converted Your Beautiful Jewels

“You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them.”

d. (:18) Converted Your Embroidered Cloth

“Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and

offered My oil and My incense before them.”

Daniel Block: Modeling her treatment of these images after the practices of Jerusalem’s pagan neighbors, she clothed them with the royal garments that she had received from Yahweh, presented them with his oil and incense, and offered them his food. In pagan ritual the food was placed before the idol or swung in a solemn ritual before the idol’s face, the oil was poured out in front of the idol, and the burning incense was held close so the smoke would waft up to the idol’s nostrils. All these she presents as a *rêah nîhōah*, “pleasant aroma.”

e. (:19) Converted Your Luxury Food

“Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil, and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened,’ declares the Lord God.”

Peter Pett: All the things which Yahweh had given them they passed on to their idols. The bread on which they had fed abundantly, and the luxury food which He had given them to enjoy, a far cry from the hunger and poor food they had known in the wilderness before they received the manna (**Exodus 16:3**), these they offered, not in thanksgiving to Yahweh, but as a sweet savour to their new gods. God had fulfilled all His promises to them and they had thanked Him by offering His abundance to their ‘lovers’.

2. (:20-21) Sacrificing Children to Idols

“Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me, and you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughtered My children, and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire.”

Leslie Allen: Emotional outrage is expressed in referring to children whom “*you had borne me*” and “*my sons*” and also in the vehement question of **vv 20b–21** and in the term “*abominations*” in **v 22**. It surfaces too in the closing recapitulation of Jerusalem’s “*young days*” (**vv 6–7**), before Yahweh’s grace had transformed her life. This recapitulation nicely illustrates the purpose of the early stages of the story, to accentuate the accusation as a surprising disappointment (**Hals** 106). “How could you!” is the implicit message. If Jerusalem had remembered what she was apart from God’s grace, she would not have behaved like this. While the accusation of **v 22aα** sums up **vv 15–21**, the recapitulation may intend to pinpoint the sins of this particular section, **vv 20–21**. She who had been at death’s door by her parents’ whim should have known better than to deliver to death her patron’s and her own children.

3. (:22) Forgetting God’s Compassion and Grace

“And besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.”

4. (:23-25) Worshipping on the High Places

“Then it came about after all your wickedness (‘Woe, woe to you!’ declares the Lord God), 24 that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. 25 You built yourself a high place at the top of every street, and made your beauty abominable; and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry.”

Constable: She committed adultery with her lustful neighbor, the Egyptians, and multiplied the instances of her harlotry thus angering the Lord further (**2 Kings 17:4; 18:21; Isa. 30:7; 36:1**). As punishment, the Lord diminished her support. He also gave her into the hands of the Philistines, pagan people who nonetheless were repulsed by her lewd (indecent, lustful, unchaste, lascivious) behavior (**2 Chron. 21:16-17; 28:16-19; Isa. 1:7-8**).

David Guzik: This is more shocking language. “The prophet describes this lover in obscenely physical terms: *your neighbors with the huge organs.*” (**Block**) There are several places in the Old Testament where the penis is euphemistically referred to as *flesh*: **Ezekiel 23:20, 44:7, 9; Genesis 17:11, 14, 23, 24, 25; Exodus 28:42;** and **Leviticus 15:2-19**.

B. (:26-29) Playing the Harlot with Pagan Nations – Political Promiscuity

1. (:26) Playing the Harlot with the Egyptians

“You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry.”

2. (:27) Playing the Harlot with the Philistines

“Behold now, I have stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations. And I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct.”

3. (:28) Playing the Harlot with the Assyrians

“Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied; you even played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied.”

Peter Pett: ‘*And yet you were not satisfied.*’ Their apostasy had done them no good. They found no peace of mind or heart, nor did they find constant prosperity. Yahweh was no longer with them.

4. (:29) Playing the Harlot with the Chaldeans

“You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied.”

C. (:30-34) Surpassing the Wickedness of Typical Harlots

1. (:30) No Shame

“How languishing is your heart,’ declares the Lord God, ‘while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot.’”

2. (:31-34) No Limit to Your Unfaithfulness

“When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square, in disdain of money, you were not like a harlot. 32 You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband! 33 Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries. 34 Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different.”

MacArthur: It is wicked to solicit and then be paid for immorality. Israel engaged in far worse behavior – she solicited and even paid her idol consorts. This refers to the heavy tribute Israel had to pay to the godless nations.

Daniel Block: These verses expand on Jerusalem’s high-handed behavior. First, she has broken the generally accepted norms of a prostitute’s behavior by scorning payment. Second, as a married woman, she commits adultery by receiving strangers instead of her own husband, Yahweh. The expression *zārîm* may be interpreted at two levels. The word principally identifies persons who do not belong, in this case primarily to one’s own family or household. However, in keeping with the common application of the term to enemies of the nation, the word refers specifically to the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, with whom Jerusalem has made her treaties, and thereby supplanted Yahweh. Third, Jerusalem has reversed the customary roles of payer and payee in harlotrous relationships. Whereas prostitutes generally follow their profession as a means of livelihood, Jerusalem has scorned the payment that men normally pay for a woman’s sexual favors. Worse yet, she has bribed them to satisfy her lusts, stifling all sense of shame, and inverting normal roles of prostitute and client. The resources that Yahweh had bestowed liberally on her she dispensed to her lovers (*mě’ahābayik*, v. 33), all the surrounding nations.

Cooper: Ezekiel enumerated at least eight reasons for the exile:

- pride (v. 15a),
- spiritual prostitution (vv. 15b-19),
- materialistic idolatry (vv. 16-19),
- human sacrifices (vv. 20-21),
- forgetting God (v. 22),
- propagating her prostitution (vv. 23-25),
- trusting relations with pagan nations (vv. 26-29),
- and a weak will that cast off all moral restraints (vv. 30-34).

III. (:35-43) EXPOSED AND PUNISHED -- JERUSALEM EXPOSED AND PUNISHED FOR HARLOTRY UNTIL THE LORD IS SATISFIED

“Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD.”

A. (:36-37) Exposed by Judging the Nakedness of Harlotries with the Nakedness of Shame

1. (:36) Nakedness Exposed by Willing Harlotries

“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols,’”

Peter Pett: Israel’s disgusting state is then clarified. She is responsible for the multiplying of idols, and the lewdness that goes with them, they are like her discharges. And she is especially responsible for the blood of her slain children offered to these idols.

2. (:37) Nakedness Exposed by God Inflicting Shame

“therefore, behold, I shall gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I shall gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.”

Feinberg: The first step in her retributive judgment at the hands of the Lord would be public exposure before both her lovers and her enemies. Public exposure of profligate women and stoning of them were well-known customs in ancient Israel.

Daniel Block: Yahweh will put Jerusalem on display before her lovers and her enemies. Again there is an ironical twist. She who bared herself before them will finally have her fill of exposure. The significance of her nudity has now been transformed. No longer is this the pathetic nakedness of her infancy, nor the culpable flaunting of her body in her maturity, but an intentional shaming action. But there is more. Even as the spreading of a garment over a woman by a man represented a nonverbal gesture of marital commitment in the ancient Near East (cf. v. 8), so the public stripping of one’s wife symbolized a divorce, a custom alluded to in **Hos. 2:4–5 (Eng. 2–3)**, which, in stylized fashion, recalls a divorce ritual. . .

B. (:38-41) Punished by the Unleashing of God’s Wrath

1. (:38) Punishment Appropriate for Adultery

“Thus I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh will execute the death sentence on Jerusalem: I will sentence you with the sentences (*ûšpattik mišpētē*) of adulteresses (*nō ’āpôt*) and murderers (*šōpēkōt dām*, lit. “those [fem.] who pour out blood”). According to priestly law, both were capital offenses, the punishment for which Yahweh himself will administer in this instance. In his wrath (*hēmā*) and passion (*qin ’ā*), both legitimate and natural responses of a husband betrayed by his wife (see **Ezek. 5:13; Prov. 6:34**), he

says, I will make you a bloody victim, an idiom for “execute.” Like v. 37, this last expression brings Jerusalem’s experience full circle: she who had been found “flailing about in her blood” now returns to her bloody condition.

2. (:39) Punishment Devastating to the Point of Stripping Naked

“I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare.”

Allen: The public exposure of the naked body was a symbolic act of legal punishment for adulterers . . . : it reversed the husband's provision of clothing (v 10) and took away the wife's married identity [cf. **Jer. 13:26; Hos. 2:10; Nah. 3:5**].

3. (:40) Punishment Lethal Via Mob Violence

“They will incite a crowd against you, and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords.”

Leslie Allen: In the prophetic representation of judgment there is usually “a kind of synergism in which divine and human actions are forged into a single whole or the divine intent of judgment is wrought out through human agency” (**Miller**, *Sin and Judgment* 138). So here the reprisals of vv 37bα2–38 were to be carried out by the assembled lovers. The punishment is presented both on the human plane, as a reaping of the baneful crop Jerusalem had sown by playing off one nation against another, and as a providential fate, masterminded by the divine victim of Jerusalem’s sins. The final downfall of the city by military means is portrayed as a fitting retribution: the brothels of vv 24–25, 31 are destroyed, and marital assets bestowed in vv 10–13 are lost. The clock was to be put back. Jerusalem would forfeit all the perquisites of royal rank given by the God of Israel. The “crowd” of v 40 is both a legally constituted assembly and an army. In the former role they stone the offender to death, as in **Deut 22:21, 24**. In the latter role they resort to sword and fire (cf. **2 Kgs 25:9**). The hacking of the corpse is unparalleled as a judicial feature. **Greenberg** (287) compared the quartering of a hanged traitor in old British law. There may simply be a literary mingling of metaphor and reality, a fusion of socio-legal and military roles (cf. **23:47**). The witness of other, uninvolved nations (“women”) recalls **5:8, 14**. In this context it signifies reversal of the international renown of v 14 (cf. v 27; **Lam 4:12**).

4. (:41a) Punishment Fiery and Shameful

“And they will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women.”

Daniel Block: Their violent actions against this woman will occur in three phases.

- First they will destroy all the accoutrements of her harlotrous business: her mounds (*gabbîm*) and platforms (*rāmôt*) will be demolished, her royal garments stripped off, and her expensive jewelry removed. She will lose all those articles with which Yahweh had transformed her into a beautiful queen, but which she

had misused in her abominations (cf. vv. 15–19), leaving her in the same condition that Yahweh had found her at the beginning: stark naked.

- Then her so-called lovers will execute her. In keeping with the Deuteronomic prescription for such sexual offenses (**Deut. 22:23–24**), they will call a crowd (*qāhāl*) together to stone her. Not satisfied with her death, they will hack her in pieces with their swords.
- Finally, while other women watch, they will torch Jerusalem’s houses. This note adds a powerful touch of realism to the manner in which they will carry out Yahweh’s judgments against her. With poetic justice, the one who had pursued her abominations out in the open would fall while the world looked on.

5. (:41b) Punishment Effective in Stopping Harlotries

“Then I shall stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers.”

C. (:42-43) Satisfied

1. (:42) Propitiation of God’s Wrath

“So I shall calm My fury against you, and My jealousy will depart from you, and I shall be pacified and angry no more.”

David Guzik: God’s judgment against and anger towards Israel was not to last forever. When their hearts were turned away from their gross idolatry, God would change His disposition toward them.

2. (:43) Justification for God’s Wrath

“Because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged Me by all these things, behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your own head,” declares the Lord God, ‘so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your other abominations.’”

Daniel Block: The issue is not that she had forgotten either her miserable origins or Yahweh’s unrestrained favors; she simply failed to take them into account, a disease that **36:26** diagnoses as a sclerosis of the heart. Yahweh’s benevolence was answered with callousness; his covenant commitment, with infidelity. That he was agitated is not surprising; this was the natural response of a spurned husband. Instead of evoking a response of gratitude and devotion, his grace had become the occasion for prostitution. Accordingly, Yahweh is perfectly justified in bringing Jerusalem’s conduct down on her own head.

IV. (:44-52) SHAMED AND DISGRACED -- JERUSALEM SHAMED AND DISGRACED FOR GREATER ABOMINATIONS THAN SODOM AND SAMARIA

A. (:44-46) Shamed and Disgraced in Terms of Spiritual Identity

1. (:44) Chip off the Old Block – Citing the Family Tree

“Behold, everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb concerning you, saying, ‘Like mother, like daughter.’”

Daniel Block: The indictment of Jerusalem resumes in vv. 44–58, but with a different rhetorical strategy. Instead of charging the city outrightly for her crimes, Ezekiel shames her by demonstrating that her depravity exceeds that of two other peoples who, in Judean circles at least, were proverbial for their wickedness. As if his audience was losing concentration, the prophet regains their attention with a new *Look (hinnēh)*. The use of the second person of direct address (referring to Jerusalem) throughout vv. 44–52 will hold their attention.

Iain Duguid: In Ezek. 16:44 the imagery changes from the husband-wife relationship to mother and daughter. Whereas Jerusalem had previously been considered in relationship to her adoptive “family,” now her natural genetics are brought to the fore. She has proved herself to be a chip off the old block by despising her husband and children. She is like her mother, the Hittite, who was married to an Amorite (16:45), the people whose sins had led to their expulsion from the land of Canaan at the time of Joshua (Gen. 15:16). This statement serves not only to link this section with the preceding one but also to suggest that she stands to share their fate of being cut off from the land.

In addition, Jerusalem has a family resemblance to her natural sisters, Samaria and Sodom, who are the primary focus of this section. Samaria, the former capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, is described as her older sister—“older” (Ezek. 16:46) refers to her size rather than age. She stands for the larger, northern kingdom, while Sodom, the “younger” (or “littler”) sister, is physically smaller. Samaria lives to the north of Jerusalem with her “daughters,” that is, in the common Semitic idiom, the surrounding villages, while Sodom is to the south (16:46). Jerusalem is surrounded by sinners and fits naturally into their company, delighting to go along with the crowd.

What Sodom lacked in size, it more than made up for in reputation. Along with its other ugly sister, Gomorrah, it had become a byword for abomination (Gen. 19:4–9; cf. Isa. 1:10)—and consequent complete destruction (Isa. 1:9). As well as the sexual sin to which it gave its name, which may lie behind the “detestable things” (tô‘ēbâ) of Ezekiel 16:50, Sodom is here cited for being proud, overfed, and untroubled by the cares of life, while neglecting the needs of the poor and needy (16:49). She is the epitome of social sin

John Taylor: vv. 44–58 -- At this stage Ezekiel takes up a completely new allegory, but links it on to the first by the reference to Israel’s mixed parentage so as to make it appear an expansion of what has gone before. Two sisters, Samaria the elder and Sodom the younger, are invented for the sinful Judah, but the prophet says that even though they were in their day a byword for complacent prosperity and pride (Sodom, 49, 50), and religious abominations of every kind (Samaria, 51), Judah’s sins have outstripped theirs both in number and in intensity (52). In so doing Judah is said to

have justified her sisters (52; av, rv), or better, made your sisters appear righteous (rsv). There will, however, be a day of restoration for Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem, but this will bring nothing but a heightened sense of shame and further humiliation for the harlot city.

2. (:45) Child of Immoral Pagan Parents

“You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and children. You are also the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.”

3. (:46) Categorized with Samaria and Sodom

“Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters.”

Constable: Other people would quote the proverb, *“Like mother, like daughter,”* in regard to Jerusalem. She was like her Hittite “mother” who was also idolatrous and selfish. And she was like her older (larger) sister, “Samaria,” and its dependent villages, and her younger (smaller) sister, “Sodom,” and its dependent villages, both of which despised their husbands and children. The Hebrew text describes Samaria and Sodom as on Jerusalem's left (north) and right (south) respectively, reflecting the customary eastern orientation of the Old Testament. However, Jerusalem acted even worse than they. The depraved worship of the Canaanites had affected all three of these cities, but Jerusalem had become the worst of the lot!

B. (:47-52) Shamed and Disgraced in Comparison to Sodom and Samaria

1. (:47) More Corrupt Than Sodom and Samaria

“Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they.”

Peter Pett: The statement is sarcastic. They had not behaved like Sodom and Samaria, no, they had behaved far worse. Sodom and Samaria were bad enough, but Israel had sinned even more. *‘It is a very little thing’* is probably the intended meaning and is heavy in sarcasm. *‘A little thing’* was how Israel might have stated it, but not Yahweh.

2. (:48) More Corrupt Than Sodom

“‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘Sodom, your sister, and her daughters, have not done as you and your daughters have done.’”

3. (:49) Guilt of Sodom Detailed

“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.”

Peter Pett: The sins of Sodom are categorised. She was proud, complacent, basking in prosperity, lacking in concern for the poor and needy, arrogant and idolatrous (committed abomination), so much so that God took her people away when He saw them. We know something of her degradation and sexual perversion from **Genesis 19**, the natural result of following their religion and of the gods they worshipped. But she had not sinned like Jerusalem had done, multiplying their idolatry over so long a period. No wonder they were doomed.

David Guzik: Being well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord (**Genesis 13:10**), there was agricultural abundance in Sodom. This made them self-reliant, sinfully independent, and overly invested in entertainments and comforts.

4. (:50) Judgment of Sodom Recalled

“Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.”

5. (:51a) More Corrupt Than Samaria

“Furthermore, Samaria did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they.”

6. (:51b-52) Shamed and Disgraced in Terms of Surpassing Abominations

“Thus you have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed. Also bear your disgrace in that you have made judgment favorable for your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. Yes, be also ashamed and bear your disgrace, in that you made your sisters appear righteous.”

Daniel Block: Thus Jerusalem has unintentionally intervened on her sisters' behalf by diverting attention to herself with all her abominable behavior. For this reason, in addition to experiencing the direct wrath of Yahweh, she will have to bear the shame and disgrace of having made those, whom Judeans had traditionally viewed as the epitome of evil, appear innocent.. .

Ezekiel lives among people who feel shame because Yahweh, in whom they had placed their trust, had reneged on his covenant commitment and failed to stand up for them. The purpose of this entire oracle has been to turn the tables on the Israelites' complaint. The charge of **betrayal** is to be leveled not against Yahweh but against themselves.

Leslie Allen: The first oracle had mentioned the daughters of the Philistines being ashamed of Jerusalem's lascivious behavior (v 27). This notion of **shame** is now reused and applied to the Jerusalem that survived in the form of the 587 b.c. exiles. Jerusalem too must come to the point of shameful. There appears to be a reminiscence of Jeremiah's complaint that Judah before its downfall had “*a harlot's brow, refusing to be ashamed*” (**Jer 3:3**; cf. **6:15**; **8:12**). In Ezekiel's prophesying, the appeal aligns with his preexilic forecast that Judah's exiled survivors would come to regard their past with

revulsion (6:9). The scales would fall from their eyes, and they would at last see themselves as God saw them. This deflated self-awareness for which Ezekiel now pleads was the only spiritually sane course for them to take. It was a call that Ezekiel's editors would reinforce for the exiles in 36:32.

Iain Duguid: However, if the similarity between Jerusalem and her sisters serves to justify further God's action in completely destroying her (**Ezek. 16:58**), that is not the only focus of attention here. Rather, the purpose of this comparison with her sisters in crime is designed to evoke a sense of shame on Jerusalem's part (**16:52**). Just as in her pride Jerusalem once scorned Sodom for her sin, so now that Jerusalem's sin has been uncovered, the surrounding nations scorn her (**16:57**). Now, instead of looking down her nose at Sodom and Samaria as beyond redemption, she will herself only be redeemed alongside them (**16:53**). Paradoxically, it is in that redemption itself that shame will be experienced as the inhabitants of Jerusalem realize how much worse they have been than the bywords of iniquity, Sodom and Samaria.

V. (:53-58) RESTORED BY GRACE -- JERUSALEM RESTORED BY GOD'S GRACE DESPITE SHAME AND DISGRACE

A. (:53-55) Restoration of Captivity

1. (:53) Promise of Restoration

"Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity,"

2. (:54) Purpose of Restoration

"in order that you may bear your humiliation, and feel ashamed for all that you have done when you become a consolation to them."

3. (:55) Promise of Restoration

"And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to their former state, and you with your daughters will also return to your former state."

Chisholm: The main point seems to be that God's willingness to restore Jerusalem, despite the magnitude of her sin, offers hope for other sinful nations, even those who violate his moral standards in blatant ways.

B. (:56-58) Resolution of Reproach

1. (:56-57) Pride Replaced by Reproach

"As the name of your sister Sodom was not heard from your lips in your day of pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered, so now you have become the reproach of the daughters of Edom, and of all who are around her, of the daughters of the Philistines-- those surrounding you who despise you."

Daniel Block: The point of the analogy is made specific. During Jerusalem's heyday, here described as the time when you were filled with pride, Sodom had been viewed as the epitome of evil and considered a paradigm of its disastrous consequences. Her name had been smugly bandied about as the subject of derisive gossip in a city oblivious to its own imminent disaster. But the tables are about to turn. When Jerusalem's wickedness is exposed, her competitors, the women of Edom and those of the surrounding nations, including the Philistines, will speak of her as she has spoken of Sodom. Wickedness has found a new model; Jerusalem has supplanted Sodom and has herself become a laughingstock (*herpâ*) and an object of scorn (*šā`t*). Accordingly, as the consequence of Jerusalem's lewdness (*zimmâ*) and her abominations (*tô`ēbôt*; cf. vv. 2, 27, 43), this public derision is added to the direct judgment of God. The divine signature with which the paragraph ends seals the city's fate.

2. (:58) Penalty for Abominations Fully Borne

"You have borne the penalty of your lewdness and abominations," the LORD declares."

VI. (:59-63) RENEWED TO COVENANT SECURITY -- JERUSALEM FORGIVEN AND PROVIDED COVENANT SECURITY

A. (:59) Punishment that Fits the Crime

"For thus says the Lord God, 'I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant.'"

B. (:60-63) Progression from Abrahamic Covenant to New Covenant

1. (:60) Faithfulness of God to the Covenant Relationship

"Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you."

Constable: Yet the Lord promised to remember and stand by His promises in the Abrahamic Covenant (**Gen. 12:1-3**). He would establish a new, everlasting covenant with His people in the future (cf. **11:18-20; 36: 26-28; 37:26-28; Isa. 59:21; 61:8; Jer. 31:31- 34**). The New Covenant is an organic outgrowth of the Abrahamic Covenant, in that it explains further the blessing aspect of that covenant. It does not have the same relationship to the Mosaic Covenant, which it eventually replaced.

David Guzik: The coming judgment would be so great that Israel would be tempted to believe there was no more hope for them with God. Yet again and again Yahweh promised to **establish** His **covenant** with them again.

Lamar Cooper: The new covenant promised here and elsewhere (**17:22-24; 34:23-29; 37:26; Jer 31:31-34**) would have a new covenant Mediator who would be the Messiah. Therefore the restoration Ezekiel presented was not based on the renewal of a broken covenant but on a new and everlasting covenant. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel foresaw a new covenant for Israel, which would be everlasting and therefore permanent.

2. (:61) Family of God's People Renewed

“Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant.”

3. (:62-63) Forgiveness Removes All Foundation for Pride

*“Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and **you shall know that I am the LORD**, 63 in order that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done, ' the Lord God declares.”*

Daniel Block: Jerusalem will acknowledge Yahweh. Finally, after more than sixty verses we encounter the **recognition formula** that plays such an important part in the rest of Ezekiel's prophecies: *you will know that I am Yahweh*. When Yahweh himself (note again the emphatic pronoun) reestablishes (*hēqīm*) his covenant with Jerusalem, she will know him. The formula is expanded in v. **63** with a complex purpose clause, the first part of which reintroduces the motif of stimulating Jerusalem's memory and evoking shame (*bôš*).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage reinforce the true impact of the ugliness of our sin?
- 2) What has our response been to the blessing of God's privileges and promotion to adoption into the royal family? How do we avoid the temptations to take God and His gifts for granted or to develop some unwarranted sense of pride?
- 3) Why does God remain faithful to His covenant even when His people are so unfaithful?
- 4) In what way has the cross addressed our shame and humiliation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: The detailed development of **chap. 16** may be presented as follows.

16:2–43b α	Jerusalem's resistance to Yahweh's grace and coming retribution
16:2	Ezekiel's accusatory commission
16:3–34	Grace and ingratitude
16:3–5	Jerusalem's pagan and hapless origins

16:6–7	Yahweh’s pronouncement of life
16:8–14	Yahweh’s commitment to and maintenance of Jerusalem
16:15–22	Jerusalem’s turning to Canaanite religion
16:23–34	Jerusalem’s turning to foreign powers
16:35	Ezekiel’s announcement of Yahweh’s punishment
16:36–43ba	Jerusalem’s degradation and capital punishment for its sins
16:43bb–58	Jerusalem’s contrition for sins worse than Sodom’s and Samaria’s
16:43bb–52	Contrition as a present necessity
16:53–58	Contrition as a future necessity
16:59–63	Yahweh’s eschatological renewal of past grace and Jerusalem’s contrition for past sins

Daniel Block: this passage offers helpful insight into the biblical perspective on guilt and shame. Against the grain of popular thinking today, this oracle is unrestrained in its shaming of unfaithful Israel. The nature and cause of biblically sanctioned shame may be appreciated by plotting Jerusalem’s experience:

1. She begins in a destitute and hopeless natural condition.
2. She is rescued from certain death by God, who lavishes his love on her and elevates her to the status of royalty.
3. She snubs her Deliverer and divine Benefactor by running after other gods and dispensing his gracious gifts to strange lovers.
4. She discovers that God is as passionate in his judgment as he had been in his love, and she loses everything that she had ever possessed.
5. After the judgment she experiences a new outpouring of divine grace, is forgiven of her sins, and accepted as his covenant people again.
6. She recognizes that the past disruption in her relationship with Yahweh was not the fault of God, but her own, and she experiences shame.

Feinberg: No passage in Ezekiel is more forceful or vivid than this chapter which is a remarkable and unparalleled setting forth of God’s dealings with Israel from the beginning and their response to His ways with them. It also is a beautiful illustration of what God does in grace for any believing sinner. The chapter is reminiscent of truths found in the prophecies of Isaiah (1:21) and Hosea (1:2). Ezekiel, too, saw Israel’s sin as one of unfaithfulness to the boundless love of God.

The prophet saw that repentance was produced not by the thunderings and terrors of Mount Sinai with its law, but by the tenderness of the gracious God with His love. In

his treatment of Sodom and her restoration he manifested that the love of God would reach down even to the lowest depths of moral corruption. A parallel is **chapter 23**, which is also an allegory. Here, in the longest chapter in Ezekiel, the story is told in detail in all its sordid, loathsome character, so that God's infinite abhorrence of Israel's sin may be clearly seen.

David Thompson: IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT ISRAEL HAS DONE ABOMINABLE AND SHAMEFUL THINGS AGAINST GOD, WHICH HAS CAUSED GOD TO PERMIT TERRIBLE THINGS TO HAPPEN TO HER, IN THE END, GOD, IN HIS GRACE, WILL REGATHER HER AND RESTORE HER.

Now according to **verses 1-2**, Ezekiel was to make known to Israel and to Jerusalem the truth about her abominations.

There are five themes that show up in this chapter:

THEME #1 – Israel was an abandoned and helpless child. 16:3-14

But according to verse 6, God took an interest in Israel and He wanted her in Jerusalem and He had compassion on her.

Action #1 - God said “*live.*” **16:6** - God brought her to life.

Action #2 - God made her numerous. **16:7a** - God made her fruitful.

Action #3 - God let her grow. **16:7b** - God let her grow and prosper.

Action #4 - God clothed her. **16:8a** - image is caring and providing for a wife.

Action #5 - God made a covenant with her. **16:8b** - This is a pure grace covenant.

Action #6 - God washed her and cleaned her. **16:9a** - Only God can make one clean.

Action #7 - God anointed her. **16:9b** - He set her apart as His own.

Action #8 - God beautifully adorned her. **16:10-12a** God not only helped her, He lavished her.

Action #9 - God made her royalty. **16:12b -13** - Jerusalem became home of Davidic dynasty.

Action #10 - God made her famous. **16:14** - During days of Solomon, nations were in awe. God did wonderful things for the nation Israel.

THEME #2 – Israel became an immoral and worldly child. 16:15-59

Reality #1 - She trusted in her beauty and not God and became a harlot. **16:15**

Reality #2 - She turned some of the things God gave her into idolatry. **16:16-17**

Reality #3 - She took sacred things and sacrificed them to idols. **16:18-21**

- A. She sacrificed her embroidered cloth. **16:18a**
- B. She sacrificed God's sacred oil. **16:18b**
- C. She sacrificed God's incense. **16:18c**
- D. She sacrificed God's bread. **16:19**
- E. She sacrificed her sons and daughters. **16:20-21**

Reality #4 - She did not remember what God did for her. **16:22**

Reality #5 - She built religious shrines in every place. 16:24-25a

THEME #3 – Israel will receive punishment for her rebellion against God. 16:35-43

God is not about to let His people get away with rebellious sin and evil.

Judgment #1 - God will gather all nations she loved and turn them against her. **16:36-37**

Judgment #2 - God will bring upon them His wrath. **16:38**

Judgment #3 - God will allow foreign nations to demolish them. **16:39**

Judgment #4 - God will allow foreign nations to cut His people to pieces. **16:40**

Judgment #5 - God will allow foreign nations to burn down houses. **16:41**

Judgment #6 - God will be pacified by what He permits to happen. **16:42**

Judgment #7 - God will bring His people's evil conduct down on their own heads. **16:43**

THEME #4 – Israel will be the talk of the nations. 16:44-59

THEME #5 – Israel will be a repentant and restored child. 16:60-63

Daniel Block: vs. 15 -- This verse functions as a thesis statement, identifying the root of the city's perversion and summarizing the manner in which it was expressed. Fundamental to Jerusalem's harlotry was a misplacement of confidence. Instead of committing herself to her divine husband, she placed her confidence in her beauty. Incredibly, the charge that Ezekiel would later level at the king of Tyre applied to this poor foundling: "*Your heart was lifted up on account of your beauty (bēyopyekā); you corrupted your wisdom on account of your splendor ('al yip'ātekā).*" For Jerusalem the

newly found beauty and fame were intoxicating. In her inebriation she lost all sense of history, perspective, and propriety; the temporal and ephemeral replaced the eternal; the gift displaced the giver. Instead of devoting herself to Yahweh, the first passerby (‘ōbēr, vv. 6, 8), who had rescued her from certain death, taken her as his wife, and shared with her his splendor, she dispenses her harlotries indiscriminately to all who pass by (kol-‘ōbēr). Preferring the parasitism of her clients to the generosity of her divine Benefactor, she shares her privileges and Yahweh’s expression of love with men who care only for her body. In a litany of specific crimes dominated by the verb lāqah (“to take”; vv. 16, 17, 18, 20), this ungrateful woman “takes” Yahweh’s good gifts and abuses them for her own prideful and vain purposes.

Wiersbe: The Unfaithful Wife

- (:1-14) – Israel experienced a great love.
- (:15-34) – Israel committed a great sin.
- (:35-42) – Israel suffered a great discipline.
- (:48-50) – God names the sins of Sodom.
- (:53-63) -- Israel will experience a great restoration.

TEXT: Ezekiel 17:1-24

TITLE: *PARABLE OF THE TWO EAGLES AND THE VINE*

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM JUSTIFIED IN LIGHT OF THE TREACHERY OF ZEDEKIAH BUT ULTIMATELY SUPERSEDED BY MESSIANIC RESTORATION

INTRODUCTION:

This parable (or allegory or fable) once again reinforces the certainty of coming judgment against Jerusalem. This time the focus is on the treachery of Zedekiah in turning away from the livable conditions of exile in Babylon to foolishly look to Egypt for military and political aid. Still God in His sovereignty will ultimately raise up the righteous Branch of David to establish the Messianic Kingdom which will enjoy dominion over the nations and vindicate the divine reputation.

John Taylor: The theme of this chapter is the **treachery of Zedekiah**, the puppet-king appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to replace the captive Jehoiachin. It was as a result of this treachery that Nebuchadnezzar eventually marched on Jerusalem to besiege and destroy it (587 bc), but as this is foretold by Ezekiel in **verse 20** it is clear that the utterance of this parable is to be dated a year or two before then, say about 590 bc. This accords well with the position of this oracle in the book, because the last preceding date (**8:1**) was 592 B.C. and the following date (**20:1**) is eleven months later.

Morgan: In the allegory of a foundling in the previous chapter Ezekiel was dealing with the spiritual and moral malady of Israel. In this message he was concerned with her political folly and wickedness.

Peter Pett: God likens Babylon and Egypt to two great eagles having dealings with Israel and declares what their fate will be.

Constable: This message addressed another objection to the destruction of Jerusalem that the exiles entertained. The preceding parable placed much emphasis on Jerusalem's long history of unfaithfulness to the Lord's marriage covenant with her. Was the Lord fair in destroying Jerusalem now, since former generations of Judahites had been unfaithful? The present fable clarified that Judah's recent leaders were also unfaithful and worthy of divine judgment. See **2 Kings 24:6-20**; **2 Chronicles 36:8-16**; and **Jeremiah 37** and **52:1-7** for the historical background of the events described in this riddle.

Adam Clarke: From the beauty of its images, the elegance of its composition, the perspicuity of its language, the rich variety of its matter, and the easy transition from one part of the subject to another, this chapter forms one of the most beautiful and perfect pieces of its kind that can possibly be conceived in so small a compass.

Douglas Stuart: This allegory, like the one in chapter 16, ends on a positive note of hope and forgiveness for the nation. The “cedar” (Israel, or more specifically its remainder state of Judah) will be revisited, rescued from exile, and resettled in the land of Judah to dwell there in safety. In spite of its terrible leadership (the vine) and failed history of diplomacy, the nation has going for it the most important asset it could ever possess: **God’s loyalty**. He has established for Himself a people and will never let them disappear from the earth, neither be assimilated into the land of their captors nor be annihilated by conquest or oppression. Though the generation in power in Ezekiel’s day has done great wrongs, the nation as an entity may look forward to future deliverance and return from exile.

I. (:1-10) THE EXPOUNDING OF THE PARABLE – WHAT’S THE STORY? FOOLISHNESS OF TURNING AWAY FROM BABYLON TOWARDS EGYPT

“Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

MacArthur: This chapter is dated about 588 B.C. (two years before the destruction of Jerusalem). The history of the period is in **2KI 24; 2Ch 36; Jer 36, 37, 52**.

A. (:2-6) Dominion of King Nebuchadnezzar in Deporting Jews to Babylon – Captivity but not Catastrophe

1. (:2) Medium of Communication

*“Son of man, propound a riddle,
and speak a parable to the house of Israel,”*

Feinberg: It is a **riddle** in that its meaning needs to be explained; there is a deeper meaning which underlies the figurative form, for something in its presentation is obscure. It is a **parable** in that it is an **allegory**.

2. (:3) Majestic Domination of Judah by the Powerful Eagle of Babylon

*“saying, Thus says the Lord God, A great eagle with great wings,
long pinions and a full plumage of many colors,
came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar. ”*

David Thompson: Characteristics:

Great wings -- This eagle will be able to move fast. He will sweep in with great speed and conquer.

Long pinions -- enable the flight of the bird to be silent and fast. They enable a bird to thrust and lift with great speed, making the bird ideal for hunting and fighting and conquering its prey. He has long feathers that are able to cover a lot of territory.

Full plumage of many colors -- A bird of many colors can have a different look. He can look one way to one nation and another way to another nation. He has royalty, power, speed and protection.

3. (:4) Major Leaders of Judah Relocated to Commercial Center of Babylon

“He plucked off the topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders.”

MacArthur: This is Jehoiachin, the king, exiled in 597 B.C. (**2Ki 24:11-16**). Babylon is the “*land of merchants*” (**16:29**).

Peter Pett: The tall cedar represents the rebel confederacy against him in Syria and Palestine, in ‘Lebanon’, a term regularly used of the area (compare **Joshua 1:4; 2 Kings 14:9; 2 Kings 19:23; Isaiah 10:34; Isaiah 37:24; Zechariah 11:1-3**), proud and upstanding. The cedars of Lebanon were famous as an example of what was tall and majestic (**Isaiah 2:13; 1 Kings 4:33; 2 Kings 14:9; Psalms 104:16; Ezekiel 31:3**). Thus in **Judges 9:15** to ‘*devour the cedars of Lebanon*’ was to wreak havoc on a variety of tall trees.

The top of the cedar represents their aristocracy. The ‘*topmost of the young twigs*’ is probably Jehoiachin, king of Judah, seen from a patriotic viewpoint. He may have been the leader of the confederacy that united to oppose Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel Block: The description highlights the magnificence of this particular bird: he is great; he has large wings and long pinions; his plumage is full; he is brilliantly colored. This bird is not only magnificent but also energetic. He comes to Lebanon, a place renowned for its cedars, snips off the fresh crown of one of the cedars, and carries the shoot off to a foreign land, identified enigmatically as a commercial territory and a city of merchants. The description offers no motivation for his actions; nor does it suggest that any of these actions is to be interpreted negatively.

4. (:5) Meticulous Planting and Nurturing of the Exiles in Babylon

*“He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil.
He placed it beside abundant waters;
he set it like a willow.”*

5. (:6) Maturing of the Exiles Under Favorable Circumstances in Babylon

*“Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches
turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine,
and yielded shoots and sent out branches.”*

MacArthur: “*spreading vine*” – Refers to Zedekiah (ca. 597-586 B.C.), the youngest son of Josiah whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed king in Judah. The benevolent attitude of Nebuchadnezzar helped Zedekiah to prosper, and if he had remained faithful to his pledge to Nebuchadnezzar, Judah would have continued as a tributary kingdom. Instead, he began courting help from Egypt (**2Ch 36:13**), which Jeremiah protested (**Jer 37:5-7**).

Leslie Allen: The role of Judah as a vassal kingdom thus comes to the fore; mention of the binding covenant also recalls the assets accruing to Judah as a vassal state of the Babylonian empire. Why is Zedekiah, as representative of the kingdom, described as a grapevine, while his predecessor was a cedar shoot? It possibly reflects Zedekiah's subordinate status, over against Jehoiachin's initial independence. Zedekiah, though son of Josiah, was Nebuchadnezzar's nominee; the natural royal descent flowed through Josiah's firstborn Jehoiakim to his son Jehoiachin.

B. (7-10) Foolishness of King Zedekiah in Turning towards Egypt – Exchanging Flourishing for Withering

1. (:7-8) Redirection towards Egypt Totally Unnecessary

a. (:7) Alternative Source of Power

“But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it.”

MacArthur: “another great eagle” – Egypt is meant (v. 15), specifically Pharaoh Apries, a.k.a. Hophra (588-586 B.C.). Zedekiah turned to him to help revolt against Babylon.

Peter Pett: In both cases the vine is planted in Palestine, but watered first from Babylon and then Egypt. Each is seen as the source of water from their great and famed resources.

b. (:8) Unnecessary Redirection

“It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit, and become a splendid vine.”

Constable: Another large eagle, not quite as glorious as the first, came along. The vine reached out with its branches and roots toward it so this eagle might water it. The vine did this even though it was growing in good soil with abundant water nearby, enough to make it a luxuriant and fruitful plant.

Feinberg: The seed of the land had good soil, many waters and every opportunity to sprout branches, bear fruit and be a luxuriant vine. There was no valid reason for Zedekiah's revolt; he was neither oppressed nor deprived. Perfidy, ambition and ingratitude led to insubordination. But his treacherous scheme would not prosper, as the rest of the chapter predicts.

Iain Duguid: The fate of the vine is predictable. In seeking to gain something more, it will instead throw away everything it has been given. Turning its branches toward the second eagle is already a repudiation of its purpose as a fruitful, splendid vine (17:8). The second eagle will do nothing for it; all the vine will succeed in doing is arousing the anger of the first eagle, who will come and tear off its fruit and uproot it from its place. It will not be a difficult task for this powerful eagle to accomplish, whose activity

throughout the parable contrasts with the passivity of the second eagle (17:9). The vine's chosen course of action is worse than foolish, it is suicidal.

2. (:9-10) Rhetorical Questions Highlighting the Folly of Redirection

*“Say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, Will it thrive?
Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers-- so
that all its sprouting leaves wither?
And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from
its roots again.’
Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive?
Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it-- wither
on the beds where it grew?’”*

Daniel Block: The redirection of the vine's branches toward the second eagle (instead of having them spread out low on the ground) and its roots upward (instead of going deeper into the fertile and well-watered soil) had rendered the plant extremely vulnerable to the wind's withering force. . .

Adopting the Socratic rhetorical style, Ezekiel poses a series of questions to his audience. These questions are grouped into two parts, separated by a parenthetical declarative comment in **v. 9b**. The first group contains a quartet of questions arranged chiasmatically so that the first and last involve the vine as the subject, and the middle two focus on the eagle's reaction. The critical issue is, **Will the vine survive after it has turned away from the first eagle and oriented itself toward the second?** Will it flourish (*ṣālah*), presumably according to the definition provided in **vv. 6 and 8**? The anticipated response is obviously negative. The next three questions are cast in negative form and anticipate a positive response. By the time Ezekiel had finished telling the story, the sympathies of his hearers would undoubtedly have been on the side of the first eagle. One can imagine them responding in unison as each question is put to them: Will the eagle not tear the vine out (*nittēq*) by the roots? Yes! Will he not strip off its fruit and cause all of its leaves to dry up? Yes! Will not all of its fresh leaves shrivel up? Yes!

MacArthur: Zedekiah's treachery would not prosper. The king was captured in the plains of Jericho (**Jer 52:8**). The dependence on Egypt would fail, and Judah would wither as the E wind (a picture of Babylon, cf. **13:11-13**) blasted her.

Constable: The Lord rhetorically asked if the owner of such a vine would not pull it out of its soil and cause it to wither and become unfruitful. Nothing that anyone could do could cause such a vine to recover its original health and fruitfulness after such treatment (cf. **vv. 22-24**). Even though its roots were still in the ground, it would not thrive. The hot east wind would easily wither it where it grew (cf. **19:12; Job 27:21; Isa. 27:8; Hos. 13:15**).

II. (:11-21) THE EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE – WHAT DOES IT MEAN? TREACHERY LEADS TO CATASTROPHIC JUDGMENT

“Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

A. (:12-18) Historical Interpretation of the Events of the Fable

1. (:12a) Rebels Need Instruction

*“Say now to the rebellious house,
‘Do you not know what these things mean?’”*

MacArthur: The parable is explained in detail. Babylon (v. 12) made Zedekiah a vassal subject to her, took captives, and left Judah weak (vv. 13, 14). Zedekiah broke the agreement (v. 15) in which he swore by the Lord to submit to Babylon (2Ch 36:13), and sought Egypt’s help, thus he was taken to Babylon to live out his life (v. 16, 19; Jer 39:4-7). Egypt was to be no help to him (v. 17) or any protector of his army (v. 21).

Daniel Block: This riddle seems to have been provoked by developments within the exilic community. Perhaps reports of Zedekiah’s overtures with the Egyptians were being greeted as an opportunity to throw off the Babylonian yoke, which in turn would enable them to return home. Like his contemporary Jeremiah, however, Ezekiel maintains a consistently pro-Babylonian stance. For him the future of the nation rests not with the remnant huddled in Jerusalem but with the exiles. Accordingly, his present aim is to expose Zedekiah’s treacherous policies and his compatriots’ support of them as rebellion against Yahweh.

2. (:12b-14) Resistance Will Undermine Covenant Security

“Say, ‘Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes, and brought them to him in Babylon. 13 And he took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, 14 that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant, that it might continue.’”

Constable: In Scripture, the eagle is often a figure used to describe God as a powerful being that comes swiftly to judge, just as an eagle swoops down quickly to snatch in flight an unsuspecting mouse or fish (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 46:11; Jer. 48:40; 49:22). In this case, the eagle represented God’s instrument of judgment, Nebuchadnezzar, who had invaded Jerusalem, cropped off the Judean king, Jehoiachin (the “*top of the cedar*” tree, v. 3), and his advisers (the “*topmost of its young twigs*,” v. 4), and carried them off to Babylon in 597 B.C. (cf. Dan. 7:4).

3. (:15-18) Redirection of Loyalties to Egypt Has No Chance of Success

a. (:15) Treacherous Miscalculation

*“But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops.
Will he succeed?”*

*Will he who does such things escape?
Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?"*

David Guzik: When the vine in the parable turned to the second eagle, it had great hope of life and vitality (**Ezekiel 17:8**). These rhetorical questions reminded everyone that the vine would find no help from the second eagle, and Zedekiah would find no help from Egypt.

b. (:16-18) Troubling Pronouncements of Doom

1) (:16) Certain Death for Zedekiah in Babylon

"As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die.'"

Peter Pett: The rebellion, which was strictly against the revealed will of Yahweh through Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 27:12-15**), was doomed from the start. Egypt made a show of strength, and the siege on Jerusalem was lifted for a time (**Jeremiah 37:5; Jeremiah 37:11**), but they were no match for Nebuchadnezzar as Jeremiah had foretold. Here great emphasis is laid on Zedekiah's failure to keep his oath and observe the terms of the treaty he had made with Nebuchadnezzar.

But the point is not so much that he broke the treaty, treaties made under duress were often being broken, but that he broke a treaty which had the approval of Yahweh. It was not only a covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, it was a covenant with Yahweh Himself (**Ezekiel 17:19**).

2) (:17) Counting on Egypt Proves Futile

"And Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build siege walls to cut off many lives."

3) (:18) Covenant Breaking Inexcusable / Doom Inescapable

"Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape."

Constable: Pharaoh would not come to Zedekiah's aid, when Nebuchadnezzar invaded and besieged Jerusalem, and slew many of the people. There was no way that Zedekiah could escape Nebuchadnezzar's wrath, since he had broken the covenant in which he had pledged his allegiance to the Babylonian king.

B. (:19-21) Theological Implications of the Fable

"Therefore, thus says the Lord God,"

1. (:19b-21a) Judgment Against Treacherous Zedekiah Comes from the Lord

a. (:19b) Covenant Breaking Brings Severe Consequences

*“As I live, surely My oath which he despised
and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head.”*

Daniel Block: The focus shifts from the plane of earthly events to the divine sphere, as Ezekiel explores the **theological implications** of the fable and of Zedekiah’s political decisions. According to v. 19, Zedekiah’s guilt involved more than treachery against a human overlord—the offended party was Yahweh himself. Zedekiah had despised Yahweh’s oath and broken Yahweh’s covenant; therefore, Yahweh would take the appropriate action to carry out a punishment suitable for the crime. The meaning of this verse is clarified by **2 Chr. 36:13**, according to which, when Nebuchadnezzar had imposed his vassal covenant on Zedekiah, he had forced him to swear by God (*hišbī’ô bē’lōhîm*), that is, by Yahweh, the God of Israel. As if legal authorization is required, this oath offered Yahweh the grounds for intervening against the king because of his rebellion against the Babylonian. To violate a political covenant is to challenge the divine Guarantor.

b. (:20) Capture and Execution of Zedekiah for His Treachery

*“And I will spread My net over him,
and he will be caught in My snare.
Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with
him there regarding the unfaithful act which he has committed
against Me.”*

Alexander: Why were they being judged for all the past sins of their nation? It was not fair! Ezekiel would respond, declaring that they would be judged for the contemporary lack of trust in the Lord, which they had shown by their tendency to rely on Egypt for security and by the corruption of their regent, Zedekiah.

c. (:21a) Complete Devastation of His Followers

*“And all the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword,
and the survivors will be scattered to every wind;”*

2. (:21b) Vindication of the Lord’s Words of Judgment

“and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken.”

III. (:22-24) MESSIANIC EPILOGUE OF KINGDOM RESTORATION AND DOMINION – WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR ISRAEL?

“Thus says the Lord God,”

David Thompson: – God will one day provide security and prosperity for His people.

Daniel Block: The story of the eagles, the cedar, and the vine climaxes with a masterful crescendo in the final coda, as the prophet looks beyond the planes of fable, history, and theology to a new and glorious future for the dynasty. The presence of Yahweh as the

subject of all the action links this panel with the preceding, especially vv. 19–21, but the repetition of the citation formula in v. 22 signals the beginning of a new movement in the presentation. . . Ezekiel had opened his riddle with a description of the great eagle taking a sprig of a cedar of Lebanon and transporting it to some enigmatic merchant city (vv. 3–4). But then he had abruptly dropped the story, turning his attention to an entirely different and apparently unrelated sequence of events. As the prophet expounded on the meaning of the riddle, his listeners must have wondered what had become of the **cedar sprig**. The opening scene had to have some function in the fable. Ezekiel finally answers that question. The interpretation offered divides into two parts:

- Yahweh’s own planting of the sprig (vv. 22–23),
- and the impact of this action on his reputation (v. 24).

A. (:22-23) Messianic Restoration in Final Kingdom Dominion

1. (:22) Kingdom Derivation from the Messianic Davidic Branch

*“I shall also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out;
I shall pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one,
and I shall plant it on a high and lofty mountain.”*

Iain Duguid: However, it is not simply a matter of rescuing the cedar sprig that has been carried off to Babylon and restoring Jehoiachin to the throne. The problem lies deeper than that, for the whole history of the monarchy is, from Ezekiel’s perspective, one of failure. Yahweh will go back to the source, as it were, for a new shoot, though still from the same cedar tree.⁹ Though no hope is held out for the present cedar sprig (Jehoiachin) or the vine (Zedekiah), yet the death of the contemporary Davidides does not mean the end of the road for the Davidic monarchy. The failure of all past Davidic kings to usher in God’s kingdom does not mean an abandonment of God’s promises to David of an eternal throne (**2 Sam. 7:16**). A new sprig from that same tree will be planted and will flourish under the blessing of Yahweh’s protection. Indeed, his future greatness will far surpass that of the past monarchs of Israel, having a worldwide impact as the nations see God visibly at work establishing his kingdom. . .

The good news, however, is that in spite of our weakness and folly, Christ’s kingdom continues to grow and develop, based on his goodness and covenant faithfulness, not ours. Our rebellion and failure may have negative consequences in our own lives, but it cannot prevent God from achieving his purposes in the world. He may work slowly, from our perspective, through imperceptible growth from small beginnings rather than radical revolution, but his work is nonetheless effective. His tree provides perfect shelter and security for all of his own people. As he has planned, he will bring men and women from every tribe and nation to know himself, justified in the perfect obedience of their true king, the shoot of David, Jesus Christ.

MacArthur: “*a sprig from the lofty top*” – This is messianic prophecy stating that God will provide the Messiah from the royal line of David (“*the cedar*”) and establish Him in His kingdom (like a “*mountain*,” cf. **Da 2:35, 44, 45**). He will be “*a sprig*” reigning in the height of success. “*Sprig*,” or “*branch*,” is a name for Messiah (cf. **34:23, 24; 37:24, 25; Is 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zec 3:8; 6:12**). Messiah will be “*a tender one*” (v.

22) growing into a “*stately cedar*” (v. 23). Under His kingdom rule, all nations will be blessed and Israel restored.

2. (:23) Kingdom Dominion over All the Nations

*“On the high mountain of Israel I shall plant it,
that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit,
and become a stately cedar.
And birds of every kind will nest under it;
they will nest in the shade of its branches.”*

Poole: All nations, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, shall build, breed, and multiply under the kingdom of Christ; it shall be no more confined to the Jews, but extend to the Gentiles also. There they shall find peace and safety; and this repeated confirms the certainty of the promise.

B. (:24) Majestic Reputation of Divine Sovereignty Vindicated

1. Recognition Refrain

“And all the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD;”

Douglas Stuart: The allegory concludes with yet another statement from God about the importance of people knowing that He was in control of human events and history. Most of these statements have taken the form “*you shall know that I am the Lord*” (e.g., **16:62**). Here, however, the allegory keeps its free imagery right to the end, expressing the certainty that “*all the trees*” (all nations) would know that God can cause nations to rise and fall at His pleasure. This theme gave condolence to the Israelites in exile who knew the stories of Daniel (e.g., **Dan. 2:21; 4:17**) and Ezekiel’s preaching: even as awesome an empire as the Babylonians controlled could fall if God willed it. And even as puny a people as the defeated Judeans in exile could be reestablished if God chose to make it happen.

Christopher Wright: The final section, **verses 22–24**, makes the point that ultimately the security and fruitfulness of Israel will come, not from either of the two great eagles—human empires which are intrinsically fickle and transient—but from God himself. And when God intervenes to reverse the fortunes of his people, then the world (All the trees of the field) will know who has done it. In comparison with the truly great eagle, Yahweh himself, Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh are very small birds indeed. And in comparison with all the other trees, the redemptive work of God for his people will result in a tree of truly cosmic dimensions.

2. Reversal Images of Ultimate Restoration Following Certain Judgment

a. First Reversal Image

“I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree,”

b. Second Reversal Image

“dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish.”

Constable: At that time the other nations (trees) would know that the one who had done this was Israel's God. He would cut down the high tree (Babylon?) and exalt the low tree (Israel). He would dry up the presently green tree (Egypt?) and make the presently dry tree (Israel) flourish. The one who promised this was Yahweh, and He would also perform it.

3. Reinforcement of Divine Sovereignty in Accomplishing Kingdom Agenda
"I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

Lamar Cooper: The concluding statement of the chapter affirms the certainty of the Lord's promised restoration. Although some have understood it to have been fulfilled in the restoration of Judah under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the language goes beyond such limited scope (cf. **Ezra 9:8-9**) to a time yet future when Israel will have its perfect King, the Messiah, reigning on the earth in righteousness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we chosen a foolish path of action in rebellious independence against the will of God?
- 2) Do we consider oath-breaking a serious offense? How about when it involves our covenant faithfulness to God?
- 3) What level of importance does God place on His reputation in the world?
- 4) How do you view God's hand of sovereignty over what seems to be the calamitous affairs of history? Do we view sinful nations as God's instruments to accomplish His kingdom agenda?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: The unit falls into the following divisions:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 17:1-10 | A fable about two eagles, a cedar, and a grapevine |
| 17:3-4 | The eagle's removal of a cedar shoot |
| 17:5-8 | The grapevine's attraction to a rival eagle |
| 17:9-10 | The eagle's likely response |
| 17:11-21 | The interpretation in terms of Zedekiah's infidelity |
| 17:12 | The deportation of Jehoiachin |
| 17:13-15a | The installation of Zedekiah as vassal and his rebellion |
| 17:15b-21 | Zedekiah's fate at Nebuchadnezzar's and Yahweh's hands |
| 17:22-24 | A promise of God's restored cedar in Jerusalem |

Derek Thomas: All this shows us that in the midst of all the comings and goings of this world, the Lord takes a peculiar interest in the establishment of his kingdom. In the last resort it is only his kingdom that will last: *‘All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish’ (17:24)*. God is in control of history; nations rise and fall at his behest. This had been the source of encouragement to those in exile: *‘[God] changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.’ ‘The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ... It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.’ ‘The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes’ (Dan. 2:21; 2:44; 4:25)*.

The key to understanding history is not military or economic, but rather a moral and spiritual one. What we see happening all around us is all part of God’s great plan that will culminate in the return of Christ in triumph and glory. Seeing God at work in this way is a wonderful encouragement.

Commenting upon this passage in a sermon, **John Owen** said, ‘I know no better way of praising God for any work, than the finding out of his design therein, and closing with him in it.’

Daniel Block: The word-event formula, *“The word of Yahweh came to me, saying,”* in **17:1** marks the beginning of a new oracle that carries on to the end of the chapter, where it concludes with an expanded version of the recognition formula. The intervening material bears striking resemblances to **12:1–16**. Beyond a common theme (the repudiation of Zedekiah) and numerous lexical links (cf. **12:13** and **17:20**), the following structural parallels are especially impressive:

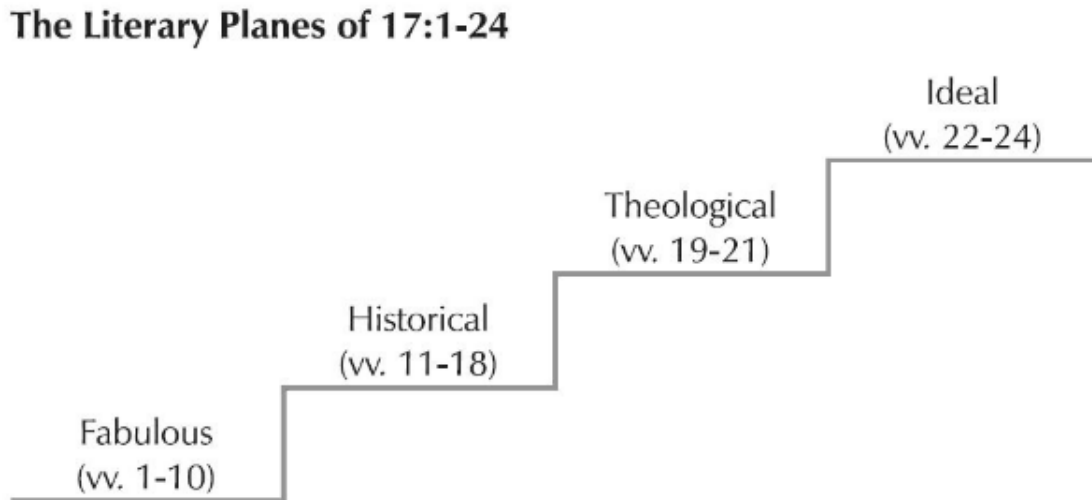
Preamble	12:1–2 1	17:1–2
Figurative presentation	12:3–7	17:3–10
Question concerning its meaning	12:8–9	17:11–12a
Divinely authorized interpretation	12:10–15	17:12b–21
Ray of hope (with motive clause)	12:16a	17:22–23
Recognition formula	12:16b	17:24

... one may conclude that what Ezekiel’s pantomime was to drama, this figure is to rhetoric. Both involve caricature—the first in the form of a dramatic presentation, the second as a literary cartoon—and both require interpretation.

The general flow of the plot contributes to the impression of an intentionally crafted unitary composition. There is obvious logic in the movement of the theme through four distinct stages, each involving a new plane of action:

- (1) an imaginative fabulous image;
- (2) an historical interpretation of the fable (vv. 11–18);
- (3) a theological interpretation of the historical events (vv. 19–21);
- (4) a theological portrayal of the future (vv. 22–24).

These stages may be plotted diagrammatically:



David Thompson: GOD GIVES ISRAEL PARABLES DESIGNED TO SHOW EXACTLY WHAT HE WILL DO AGAINST HIS PEOPLE AND ALSO WHAT HE WILL DO FOR HIS PEOPLE.

This is an amazing chapter of grace. Think of the horrible idolatry we have seen in this book. It is totally unbelievable to think that God would ultimately bless these people. But that is what this chapter promises. Even though God permits a series of negative and horrible things to happen to His rebellious people, in the end He will restore them and in His sovereign grace He will exalt the branch of David.

Iain Duguid: . . . a deeper significance to the breaking of Zedekiah's oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. It is not simply that breaking an oath lawfully taken is a serious matter. It is not even that the oath Zedekiah was forced to swear was taken in the Lord's name and therefore he would act as guarantor to bring into effect the covenant curses attached to it. It is that there is a fundamental analogy between Zedekiah's rebellion against his covenant overlord, Nebuchadnezzar, and Israel's rebellion against her covenant overlord, God himself. If Zedekiah's abandoning of his (relatively) prosperous situation in favor of the Egyptian option is a suicidally foolish breach of the covenant relationship, what may we say about Israel's abandonment of the Lord and their history of rebellion against him?

TEXT: Ezekiel 18:1-32

TITLE: PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CONDUCT

BIG IDEA:

GOD CANNOT BE ACCUSED OF INJUSTICE BECAUSE HE HOLDS EACH INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS OWN CONDUCT

INTRODUCTION:

Amidst the blame shifting and complaining of the exiles in Babylon who refused to take responsibility for sin, Ezekiel delivers a clear proclamation of the principle of individual accountability for conduct. *The soul who sins will die.* You cannot speak the authoritative word of God with more clarity than that simple declaration. You can't base your hopes on the righteousness of a previous generation (an important lesson for children from Christian homes) or call God out for a lack of fairness when you find yourself experiencing His chastening. But equally important, you are not obligated to repeat the unrighteous conduct of your parents. There is opportunity to repent and convert and enter into the blessing of life. But you also must take responsibility for persevering in the course of righteousness (even though other Scriptures make plain that the grace of God is the determining factor).

MacArthur: One of the foundational principles of Scripture is presented in this chapter (also taught in **Dt 24:16; 2Ki 14:6**): Judgment is according to individual faith and conduct. He had foretold national punishment, but the reason was individual sin (cf. **3:16-21; 14:12-20; 33:1-20**).

Feinberg: The judgments Ezekiel introduces here are temporal judgments, and the death dealt with is physical death. . . The subject of justification by faith should not be pressed into this chapter; it is not under discussion.

Leslie Allen: The tenor of the chapter suggests that the slogan gave expression to **practical nihilism**. The exiles saw the present through the prism of the past. The slogan occasioned by Judah's downfall turned into a generalization. Overwhelmed by that recent catastrophe, they saw their whole lives doomed and devoid of purpose. Life was like that, and nothing they did could alter it. Elements in Ezekiel's prophesying might have played a part in encouraging this sentiment. Yahweh's punishment was not only to consist of national defeat but would chase its victims into exile, where he would continue to plague them (**5:12**). Life would be a misery spent in preoccupation with the past (**6:9**). That was to view the exile from the pre-587 perspective of judgment. After the watershed of 587, exile looked more rosy. It provided an opportunity to enjoy the limited presence of God (**11:16**). It was a typological Egypt from which Yahweh would lead his people to the promised land (**20:33-42**). The different perspectives of judgment and salvation were in line with an already established prophetic tradition and doubtless took their cue from it. In the present oracle the exiles are urged to share such optimism and to view their present and future as time to be lived in relation to God.

Douglas Stuart: Three facts needed careful explanation:

- (1) God judges the lives of individuals according to their own obedience to Him;
- (2) God is little concerned with what an individual was before his or her conversion and greatly concerned with what an individual has become after conversion; and
- (3) that it is possible to convert either from sin to righteousness or from righteousness to sin.

To teach this to the Israelites in exile and, by extension, to all who would later hear or read these words, God adopts a dialogical teaching style in which He both asks and answers questions about individual responsibility and conversion.

Lamar Cooper: There are two main emphases and thus two divisions in **18:1–32**. First, individuals were not guilty for sins committed by others or by their families (**18:1–20**). The thesis is stated in **vv. 1–4**, then illustrated with three examples. **Verse 20** summarizes the first division and previews the second. The point of the second division (**18:21–32**) is that individuals were not bound by former sins, their own or others, but could alter the situation through repentance and faith. The proposition is stated in **vv. 21–24**. Then there is a response to charges of divine injustice in **vv. 25–29**. The chapter concludes with a call to repentance in **vv. 30–32**.

I. (:1-9) ADVOCATING FOR THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE = THE SOUL WHO SINS WILL DIE

A. (:1-4a) Denying the Principle of Family Guilt for Sin

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

1. (:2-3) Dismissing the False Proverb Promoting Family Culpability

a. (:2) Questioning the Use of the Proverb

“What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge?'”

MacArthur: The people of Judah would not acknowledge their guilt worthy of judgment. Though they were themselves wicked and idolatrous, they blamed their forefathers for their state (cf. **2Ki 21:15**). The rationalizing is expressed in a current proverb (cf. **Jer 31:29**) which means, in effect, “They sinned (eat the sour grapes), we inherit the bitterness” (teeth set on edge).

Douglas Stuart: It wasn't easy to be defeated, in exile from one's homeland at the whim of a great military power, impoverished, and looking forward to one's remaining years eking out a hardscrabble existence on foreign soil in what amounted to a resettlement camp. Ezekiel and his contemporaries had endured humiliation and discouragement, and many of them undoubtedly took psychological refuge in the popular little epigram quoted in **verse 2**. . .

It was an appealing saying, since its subtle message was that the present generation was not responsible for all the disasters that had come upon it but had merely inherited conditions and problems that previous generations had set in motion. The attitude expressed in the saying, then, was one of both fatalism (“you can’t do anything about the way things are”) and irresponsibility (“you don’t have to do anything about your own situation since it isn’t your fault”).

Wiersbe: Where did Ezekiel’s listeners get the idea that God punished the children for the sins of their fathers? This philosophy came from two sources:

- (1) a misinterpretation of what the Lord had said in His law, that He visited the sins of the fathers upon the children (**Ex. 20:5; 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 7:9-10**), and
- (2) the Jewish idea of the oneness of the nation.

Constable: It is true that the sins of parents result in consequences for their children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren that we might call the "fallout" of the parents' sins. But it is not correct to say that God "punishes" children because their parents have sinned. This is the conclusion that the Israelites in exile had drawn and that this chapter refutes (cf. **Jer. 31:27- 30; Lam. 5:7**).

Peter Pett: The coming lesson on individual responsibility is opened by taking a popular proverb and rebutting it. Like all proverbs it contained truth when taken rightly, but was misleading when taken wrongly. It is always true that our children to a certain extent suffer for our failures, as well as benefiting from our successes, that we are all to a certain extent what we are because of our backgrounds. But when this becomes fatalism, suggesting that we cannot escape the round of fate, it becomes dangerously misleading. In the end we are what we choose to be.

Daniel Block: The problem that the proverb poses for Ezekiel is not with punishment that children are bearing for the sins of the fathers, or even the issue of theodicy. On the contrary, it reflects a **materialistic fatalism**, a resignation to immutable cosmic rules of cause and effect, an embittered paralysis of the soul, that has left the exiles without hope and without God. To the extent that the charge concerns God at all, it accuses him of disinterest or impotence in the face of the exiles’ current crisis. All these years they have put their trust in their divine patron, only to discover that they are victims of an immutable law of the universe: the fate of one generation is inexorably determined by the actions of the previous. Their theology and their God have betrayed them.

b. (:3) Quitting the Use of the Proverb

“‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.’”

MacArthur: God rejected their blame shifting and evasion of responsibility.

Feinberg: With a strong oath the Lord declared that the practice of using the proverb must stop at once because its use implied God was unjust.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel was not contradicting the biblical concept of **corporate solidarity** that was an essential part of Hebrew thought; nor was he introducing a new doctrine. **G. H. Matties** argues that whereas **H. W. Robinson** felt that **Ezek 18:4** was “untrue to the facts of life,” **Ezek 18** combines corporate and individual dimensions of personality in a way that is not contradictory. Ezekiel’s goal was to reconstruct Israel as the holy people of God. Such a community would have to be created on the basis of individual choice. So it is through the commitment of the individual that the social and religious orders are to be saved.

2. (:4a) Declaring God’s Lordship over Each Individual Soul

*“Behold, all souls are Mine;
the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine.”*

Feinberg: all souls belong equally to God. God as Creator loves all the creatures He has made, so what possible objective could He have besides absolute equity in every case? Individual responsibility is the only explanation of the dealings of God. If they complained of suffering for their fathers’ sins, they should have been ready to suffer for their own. The soul (the person) who sins must die. This does not contradict the principle in **Exodus 20:5** because it is well known that children have a tendency to repeat the sins of their fathers (see **Matt. 23:32, 34-36**).

Daniel Block: First, one cannot achieve a true understanding of human experience without a recognition of the divine claims to one’s life. The opening statement is unequivocal and forthright: Every living person belongs to me. . . Although the form of this statement is unparalleled in the OT, the idea of Yahweh’s lordship over all human life is ancient. After all, he is the source and creator of all, and he sustains life with his own breath. With this opening statement Ezekiel repudiates the fatalism of his peers and announces his own radically theocentric view of the universe. He challenges his audience to abandon their materialistic worldview. They are not victims of immutable cosmic laws; their fate is in the hands of God.

B. (:4b-9) Asserting the Principle of Individual Accountability for Sin

1. (:4b) Statement of the Principle

“The soul who sins will die.”

Daniel Block: The form in which Ezekiel develops his thesis is impressive. On the one hand, the presentation of three cases to prove his point may have been influenced by the Deuteronomic requirement of two or three witnesses to prove a criminal case. On the other hand, he employs a repetitive style with great rhetorical effect to affirm that all three generations are judged by the same standards, while highlighting the real possibility of any generation breaking out of the patterns of behavior that have characterized the parents.

John Taylor: Everyone will be responsible to God for his own conduct. To this Ezekiel would surely add that, so far from their having cause to blame their sinful forbears for their present sufferings, the exiles were more guilty than their fathers because they had sinned more and their idolatries were greater (cf. **chapter 8**). It could not all be blamed on Manasseh and his reign of wickedness.

2. (:5-9a) Characterization of the Righteous

a. (:5) Opening General Summary

*“But if a man is righteous,
and practices justice and righteousness,”*

b. (:6-8) List of Specific Sins to Avoid

1) (:6a) Idolatry

*“and does not eat at the mountain shrines
or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,”*

Peter Pett: To ‘eat on the mountains’ referred to participating in festivals connected with idols in the high places (see **Deuteronomy 12:2**). These festivals in Canaan were orgies of sexual perversion (**Ezekiel 22:9**) and involved mystical association with the gods in all their lax ways. Combined with this was the submission to, and worship of, these idols, bowing down to wood and stone in direct contravention of God’s demands (**Exodus 20:5**). As Paul would demonstrate, this would lead to corrupt living (**Romans 1:18-32**).

2) (:6b) Defiling a Woman

*“or defile his neighbor's wife,
or approach a woman during her menstrual period—“*

Constable: The prohibition against having intercourse with one's wife during her period was clear in the Mosaic Law, but when Jesus terminated that code as the basis for believers' conduct this law no longer remained binding on believers (**Heb. 7:11-12**). The New Covenant teaching of believers' present duties says nothing about this practice. It is now a matter of choice (liberty) for believers.

3) (:7) Oppression

*“if a man does not oppress anyone,
but restores to the debtor his pledge,”
does not commit robbery,
but gives his bread to the hungry,
and covers the naked with clothing,*

4) (:8a) Usury

“if he does not lend money on interest or take increase,”

Daniel Block: Fifth, a person’s character is reflected in the way he or she handles financial matters, particularly in relation to the economically disadvantaged. Ezekiel’s

conviction that the righteous person refuses to exploit the poor for personal gain is based on the legislation in **Lev. 25:35–37**.

5) (:8b) Iniquity and Injustice

*“if he keeps his hand from iniquity,
and executes true justice between man and man,”*

c. (:9a) Closing General Summary

*“if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances
so as to deal faithfully—“*

Constable: In sum, the Israelite who lived by the Mosaic standards was righteous in behavior and could anticipate a long life of blessing from God (**Lev. 18:1-5; Deut. 11; 26:16-19; 30:15-20; cf. Phil. 3:6**). Clearly one's attitudes and actions toward other people demonstrate his or her attitudes and actions toward God.

3. (:9b) Verdict Regarding the Righteous

“he is righteous and will surely live, ’ declares the Lord God.”

Leslie Allen: Life was the intended consequence of observing the divine revelation of the Torah according to **Lev 18:5**, where it means that “Israel will have a secure, healthy life with sufficient goods in the promised land as God’s people” (**J. E. Hartley, Leviticus**, WBC 4 [Dallas: Word, 1992] 293). Ezekiel cites **Lev 18:5** in **20:13, 21**, and he will echo it in **18:19**. In **chap. 20** the wilderness generation is portrayed as turning their backs on such life and meriting destruction. By implication, the promise of qualified restoration in **20:32–44** represents enjoyment of the promised life.

II. (:10-20) APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE -- TRACKING SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS DOWN THROUGH GENERATIONS

A. (:10-13) Case of the Unrighteous Son of a Righteous Father = He Will Die

1. (:10-11a) Introducing the Case

*“Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood,
and who does any of these things to a brother
(though he himself did not do any of these things),”*

Peter Pett: The purpose of the comparison is to refute the idea that a man suffers or benefits as far as God is concerned because of his family connections. A man may naturally benefit, or otherwise, as a result of his family environment, behaviour and wealth, but in the end God’s dealings with him will be solely on the basis of his own moral behaviour and attitude towards God.

2. (:11b-13a) Unrighteous Lifestyle

*“that is, he even eats at the mountain shrines,
and defiles his neighbor's wife,
12 oppresses the poor and needy,*

*commits robbery,
does not restore a pledge,
but lifts up his eyes to the idols, and commits abomination,
13 he lends money on interest and takes increase;”*

Peter Pett: Note the close connection between eating on the mountains and defiling the neighbour’s wife. The two were regularly connected as men and women got drunk and behaved licentiously in fertility rites under the guise of religious activity. Note also ‘all these abominations’. Idolatry was ‘abominable’ because of the attitudes it encouraged and the fruit that it produced. Almost any evil behaviour could be justified from the behaviour of the gods. So when God condemned ‘abominations’ it included all these things.

3. (:13b) Verdict = Death

*“Will he live?
He will not live! He has committed all these abominations,
he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.”*

B. (:14-18) Case of the Righteous Grandson of an Unrighteous Father = He Will Live

1. (:14) Introducing the Case

*“Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father's sins
which he committed, and observing does not do likewise.”*

Wiersbe: How strange that the godly man of **verses 5-9** should raise an ungodly son who himself had a godly son! The grandson followed the righteous example of his grandfather and not the evil example of his father. King Hezekiah was a godly father whose son Manasseh was evil, although late in life he did repent. Manasseh’s son Amon was evil, but he fathered godly King Josiah! (See **Matt. 1:10-11**). The ways of the Lord are sometimes strange, and “*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*” (**Rom. 5:20**, NIV).

2. (:15-17a) Righteous Lifestyle

*“He does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of
the house of Israel,
or defile his neighbor's wife,
16 or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery,
but he gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing,
17 he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest or increase,
but executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes;”*

3. (:17b-18) Verdict = Life

“he will not die for his father's iniquity, he will surely live.”

Leslie Allen: The summary in **vv 17b–18** shows that the slogan is under attack. It was wrong to extrapolate from the deferred punishment of the recent calamity and a

(doubtful) claim of contemporary innocence a nihilistic application to the present and future. Overall, Ezekiel seems to imply that the downfall of Judah, with its strong element of deferment, was a special case in God's purposes. That judgment was now over, and one could look forward to salvation, yet not with presumption. The old divine standards for each generation of Israelites would still apply, not only back in the promised land (**11:20**; cf. **Jer 31:33**) but even now as a crucial pledge of good faith.

4. (:18) Addendum

“As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.”

C. (:19-20) Answering Objections

1. (:19a) Complaint

*“**Yet you say**, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?'"*

2. (:19b-20) Refutation

a. (:19b) Righteousness Deserves Life

“When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.”

b. (:20a) Sin Deserves Death

“The person who sins will die.”

c. (:20b) Principle of Individual Accountability for Conduct

“The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”

III. (:21-29) APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE – AN INDIVIDUAL CAN CHANGE HIS OWN STATUS – YOU ARE NOT LOCKED IN TO YOUR INITIAL STATE

A. (:21-22) Repentance Changes Your Status to Life

1. (:21) Conversion to Righteousness

“But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”

2. (:22) Deserving of Life

“All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.”

B. (:23) Preference of the Lord

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord God, ‘rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?’”

Daniel Block: Ezekiel reinforces his rejection of cosmic determinism by opening the door to new possibilities and offering life to those in despair. The style and content of Ezekiel’s argumentation in vv. 21–24 create the impression of a self-conscious donning of the mantle of Moses (cf. Deut. 18:15). Many centuries earlier, as the nation of Israel had stood on the border of the promised land, Moses had concluded his final address with a challenge to shun the way of apostasy and death, and to choose the way of life and blessing. This way was open to all who would express their covenant commitment to Yahweh by “walking in his ways,” and “keeping his commandments, decrees, and laws.” Ezekiel casts his offer in the form of an inclusio:

The way of life (vv. 21–22)

The basis of hope (v. 23)

The way of death (v. 24)

C. (:24) Backsliding Changes Your Status to Death

1. Conversion to Sin

“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live?”

2. Deserving of Death

“All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.”

Wiersbe: In **Ezekiel 18:24**, Ezekiel isn’t dealing with what theologians call “the security of the believer,” because the issue is physical life or death, as stated in God’s covenant (**Deut. 30:15-20; Jer. 21:8**). The righteous man who adopted a sinful lifestyle in defiance of God’s law would suffer for that decision.

Lamar Cooper: Judgment that must be executed on a true believer is called chastening (see **Heb 12:1–29**). Believers are warned of God’s chastening. Aside from its corrective purpose, chastening is an evidence of true faith (**Heb 12:8**). If a person sins and is not chastened, that person is illegitimate and not a genuine believer (**Heb 12:8**). If salvation could be lost, as some argue, “chastening” as a category of divine punishment has no meaning. A believer who sinned would be lost and simply once again would be in need of being saved. Consequently, Ezekiel was not discussing the issue of being lost or saved but how all people, lost and saved alike, can avert the judgment of God for sin.

John Taylor: The charge of injustice which is levelled against the Lord (**25, 29**) is turned back upon the accusers. It is they whose ways are not just (rsv; *equal*, av, rv). The law of individual responsibility which Ezekiel has been expounding is supremely fair, for every man has his own personal choice and the chance to live. God will

judge every one according to his ways (30). It is the combination of this fact and the knowledge that God has no pleasure in the death of any one (32) that leads Ezekiel to appeal to the people in God's name to repent and turn to him. As a people they may be rebellious and idolatrous, but as individuals they can be appealed to and, through their repentance, can be saved.

D. (:25-29) Answering Objections

1. (:25a) Complaint

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.'"

Daniel Block: It is obvious from the hearers' second protest that they reject not only Ezekiel's offer but also his view of God. The response to Ezekiel's foregoing appeal to choose life instead of death demonstrates that the people's problem was not primarily cosmological but theological. While they claim to be victims of an immutable universal law that locks their fate to the conduct of their parents, they really perceive themselves to be at the mercy of a capricious God, whose actions are unpredictable and arbitrary.

2. (:25b-28) Refutation

a. (:25b) Turning the Tables

*"Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right?
Is it not your ways that are not right?"*

b. (:26) Sin Deserves Death

*"When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness,
commits iniquity, and dies because of it,
for his iniquity which he has committed he will die."*

c. (:27-28) Righteousness Deserves Life

*"Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness
which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness,
he will save his life. 28 Because he considered and turned away
from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall
surely live; he shall not die."*

3. (:29) Restatement

a. Complaint

"But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.'"

b. Turning the Tables

*"Are My ways not right, O house of Israel?
Is it not your ways that are not right?"*

Wiersbe: Ezekiel pointed out that it was the people who weren't being fair with God! When they obeyed the Lord, they wanted Him to keep the terms of the covenant that promised blessing, but when they disobeyed, they didn't want Him to keep the terms of

the covenant that brought chastening. They wanted God to act contrary to His own Word and His own holy nature.

IV. (:30-32) URGENT CALL FOR REPENTANCE

A. (:30a) Reality of Individual Judgment

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct, declares the Lord God.”

MacArthur: The conclusion is that the just God must judge each person for his own life. But He invites repentance, so that hope may replace ruin (cf. **33:10, 11**).

B. (:30b-32) Repentance Essential for Spiritual Life

1. (:30b) Call for Repentance so that Sin Does Not Trip You Up

“Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.”

Derek Thomas: There is a sense in which it is right to let passages such as these speak for themselves, without the encumbrance of other passages which might seem to convey another point of view. Certainly, we must not allow other considerations to dilute the force of what is being said here. Equally, however, the fact that we believe the entire Scriptures to be inerrant means that we must not interpret one passage so as to contradict another. What is said here may well appear to be at odds with sovereign election; but it only appears to be so. There are doctrines in the Scripture which cannot be reconciled by a finite mind: **God’s sovereignty** and **man’s responsibility** being two such truths. No amount of reasoning can fully understand how both can be true; and yet both are true. Like the twin tracks of a railway line, they lie alongside each other, stretching out into the foreseeable distance. We tamper with either one at our peril.

2. (:31a) Repentance Essential for Regeneration

“Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!”

Here the ambiguity over whether the judgment refers to just physical life and death or eternal life and death seems to be resolved more on the side of the eternal consequences.

A. H. Strong: Since the relation between the divine and the human activity is not one of chronological succession, man is never to wait for God’s working. If he is ever regenerated, it must be in and through a movement of his own will, in which he turns to God as unconstrainedly and with as little consciousness of God’s operation upon him, as if no such operation of God were involved in the change. And in preaching, we are to press upon men the claims of God and their duty of immediate submission to Christ, with the certainty that they who do so submit will subsequently recognize this new and holy activity of their own wills as due to a working within them of divine power.

Daniel Block: The prophet's appeal is dominated by three imperatives, which when taken together provide another picture of the biblical understanding of repentance.

- First, reiterating a notion expressed earlier, repentance involves “*turning away*” from rebellious behavior against the divine overlord. This is the only way in which the stumbling block of iniquity can be avoided.
- Second, repentance involves *casting off* (*hišlīk mē ‘ālêkem*) all rebellious actions, presumably because they contribute to the guilt that a person carries.
- Third, repentance involves a mind/heart transplant. Shifting from a negative to a positive mode, Ezekiel calls on his people to make for themselves (*wa ‘ăšû lākem*) a new heart and a new spirit.

As in **11:19** and **36:26**, the use of *lēb* and *rūah* highlights the fundamental nature of Israel's problem. However, this text is unique in that it calls on the wicked to take initiative in making their own hearts and spirits new. What is promised elsewhere as a divine act and as a gift (**36:26–27**) is now recast as a command. The use of the imperative mood does not mean that Ezekiel believes his audience capable of moral and spiritual self-transformation. The command create a new heart and a new spirit for yourselves is a rhetorical device, highlighting the responsibility of the nation for their present crisis and pointing the way to the future. The prerequisites for positive divine intervention are a wholesale reorientation of life and an internal change in disposition. The former will not happen without the latter.

3. (:31b) Stubborn Persistence in Path of Death Makes No Sense
“*For why will you die, O house of Israel?*”

Daniel Block: The second purpose in this call for repentance is to highlight Yahweh's burden for his people and his yearning for their obedience, evident in his passionate outburst, *Why should you die, O house of Israel?* Repeating an earlier statement, Ezekiel declares that Yahweh takes no delight in anyone's death. He longs to bestow life on his people, if only they will repent and receive it. Sin and judgment need not have the last word; the door is wide open even now for Israel (the exiles) to return to him. The sentence of death may yet be lifted.

Yahweh's offer of life is gracious in the extreme, but it is both principled and contingent. Among the laws by which his justice is administered is the law of human freedom. Yahweh will not impose his grace on a rebellious people. They must accept responsibility for both the course of their lives and their destiny. Without repentance God cannot forgive and the death sentence remains inevitable. But where repentance occurs, grace triumphs and the sinner is granted life, full and abundant.

4. (:32a) Judgment of Death Not God's Desire
“*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,*’
declares the Lord God.”

MacArthur: The death of His saints is precious to God (**Ps 116:15**). By contrast, He has no such pleasure when a person dies without repentance. While God is sovereign in salvation, man is responsible for his own sin, **repent and live**.

5. (:32b) Call for Repentance in Order to Live
“Therefore, repent and live.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you have NT blinders on when reading passages like this so that you equate the issues of life and death with eternal salvation and justification by faith? What type of nuances are involved in the OT preaching about life and death?
- 2) How does this passage help you to affirm the justice of God with respect to how He deals with you as an individual?
- 3) What types of objections or arguments or rationalizations do people present today in the context of dealing with personal accountability for their conduct?
- 4) What lessons about repentance can you learn from this passage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: **Responsibility** is one of the major themes of these four chapters (**18-21**). The Jewish exiles in Babylon were blaming their ancestors for the terrible judgment that had befallen them, so Ezekiel explained that God judges people individually for their own sins and not for somebody else’s sins (**chap. 18**). He then pointed out that the Jewish leaders were responsible for the foolish decisions they had made (**chap. 19**), and that the nation itself had a long history of irresponsibility (**chap. 20**). Finally, the prophet reminded his listeners that the Lord Jehovah also had a responsibility to be faithful to Himself and His covenant with the Jews, and this was why He had chastened them (**chap. 21**). By dealing with the subject of [personal and national responsibility, Ezekiel was able to answer the frequent complaints of the people that the Lord was treating them unfairly.

Peter Pett: Note the **positiveness** of the whole passage. Had the prevailing position been totally in mind the contrast would have been between two wicked and one righteous. But the concentration is here on the blessing of the righteous, and the attitude is positive. The threefold generations may well have in mind the idea that Israel began well, sank into sin and now have the opportunity to repent resulting in full restoration.

Furthermore it does away with the **fatalism** of those who felt that they were at the mercy of their fathers' doings. Let them but arise and change and all will be different. Each man is responsible for his own sin and his own life, and finally determines his own destiny. The future can be rosy, but only if they go forward with their hand in the hand of God.

Ezekiel was not questioning the continuity of the effects of sin. The **consequences of sin** often go on long after the sin is forgiven, and sadly embrace others, often to the third and fourth generation. The life of David was constantly beset by the consequences of his forgiven sin, and he was finally refused the privilege of building the temple because of them. And his manner of life badly affected his sons. But Ezekiel is stressing final individual responsibility, and that God can compensate for a man's background, and will not hold it against him where he seeks to do the right. . .

Yet the whole book reveals that only within the sovereignty of God would they respond. That is why this great movement of the Spirit awaited the future. Though He called them they would not respond. Jerusalem would be destroyed. In the end it is only when God makes the first move and brings about His will on those whom He will call, that response will come.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel repudiates any doctrine that would accuse God of unscrupulosity and capriciousness. His moral universe runs according to fixed rules, which this text affirms to include the following:

- (a) The person who sins dies for his or her own sin.
- (b) Righteousness is expressed primarily by right action (rather than credal assent).
- (c) Those in authority and those with means will be held accountable for the way in which they have treated the marginalized members of society.
- (d) A person's past behavior need not determine his or her future well-being.
- (e) God is on the side of life for all, rather than death for any.

Derek Thomas: God's Desires and His Secret Decrees

Since it is evident that some will not repent, does this not pose a problem—that God longs for something that will not happen; that God sometimes expresses a desire for the fulfilment of certain things that he has not decreed in his inscrutable will to come to pass? 'This means,' comments **John Murray**, 'that there is a will to the realization of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree. This is indeed mysterious, and why he has not brought to pass, in the exercise of his omnipotent power and grace, what is his ardent pleasure lies hid in the sovereign counsel of his will.' Is God sincere when he expresses such emotions? This dilemma comes into sharp focus in the incarnate ministry of God's Son, for when Jesus beheld the city of Jerusalem, he longed to gather them under his protection '*as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*' (**Matt. 23:37**). '*But,*' he adds, '*you were not willing.*' He longed for the conversion of Jerusalem's inhabitants, but this evidently did not occur. Jesus' will seems in opposition to the will of God's decree. . .

What Jesus desires, God desires. Jesus is the ‘Word’ of God. . .

We must not therefore dilute the longing expressed in these verses: God desires the repentance of those whom he has not decreed to save. He yearns for them to be saved. It is partly this that gives us the warrant to preach the gospel to everyone. We are entitled to say to everyone, whoever they may be, ‘God longs for you to be saved.’ The grounds upon which Christ is offered to the world have nothing to do with election. Four reasons tell us why we should call upon everyone to repent and believe the gospel:

1. Everyone is sinful and needs him (**Rom. 3:19–26; Acts 4:12**).
2. Christ is a perfect and sufficient Saviour for everyone who believes in him (**John 3:16; Acts 13:39; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 7:25**).
3. Christ invites all who are needy to come to him (**Matt. 11:28; John 6:37**).
4. God commands that everyone who hears the gospel should repent and believe in Christ (**Acts 17:30; 1 John 3:23**).

Evangelism is not to be carried out under speculative notions of whether folk are elect or not. That is something we are not given to know. We evangelize because God tells us to. If someone asks: ‘How can such an invitation on our part, or for that matter a desire on God’s part, be bonafide?’, the answer, in brief, is that we do not know. The truth of God’s sovereignty should not affect the necessity, or the urgency, of evangelism on our part. The secret will of God is, to put it bluntly, but truthfully, none of our business. And if election does not affect the role of the evangelist, neither ought it to affect the responsibility of the one being evangelized.

The whole point of this chapter is to underline the fact that each man is accountable for his own actions. ‘Everywhere in Scripture,’ writes **J. C. Ryle**, ‘it is a leading principle that man can lose his own soul, that if he is lost at last it will be his own fault, and his blood will be on his own head. The same inspired Bible which reveals this doctrine of election is the Bible which contains the word, “*Why will ye die, O house of Israel?*”—“*Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life*”—“*This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (**Ezek. 18:31; John 5:40, 3:19**). The Bible never says that sinners miss heaven because they are not elect, but because they “*neglect the great salvation*”, and because they will not repent and believe.

The last judgement will abundantly prove that it is not the want of God’s election, so much as laziness, the love of sin, unbelief, and unwillingness to come to Christ, which ruins the souls that are lost.’ **Calvin** further comments: ‘We hold, then, that God wills not the death of a sinner, since he calls all equally to repentance, and promises himself prepared to receive them if they only seriously repent. If anyone should object—then there is no election of God, by which he has predestined a fixed number to salvation, the answer is at hand: the Prophet does not here speak of God’s secret counsel, but only recalls miserable men from despair, that they may apprehend the hope of pardon, and repent and embrace the offered salvation.’

TEXT: Ezekiel 19:1-14

TITLE: LAMENT OVER FAILED LEADERSHIP

BIG IDEA:

THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY HAS GONE DOWN IN FLAMES DUE TO FAILED LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Here we have the sad lament of Judah's failed leadership and its impact on the nation. The common figures of a lioness and a vine are employed to picture the rapid decline and tragic conclusion. Despite the nation's privileged position of prominence and productivity, her final kings ended up reigning in despotic fashion, ignoring God's Word, and characterized by oppression. Their behavior was so offensive to the surrounding nations that they ended up being captured and brought into humiliating subjugation. The Davidic dynasty enters into a prolonged period of interruption where no kings are raised up to rule. Until Messiah takes up the scepter, the nation must suffer the consequences of its failed leadership.

Constable: This is the first of five **laments** in Ezekiel (cf. **26:17-18; 27; 28:12-19; 32:1-16**). Laments usually utilize the *qinah* or limping form of rhythm in Hebrew, and this one does. The *qinah* form consists normally of three accented words followed by two accented words in a couplet. For example in **verse 2** in the NASB this rhythm is discernible: "*She lay down among young lions; she reared her cubs.*" Usually translations cannot capture the rhythm of the Hebrew text.

This rhythm gives a sorrowful feeling to the composition when it is read in Hebrew. The form is quite common in the Old Testament, especially in Lamentations, Psalms, and some of the prophetic books.

Vawter and Hoppe: This pattern apparently attempted to imitate the drumbeat (or its equivalent) of a funeral dirge: BOOM BOOM BOOM-pause-BOOM BOOM.

Daniel Block: He has taken the form of a *qînâ* and infused it with alien content. The incongruity between form and substance produces a parody's rhetorical force. By utilizing some of the features of a dirge, the prophet creates a somber and melancholic atmosphere, and raises a certain anticipation in his hearers. However, the tension between form and substance, *qînâ* and story, song and fable, challenges the hearers to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the poem. Contrary to the original hearers' and many modern readers' expectation, like **ch. 17**, this is a **riddle**, not a funeral song; it deals enigmatically with a living reality—the **fate of the Davidic dynasty**.

Like **Isa. 14**, which imitates the lament to mock and condemn the tyrannical king of Babylon, Ezekiel parodies the kings of Judah. In so doing he has two audiences in mind. On the one hand, he mocks Judah's kings and announces the imminent judgment

of the last member of the line. On the other hand, he deliberately undermines the false hopes and aspirations of his fellow exiles. So long as a descendant of David occupied the throne in Jerusalem, the Judeans could hope in divine protection. After all, Yahweh had made an eternal covenant with David (**2 Sam. 7**); he would surely not abandon his designated ruler or the people he represented. Ezekiel's aim in this "dirge" is to demolish another false theological pillar on which the nation's sense of security was based. Yahweh's covenant with David is hereby suspended.

Iain Duguid: Ezekiel's lament is made up of two distinct images: a lioness and her cubs, and a vine and its branches. At first sight, these images seem distinct and unconnected. However, both were familiar images for the royal tribe of Judah, and the images are brought together, albeit in a different way, in Jacob's blessing of a ruler who would come from the tribe of Judah (**Gen. 49:9–11**). When the familiar imagery was combined with the familiar meter (and musical style?) of lament, it would have been immediately apparent to Ezekiel's listeners that what they heard was "*a lament concerning the princes of Israel*" (**Ezek. 19:1**).

Peter Pett: Having faced all Israel up to their personal responsibility Ezekiel now brings the lesson home by writing a lament for the kings of Judah (called '*the princes of Israel*'), Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. These were the men to whom Israel had looked but in each case they had failed. Israel is likened to a lioness producing cubs, and the cubs are the princes of Judah (Israel). Their fate is then lamented, a fate which was the result of the fact that they '*did evil in the sight of Yahweh*'. This is followed by a poem of the withering of the vine of Israel and the cessation of kingship.

Wiersbe: In this brief parable, the Lord made it clear that these two kings of Judah thought themselves to be great leaders, but they ignored the Word of God and He cut them down after their brief reigns.

Derek Thomas: The exiles blamed their situation on the sins of others rather than their own. They also sought for deliverance from the wrong source. Ezekiel has to correct both these errors, for both were fatally flawed. Before we can be made right with God we must learn and acknowledge that we are sinners and that we are morally culpable. It is equally essential to know that Christ alone is the source of our deliverance from sin's curse and bondage.

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel tolls the bell for Zedekiah and for the Davidic dynasty. The last king would be captured and deported, while by implication the dynasty would perish. Jehoahaz's deportation at the hands of a world power must be seen as an omen of a similar fate for Zedekiah, the cub from the same litter of the dynastic lioness. The shameless oppression that marked the royal house was to lead to the withdrawal of divine promise, not least that of **Gen 49:9**. The second lament reverses **Gen 49:10–11** and stresses destructive wrath. The two laments with their different emphases are to be read together for the total message. An accusatory note of soaring pride has been skillfully woven into the latter lament, to reinforce the necessity of the divine verdict.

(:1) PROLOGUE – COMMAND TO LAMENT FAILED LEADERSHIP

“As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, 2 and say,”

Daniel Block: This literary unit is framed by an introductory command to Ezekiel to take up a lamentation (*qînâ*, v. 1) and a concluding colophonic notice that this has been achieved (v. 14c).

MacArthur: This is an elegy in typical lamentation meter (v. 14b), dealing with the captivity of Kings Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) and Jehoiachin (597 B.C.), and the collapse of the Davidic dynasty under Zedekiah (586 B.C.).

David Thompson: When God gives a lamentation, it is serious business; it is sad business. God was very sad over the fact that the leadership of Israel had become so corrupt that it no longer led the people to be right with Him. . .

A lamentation or dirge is a mournful and very sad song or poem that typically was used at a funeral. It was something that usually was designed to honor a dead person. But the dirge in Ezekiel is not designed to honor a physically dead person, but to warn a spiritually dead nation.

I. (:1-9) INDICTMENT OF JUDAH’S FINAL KINGS

A. (:2) Leadership of Judah Should Rule Like a Lioness – with Power and Dominion

*“What was your mother?
A lioness among lions!
She lay down among young lions,
She reared her cubs.”*

MacArthur: Judah is the “*lioness*,” just as in v. 10 she is the “*vine*.” Her cubs symbolize kings who were descendants of David exposed to the corrupting influences of heathen kings (“*young lions*”).

Peter Pett: Lions were a familiar feature of life in Palestine throughout the Old Testament and beyond. They were seen as fierce and noble beasts and were used to symbolise powerful control and rule (**Genesis 49:9; Micah 5:8; Numbers 23:24; Numbers 24:9** compare **1 Kings 10:19-20**). A royal lion was found on the seal of Shema from Megiddo.

Leslie Allen: The young males are the individual kings whom the royal house produced, while the cubs are the princes being groomed for royal office or for civil and military leadership.

B. (:3-4) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Jehoahaz

1. (:3) Oppressive Ruler – Devouring Men

*“When she brought up one of her cubs, He became a lion,
And he learned to tear his prey; He devoured men.”*

MacArthur: This refers to Jehoahaz (Shallum), who ruled in 609 B.C. and was deposed by Egypt’s Pharaoh Neco after reigning only 3 months (v. 4; **2Ki 23:32-34**; **2Ch 36:2**).

2. (:4) Offensive Ruler – Captured and Subjugated by the Nations

*“Then nations heard about him; He was captured in their pit,
And they brought him with hooks To the land of Egypt.”*

C. (:5-9) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Jehoiachin

1. (:5) Opportunistic Leader

*“When she saw, as she waited, That her hope was lost,
She took another of her cubs And made him a young lion.”*

Feinberg: King Jehoiakim, who succeeded Jehoahaz, was passed over, and Jehoiachin is Presented next. Jehoiakim was probably omitted because his judgment was not so conspicuous as that of the others (**II Kings 24:6**). His life ended peacefully.

MacArthur: This refers to Jehoiachin, who in 597 B.C. was carried to Babylon in a cage as in v. 9 (2Ki 24:6-15). Though he reigned only 3 months, he was oppressive and unjust. God used the pagan nations of Egypt and Babylon to judge these wicked kings. The Babylonians kept Jehoiachin imprisoned for 37 years, releasing him at the age of 55 (**2Ki 25:27-30**; **Jer 52:31, 32**).

[Other commentators think the reference is to Zedekiah]

Douglas Stuart: It is most likely, however, that Jehoiachin is not left out here in favor of Zedekiah, and that he is indeed the king whom Ezekiel intends to be understood behind the images of **verses 5–9**. After all, it was Jehoiachin who was in power when Ezekiel and his audience were taken prisoner and brought into exile, and it was Jehoiachin who was considered by them the last legitimate king of Judah. Even **2 Kings** ends by paying attention to Jehoiachin’s fate in exile (**2 Kin. 25:27–30**) since he was, in effect, the king of the exiles. Jehoiachin had great potential and was impressive (v. 7), but foreigners (Babylonians this time) captured him (v. 8) and brought him into exile, in Babylon (v. 9) so that *“his voice should no longer be heard,”* that is, he could no longer command his people as king.

Iain Duguid: The identity of the second lion has been the object of much debate. The primary choices are Jehoiachin, with whom Ezekiel was exiled, or Zedekiah, his successor, who was exiled in 586 b.c. If the lion metaphor is taken as a separate unit, then Zedekiah is probably the best choice. However, if the entire chapter is viewed as a two-image picture, with a change of metaphor between the first and second images, then Jehoiachin fits best as the second lion, while Zedekiah is then reserved for the second image, that of a vine and its branches. Although much attention has been devoted to the question, the meaning of the passage is not significantly altered by which

identification is adopted; the point is that the current rulers of Judah are simply the latest outcroppings of the rock of oppression and pride from which they were hewn.

2. (:6-7) Oppressive Leader

a. (:6) Devoured Men

*“And he walked about among the lions; He became a young lion,
He learned to tear his prey; He devoured men.”*

b. (:7a) Destroyed Their Fortified Towers and Cities

*“And he destroyed their fortified towers
And laid waste their cities;*

c. (:7b) Despotic Approach to Governing

*“And the land and its fulness were appalled
Because of the sound of his roaring.”*

3. (:8-9) Offensive Leader – Captured and Subjugated by the Nations

a. (:8) Captured

*“Then nations set against him On every side from their
provinces, And they spread their net over him; He was captured
in their pit.”*

b. (:9) Subjugated by the Nations

*“And they put him in a cage with hooks And brought him to the
king of Babylon; They brought him in hunting nets So that his
voice should be heard no more On the mountains of Israel.”*

II. (:10-14a) INDICTMENT OF THE NATION ITSELF

A. (:10-11) Lofty Position of Privilege for the Nation of Judah

1. (:10a) Planted by the Waters

“Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard, Planted by the waters;”

Daniel Block: Like the leonine phase of Ezekiel’s riddle, these verses open with a reference to “*your mother*.” However, this is where the similarities end. The metaphor of v. 2 is now replaced with a simile: the mother is no longer a lion; she is like a vine. Furthermore, whereas vv. 2–9 had focused on the mother’s offspring, now more attention will be paid to her.

2. (:10b) Prosperous and Fruitful

“It was fruitful and full of branches Because of abundant waters.”

3. (:11a) Producing Strong Leaders

“And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers;”

4. (:11b) Prominent in Reputation among the Nations

“And its height was raised above the clouds So that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.”

Constable: Ezekiel changed the figure of the Davidic dynasty to that of a fruitful vine in a vineyard. This vine was fruitful and it flourished because it enjoyed abundant resources. The Davidic dynasty was like a fruitful vine among the other nations because God blessed it (**15:1-6; 17:1-10; Deut. 8:7-8; Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1- 7; 24:7; 27:2-6; Jer. 2:21; 6:9; cf. Matt. 21:33-41; John 15:1- 8**). Its branches were so strong that they proved usable as scepters for rulers. The vine became exceedingly large in the season of its greatest glory, the days of David and Solomon.

Douglas Stuart: Now the focus of the allegorical lament is fixed not just on one of the kings, but also on the nation of Judah as a whole, with the role of its final puppet king, Zedekiah, being described as one of the factors in the whole nation’s exile. Here, then, the lament becomes definitely predictive. Ezekiel’s compatriots in exile in 592/91 may well have still hoped for some sort of rescue for their nation, a turn of events that might even provide a means for them to be brought back from Babylon and resettled in their homeland of Judah. The idea that Jerusalem would fall once for all to the Babylonians and that remaining Judeans would be exiled for many years was, however, what Ezekiel had been preaching right along, as the preceding chapters of the book display. This is also what the lament reiterates. Jehoiachin had surrendered in 598 b.c. after a brief Babylonian siege of the city so that the city and many of the population would be spared, even though Ezekiel and others had been deported along with the king. But now was coming a complete collapse and surrender, with the end of the nation as an independent member of the commonwealth of nations now in sight.

Daniel Block: In spite of the links with **17:1–10**, an important shift in the symbolic significance of the vine is evident. Whereas the previous plant had represented an individual king, Zedekiah, in this instance, the vine (mother) is better interpreted as the tribe/nation of Judah, from which more than one ruler sprouts. She has abandoned her natural role as a producer of grapes, and assumed the posture of a huge tree, a symbol of the arrogance of nations. This self-aggrandizement has provoked the wrath of Yahweh, who punishes her by uprooting and humiliating her, subjecting her to the east wind (the Babylonians), and transplanting her in a foreign land. This interpretation recognizes an enhanced and democratized relevance of the story for Ezekiel’s audience. This is not only a critique of Judah’s kings but also an **indictment of the nation**. The exiles are hereby reminded that they, who now wallow in the misery of Babylonian exile, represent the pathetic remainder of this once proud plant.

B. (:12-14a) Lament for Failed Leadership of King Zedekiah

1. (:12) Devastated Nation and Defeated Rulers

*“But it was plucked up in fury; It was cast down to the ground;
And the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong branch was torn off
So that it withered; The fire consumed it.”*

Feinberg: But when God was ignored and forgotten in the counsels of the kings, the vine, that is, the nation, was plucked up in fury. While the kingdom declined gradually, its end came by a sudden stroke of God's wrath. From great exaltation the Judean dynasty was abased to the ground. The Babylonian invaders from the east are represented by the east wind; they shriveled up the fruit of the land. The fire of judgment did its work of retribution. The result was that the vine was planted in a dry and thirsty wilderness. Such is the description of her condition in exile after 586 B.C. Transplantation of this kind meant complete loss of productiveness.

2. (:13) Doomed to Exile in Babylon

“And now it is planted in the wilderness, In a dry and thirsty land.”

John Taylor: Although the picture has changed, the mother is still to be taken as the nation Israel. The symbol of the vine and the vineyard was a favourite with Ezekiel (15:1–6; 17:1–10) as well as with other writers (Isa. 5:1–7; 27:2–6; Ps. 80:8–16; cf. Matt. 21:33–41; John 15:1–8). It had an honourable ancestry from Genesis 49:9–12, where can be found the same imagery of lions, sceptres and vines as Ezekiel uses here. In this allegory, the vine, planted in a well-watered land, flourishes and sends out sturdy shoots like so many royal sceptres, and these represented the nation's succession of rulers. When the vine was pulled up by its roots, however, its strong stem withered away and was burnt. The vine was transplanted to a desert land and at the same time fire came out of its chief branch and destroyed all its fruit and the rest of its foliage. This is clearly a reference to Zedekiah, the last ruler of Israel, who was regarded as the cause of the nation's ultimate collapse.

3. (:14a) Davidic Dynasty Extinguished for Now

“And fire has gone out from its branch; It has consumed its shoots and fruit, So that there is not in it a strong branch, A scepter to rule.”

Peter Pett: Here is the depiction of the failure of the kingship, and of the people. The glory of Israel-Judah was plucked up and cast down, and her rulers (*‘strong rods’*) were broken off and withered, and consumed by fire. Israel-Judah was transplanted to an unfruitful desert place, and her misfortunes will have resulted from her king who had brought about her misery (fire has gone out from him), leaving her with no one to rule her. And the whole finally resulted from the failure of Zedekiah to obey God and remain in submission to Babylon (**Jeremiah 27:12-13**).

Douglas Stuart: What is the immediate cause for this disastrous end to a once great nation? **Verse 14** points out, somewhat cryptically, that *“fire”* from *“a rod of her branches”* is what burned the vine so badly that it could no longer provide *“a strong branch—a scepter for ruling.”* The *“branch”* surely refers to any future king, and thus the point of the verse is that the *“fire”* brought an end to Israel's monarchy. **Verses 2–9** spoke of the end of the reigns of two kings; **verses 10–14** speak of the end of the reigns of all the kings. If this is the case, it is almost certain that the *“fire”* of **verse 14** is Zedekiah himself.

Fire in the ancient world was always viewed as destructive, which it surely is. The fact that fire can reduce wood to merely a bit of ash from which the wood can never again be reconstituted was rightly impressive to ancient people, and thus fire in the Bible is routinely a symbol of **annihilation** (e.g., **Gen. 19:24; Jer. 50:32; Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; 7:4; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:14**; etc.). It was Zedekiah whose leadership as a rebellious and godless king ruined Judah at the end of its history (**2 Kin. 24:18–25:7**, esp. **24:20**). This does not mean that Judah would not have been exiled without Zedekiah's evil. It does mean, however, that without Zedekiah's evil the inevitable destruction of the nation and deportation of its citizenry might have been delayed, as it was in days of the righteous Josiah (**2 Kin. 22:19–20**). Judah's fate had long ago been decided (**Deut. 4:21–31**). The actions of its latter kings merely sped up the timing (**2 Kin. 23:26–27**).

Zedekiah's rebellion against the Babylonians sometime in the late 590s (**2 Kin. 24:20**) was the immediate cause of the nation's collapse. As a puppet king (**2 Kin. 24:17**) Zedekiah had brought a sort of temporary stability to things in Judah, though at the price of heavy taxes and tribute paid to the Babylonians year after year. Undoubtedly in part to get out from under this burden, the king must have foolishly listened to advisers of poor judgment, who read the signs of the times wrongly, for his attempt to rebel never had a chance, and his own life and that of the nation ended disastrously with the siege of Jerusalem, the defeat of the Judeans, large-scale death and destruction, and a massive exile of people (**2 Kin. 25:1–21**).

All happened just as Ezekiel predicted. For even though the verbs in **Ezekiel 19:10–14** are in the past tense, the lament is still a prediction. The prophets were allowed to see the future and report back to the present on what they had seen in the future. Thus they often employ the past tense when describing what has not yet taken place. So Ezekiel's final lament is futuristic, and his audience could only tremble at its implications for their own continuing miserable fate as captives in a hostile foreign land.

Galen Doughty: Judah is now bereft of power and is incapable of raising up leaders who will lead the country out of its disaster. This is a scathing critique of Zedekiah who is king in Jerusalem at the time Ezekiel writes this lament. In his lament Ezekiel sarcastically calls Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin lion cubs who were strong rulers. Zedekiah is "*not fit for a ruler's scepter!*" Ezekiel's point is Judah is doomed and her king will be judged and there is nothing he or anyone else can do about it. All they can do is lament Judah and Jerusalem's fall.

John Taylor: The verse refers to Zedekiah's rebellion which brought in its wake the punitive Babylonian measures which virtually ended Israel's national identity, at least for many years, and certainly brought the Davidic line to an end. Thus the cause of its own destruction was found within itself, and it is worth noting that most institutions involving human beings end in much the same way.

Iain Duguid: Echoes of **chapter 17** are evident throughout this second picture. Both describe a vine planted in conditions suitable for growth (**17:5–6**), then uprooted in

wrath (17:9) and shriveled by the east wind (17:10). The tall tree is brought low (17:24). Though the focus is different, placed on divine action rather than human action, the conclusion for Zedekiah is the same: no escape.

(:14b) EPILOGUE – LAMENTATION CONCLUDED

“This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.”

Constable: It is appropriate that this last section in the part of the book that consists of Yahweh's reply to the invalid hopes of the Israelites (**chs. 12—19**) should be a lament. Judah's doom was certain, so a funeral dirge was fitting. All the exiles could do was mourn the divine judgment on their nation that was to reach its climax very soon.

Feinberg: His message was a lamentation for the destruction already carried out; it would be a lamentation for the desolation yet to be accomplished.

Leslie Allen: **V 14b** is a hermeneutical key to the editorial significance of the chapter. History had overtaken prophecy. What has been predicated of the future in a prophetic lament was now verified as valid. Hindsight could now interpret its past tenses literally. From this perspective, **chap. 19** serves to confirm what had been unambiguously future threats in **chap. 17**. Yahweh's word had come true. By the eclipse of royal sovereignty, God's moral sovereignty could be celebrated. Nor was that all. In the complex of **chaps. 17 and 19**, the central place is given to the salvation oracle of **17:22–24**. Where there was a real and undeniable end, there was to be a new beginning. Where judgment had to do its deadly work, salvation was eventually to revive the ancient promises. Room is made for a new, positive version of the vine fable and the vine lament, promising new glory that would transcend the old. Readers who look back and around with despair are bidden to look forward with messianic hope. They—and we—are given *“a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns”* (**2 Pet 1:19**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are the promises and blessings of God to previous generations any guarantee of blessing upon the present generation?
- 2) How do you evaluate your spiritual leaders along the spectrum of exploitation to servanthood?
- 3) Why was God so quick to extinguish the false hopes of those exiles in Babylon?
- 4) What is the involvement of the surrounding nations in the demise of the Davidic dynasty?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: The chapter falls into the following parts:

19:1	Yahweh's command to lament Israel's rulers
19:2–9	The lament over Jehoahaz and Zedekiah as young lions
19:2–4	Jehoahaz's violent reign and deportation
19:5–9	Zedekiah's violent reign and coming deportation
19:10–14a	The lament over the Davidic grapevine
19:10–11	Its past glory, culminating in Zedekiah's ambitions
19:12	Its coming destruction
19:13–14a	Its exilic fate brought about by Zedekiah
19:14b	The fulfillment of the predictive lament

David Thompson: The point of this chapter is this:

KINGS OF ISRAEL ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE JUDGMENT OF GOD THAT WILL COME AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THEIR PROMISED LAND.

Bad leadership will ruin God's blessings very fast.

When God sends judgment against a nation or a state or a church, you may be certain there are people in positions of power who are leading things the wrong way. There are leaders who are leading people away from the truth of God.

Now there are two main lamentation themes that show up in this chapter:

LAMENTATION THEME #1 – The lamentation over the leadership of Israel. 19:1-9

What is the point of all of this? The point is crooked leadership brought all of this negative destruction on Israel. The reason why these Davidic Kings were overtaken and treated so badly is because they were evil.

Wicked leaders can bring something godly down fast. It does not take long to ruin something that was once known as a sacred place of God. Both of these kings led Israel the wrong way and both were destroyed. One would think that Zedekiah and other leaders would learn from this; but they didn't.

LAMENTATION THEME #2 – The lamentation over the land of Israel. 19:10-14

Now had Ezekiel ended this in **chapter 19**, it would be a tragic story. But as we will see, the story does not end here and next week we come to **chapter 20**.

God intends to judge Israel and He also intends to regather her and bring her to her land (20:38, 40).

Now the glory of the righteous king and the glory of the land will not be seen again until a Lion from the tribe of Judah comes to take charge. Who is this lion who will come who will once again cause righteousness to reign? It is Jesus Christ. He will come and He will rule (**Gen. 49:10; Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15**).

Galen Doughty: Ezekiel may be "lamenting" the two captured kings in order to attack the official theology. The people falsely believed that because they had a king from David's line who sat upon Solomon's throne Jerusalem would never be captured or destroyed. God would protect the king because of his covenant with David. They had divorced the covenant with David from the covenant God made with all of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The official theology didn't even consider the king's behavior according to God's Law. Josiah did but the rest of the last kings of Judah did not. The problem for the kings was God felt like Josiah. He cared very much how the kings acted and whether they were obedient to his commandments. It is as if Ezekiel says all the nations around Judah and the Lord himself saw Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin for what they were; young weak kings who were in over their heads and had no chance of succeeding. The official theology saw them as "young lions" who devoured their prey and whose roar terrified the peoples around Judah. False teaching and doctrine can blind us to the truth of the situation. That is what happened to the leaders and people of Judah.

Douglas Stuart: From David's famous lament (*qinah*) over Saul and Jonathan in **2 Samuel 1:19–27** and similar lengthy laments in the Old Testament, we can distinguish four elements that normally go together to make up a *qinah*:

1. Summons/instruction to mourn
2. Direct address to the departed
3. Description of the tragedy (how greatly the loss is felt)
4. Retrospective praise of the qualities of the departed

The *qinah* of **Ezekiel 19** certainly has all of these elements and thus qualifies as a classic lament of a type well attested in the Scripture.

Lamar Cooper: This message concludes the prophecies of judgments to befall Judah and Jerusalem that began in **12:1** (and perhaps also the entire first part of the book). As noted in the introduction to **chap. 12**, Ezekiel set forth in these messages seven reasons for the fall of Judah that may be used to summarize the theme and point of this section that began in **chap. 12**. They show that God was justified in bringing severe judgment on Judah. These failures will disintegrate the life of any nation or individual. They may be summarized as follows:

1. Judah failed to submit to God's chastening and rebelled in the face of captivity (**12:1–20**).
2. Judah rejected divine revelation. True prophets were ignored while false prophets and the idolatry they approved were accepted (**13:1–14:23**).

3. Judah failed to fulfill the purpose of fruitfulness for which God had created it (15:1–8).
4. Judah had a long history of unfaithfulness to God (16:1–63).
5. Judah depended on political alliances for security rather than looking to God to sustain the nation (17:1–24).
6. Judah was responsible to God for sin though there was reluctance to accept it (18:1–32).
7. Judah already was spiritually dead, so its political life also was allowed to die (19:1–14).

Derek Thomas: What can we conclude from this chapter? At first glance it appears cruel to tell these exiles that Judah is going to be destroyed in a few short years. We tend to want to reassure folk that some hope remains, no matter how dark the circumstances might be. Few of us would tell a friend suffering from terminal cancer that he has no hope. That would be cruel. So why does Ezekiel rob his hearers of what was to them the only source of comfort? The answer lies in the fact that this was not their only source of comfort! Their delivery lay, not in the power of Zedekiah or anyone else in Judah; it lay in the power of God to rescue them from their bondage. Sovereign grace was the source of their deliverance, and nothing else! This is a lesson that needs repeating again and again. For what saves us from our sin is not ourselves; nor is it the combined resources of other sinners. It is the power of God in the gospel, the operation of the sovereign Spirit of God at work in our hearts (cf. **Rom. 1:16**). We need to be shut in to the utter futility of every other means of rescue so that we might turn to the Lord and seek his mercy. That is what Ezekiel was doing here. Far from being cruel, it was an act of mercy in itself.

Iain Duguid: The good news is that in Jesus Christ God has done precisely such a radical new work. In spite of the failure of all of Judah's kings, good as well as bad, God sent another King, the true "*Lion of the tribe of Judah*" and "*Root of David*" (**Rev. 5:5**). In spite of your personal repeated failure, God has triumphed in Christ to win the salvation of all his people. But this Lion, far from tearing the prey and devouring men (**Ezek. 19:6**), has conquered by appearing as a Lamb, who has been slain on behalf of his people (**Rev. 5:6**).

The appearance of this Lamb of God opens a window into heaven that transforms our experience of present realities. Though the present we live in and the immediate future we face may be bleak and forbidding, "*a dry and thirsty land*" (**Ezek. 19:13**), that fact no longer devastates us because this world is not our home. It is merely our place of pilgrimage on a journey to our real home. . . We believe that the ruler's scepter has been given into the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately he will rule the nations as King of kings and Lord of lords (**Rev. 19:15–16**). In that promise lies a sure and certain hope that our failures are not the end of the story. God's faithfulness is.

TEXT: Ezekiel 20:1-32

TITLE: ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF SIN

BIG IDEA:

ISRAEL'S CONSISTENT PATTERN OF SIN DOWN THROUGH HER HISTORY JUSTIFIES GOD'S JUDGMENT AND MAGNIFIES HIS MERCY

INTRODUCTION:

Once the Lord has the attention of the elders in exile, He turns the table on their desire for some type of new counsel that would answer their perplexity regarding their current plight. Through His prophet Ezekiel, the Lord provides a sobering history lesson that details the persistent rebellion and idolatry of Israel down through her generations. Their course of sin continued to the present day so that their culpability does not hinge on the actions of previous generations. Despite the privileges of being called into a covenant relationship with the one true God, gifted with revelation and specific laws, delivered from Egypt, sustained through the wilderness wanderings and brought safely into the Promised Land with its abundant provisions, Israel showed no allegiance or loyalty. Their shocking abominations and harlotries and treachery would have justified annihilation but God in His mercy limited His judgments in order to maintain His reputation among the watching nations.

Iain Duguid: After five chapters of largely pictorial speech—proverbs, riddles, parables, and laments—the prophet returns to the language of straightforward history. This change is marked by a renewed interaction between the prophet and his public.

Peter Pett: In this chapter we are given a detailed description of the history of what God had done for His people, and how they had not responded to Him, beginning with their experiences in Egypt, continuing in the wilderness, and then in the land of Canaan. It continues by speaking of what God's purposes and intentions for His people are. In each example He reveals how He showed His goodness towards them, how they then rebelled against Him, how He purposed to reveal His anger on them, and how in the end He spared them for the sake of His own name and reputation.

Leslie Allen: There is historical development between the five parts. **Vv 5–9** begin the story in Egypt, and **vv 10–17** move on to the first wilderness generation in a sequence of two parts, **vv 10–14** and **15–17**, while **vv 18–26** progress to the second wilderness generation, again in two parts, **vv 18–22** and **23–26**. This structuring in an A / B 1 / B2 / C1 / C2 pattern cries out for a climax D. It is to be found in **vv 30–31**; it establishes a movement from Israel past in Egypt and the wilderness to Israel present in the land. The climax smoothly echoes the terminology of **v 26** and concludes well by accusing the present generation of their ancestors' crimes.

Daniel Block: This is a **parody**. With painstaking precision, incontrovertible logic, and deliberate skewing and distorting of the sacred traditions, Ezekiel turns his people's history on its head. Employing ancient theological and historical motifs but infusing them with radically new content, he calls his audience to critical self-evaluation. Far from being a story of election and salvation, Israel's story is one of apostasy. Assuming the role of an outsider, a social critic, Ezekiel recounts Israel's past by dividing it into four epochs, each of which was characterized by persistent rebellion against Yahweh (vv. 5–31). Instead of accepting their role as covenant benefactors and agents of Yahweh's honor, they had brought shame to the divine name by running after other gods.

(:1-4) PROLOGUE – DON'T CHALLENGE THE LORD YOUR GOD – ISRAEL'S PAST GENERATIONS DESERVES GOD'S JUDGMENT

A. (:1) The Challenge from Israel's Elders

“Now it came about in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.”

Some of the elders of Jewish exiles in Babylon approached Ezekiel seeking answers from God to specific questions and objections they had regarding God's treatment of His chosen people. This constituted a challenge to the justice of God.

Ralph Alexander: The chronological notice (July/August 591 B.C.) in v. 1 indicates the beginning of a new segment of the book and a new series of messages. Eleven months had passed since Ezekiel had delivered the previous revelation from God (cf. 8:1). . . Would Zedekiah's current diplomacy with Egypt succeed in bringing freedom for the exiles from the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar? Would the Hebrew captives soon return to the Promised Land?

MacArthur: cf. the similarity in 14:1-3. The prophet responds with a message from the Lord that gives a historical survey of Israel, featuring its uniform pattern of sin. Israel rebelled in Egypt (vv. 5-9), then in the wilderness trek (vv. 10-26), and the entry into the Land of Promise (vv. 27-32). Through all this, God kept delivering them to save His reputation (vv. 9, 14, 22).

Derek Thomas: The elders have once more gathered to hear what Ezekiel has to say (cf. 8:1; 14:1). The reason for their coming together was *‘to enquire of the Lord’*. Perhaps they were anxious to know the length of the exile; or perhaps they wished to know if Zedekiah's fall, predicted in **chapter 19**, was now imminent and how this might affect relatives and friends back home. It is possible that some of them were anxious to make a deal with their captors and were seeking Ezekiel's support for it. Whatever the precise reason for their coming together, the tables are turned: the Lord does not allow the elders to set the agenda for discussion; he has an urgent, and highly critical, word for them to hear.

Charles Dyer: The answer God then gave was not a response to their question but a review of their history. To find an answer the people only needed to look into their past.

Peter Pett: Ezekiel was divided up into major sections by these datings.

- **Ezekiel 1:2** is dated July 592 BC,
- **Ezekiel 8:1** is dated September 592/1 BC,
- **Ezekiel 20:1** is dated August 591/0 BC,
- **Ezekiel 24:1** is dated January 588 BC,
- **Ezekiel 33:21** is dated January 586/5 BC and
- **Ezekiel 40:1** is dated April 573 BC, which are in chronological order.

(The oracles against nations were also dated (**Ezekiel 26:1 to Ezekiel 32:32**), but not in chronological order).

Iain Duguid: To *seek the Lord* means not to seek the calf idols of Bethel (**Amos 5:5**). But this is precisely where the elders fail the test. Because they are involved in the idolatrous practices of their ancestors, the Lord will not answer them. The door is so firmly closed in their faces that the prophet does not even bother to record the substance of their request. They might just as well not have said a word. In fact, they may not even have reached the point of framing their question before they are cut off. It is not what they ask that the Lord finds unacceptable but who they are.

B. (:2-3) The Rejection of the Challenge by the Lord

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 3 ‘Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Do you come to inquire of Me?

As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.”

Daniel Block: The instructions for Ezekiel consist of two parts. On the one hand, he is to announce that Yahweh has refused their request for a divine determination on the present crisis; he is under no obligation to respond to them. The rejection notice is also cast in two parts. The opening rhetorical question challenges the sincerity of the men; have they really come to inquire of Yahweh with the wholeheartedness called for in **Deut. 4:29**? The follow-up declaration, strengthened with the oath and signatory formulae, responds to their request more directly: Yahweh will not permit these people to inquire of him. Unlike **14:3–4**, no explicit reason for the rebuff is given at this time.

Although Yahweh refuses to satisfy the elders’ inquiry, he takes advantage of this “teachable moment” by communicating an alternative oracle through his prophetic mediator. Instead of announcing the longed-for salvation, Yahweh charges the prophet to arraign the nation. The manner in which he is to arraign his people is specified in **v. 4b**: he is to declare the abominations of their ancestors. The assonantal phrase *tô ‘ăbôt ‘ăbôtām* may be pleasant to the ear, but it represents an intentional distortion of the Deuteronomistic phrase *tô ‘ăbôt haggôyim*, “the abominations of the nations.” Pagan actions that are explicitly classified as “abominable” include witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, the use of mediums; the construction of cult installations, high places,

pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree (cf. v. 28); the sacrifice of children and the burning of incense to the gods; the worship of the astral deities; and the erection of pagan altars in the temple of Yahweh. In each occurrence of the phrase, the abominations involve the practices of the original inhabitants of the land of Israel. The people in Ezekiel's audience were probably shocked by Yahweh's substitution of 'ābôtām (lit. "their fathers") for haggōyim ("the nations").

With this phrase Yahweh's disposition toward Israel is transparent; to him the nation has historically been merely one of the Canaanite nations. In his development of this thesis the prophet will raise two primary arguments. First, Israel's total depravity is reflected in that the people have been idolatrous since their beginnings in Egypt. Second, enraged by their response to his grace, Yahweh had decided already while they were wandering in the desert to scatter them among the nations (v. 23), but had delayed the punishment until the cup of iniquity was full.

C. (:4) The Changing of the Narrative to Focus on Deserved Judgment for a History of Sin

1. (:4a) Judgment Commanded

"Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man?"

Charles Dyer: "Will you judge them?" conveyed His impatience with the people, and it has the force of a command, "Judge these people!" Ezekiel was to confront them regarding the detestable practices of their fathers. The court was to be opened and the evidence presented.

2. (:4b-6) History Lesson Prescribed

"Make them know the abominations of their fathers;"

Constable: In response to the request of these elders, God gave His prophet a message for them. He told Ezekiel to say that He would not satisfy their curiosity about the matters that concerned them. However, Ezekiel was to communicate another message to these elders, a message that included judgment because of the Israelites' abominable idolatry throughout their history. The Lord's repeated question has the effect of an emotional imperative: you must pass judgment on them.

Iain Duguid: The way in which Ezekiel challenges the elders with Israel's history has more than a little in common with **chapter 18**. It is essentially a story of three consecutive generations, with intended application to the present generation. . . Each generation's history is presented as a six-stage cycle:

- (1) The Lord's self-revelation (vv. 5–6, 11, 18–19)
- (2) A challenge to exclusive devotion (vv. 7, 12, 19–20)
- (3) Israel's rebellion (vv. 8, 13, 21)
- (4) The threat of the Lord's wrath (vv. 8b, 13b, 21b)
- (5) Wrath limited/deferred for the sake of the divine name (vv. 9, 14, 22)
- (6) Act of limited judgment (vv. 10, 17, 23)

I. (:5-9) PATTERN OF SIN FOR THE GENERATION IN BONDAGE IN EGYPT

A. (:5-6) The Origin of the Nation in the Land of Egypt

1. (:5) Establishment of the Covenant Relationship with the Chosen People

*“and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God,
On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the
house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt,
when I swore to them, saying, **I am the LORD your God,**”*

Peter Pett: God depicts His choice of them as occurring when they were in Egypt. Prior to that His choice had been of individuals and their households, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But in Egypt He had chosen Israel as a budding nation, as a people for Himself.

Lamar Cooper: The word “*know*,” *yāda*’, is also the word translated “*revealed*” in **vv. 5, 9** (cf. **v. 20**). It speaks specifically of knowledge by personal experience. Despite the Hebrews’ not “*knowing*” God, Moses appealed to God not to abandon or annihilate them. The basis of his appeal was the name, which represents the character and reputation of God (**vv. 13–14**; see **Num 14:13–19**). Again, for his name’s sake, God spared Israel.

2. (:6) Intention to Deliver Them Out of Egypt and Into the Promised Land

*“on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt
into a land that I had selected for them,
flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.”*

Iain Duguid: God came to Israel in the midst of their miserable bondage and offered them the way to the total freedom of pure worship. He promised them not just any land but a beautiful land for their own (**Ezek. 20:6**). Only the very best would do for God’s people. They, however, sought only half-freedom. They wanted freedom from the unpleasant circumstances of their sin and from its messy complications, but not freedom from the sin itself. They would rather keep their idols and perish in the desert than enter the Promised Land without them.

B. (:7-8a) The Objective that the People Repent of Pagan Idolatry

1. (:7) Repentance Commanded

*“And I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his
eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt;
I am the LORD your God.”*

Daniel Block: In view of the grace that Yahweh demonstrated in calling Israel to this special relationship with himself, his demand for exclusive allegiance was not unreasonable. But instead of treasuring the relationship and expressing their gratitude by wholehearted obedience, the Israelites rebelled against him by refusing to listen to him. Their obduracy is highlighted by casting the accusation as a negative echo of the

command in v. 7. Whereas the psalmist traces this insubordination to the Red Sea (**Ps. 106:7**), Ezekiel insists it has its roots in Egypt.

Derek Thomas: The point Ezekiel is now making is that the Israelites in Egypt, far from longing for the fulfilment of this promise, were fully accommodating themselves to their surroundings, even to the extent of needing to be told to get rid of their ‘*vile images*’ (**20:7, 8**). These ‘*idols of Egypt*’ (**20:7**) were undoubtedly dear to the Israelites, for they refused to forsake them (**20:8**).

2. (:8a) Rebellion Persisted

“But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.”

Constable: Some expositors believed that this is a reference to God judging the Israelites at Mt. Sinai because of the Golden Calf incident. However, it seems clear that the Lord was referring to Israel's idolatry in Egypt before the Exodus, which is not revealed as explicitly elsewhere in Scripture. Then He chose to bring them out of Egypt for the sake of His reputation among the other nations (cf. **Gen. 15:13-16**).

Douglas Stuart: In Egypt before the Exodus the Israelites were hardly devoted, faithful, trusting servants of the Lord waiting longingly for the promises of old to be fulfilled. As the centuries had gone by they had become fully accommodated to their surroundings and had gradually adopted the idolatrous beliefs and worship practices that prevailed in Egypt and everywhere else. These beliefs and practices were so ingrained that it was necessary for the Israelites to be given strict laws against them once they—and the many non-Israelites who, joined them in the Exodus (**Ex. 12:38**)—got to Mount Sinai (**Ex. 20:3–6, 23**).

C. (:8b-9) The Opposing Commitments of God -- Mercy Must Triumph over Judgment

1. (:8b) The Commitment of God to Pour Out His Wrath in Judgment

“Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.”

Feinberg: The Lord did not want His glory and power to be disregarded or lightly esteemed by the nations of the earth. To profane the name of the Lord is the opposite of sanctifying it. If God had poured out His wrath on His people, though they warranted such action by their multiplied transgressions against Him, the heathen could well have concluded according to their reasonings that God was unable to deliver His nation from their enemies.

Daniel Block: These verses reflect the turmoil in Yahweh's heart over the rebellion of his people. Since *El Qanna*, “*Impassioned God*,” cannot stand passively by while his covenant partners turn to other gods, their infidelity fans his fury into flame and he resolves to pour out his wrath on them before they have even left the land of Egypt.

But he cannot wipe his people out. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this panel, if not the entire chapter, is the **motive** Ezekiel offers for Yahweh's restraint, which reflects the radical theocentricity of Ezekiel's perspective on his people's history and his eschatology. Far from capitulating to last-minute sentimentality or pity toward his people, or the sudden realization of their deep-seated need for forgiveness, Yahweh's unexpected withdrawal rests entirely on personal concerns: he must act for the honor of his name. The phrase *'āśâ lēma 'an šēm* has been interpreted as "to act in accordance with one's character," but the present context confirms that it is better understood as "to act for the sake of one's **reputation.**" Yahweh's special relationship with Israel was not a secret affair. They were living among the nations, and Yahweh had publicly demonstrated his covenantal relationship with them by bringing them out of Egypt.

2. (:9) The Commitment of God to Show Mercy to Protect His Reputation among the Nations

"But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt."

Ralph Alexander: The Lord's name embodied all he was. He was the ever-present, eternal, covenant God of Israel. . . The Lord did not want the Egyptian bondage to be misconstrued as a demonstration of his inadequacies, for the truth was just the opposite. It was because of his immutable faithfulness to his promises that he disciplined his people. But the name of the Lord was holy, and the Israelites were to bear continually a proper witness to that holy name (**Exod. 19:5-6**). Though Israel had failed to sanctify the name of the Lord among the nations, the Lord himself would do so by his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Then all the nations would know that he was the Lord, the true, faithful, and powerful God of Israel (**Exod 7:5; Ps 106:8-12**).

Anton Pearson: His name is profaned when men harbor thoughts of him or attribute deeds to him inconsistent with his character as holy and unique (cf. v. **39; 36:20-22**). The opposite of "*to profane*" is "*to sanctify*." It is to recognize the Lord as the one true God in every area of life, and to live in a manner befitting him.

II. (:10-26) PATTERN OF SIN FOR THE GENERATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS

A. (:10-14) First Generation in the Wilderness Rebelled Against God's Goodness

1. (:10-12) Demonstration of God's Goodness

- a. (:10) Redemption = God's Deliverance
"So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness."
- b. (:11) Revelation = God's Law
"And I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live."

c. (:12) Reminders = God's Sabbaths

“And also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Charles Dyer: God singled out one of His laws – the **Sabbaths** – as a visible manifestation of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. **Isa. 56:1-8**). It was a **sign** to the Israelites that they were God's special people and were obligated to keep His laws.

Constable: By observing the Sabbath, the Israelites demonstrated their uniqueness among the nations, their sanctification unto Yahweh (**Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17**). The Sabbath was a dual sign to the Israelites. It reminded them of Yahweh's creation of the cosmos (**Exod. 20:11**) and of His creation of their nation (**Deut. 5:14-15**). It was the central sign of the Old Covenant (**Isa. 56:2, 4**).

Daniel Block: Ezekiel's emphasis is entirely on the Sabbaths as a gift of Yahweh. For him the Sabbaths served two functions. First, they were a perpetual reminder of Yahweh's covenant with them. What the rainbow was to the Noachian covenant (**Gen. 9:8-17**), the Sabbath was to Yahweh's covenant with Israel—an attesting sign ('ôṭ) of Israel's relationship with him. Second, they had a didactic function: to remind the nation that their special status derives from Yahweh's action alone. In a clever departure from the decalogic Sabbath, which called on Israel to sanctify the day (*qiddēš*), here the Sabbaths are perceived as gifts that declare that Yahweh had sanctified them (*mēqaddēšām*).

2. (:13a) Rebellion against God's Goodness

“But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned.

3. (:13b-14) Conflict Between Commitment to Wrath vs. Mercy

“Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them.

But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out.”

B. (:15-17) Discipline Coupled with Mercy

1. (:15-16) God's Discipline

“And also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands, 16 because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols.”

Peter Pett: This is the reversal of **Ezekiel 20:6**. He who had sworn to them to bring them out of Egypt into the good land He had prepared for them, now lifted up His hand

and swore that those of that generation would not enter it (**Numbers 32:10-13**). The land that that generation had so looked forward to seeing was lost to them forever. God's favours are conditional on obedience.

2. (:17) God's Mercy

*"Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them,
and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness."*

C. (:18-21a) Second Generation in the Wilderness Persisted in Rebellion

1. (:18) Repentance Commanded

*"And I said to their children in the wilderness,
'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers,
or keep their ordinances,
or defile yourselves with their idols.'"*

Feinberg: The children of **verse 18** are the second generation in the wilderness. They were solemnly warned of God not to follow the wicked ways of their fathers who had shown themselves to be incorrigible. The entire message of Deuteronomy was one constant reminder and warning in this regard.

2. (:19) Relationship to the God of the Covenant Should be the Motivation to Obey

*"I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes,
and keep My ordinances, and observe them."*

3. (:20) Reminders by Sanctifying God's Sabbaths Should be Helpful (not Burdensome)

*"And sanctify My sabbaths;
and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that
you may know that I am the LORD your God."*

4. (:21a) Rebellion Persisted

*"But the children rebelled against Me;
they did not walk in My statutes,
nor were they careful to observe My ordinances,
by which, if a man observes them, he will live;
they profaned My sabbaths."*

D. (:21b-26) Discipline Coupled with Mercy

1. (:21b-22) The Opposing Commitments of God –
Mercy Triumphant over Judgment

a. (:21b) The Commitment of God to Pour Out His Wrath in Judgment

*"So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them,
to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness."*

b. (:22) The Commitment of God to Show Mercy to Protect His Reputation among the Nations

“But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.”

2. (:23-24) The Ordained Discipline of Scattering the Jews among the Nations

a. (:23) Promise of Discipline

“Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands,”

b. (:24) Reason for Discipline

“because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes, and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers.”

Douglas Stuart: The people of Israel were forced to remain in the wilderness for forty years while the original exodus generation gradually died away leaving a new generation to enter into the Promised Land. That new generation was for the most part born in the wilderness, although it included some of the original group from Egypt, people like Joshua and Caleb, who had remained faithful even while most of the others had not (**Num. 14:6–9**). The new generation was given every chance to obey the Lord and to enjoy His constant protection and favor. They, too, however, showed themselves unfaithful, doing the same sorts of things that their parents had been condemned for (**v. 21**). Accordingly, God’s anger was poured out against them (see **Num. 25:3–9**), again because of idolatry and all that it entailed. A major incident of idolatry committed by the second wilderness generation was that which occurred at Baal-Peor in Moab. There, the Israelites turned virtually en masse to Baal worship and to the ritual sex that accompanied it (**Num. 25:1–3, 6–9, 14–18**).

Lamar Cooper: **Verse 24** contains the fifth reference in this chapter to the Sabbath, four of which specifically meant the desecration of this holy day (**vv. 13, 16, 20, 21, 24**). Ezekiel’s constant reference to the Sabbath seems to have a wider significance than the censure for failing to observe the weekly holy seventh day commanded in **Exod 20:8–11**. It also may include reference to the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee Year observances of **Lev 25:1–34**.

3. (:25-26) The Outrageous Idolatrous Practices Designed to Bankrupt Them to Restore Them to the Covenant Relationship

a. (:25) Promulgated Pagan Rituals to Bankrupt Them

“And I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live;”

Feinberg: the statutes which were not good were the Molech worship of **verse 26**. Undeniably, this heathenish worship was never promoted by God, but rather strongly condemned by Him many times in the Old Testament prophetic messages. Ezekiel was

declaring that in retribution the Lord allowed them to go after their own ways in order to punish them according to their deeds. The passage is speaking in the sense of a judicial sentence. The problem is susceptible of solution if we see that God identifies Himself with the instruments of His wrath and His providential chastisements which He brings upon Israel in answer to their sin. The Lord gave them these worthless and unprofitable statutes in the same sense as **Isaiah 63:17**. Disobedience leads to greater sin.

- b. (:26) Pronounced Them Unclean with the Goal of Restoration
*“and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts,
in that they caused all their first-born to pass through the fire so
that I might make them desolate,
in order that they might know that I am the LORD.”*

Douglas Stuart: Among the most disgusting of the idolatrous practices that developed among the Israelites was child sacrifice (v. 26). A sacrifice as understood by Israel’s pagan neighbors was a way of giving desirable things to the gods. Humans were supposed to feed the gods by cooking food for them. (The smoke would send the food up to the gods.) And if you could send food via smoke to the gods, how about sending them servants that way? How about really impressing a god with your dedication and sincerity by sending that god something more precious to you than anything else—your own firstborn child? Thinking themselves likely to gain the lifetime favor of the gods in this way, the Israelites borrowed child sacrifice, too, from their neighbors and began killing their firstborn infants and burning them on altars as a means of sending them to the false gods they were worshipping. It is evident that such people really wanted the gods to love them and were willing to “give their all” to gain such love. But all they were doing was playing into the hands of Satan (**1 Cor. 10:20**). How could such worshipers then be “clean” in the worship of Yahweh? How could they escape His making them “desolate,” that is, imposing on them the curses of desolation predicted for the nation if it would rebel against Him (e.g., **Lev. 26:31–35; Deut. 28:51; 29:23**)?

III. (:27-29) PATTERN OF SIN FOR THE GENERATION ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

A. (:27) History of Blasphemy and Treachery

*“Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and say to them,
'Thus says the Lord God,
Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me
by acting treacherously against Me.’”*

Douglas Stuart: In **verse 27** the Lord commands Ezekiel to tell not only the elders of the captive Israelites but to the people in general (“*the house of Israel*”) that they are descended from blasphemers. Blasphemy (Hebrew, *giddēf*) is taunting or reviling God. It may be done orally or by one’s actions. In that the forefathers of the Israelites were almost immediately unfaithful to God in Canaan, they reviled Him.

B. (:28) Perversion of God's Gifts into Instruments of Idolatry

*"When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them,
then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree,
and they offered there their sacrifices,
and there they presented the provocation of their offering.
There also they made their soothing aroma,
and there they poured out their libations."*

Peter Pett: They compounded their rebellion in that when God actually gave them the land He had promised them, in spite of their rebellion, they made use of it to worship other gods. The very basis of the land, the high hills and the flourishing trees (thickly branched and therefore prominent and flourishing) became the means of worship of false gods. Instead of seeing all that was in the land as the blessing of Yahweh, they offered up sacrifices, presented offerings, offered up incense and poured out drink offerings to the so-called gods of the land, utilising the ancient sanctuaries of the Canaanites. Yahweh was sidelined.

David Thompson: God brought Israel into her Promised Land and what did she do? She pursued idolatry. She did not pursue the Word and will of God; she pursued "*Bamah*" (v. 29), which refers to false religions on almost every high hill. They pursued immorality and idolatry (v. 30). When we read through the book of Judges, everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes. The entire Promised Land was idolatrous.

C. (:29) Futility of Worshiping on the High Places

*"Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?'
So its name is called Bamah to this day."*

Constable: The Lord had confronted His people with their use of the high places on hilltops for idolatry. The name of the high places, "*Bamah*," had a double significance. It meant "*high place*," but it also meant literally "*go where*" or "*go what*" (Heb. *ba mah*). Thus Bamah became a contemptuous pun. When the people went to the high places to worship idols, where were they going? They were going nowhere of any significance, to do nothing of any importance, since these idols were nonentities and could not help them. The name "*Bamah*" said more about these places than just identifying them as high places of worship, and the Lord had perpetuated the name Bamah for this reason.

Iain Duguid: To this threefold cycle of gracious election, rebellion, and limited judgment, a coda is added in **Ezek. 20:27–29**, briefly bringing the story up to date. Lest anyone should argue that Ezekiel is raking up old history long forgotten, he replies that the history of Israel's occupation of Canaan is similarly depressing. Their ongoing love affair with the high places and their defiled worship proves that they are under God's judgment, even in the sworn land of promise (**20:28**), down to this very day (*'ad hayyôm hazzeh*, the last words of **20:29**). Today is, after all, Ezekiel's interest, as the repetition of the phrase in **20:31** makes clear. Israel's present is exactly the same as

Israel's past: vile images, child sacrifice, and idolatry (20:31). Surely Israel is a rebellious house, not just in times past but in the present, as the Lord had made clear to Ezekiel in 2:3. Such people need not expect any reply to their attempts to inquire of the Lord (20:31).

(:30-32) EPILOGUE—DON'T CHALLENGE THE LORD YOUR GOD – EZEKIEL'S CURRENT GENERATION DESERVES GOD'S JUDGMENT – ASKING THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

A. (:30-31a) Why Continue in the Harlotries of Your Ancestors?

“Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? And when you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day.’”

Anton Pearson: the prophet, speaking for Jehovah, was condemning the syncretistic and idolatrous practices of his fellow countrymen in Judah.

Derek Thomas: Sexual promiscuity has always been a feature of man's rebellion from the beginning. Even the greatest of Old Testament saints fell into this snare. To give it religious justification was only to add to the abhorrence of it in God's eyes. Most of the ancient Near Eastern religions believed that the gods brought things into being through a sexual act. Baal and Asherah, the Canaanite god and goddess of fertility, were believed to be capable of stimulation by sexual acts performed by their worshippers. Consequently the shrines of Canaanite religion had their professional prostitutes with whom sexual acts were performed. It is hard to imagine a more perverted justification of sin.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel demands reflection by his audience by casting his accusation in the form of two rhetorical questions. As if to dismiss any possibility that the exiles still view their fate as a consequence of ancestral sin, the first charges them with self-defiling (*niṭmā'*) practices. The present generation is not responsible for the sins of the ancestors, but they are accountable for following the pattern of rebellious behavior that their forebears set. The second question raises the issue of spiritual harlotry, accusing the exiles of whoring after their “*disgusting things*.”

Verse 31 answers both questions. The defilement comes from, and the spiritual harlotry is expressed by, the sacrifice of children to idols. **V. 26** intimated this to have been a problem with the second desert generation, but now the accusation is explicit. The phrase to the present day (*'ad-hayyôm*) specifically attributes the crime to Ezekiel's contemporaries. By any interpretation, the verse raises several nagging questions. Are child sacrifices being offered in Babylon? If so, where and when? Unfortunately, little is known about the religious practices of the exiles, but the accusation is too direct to be restricted to those who remain behind in the homeland.

B. (:31b) Why Seek Counsel from the Lord While You Persist in Rebellion?

*“And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel?
As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I will not be inquired of by you.’”*

Charles Dyer: In Ezekiel’s day Israel was still rebellious, just like her ancestors, and was involved in idolatry and child sacrifice. Therefore God refused to let them inquire of Him (cf. v. 3). He would not be a divine Ouija board they could manipulate for an answer whenever they pleased.

C. (:32) Why Desire to be Like the Pagan Nations Who Serve Dead Idols?

*“And what comes into your mind will not come about, when you say:
‘We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands,
serving wood and stone.’”*

Peter Pett: They would have neither the one thing nor the other. They had lost their right to learn from Yahweh, but they would also not be allowed to continue in their idolatrous ways. It is always man’s desire to fit in with his environment and be like others and ‘accepted’. But God’s people are not to be like that, indeed will not finally be allowed to be like that. Note the contemptuous ‘serve wood and stone’. This is in contrast with worshipping the living, invisible God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Under what circumstances would the Lord be unwilling to provide new counsel?
- 2) Do we have an overly positive perspective on the moral condition of our ancestors – either within our immediate family or within our country?
- 3) What was the purpose of the sabbath requirement and how does it apply to believers today?
- 4) How can we promote the Lord’s reputation to the watching world around us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: National Responsibility

In **chapter 18**, Ezekiel taught that the children were not punished for the sins of the fathers, but in this chapter, he seems to say that the past sins of the nation (carefully documented) were the cause of Israel’s failure and the Babylonian invasion . . .

But that wasn't what the Lord was saying to Ezekiel. By reviewing the history of the nation, God was judging that current generation because they were guilty of the same sins of unbelief and rebellion. Jeremiah said that his generation of Jews was even worse than their fathers! (**Jer. 16:12**) In this historical summary, God proved that He had been consistent in His dealings with the Jews. The exiles had complained that God had not treated Israel fairly (**Ezek. 18:2, 19, 25, 29**), but their national history proved that God was not only fair with them but also very long-suffering and merciful. God wasn't punishing the Jews in Ezekiel's day because of the sins their fathers committed centuries before but because Ezekiel's contemporaries had committed the very same sins! That's why God reviewed the history of Israel.

Galen Doughty: If one looks at Israel's history from Joshua through 2 Kings in every generation the Israelites disobeyed God. There were brief times of faithfulness but the people always returned to their pagan rebellious ways. In 1 & 2 Kings NO king of the north kingdom Israel was ever completely faithful to Yahweh and his covenant. There are a handful of the kings of Judah who are, the most important being Hezekiah and Josiah, but most of the time the kings of Judah are unfaithful to the Lord as well. The facts are the people of Israel throughout their history were a rebellious people and were not faithful to God and his covenant. The remarkable fact is that the Lord allowed them to occupy his land and be his people for 7 centuries before he had finally had enough of their idolatry, wickedness and rebellion. God bent over backwards way beyond what we would have done, giving them every chance to repent. It took the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon to bring them to their knees so he could start over.

Leslie Allen: Israel's theology placed a high value on the events of the Exodus, the trek through the wilderness and settlement in the land. This complex of events constituted a once-for-all divine intervention in human history which revealed ongoing positive purposes for Israel. For Ezekiel, however, these archetypal saving events were cancelled out by a counter-determination on Yahweh's part. A step behind each stage of his saving work there loomed a shadow of divine threat in reaction to Israel's rejection of their God. Here indeed was theological time which presented Israel with a warranty—but it was negative in its import. Yahweh was characteristically no longer one who saved and blessed but one who deprived and destroyed. Yet he took on this negative role not willingly but under the ever growing constraint of the perversity of his covenant partner. Commitment and justice tussled in the mind of God; eventually not even a possible slur of capriciousness could stay his hand, so blatant was Israel's lack of commitment. Singled out for special mention are their breaking of what in the Decalog is the first commandment, to have no other gods before Yahweh, and the profaning of the sabbath, which was regarded as a hallmark of Israel's faith.

Iain Duguid: What, then, are the implications of Ezekiel 20 for such a generation? . . . rebellion will inevitably be punished. Israel can never simply choose to be like the nations and thus remove herself from God's authority. There are only two choices for Israel: She can choose to accept her election and live on the basis of God's laws, or she can rebel as she has so often before and face the consequences of certain death. Likewise, our generation needs people within the covenant community who are

prophetically willing to call a spade a spade, to call sin sin, to speak of death and hell and the judgment to come. We need to confront the socially acceptable idols of comfort and success and career progress, which many in our churches attempt to combine with a commitment to Christ, as well as the more blatantly pagan idolatries.

We need to confront in our own hearts the continual temptation to remake our understanding of God into a comfortable reflection of our own image instead of submitting unreservedly to his self-revelation in Scripture. It is not a comfortable message to proclaim in an age that calls idols of wood and stone “different paths to God” and the high places “the church of your choice.” But God has not changed and the reality of his wrath must be recognized. Otherwise, we are simply deceiving ourselves and those around us with lies about God.

TEXT: Ezekiel 20:33-44

TITLE: *MILLENNIAL RESTORATION*

BIG IDEA:

MILLENNAL RESTORATION TRANSFORMS WORSHIP AND GLORIFIES GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Note that the familiar **Recognition Refrain** marks the end of each of the three segments of this section of the book (vs. **38, 42, 44**). Ezekiel now looks ahead to the end times scenario when the nation of Israel will be judged and purged in order to be regathered and restored to the land for God's reign in the Millennial Kingdom. Then worship will be transformed as the Jews finally bring offerings that are acceptable to God and as they maintain loyalty to their covenant bonds. They will manifest appropriate loathing for their previous rebellious hearts and actions and will genuinely know God in a way that enhances His reputation among the nations.

Daniel Block: the primary motivation behind divine activity is **revelatory—that the world may know who Yahweh is**. In the individualistic and hedonistic Western world it is difficult to understand, let alone accept, that the universe does not revolve around oneself. God, the source and sustainer of all things, is also the goal of all things. When he intervenes in earthly affairs he does indeed respond to human needs, but the nature of his response is set by his own character. His reactions are never arbitrary or capricious, but driven by his internal consistency. We may be grateful that grace is a significant element in that character, and that in his struggle over human rebellion his justice is tempered by mercy. But even when he acts with compassion, his concern is **the manifestation of his holiness**.

. . . as a corollary, the **divine reputation** depends on the fate and welfare of his people. All of God's dealings with Israel were public—before the eyes of the nations. Israel was to be the agent through whom the nations would come to know that he is Yahweh. Nothing has changed. Jesus reminded his disciples that their prayers should be different from the self-seeking petitions of the Gentiles (**Matt. 6:5–15**). **Concern for the sanctity of his name and the glory of his kingdom remains the mark of God's people.**

Leslie Allen: The prophet Ezekiel straddled two eras, the grim era of the past and present which culminated in double exile and—in prospect at least—a glorious era to be inaugurated by a new work of God. In this chapter both these aspects are set side by side so that it presents an epitome of his total message.

Wiersbe: The experiences described in **verses 33–44** cannot be applied to the return of the Jewish exiles to the land of Judah in 538 B.C. This was not an exodus from many

countries nor did it result in the glorious restoration of the Jewish nation. We have to apply this paragraph to that time in the future that Ezekiel describes in **chapters 33 to 48**, when Christ will return and the promised kingdom will be established.

I. (:33-38) MILLENNIAL RESTORATION REQUIRES PREPARATORY JUDGMENT AND PURGING

A. (:33) Assertion of Powerful Sovereignty over Israel

“As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.’”

Daniel Block: The people’s determination to be like the nations meets with an equally resolute response from Yahweh. With a strong asseveration, he announces he is not willing to let Israel sink to the level of other nations by serving other gods. The absence of references to divine kingship elsewhere in Ezekiel renders his declaration, I will reign over you as king (*’emlôk ’ălêkem*), all the more significant.

Peter Pett: *‘As I live.’* This is in direct contrast with the gods of *‘wood and stone’*. He is the living God. And because they are dealing with the living God they will be treated differently from others. He will come as their sovereign overlord to His rebellious subjects (just as Nebuchadnezzar would come against Jerusalem), and with power and vengeance, to take His rightful place as their King and to receive their submission. And this because it is His purpose.

Note how these words are a **threat** rather than a promise. They had wanted to be absorbed into the nations with their idolatry but it would not be allowed. God will not let them go. They will be called to account and then their future will depend on their response.

B. (:34-36) Adaptation of Former Historical Experiences

1. (:34) New Exodus

“And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;”

Leslie Allen: There is thus a typological contrast between the old Exodus and the new version by which Yahweh was to inaugurate a new era of salvation. It is followed here by a comparison between the wilderness experience after the Egyptian Exodus and a parallel one after an “Exodus” from the Diaspora.

David Thompson: Israel today is scattered all over the world. I just read a statistical breakdown of Israel and she is the most scattered nation in the world. Jews are scattered and live in 137 nations of the world. When Christ returns, He will regather the Jews (**Matt. 24:31**).

2. (:35) New Wilderness Experience

“and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh will lead his people out into the desert. The expression desert of the peoples (*midbar hā ‘ammîm*) refers to a no-man’s-land, a land of wandering and death, through which many tribes and peoples pass but which none recognizes as a homeland. Isolated from the nations, Yahweh may engage his people without interference and distraction. This meeting is described as a face-to-face encounter between deity and people. *pānîm ‘el-pānîm* recalls the manner in which Moses used to meet with God (**Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10**). However, here the emphasis is not on the intimacy of the relationship between deity and human but on the directness of the encounter. This time there will be no cloud or mediator to shield Israel from the awesome divine majesty.

Peter Pett: Note the emphasis that this will be in ‘*the wilderness*’. This will be a new Exodus, but here it also stresses that they will still be in barrenness (compare **Hosea 2:6; Hosea 12:9**). Their future blessing will depend on their response. There He will plead with them face to face, just as He had at Sinai in the wilderness. But many will not respond (**Ezekiel 20:38**) and will stay in the wilderness, just as the previously rebellious Israel in the time of Moses had died in the wilderness and had never seen the Promised Land.

3. (:36) New Confrontation in Judgment

“‘As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,’ declares the Lord God.”

C. (:37-38a) Abandonment of Covenant Transgressors

1. (:37) Passing under the Rod of Examination and Discipline

*“And I shall make you pass under the rod,
and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant;”*

Lamar Cooper: Reference to those who ‘*pass under my rod*’ was first an allusion to the tithe (**Lev 27:32**). Every tenth animal that passed under a ‘rod’ held over the sheep was separated and declared to be holy. The purification of the exile, likewise, would separate the righteous and the wicked. The ‘rod’ also was an instrument of discipline, correction, and punishment. This was another way of communicating the purpose of the exile, which was to ‘purge’ and purify those who rebelled against God (v. 38).

Feinberg: As a shepherd’s staff is employed to count the sheep (**Jer. 33:13**), so the Lord will bring the entire flock under the rod, this time with the purpose of separating the godly from the wicked. The godly will be brought more firmly into the bond of the covenant, whereas the rebels will be purged out; those who have transgressed against the Lord will be brought out of the land of their sojourn but denied admission to the land of promise. Just as in **Matthew 25** in the judgment on the nations (an event which

takes place in the same general prophetic period of the latter days for Israel) there is separation of sheep individuals from goat individuals, so in this purging judgment on Israel. This is an exclusive judgment on Israel which will take place during the time of Jacob's trouble, probably at the end of the period.

Ralph Alexander: the idea of **shepherd possession** seems the basic idea expressed by this phrase.

Peter Pett: *'The bond of the covenant.'* The new covenant would be **binding**. It was not something that could be entered into lightly. Once they accepted it they would be bound by it.

2. (:38a) Purging the Rebels

"and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel."

Daniel Block: Yahweh will purge the rebels from his people. If the obligation of the covenant applied to those who had passed Yahweh's examination, **v. 38** deals with those who fail. The rebels (*mōrēdīm*) and revolutionaries (*pōšē 'im*) are removed, yielding a purified people who acknowledge Yahweh and with whom he can start anew.

D. (:38b) Recognition Refrain

"Thus you will know that I am the LORD."

II. (:39-42) MILLENNIAL RESTORATION FEATURES TRANSFORMED WORSHIP – UNIFIED AND PURIFIED

A. (:39) Service No Longer Profaned

"As for you, O house of Israel,' thus says the Lord God, 'Go, serve everyone his idols; but later, you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.'"

Feinberg: The viewpoint that takes the verse as irony explains that God would have them open and out-and-out idolaters rather than the hypocritical patronizers of His worship which they have been thus far (see **I Kings 18:21; II Kings 17:41; Amos 5:21-22, 25-26; Matt. 6:24; Rev. 3:15-16**).

David Guzik: What God did *not* want from Israel was a **divided heart**. When they brought Yahweh worship from hearts also given to idols, it profaned God and His name. In New Testament phrasing, God called Israel to be hot or cold, but no longer lukewarm (**Revelation 3:15-16**).

B. (:40-41) Series of Dramatic Reversals

1. Change in Venue

“For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel, ’ declares the Lord God,”

Daniel Block: Israel’s superficial and partial obedience will be replaced by wholehearted service to Yahweh. **V. 40** highlights the place where this new relationship will be expressed; not in Egypt, in the desert, or in exile, but in the homeland (*bā`āreš*). The expression signals the normalization of all covenantal relationships: deity, nation, and land are finally reunited.

Feinberg: So blessed will it be then to live in the land, that Ezekiel refers to the land six times in **verse 40**.

2. Change in Corporate Loyalty

“there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land;”

MacArthur: The promised regathering in Messiah’s earthly kingdom is to the very same land – literal Palestine – from which they were scattered (**v. 41**), expressly the land given to their fathers (**36:28; Ge 12:7**). They will “*all*” be there, repentant (**v. 43**) and saved (**Ro 11:26, 27**), serving the Lord wholeheartedly, a united nation engaged in purified worship (cf. **27:22, 23; Is 11:13**).

3. Change in Divine Favor and Acceptance

“there I shall accept them,”

4. Change in Approval of Offerings

“and there I shall seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things.”

Constable: At that future time, all Israel would serve the Lord, specifically on the holy mountain where the temple stood (cf. **Isa. 27:13; 56:7; 66:20; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Zeph. 3:11; Zech. 8:3**). Then the Lord would accept their offerings of worship, their special gifts to Him, and all the things that they devoted to Him because they had repented (cf. **chs. 40—48**).

5. Change in the Positive Receiving of Scattered Peoples

“As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered;”

6. Change in Divine Reputation

“and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.”

Daniel Block: There I will accept them (*šām`eršēm*) functions as a title for **vv. 40b–42**. In the marks of the new acceptance one may recognize a series of dramatic reversals.

- First, instead of Yahweh’s present refusal to receive the inquiry of the exiles, he will request their offerings.
- Second, in place of Israel’s past defilement (*hiṭṭammē`*) through idolatrous

practices (vv. 7, 18), their offerings, specified as contributions (*těrumôt*), and choice gifts (*rē'sît mas'ôt*, lit. “the first/choice lifted up ones”) will be accepted as genuinely holy (*godāšîm*).

- Third, instead of the people provoking Yahweh with their pagan rites, including their “soothing aromas” (v. 28), Yahweh will accept the people themselves as a soothing aroma (*rêaḥ nîḥōaḥ*).
- Fourth, instead of defending the honor of his name before the nations through restraint, viz., by not destroying his people, Yahweh will vindicate his holiness publicly by affirmative action on Israel’s behalf: the new exodus from the peoples and countries where they are dispersed.
- Fifth, instead of living in Egypt (cf. vv. 5–9), the desert (cf. vv. 10–26, 35–38), or the diaspora (vv. 30–34), Israel will finally be brought to their own land, in fulfillment of Yahweh’s ancient promises to the ancestors.

C. (:42) Recognition Refrain

“And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.”

John Taylor: A purified remnant will worship the Lord on his holy mountain, Mount Zion, the ordained centre for his worship and the place of his dwelling. The choicest offerings will be made, the people’s worship will be accepted, and this will prove to be a manifestation to all the nations of Yahweh’s holiness (41). av, rv render this, I will be sanctified in you, which means ‘I will be recognized as God among you’, and this, more than any personal concern for his rebellious people, remains God’s ultimate aim. At the same time, the people will be overcome with shame for their past sins (43) and presumably their repentant spirit will also testify to the nature and holiness of God. It is precisely at this point, for their lack of a sense of shame and a spirit of repentance, that the elders are shown to be guilty and found unworthy to receive a word from a holy God.

Charles Dyer: God’s restoration of Israel will produce several changes: (1) The first change will be a new realization of here God. God said that Israel *will know that I am the Lord*. “LORD” (*Yahweh*) is God’s personal name, revealed to Israel (cf. Ex. 3:13-15). It stresses God’s **self-existence** and His **covenant-keeping faithfulness**. Israel will come to understand the true meaning of God’s name (and character) when He brings her into Palestine. This promise does not depend on her faithfulness, for she had been extremely unfaithful. The promise, made by God, depends on **His** faithfulness. He will demonstrate His covenant loyalty by fulfilling it (cf. Ezek. 20:44).

III. (:43-44) MILLENNIAL RESTORATION MANIFESTS A HEART OF REPENTANCE AND TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

A. (:43) Heart of Repentance

“And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds, with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.”

Feinberg: In that hour Israel will review their long career and dwell on their past deeds and pollutions with sincere conviction of heart and loathing for their past transgressions (16:61). To look at God in His holiness and majesty is to abhor self with all its sinful ways (cf. Job in **Job 42:5-6** and Isaiah in **Isaiah 6:5**). So loathsome will be their past history of defection that they will never return to idolatry. They will see it in all its stark reality for what it really is: suicide of the soul. They will realize too that the foundation of all God's dealings with them has been in grace and solely for His glory.

B. (:44) Recognition Refrain – True Knowledge of God

“Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God.”

Daniel Block: The portrait of Israel painted in vv. 43–44 represents the antithesis to the arrogance and defiance that Ezekiel finds among his compatriots. Three elements of their response to Yahweh's actions on their behalf are cited.

- First, Israel will remember their corrupt past. As elsewhere *zākar* does not mean simply “to recall to mind,” but “to acknowledge, take account of, accept responsibility for,” their conduct (*dērākīm*). For Ezekiel's audience this implied ceasing to blame past generations (cf. **ch. 18**) or God for their misfortune, and recognizing their sin for what it was: provocative deeds or wanton behavior (*ālilôt*) that was self-defiling (*niṭmā'*), evil actions (*rā'ôt*), and corrupt, or vile, deeds (*nišhātôt*). If Yahweh acts on the nation's behalf, it is in spite of, rather than because of, the people's desert.
- Second, the memory of this sordid past will evoke in Yahweh's people utter disgust, an intense self-loathing. There is no room for pride here, only the humble acknowledgment of one's shameful past.
- Third, Israel will recognize Yahweh, specifically that he is faithful to his covenant oaths (v. 42), that his actions involving them are motivated by a concern for his own honor, and that they run contrary to what they deserve. If Yahweh's original election of his people had been unmerited, how much more would their restoration be. Despite a history of rebellion, Yahweh's personal integrity and his jealous concern for his reputation triumph over his wrath.

Morgan: Israel would have new understanding of Jehovah, and come to know that the perpetual reason for His operation was the glory of His name, and not merely punishing them for their evil ways, that is to say, the punishment of Jehovah was never merely vindictive, but always a process moving toward the realisation of His original intention of good to the nations of the earth.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the Lord eventually want to **reign as king** over His chosen people? What is the consequence of rejecting the Lordship of Jesus Christ?
- 2) If the promises made in the OT to the physical nation of Israel are actually fulfilled in the context of the NT church, why is there any need for **regathering** of scattered peoples?
- 3) What is the significance to you of the “*bond of the covenant*” (vs. 37)?
- 4) Why is the **physical land** such an important part of eschatological prophecy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: In the present passage Ezekiel conveys from God to his audience a similar symbolic model for the gathering of the Israelites from Mesopotamia (and elsewhere) and their return to the Promised Land. This “**new exodus**” motif also has a particular emphasis on the fact that Israel will not go through the process again and remain unstable in its commitment to the Lord and enamored of idolatry as the people of the first exodus did. Instead, this time God will by His own power see to it that His people will be pure in their faith. He will purge them so that He might also be able to accept them, not by lowering His standards, but in a manner precisely consistent with His high standards for them.

This promise of resettling a purified Israel in Palestine following the Babylonian captivity is called the **restoration**. It is predicted here by God not at all for the first time, but rather is repeated just as it had been repeated by virtually all the orthodox prophets who preceded Ezekiel. The prophets preached the restoration of Israel on the basis of its original statement in the Mosaic covenant, in such places as **Deuteronomy 4:27–31; 30:1–10; and Leviticus 26:40–45**. There, through Moses, God had promised the first and second wilderness generations—and all generations after them—that in spite of the destruction and deportation of Israel that would inevitably result from their sin, He would nevertheless not allow His people to be exterminated totally. Instead, He would always retain a remnant, whom He would one day restore to truer prosperity and fidelity to Him than the nation had ever known. This is what **verses 33–44** describe.

Daniel Block: God did not express his love in Jesus Christ in response to our worthiness, but to redeem us from our unworthiness. The fundamental problem with most of us is not deficient self-esteem but an **inadequate divine-esteem**. As we submit ourselves to God, recognizing that ultimately **he operates for his own name’s sake**, and that his investment in us relates to agendas far greater than ourselves, we will treasure the grace with which he reaches out to us. Within this framework, the fundamental human pathology is not self-loathing but pride, an unhealthy and

unrealistic self-esteem. It is from this arrogance that we, especially we in North America, need deliverance.

Daniel Woodhead:

Vs. 39 -- God switches the direct object of His message back to the elders of Israel gathered together in Ezekiel's home for prophetic insight. Previously He was speaking about the 2 future generation of people who would emerge from the diaspora in different nations around the world and be gathered into Israel the first time. God is using sarcasm as he says to the elders, "*Go ye, serve everyone his idols.*" What He means is that if they go and do what they have been doing they will experience what God has for the Idolaters. They will not like what is in store for them. He follows that with a warning regarding their mixing the worship of Him with idols. He says they are profaning His Name by bringing Him gifts, that is, to the Temple worship, while still adoring idols. So in essence they were falsely worshipping Him but in their hearts carrying on with the pagan idolatrous practices.

VV. 40-41 -- Now Jehovah God turns from focusing on the sins of the Jews exiled to Babylon and refers again to the future when Israel will be gathered together from the four corners of the earth. Now however He is advancing the time on the world chronology to the second time that He will gather them (**Isaiah 11:11-12**) after the Tribulation which is discussed in chapters six through nineteen in the book of Revelation. Other passages add clarity to the concept of holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel; the house of Israel. Because of the extent of the Tribulation also known as the seventieth week of Daniel or the Time of Jacob's trouble it is clear that there will be major topographical alterations in the structure and surface of the earth. Within Israel at that time will emerge the highest mountain in the world which will be home to the Millennial Temple (Jehovah's House) and Millennial Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:2-4

Now God is telling Ezekiel and the elders before him that this high and lofty mountain will be the center of worship for the Nation Israel and the world. This will be world government headquarters during the Messianic Kingdom. Later in the book God will describe in great detail the Millennial Mountain and the Temple which will be built at that 3 time. This will encompass chapters forty to forty seven. During this time He will have the Jews back in the land the second time in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant (**vs.42**). They will turn away from their sins and hate them (**vs. 43**) and finally serve God alone through gifts and worship free from the idols (**vs. 44**). This along with other passages all specify that these events will only occur after the Second Coming of the Messiah and not before (**Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; Isaiah 11:11-12:6; 43:5-7; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 31:7-14; Ezekiel 11:16-21; 36:22-31**). Jehovah would be sanctified or show himself holy among his people in such a way the non-Israelite nations would recognize God's hand on them. . .

VV. 42-44 -- God made it quite clear through His prophets that any future restoration would be based upon repentance. Because of this God would be glorified through His

people. God will again turn to this topic in **chapters thirty six and thirty seven**. God is not vindictive. He always wants to bring the rebellious to repentance and restoration. He wants His people to live lives according to His original plan of faith and purity in their lives so He can bless them in accordance with His consistent character.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/65161547401.pdf>

TEXT: Ezekiel 20:45 – 21:32

TITLE: CERTAINTY OF DEVASTATING JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

THE SWORD OF THE LORD WILL ACCOMPLISH ITS MISSION OF JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

The last paragraph in **chapter 20** starts a new chapter in the Hebrew bible since it fits with the context of **chapter 21**. The imagery of a consuming fire transfers over to the imagery of the sword of the Lord workings its devastating judgment. The ultimate executioner is God throughout, although He uses Babylon to wield the sword against the treacherous Zedekiah and the city of Jerusalem. Ammon thought themselves fortunate when Nebuchadnezzar chose to attack Jerusalem, but their fate is certain as well – just reserved for a later slaughter. There is no way to escape the devastation of the sword of the Lord. Once it has been unsheathed, it must accomplish its mission.

MacArthur: This is the sign of the sword against Jerusalem (**vv. 1-17**). God depicts His judgment in terms of a man unsheathing his polished sword for deadly thrusts. God is the swordsman (**vv. 3, 4**), but Babylon is His sword (**v. 19**). The historical background for this prophecy is Nebuchadnezzar's 588 B.C. campaign to quell revolts in Judah, as well as Tyre and Ammon.

Leslie Allen: The chapter is dominated by the image of the sword of judgment. In the powerful poem that stands at its heart the sword functions as a destructive force unleashed by Yahweh and so an instrument of his providential will. In the first oracle it is described more precisely as Yahweh's sword, seemingly wielded for breach of covenant, while in the third it is Nebuchadnezzar's, who functions as Yahweh's agent in punishing an immoral community. Divine and human factors are intertwined in Ezekiel's representation of Judah's grim future.

Iain Duguid: The common theme that binds these sections together is the catchword "sword" as an image of God's judgment, which together with the associated image of *fire*, falls first on God's people, then on the not-so-innocent bystanders, and finally on the agent of judgment, the Babylonians. [I would say the last section targets judgment against the Ammonites.]

I. (20:45-49) THE PARABLE OF THE SWORD OF THE LORD – JUDGMENT COMING AGAINST JERUSALEM

"Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

Constable: A new chapter in the Hebrew Bible begins with **20:45**. The section of the book that it begins contains four messages of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem with

special emphasis on the judgment coming on the leaders of the people. The Lord explained the basis for His judgment of Judah (20:1- 44) and then proceeded to describe and to affirm the certainty of that judgment (20:45—21:32).

A. (:46-48) Directed Prophecy of Coming Judgment against Jerusalem

1. (:46-47a) Certain Target is Jerusalem

*“Son of man, set your face toward Teman,
and speak out against the south,
and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev,
and say to the forest of the Negev, 'Hear the word of the LORD:
thus says the Lord God, ”*

Derek Thomas: Though Babylon is the immediate cause of Judah’s destruction, it is clear from the parable that the ultimate cause lies with God. It is God who uses the Babylonians in his judging work. To miss that point is to fail to understand the nature of history as ‘his story’.

2. (:47b) Consuming Fire of Comprehensive Scope and Catastrophic Severity

*“Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you,
and it shall consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree;
the blazing flame will not be quenched,
and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. ”*

Lamar Cooper: In order for the restoration to begin, judgment must be dispensed. The process of purging the land will begin with the refining fires of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. As a sign of the coming purge, Ezekiel was told to turn toward the south and deliver the brief message of judgment. Use of the words for “south” and “forests of the southland” are references that point to Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 45–46). God promised a fire would consume all trees, green and dry, of the south (v. 47). Ezekiel portrayed, in this parable form, the invasion of Judah by the Babylonian armies and the destruction of Jerusalem that was inevitable. The destruction will be of a scope and severity that everyone would recognize it as an act of divine retribution (vv. 48–49).

John Taylor: Ezekiel may have reinforced his words by facing southwards as he uttered his oracle, predicting that the Lord will cause a forest fire to sweep through the land from south to north. All will see it and no-one will be able to avoid its heat (47; *all faces ... shall be scorched by it*). Men will realize that it has been sent by the Lord as an act of judgment.

3. (:48) Recognition Refrain

*“And all flesh will see that I, the LORD, have kindled it;
it shall not be quenched.”*

Constable: Here it becomes clear that God was using the trees in the south to represent Judah's people. The Lord announced that He was going to judge the Judahites as when a fire sweeps through a forest. All types of people would suffer, the outwardly righteous

(green tree) and the outwardly unrighteous (dry tree), and the judgment would affect the whole land.

B. (:49) Dismissive Response by the People

“Then I said, ‘Ah Lord God! They are saying of me, Is he not just speaking parables?’”

Lamar Cooper: his section closes with the prophet’s complaint that he was not being taken seriously because he spoke in parables rather than plain, direct words. The message that follows in **21:1–27** therefore was presented in clear terminology in which all the subjective elements of the message were identified.

Judgment of sin is a prerequisite to blessing. The wrath of God’s judgment precedes the restoration of his blessings and the fulfillment of his promises. This pattern was true for Ezekiel’s day, and it is also the pattern of the end time when God will purge the earth (**Rev 17–18**) in preparation for the rule of the Messiah (**Rev 19–20**).

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel faithfully preached the allegory to the people, as he was commanded, but at the time he may not have understood its point himself. At any rate, the audience certainly didn’t get it. They accused him of speaking “*parables*” (also translatable as “allegories,” since the Hebrew *mashal* can refer to virtually any figure of speech). By this they apparently meant that his prophecy was too obscure or complicated for them to understand, just as Jesus’ speaking in parables to people not willing to seek the kingdom of God was dismissed as purposeful obscuring of the message (**Matt. 13:10**).

In response to his appeal to God about the people’s accusation (v. 49) Ezekiel then receives a second, supplementary revelation (**21:1–7**) in which he (and his audience) learns what the allegory really meant because the figures of the allegory are now defined clearly (“fire” = war, “south” = Judah, etc.). He is also told to undertake a simple kind of enactment prophecy (going around sighing) so that the people in exile with him will be vividly warned that the news of the fall of Judah will greatly demoralize them.

Feinberg: Ezekiel was alert to the reactions of his contemporaries, and knew what they were saying of his method of presentation of truth. They refused to comprehend his message. Men find difficulty in understanding a message which is distasteful to them. Some even take the question as a statement of the people’s skepticism. It is well known that to the unwilling heart any message from God appears to be difficult of comprehension. The parable forms a transition to the next chapter where Ezekiel speaks in nonfigurative speech.

II. (21:1-7) THE UNSHEATHING OF THE SWORD OF THE LORD – THE EXPLANATION OF THE RIDDLE – THE SWORD IS COMING

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

A. (:2-3) Comprehensive Judgment Executed by the Sword of the Lord

1. (:2) Targets the City, the Sanctuaries and the Land

“Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against the sanctuaries, and prophesy against the land of Israel;”

That which had been chosen by the Lord and intended to be set apart as holy for a witness to the nations was not going to come under siege from the Covenant God Himself.

Iain Duguid: The three Hebrew terms for “south” in the parable (*tēmān*; *dārôm*; *negeb*) are matched by three objects of judgment: Jerusalem, the sanctuary, and the land of Israel (**21:2**).

2. (:3) Targets Both the Righteous and the Wicked

“and say to the land of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am against you; and I shall draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked.'”

Iain Duguid: The focus of the interpretation, like that of the parable, is the **all-encompassing** nature of the coming judgment. “Righteous” and “wicked,” like “green tree” and “dry tree,” operate together as a **merism**, a pair of opposites that includes everything in between. These two are not, however, a randomly chosen pair, which could be replaced by another stock pairing such as “young” and “old.” If the judgment includes even the righteous, whom one would expect normally to be spared (**9:4**), then indeed no one will escape. The coming judgment on Jerusalem will not be selective and short-lived, as was the invasion of 597 b.c., but all-encompassing and all-consuming. Nor is there any hope of a reprieve: The fire is kindled; the sword is drawn; there is only the fearful expectation of judgment.

B. (:4-5) Committed Judgment – No Turning Back of the Sword of the Lord

1. (:4) Sword Slaughters without Exception

“Because I shall cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword shall go forth from its sheath against all flesh from south to north.”

Peter Pett: This time the judgment will be total and unrestrained. The whole land will be included, both those who think themselves righteous, as well as the very wicked. It will cover all, moving from the south upwards, and all will realise that this is indeed the work of Yahweh and that it is final. There comes a time for all when God’s moment for reaping comes.

2. (:5) Recognition Refrain – Sword Cannot be Restrained

“Thus all flesh will know that I, the LORD, have drawn My sword out of its sheath. It will not return to its sheath again.”

David Guzik: The magnitude and severity of God’s judgment would be a revelation to the watching world. They would know that only God Himself could be behind such a great judgment.

C. (:6-7) Compassionate Concern of the Prophet

1. (:6) Prophetic Empathy for the Condemned People

“As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight.”

Peter Pett: The ‘*breaking of the loins*’ represents deep emotions and fear (**Psalms 69:23; Nahum 2:10**). The ‘*bitterness*’ reveals his heartbreaking concern. This will then raise questions in his hearers (by now anything that Ezekiel did raised questions), and when they ask for its reason he will reply that it is because of the coming bad tidings, tidings which result in great dismay and regret, so that even the strong are made weak, and all suffer emotional collapse. The hands will be feeble, every spirit will be faint, the legs will be weak as water. They could hardly doubt that he was referring to the final destruction of Jerusalem and the collapse of all their hopes.

Feinberg: He was not communicating a message toward which he had superficial feelings, but one which he felt deeply. . . . This was a heartbroken sorrow, and doubtless Ezekiel’s anguish would not go unnoticed. In reply to the question of his people, Ezekiel would truthfully inform them of the coming devastating judgment, a visitation so thorough and terrifying that it would paralyze the people and render them incapable of resisting the enemy. Of the certainty of coming judgment there was no possible doubt. What God had purposed would be accomplished without fail.

2. (:7) Paralyzing Impact of the News of Imminent Attack

“And it will come about when they say to you, ‘Why do you groan?’ that you will say, ‘Because of the news that is coming; and every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it comes and it will happen,’ declares the Lord God.”

Trapp: Hebrew, *Shall go into water* – that is, they shall bepiss themselves for fear, saith **Jerome**; they shall be all on a cold sweat, say others; or their knees shall shake, *instar aquae tremulae*, like trembling water, and knock together, as Belshazzar’s did. [**Daniel 5:6**]

David Thompson: But do you see what response is missing? No repentance. People are scared; people are sad; but they do not turn to God and cry out for His mercy and grace because of their sin.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel exhorts his audience to abandon their false bases of security. Instead of smugly counting on Yahweh to rescue Jerusalem, they should react to the riddle and its interpretation the way people should have grieved over the city’s abominations (cf. **9:4**). Instead of dismissing Ezekiel as a “prattler of proverbs” they

should have imitated his behavior. After all, as the final statement asserts, *And it will be fulfilled!* (*wěnihyātā*). The prophetic event concludes with the divine signatory formula, Yahweh's imprimatur on Ezekiel's declaration.

Derek Thomas: No form of ministry for the Lord should be done without some measure of empathy with those to whom we minister. We are to weep with those who weep. We are even to weep for those who will not weep for themselves.

III. (21:8-17) THE WARSONG OF THE SWORD – PREPARED TO EXECUTE THE SLAUGHTER OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

A. (:8-13) The Execution of the Slaughter Demonstrates the Power of the Sword and Grieves the Prophet of God's People

“Again the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

1. (:9-11) Preparing the Sword for Action

a. (:9) Sharpening and Polishing the Sword

*“Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the LORD.
Say, A sword, a sword sharpened And also polished!’”*

Iain Duguid: The twin judgment images of cutting (the sword) and burning (the fire) are maintained in the twin actions of sharpening and burnishing (note the connection between polishing and lightning in **21:10, 15**). Together, these actions serve to prepare the weapon for action. Once prepared, the sword is handed over to the executioner to use against God's people and the princes of Israel.

Charles Dyer: God's sword of judgment was sharpened with a whetstone to give it a keen cutting edge and polished and scoured to remove all rust and give the blade a gleam. Much like a soldier preparing for battle, God had honed His weapon so it would be effective.

b. (:10) Shocking People out of Complacency and False Security

*“Sharpened to make a slaughter, Polished to flash like lightning!
Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree?”*

Feinberg: *Should we then make mirth?* “In view of the fearful prospect, Ezekiel asked whether this was the hour for mirth, an hour of enjoyment and complacency. The implication was that any imagined basis for confidence was false.

John Taylor: the prophet is rebuking his hearers for inattention (*‘do you think I am joking?’*), and accusing them of scorning all former instruments of punishment.

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel's prophecy of God's sword is filled with violent descriptions and solemn language so that by its bluntness it might shock his audience into paying attention to what their complacency had been causing them to avoid thinking about: the ravages of war were coming soon, and many people would lose their lives.

Daniel Block: By *despising every tree* Ezekiel affirms that immunity from foreign invasion is not guaranteed even by the ancient promises to David.

c. (:11) Slaying about to Commence

“And it is given to be polished, that it may be handled; the sword is sharpened and polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer.”

Peter Pett: This fearsome warsong was a reminder that Yahweh of hosts was leading the warfare against His people. It reminds us of an earlier day when with His sword drawn He had led the way against Canaan (**Joshua 5:13**) once its iniquities had reached their full allowance (**Genesis 15:16**). Now it was Judah-Israel who must experience the same.

Constable: The figures of the rod and the son of God both describe Messiah elsewhere (cf. **Gen. 49:9-10**; **2 Sam. 7:14**), so Ezekiel's hearers were accustomed to thinking of these figures as representing their deliverer. But here they learned that God had another son with a scepter who would destroy them (cf. **Isa. 10:5**, where the rod is the Assyrians).

2. (:12) Mourning over the Targeting of both People and Princes

“Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the officials of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with My people, therefore strike your thigh.”

Leslie Allen: As a concession the oracle is reissued, admittedly dominated by another metaphor, that of the sword, but now speaking plainly of the people of Judah and their total fate. The homeland and its capital—temple and all—would be the target of Yahweh's weapon of judgment. Mention of the sword seems to echo the covenant curse of **Lev 26:25**, which thus provides an implicit reason for the onslaught. All would be caught up in a solidarity of judgment for the broken covenant. . . The divine sword would be wielded until it had done its grisly work. So radical would be the onslaught upon Judah that others to the north would be included, like the seeping contamination of a neighborhood after a nuclear attack. In a culture prone to religious explanations of overwhelming crisis (cf. **Jonah 1:4, 5**), the message would be inescapable and no natural explanation could satisfy. It must be Yahweh's work.

Daniel Block: The land of Israel is not the only object under attack; the weapon is also directed at her population. But this sword is two-edged, being directed at two of the pillars on which Judean hopes for deliverance were based. First, it is aimed at the population of Israel, deliberately designated my people (*'ammī*) twice in the verse. The form of the expression highlights the national theological significance of the event. Yahweh was turning on his own people; their claims to security based on his covenant with them were futile. Second, the sword is aimed at Judah's nobility, all the princes of Israel (*něšī'ē yiśrā'ēl*; cf. **19:1**; **22:6**), which includes the remaining members of the

royal house. They will not be spared the fate awaiting the general population; all have been delivered over to the sword.

3. (:13) Recognizing there is No Defense against God's Coming Judgment

"For there is a testing; and what if even the rod which despises will be no more?" declares the Lord God."

Ellicott's Commentary: The most satisfactory translation is this: "*For it (the sword) has been proved (viz., on others), and what if this contemning rod shall be no more?*" i.e., the power of the sword of Babylon has already been proved; and the sceptre of Judah, which despises it, shall be clean swept away. Various other translations, differing in detail, give the same general sense.

Matthew Poole: But if the king and kingdom of Judah despise this trial, and harden themselves against this sword, both shall be destroyed, and be no more, for nothing but a right use of this last trial could help them.

Cambridge Bible: "*for trial hath been made, and what if the sceptre (R. V. rod) that contemneth should be no more!*"—reference being to the royal house of Judah which shall perish, cf. **Ezekiel 21:25-27; Ezekiel 21:29?**

B. (:14-17) The Effectiveness of the Slaughter Secures both Prophetic and Divine Approval

1. (:14a) Prophetic Approval of Coming Judgment

"You therefore, son of man, prophesy, and clap your hands together;"

John Taylor: Although the identity of the slayer is not given in **verse 11**, it is evident that Ezekiel has a part in the slaughter, if only in providing the applause to go with it. This indicates that he did in all probability act out this warning of impending judgment and play the part of an exultant onlooker as the swordplay went on. The sighings and groans that came earlier from his lips are sufficient evidence that it was not his nature to exult over the destruction, but we must understand it as a necessary and graphic accompaniment of the oracle which, as God's spokesman, he had to fulfil. For in so doing he was demonstrating God's approval at what was taking place: *I also will clap my hands, says the Lord (17)*.

2. (:14b-16) Effectiveness of the Sword in Executing the Slaughter

a. (:14b) Intensity of the Slaughter

"and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword for the slain. It is the sword for the great one slain, which surrounds them,"

Clarke: The sword has been *doubled*, and it shall come the *third time*. Nebuchadnezzar came against Judea **THRICE**. 1. Against *Jehoiakim*. 2. Against *Jeconiah*. 3.

Against Zedekiah. The sword had already been *doubled*; it is to come now the *third time*, i.e., against Zedekiah.

Constable: The invasion would be unusually devastating. Living in an age of special visual effects in which images transform themselves, it is not difficult for us to visualize this sword multiplying and swashbuckling its way through Jerusalem. Even "*the great one[s]*" among the people would not escape. This may refer to "*the great one*," King Zedekiah, or to "*the great ones*," the leading men of Judah. The invaders would surround everyone.

b. (:15a) Impact Emotionally of the Slaughter

"that their hearts may melt, and many fall at all their gates."

Daniel Block: Ezekiel elaborates on the ruthless function of the sword. This sword of the great slaughter is more than a symbol of war. Since elsewhere in the book *ḥālāl* refers to those who have been murdered or executed, this should also be interpreted as a judicial act. As the divine judge, Yahweh has charged the instrument of judgment to execute his sentence. According to the construction of v. 20 (Eng. 15), the executioner's sword has been sent out deliberately to create panic in the people,¹³⁶ and to hunt them down even to the gates of the cities. The latter expression conjures up two images. On the one hand, the gates of a city symbolized safety from the enemy. But Ezekiel affirms that the sword will catch up with all who seek safety within the walls of Jerusalem. On the other hand, since the city gate also functioned as the courtroom in ancient Israel (Amos 5:12, 15), one may recognize a legal significance to the statement. At every gate, viz., in every legal case, the result will be the same: Yahweh has sentenced all to death, and commissioned the flashing sword to perform his gruesome task.

c. (:15b) Speed and Power of the Slaughter

"I have given the glittering sword. Ah! It is made for striking like lightning, it is wrapped up in readiness for slaughter."

d. (:16) Pervasiveness of the Slaughter

"Show yourself sharp, go to the right; set yourself; go to the left, wherever your edge is appointed."

3. (:17) Divine Approval of Coming Judgment

"I shall also clap My hands together, and I shall appease My wrath; I, the LORD, have spoken."

Anton Pearson: The Lord exults over the coming vengeance.

Douglas Stuart: At least some of the problem that Ezekiel's audience had in accepting such a gloomy picture of the future can be traced to the natural religious tendency to think of God as kindly and thus not really capable of punishing people decisively. Why would God destroy His own beloved people in whom He had invested such time and

effort since He brought them out of Egypt centuries before? Some of the problem lay also in people's natural, routine optimism. It is hard to imagine the country in which one grew up and enjoyed life in the past actually coming to an end, never again to be an independent nation, never again to have its own government and laws and economy and stable traditions. "Somehow, surely, we'll get through all this," thought the Judeans—both in exile and back in Judah. But it was not to be. God can be trusted to keep His promises. If He says that the punishment of those who reject Him is death, He means it. Wishful thinking will not change a thing.

IV. (21:18-27) THE TARGET OF THE SWORD = JERUSALEM – NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DECISION TO ATTACK JERUSALEM AND NOT AMMON

A. (:18-23) The Sword is Aimed at Jerusalem

"And the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

1. (:19-21) Discerning the Target

a. (:19) Displaying a Signpost

"As for you, son of man, make two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; both of them will go out of one land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to the city."

Feinberg: The roads to both Judah and Ammon came from the one land of Babylon; south of Riblah the road southwest led to Judah and Jerusalem, that southeast to Rabbath and Ammon.

b. (:20) Distinguishing between Ammon and Jerusalem

"You shall mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah into fortified Jerusalem."

c. (:21) Divination Consulted – 3 Types

"For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver."

Peter Pett: These were three ways of determining the will of the gods. The shaking up of arrows in their quiver (**belomancy**), in this case probably with the names of the cities on, and then drawing one out with suitable ritual (this was also a common practise among Arabs); consulting the teraphim, household cult objects used for divination (see **2 Kings 23:24**); and examining the marks on the liver of a sacrificed animal (**hepatoscopy**), for which procedures were well known which were taught to the initiated, probably firstly by the use of clay models of which we have discovered examples.

Ezekiel no doubt in some way mimed each of these actions as the tension grew.

Charles Dyer: perhaps the idols were used in an attempt to contact departed spirits and hear their advice. Examining the liver was a form of divination known as hepatoscopy. The shape and markings of the liver of a sacrificed animal were studied by soothsayers to see if a proposed plan was favorable or not.

2. (:22-23) Deceiving the Inhabitants of Jerusalem

a. (:22) Babylonian Battle Preparation

*“Into his right hand came the divination, ‘Jerusalem,’
to set battering rams, to open the mouth for slaughter,
to lift up the voice with a battle cry, to set battering rams against
the gates, to cast up mounds, to build a siege wall.”*

Derek Thomas: Verse 22 outlines the battle plans, including ‘battering rams’ to break down the city walls, a ‘ramp’ to scale the city wall and ‘siege works’—wooden or stone structures which the enemy would use to gain cover from attack. Those in Judah will not believe it, partly because those left behind after the siege of 598 B.C. made an oath with King Nebuchadnezzar to be loyal to him (21:23). But they were mistaken; Nebuchadnezzar attacked.

b. (:23) Baseless False Security of the Jews in Jerusalem

*“And it will be to them like a false divination in their eyes;
they have sworn solemn oaths.
But he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized.”*

Peter Pett: The point here would seem to be that the waiters and watchers in Jerusalem would dismiss what was happening as vain divination. They would not be in suspense. They would be confident that they were well able to resist, for they were full of confidence, having sworn solemn oaths with each other, and with others such as Ammon, and were at the ready, and probably because they also counted on a solemn treaty with Egypt for assistance (which came and then melted away).

Constable: Nebuchadnezzar's decision to come against Jerusalem would look like a mistake to the leaders of Israel. It would seem to them that God should have guided him to besiege the Ammonites since they were more wicked. Furthermore Israel's leaders had sworn oaths of allegiance to Yahweh in response to His sworn promises to them. They thought surely He would defend them, but they were wrong. He would allow Nebuchadnezzar to capture them.

Iain Duguid: The irony is that this use of pagan means of discerning the will of the gods is here an accurate discernment of the will of the true God. The “lying divinations” that had found such favor with God’s people (Ezek. 13:7) now become the very means through which judgment comes on them (21:23). Their broken oath to the Lord is punished by the one with whom they have broken a human covenant. In this way, the king of Babylon is acting as divine prosecution counsel (*mazkîr*), bringing out into the open Israel’s guilt and arresting them for it. As in a court of law, the point is not so

much that the guilty party is “reminded” of their sins, as the niv suggests, but rather that they are made public and therefore subject to the punishment they deserve (21:24).

B. (:24-27) The Sword Specifically Singles Out Zedekiah

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:24) Remembering the Sins of Zedekiah

“Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear - because you have come to remembrance, you will be seized with the hand.”

Leslie Allen: Zedekiah is singled out in a personal oracle. He is introduced not by name but by office (cf. 12:10, 12) and moral invective. There is a sinister allusion to the coming of the day of Yahweh in all its finality (cf. 7:2, 3, 6, 10, 12 and **Brownlee**, Ezekiel 1–19 114, 117, 119). Judah’s mounting history of sinfulness had reached a level that forced Yahweh to intervene (cf. **Gen 15:16; 2 Kgs 21:11**). Zedekiah’s own behavior had been “the last straw that breaks the camel’s back” (**Ehrlich**, Randglossen 83, cf. 17:11–21). He is to lose his royal status: Yahweh’s staccato orders already ring out, stripping his vassal of power. The social order was to be overthrown in the coming crisis, along with the regime of king and government.

2. (:25-26) Removing the Priestly and Royal Leadership

“’And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end,’ 26 thus says the Lord God, ‘Remove the turban, and take off the crown; this will be no more the same. Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high.’”

MacArthur: God, in the coming judgment on Judah in 588-586 B.C., removed the turban representing the priestly leadership, and the crown picturing the succession of kings. Neither office was fully restored after the captivity. This marked the commencement of “*the times of the Gentiles*” (**Lk 21:24**).

Daniel Block: Ezekiel’s tone reaches a fever pitch. Without warning he forgets completely about the king of Babylon and launches into a tirade against Zedekiah, unequalled in this book or any other prophet for its forthrightness and harshness. He begins with a quadrupled vocative, followed by an awkwardly constructed announcement of the end. In his address of the king he pulls no punches. *O vile one* (*ḥālāl*) derives from a root meaning “*to defile, profane*.” The prophet does not elaborate on how the king has defiled himself, but he undoubtedly had in mind the violation of his vassal oath, hereby considered as sacrilege. *O criminal* (*rāšā’*, lit. “*O wicked one*”) interprets this violation as a criminal act. As observed elsewhere, prince of Israel (*nēšī’ yisrā’ēl*) is deliberately deprecating. **V. 30b (Eng. 25b)** is syntactically difficult, but the ominous ring is obvious. The Babylonian’s advance toward Jerusalem ushers in the “*day of Zedekiah*,” the final moment of truth. in time for your final punishment (*bē’ēt ’āwōn qēš*, lit. “*in time of guilt, end!*”) is pregnant with meaning,

speaking not only of the moment of Zedekiah's punishment but also of the termination of his iniquitous behavior.

3. (:27) Ruination until the Sceptre Passes to the Messiah

"A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I shall make it. This also will be no more, until He comes whose right it is; and I shall give it to Him."

Chisholm: Jerusalem would no longer enjoy its former glories until One would come who had a divine right to replace both high priest and king (cf. **Ps. 110:2, 4; 72; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5; 33:17; Zech. 6:12-13**). God would then give the city into His control (**Gen. 49:10; Isa. 2:1-4**). This is, I believe, a messianic prediction of Jesus Christ's future earthly reign from Jerusalem (cf. **Heb. 5-7**).

Wright: **Verse 27** is one of the great Messianic promises of the O.T., although it is often overlooked. It is similar to the promise of **Genesis 49.10**, (RSV). After the exile there were no more kings of David's line. Zerubbabel, who was leader soon after the return, was of David's line, but was never king.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel highlights the role of Yahweh in the chaotic events with the following verb, I will make it (*'ăšîmennâ*). The anarchy in Jerusalem is not merely the result of social or political incompetence; it is Yahweh who turns the world upside down.

John Taylor: The triple repetition of a word is the strongest superlative the Hebrew language can give (cf. *'Holy, holy, holy'* in **Isa. 6:3**, or the formula of **Jer. 7:4**). So Ezekiel spells out the overthrow of the kingly line, and he concludes with a cryptic reference back to **Genesis 49:10** with its distant prospect of the one who had always been expected and to whom the right of kingship genuinely belonged. When he eventually appears, the crown and diadem will be given to him, for he will be the culmination of everything to which the Davidic house and the Messianic kingship in Israel have always pointed.

**V. (21:28-32) THE SHEATHING OF THE SWORD –
PROPHECY OF JUDGMENT ON THE AMMONITES**

"And you, son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,'"

Douglas Stuart: Oracles against foreign nations are an aspect of God's covenantal restoration promises to Israel (centrally located in **Lev. 26:40-45** and **Deut. 30:1-10**). The reason for them is fairly simple: Israel's foes must decrease if Israel is to increase. The promise of power over enemies is a reversal of the curses of subjugation by enemies, as **Deut. 30:7** says: *"The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies."* Such oracles, then, gave great reassurance to righteous Israelites that no matter how severe their own circumstances might be at the moment, the time was coming when the nation—in whatever future generation it might occur—would

experience deliverance from exile and oppression and exaltation to God's favor and blessing. From the point of view of orthodox Israelites, the oracles against foreign nations were oracles of hope.

John Taylor: In a passage which is very obscure but has obvious affinities with earlier parts of the chapter, especially **verses 9–17**, the Ammonites are represented as wielding a sword against Israel. This may reflect the period during or after the siege of Jerusalem when the Ammonites joined with others in taking advantage of Judah's plight by attacking and plundering her lands. This apparently is done under the influence of false auguries and lying visions (**29**), but God stays their hand and calls upon them to return it to its sheath (**30**). Words of condemnation follow: in his own land Ammon will be judged and punished. He will suffer at the hands of brutish men, skillful to destroy (**31**), who are later designated as *'the people of the East'* (**25:4**), i.e. the savage tribesmen of the desert. So the Ammonites' vindictive plans will rebound back upon themselves, as the further oracle on their fate makes clear (**25:1–7**). Their ultimate fate will be worse than Israel's and worse even than Egypt's, for they will be no more remembered. To the Semitic mind nothing could be more terrible: no prospect of restoration, no continuance in succeeding generations, no memorial, not even a memory. Oblivion.

A. (:28-29) Taunt Directed Against Jerusalem – Ammonite Version of the Sword Song

“and say: 'A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for the slaughter, to cause it to consume, that it may be like lightning-- 29 while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you-- to place you on the necks of the wicked who are slain, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end.'”

Peter Pett: Once again we have a warsong, this time depicted as sung by Ammon, for the command comes for them to sheathe their sword (**Ezekiel 21:30 a**) to await God's judgment.

Daniel Block: **Vv. 28b–29 (Eng. 23b–25)** do not constitute an oracle against the Ammonites, but a quotation of **their taunt of Israel**, once they realized that the omen had pointed Nebuchadnezzar in the direction of Jerusalem instead of toward them (**vv. 26–27 [Eng. 21–22]**). It is fitting that their taunt song should be cast as an echo of the earlier sword song (**vv. 14–15 [Eng. 9–10]**). Second, this interpretation integrates the oracle into its present literary context and obviates the need to date it after the fall of Jerusalem. The taunt leaves the impression that the sword is still poised; its deadly mission has not yet been fulfilled. Third, it eliminates the problem of an oracle against a foreign nation appearing prematurely at this point in the book. Not only are most of Ezekiel's oracles against foreign nations gathered in **chs. 25–32**; those that address the same nation appear together. Had the editor understood this text as a prophecy against Bene Ammon, he should have placed it in **ch. 25**. Fourth, it accounts for the apparently redundant *wē'āmartā* in **v. 33 (Eng. 28)**. The duplication serves the rhetorical function of focusing the hearers' attention on what follows, as in **v. 14 (Eng. 9)**: *“A sword! A sword!”* Furthermore, the two occurrences of the word here appear to be directed at two different objects. The first, combined with *hinnābē'*, is clearly intended for Ezekiel; the

second is part of the prophet's speech directed at Bene Ammon. Yahweh hereby commands the prophet to instruct the Ammonites regarding their taunt, encouraging them to scorn Israel by singing the sword song themselves. The rhetorical strategy is impressive. No longer is it only the voice of the prophet announcing Israel's doom; even the nation's enemies have picked up the tune.

B. (:30-32a) Turning the Tables on the Ammonites

Key: Is this a prophecy against Babylon or against the Ammonites who had just mocked Jerusalem)? Appears to be directed against the Ammonites.

1. (:30a) Sword of the Ammonites Must Be Sheathed

"Return it to its sheath."

2. (:30b) Security of Home Country No Refuge

"In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I shall judge you."

3. (:31) Wrath of God Unleashed in Brutal Fashion

"And I shall pour out My indignation on you; I shall blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and I shall give you into the hand of brutal men, skilled in destruction."

4. (:32a) Consuming Fire Will Leave Nothing but the Blood of the Slaughtered

"You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be in the midst of the land."

Peter Pett: So while Jerusalem has faced the awful and seemingly final judgment of God there is here the recognition that there is hope for the future, for God has not taken His eye off them, and those who take advantage of them will themselves be destroyed.

Ralph Alexander: God would judge Ammon by the sword in their own land (v. 30b; cf. 25:1-7), where he would pour out indignation on them with the fire of his wrath, delivering them to men skilled in destruction who would devour them (vv. 31-32). This judgment on Ammon was not forgotten just because Babylonia chose to attack Jerusalem first. It was certain!

C. (:32b) Targeting Ammon for Irreversible Eradication

"You will not be remembered, for I, the LORD, have spoken."

Douglas Stuart: Ammon's eradication is the subject of three metaphors in **verse 32:** being burned up, having their blood shed, and not being remembered. Thus, in contrast to the fate of Israel, which will be decimated and exiled, destroyed as an independent nation but not wiped out, with a promised future of hope, the Ammonites can look forward only to annihilation.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why the use of the mixed metaphor of *fire* and the sword?
- 2) What types of **divination services** do people seek out today and pay for? Why do they persist and stay so popular when on the surface they seem so ridiculous?
- 3) What characterized the “*time of the Gentiles*’ in which we are presently living?
- 4) Why should believers be concerned about the **fate of their enemies** and how God will treat them?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: The main points of the passage may be outlined as follows:

Forest Fire Allegory (20:45–49)

- Command to preach against southern forest (20:45–46)
- Prediction of forest fire affecting everyone (20:47)
- Identification of the Lord as the source of the fire (20:48)

Warfare “Sword” Explanation (20:1–7)

- Command to preach against Jerusalem (21:1–2)
- Prediction of warfare (“sword”) affecting everyone (21:3–4)
- Identification of the Lord as the source of the warfare (21:5)

Response of Prophet and People (21:6–7)

- Ezekiel to sigh/moan (i.e., agonize, 21:6)
- People to agonize (21:7)

There’s a lot of bad news for Judah and Judeans in the Book of Ezekiel. God wants the exiles, to whom Ezekiel has especially been appointed a prophet, to be sure that they do not misunderstand His causing Judah to suffer its extinction as an independent nation. It must not happen that they miss what’s going on, foolishly hoping that the present hard times were temporary and that Judah’s fortunes would rise again soon. So through an allegory, its explanation, and a little bit of “acting” Ezekiel makes a deadly serious point. God will not be disobeyed forever. Sin has its inevitable consequences, and God is determined to enforce His covenant against those who sin against him. For Judah as a nation, it was too late now to repent. Only individuals could do that—and even the righteous individuals were going to be swept up in the bad events that were coming. Their eternal life might be secure personally, but their lives on earth had no hope of being spared from the brutality of the Babylonian invasion.

David Thompson: THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS COMING AGAINST ISRAEL FOR HER UNFAITHFULNESS; BUT THE PROBLEM IS MOST PEOPLE DID NOT BELIEVE THIS OR RESPOND TO THE WARNING.

This has always been the problem with most people. They really don't believe God is going to judge them. Even God's own people tend to think we can just drift along just the way we are, even in rebellion against God, and in the end, everything will turn out okay. Most people really don't believe judgment will come. **Ezekiel 21** says, "yes it will." The writer of Hebrews said, "*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (**Heb. 10:31**).

In the latter part of **chapter 20**, God used coming "*fire*" to communicate that judgment was on the way. We may recall that the response of the people is "*Ezekiel is just speaking in parables.*" They were not taking him seriously (**20:49**). In **chapter 21**, God uses the "*sword*" to communicate that judgment is on the way.

Iain Duguid: Fire and sword. The images of fire and sword for God's judgment have a venerable history. They come together already in **Genesis 3:24**, where the cherubim assigned to guard the entrance to Eden are accompanied by a flaming sword. The flashing sword is God's instrument of judgment on his enemies in **Deuteronomy 32:41**; his sword is poised against Assyria (**Isa. 31:8**) and Edom (**34:5–6**), and the angel of the Lord appears to Joshua with a drawn sword before the battle of Jericho (**Josh. 5:13**).

But the Lord can fight against his people as well as for them. In **1 Chronicles 21:16** the angel is poised with drawn sword over Jerusalem rather than an enemy city, while Jeremiah prophesies the coming of the sword of the Lord against the whole land from one end to the other (**Jer. 12:12**). Equally, the Lord's fire continually threatens his unholy people: It burns up those who rebel against him in the desert (**Num. 11:1; 16:35**) and hangs over the head of their unholy descendants (**Jer. 15:14; 17:4**).

In no instance, however, is either the sword or fire an entity with a mind of its own. Even when they are figurative representations of human agencies of destruction, they operate entirely within the realm of God's sovereignty as agents of his judgment. He kindles the fire and brings the sword down on his enemies in his wrath. Nor is that simply an Old Testament concept of God. In fact, Jesus describes his ministry on earth in precisely those terms. He came not "*to bring peace to the earth ... but a sword*" (**Matt. 10:34**). In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, the sword is replaced by fire as Jesus exclaims: "*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*" (**Luke 12:49**). His mission is one of executing God's judgment on earth.

This indeed was what the Old Testament prophesied: Malachi spoke of the appearance of the Lord like a refiner's fire or launderer's soap (**Mal. 3:1–2**). But if Jesus has come to bring about judgment, how can any survive? Will his judgment not be as comprehensive as that which Ezekiel described, leading to the total destruction of all flesh?

Derek Thomas: The Ammonites always had expansionist ambitions: in the eyes of the prophets, they were terrorists (**Amos 1:13–14**) who delighted in casting ‘insults’ at Israel’s misfortunes (**21:28**). During the period of the judges they assisted Eglon of Moab to subdue Israelite territory (**Judg. 3:13**); when Saul became king, his first task was to drive them out of Jabesh-Gilead, which they had recently taken (**1 Sam. 11:1–11; 12:12; 14:47**); in Jehoshaphat’s time, the Ammonites and Moabites joined together to raid Judah (**2 Chron. 20:1–30**), and Joash was slain by an Ammonite, Zabad, and a Moabite, Jehozabad (**2 Chron. 24:26**). And shortly after the time of Ezekiel’s prophecy, Baalis, King of Ammon, was to deal a disastrous blow against Judah by instigating the murder of Gedaliah, the chief minister and governor of Judah appointed by Nebuchadnezzar at the fall of Jerusalem (**Jer. 40:14; 41:15**).

Admittedly, some individual Ammonites were friendly with the Israelites: Nahash and Zelek in David’s time (**2 Sam. 17:27, 29; 23:37; 1 Chron. 11:39**); Solomon included Ammonite women in his harem—resulting in his idolatrous worship of Molech, the Ammonite god—and Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam, was an Ammonite (**1 Kings 14:21, 31; 2 Chron. 12:13**). Yet, clearly, in general the relationship between Israel and the Ammonites was a hostile one. The prophets lost no time in condemning them (**Jer. 49:1–6; Amos 1:13–15; Zeph. 2:8–11**). Ezekiel also joined in the attack, both here and later in **chapter 25:1–7**.

If God’s sword is to come down upon Jerusalem, what is going to happen to Israel’s enemies? Is God going to punish them as well? The question is raised because earlier (**21:20–21**) Nebuchadnezzar was depicted as standing at a cross-roads deciding whether to attack Jerusalem or Rabbah, and deciding upon the former.

TEXT: Ezekiel 22:1-22

TITLE: THE BLOODY CITY BURNED UP AND DISPERSED BY GOD'S WRATH

BIG IDEA:

**JERUSALEM DESERVED THE FURNACE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT
BECAUSE OF HER DOCUMENTED ABOMINATIONS**

INTRODUCTION:

God's indictment against His people consisted in summary form of two basic categories of violations: shedding blood and making idols. These abominations then receive more specific delineation. There can be no question that Jerusalem is being judged for contemporary sins rather than just her history of apostasy. All false security and pompous self-righteousness have now been stripped away so that the nation is left trembling in fear in light of the coming crucible of God's fiery judgment. The effects of the dispersion will be long lasting and will make God's chosen people the object of derision among the nations.

Leslie Allen: Chap. 22 is composed of three prophetic units, vv 1–16, 17–22 and 23–31, each introduced by the **message reception formula** and focusing upon Jerusalem. The first is a proof saying, as the recognition formula of v 16b shows. It is basically a judgment oracle addressed to Jerusalem, with accusations leveled in general terms in vv 3ab–4a and in detail in vv 6–12, while sentence is passed in vv 13–15. Interim judgment, which lies in the past, is cited in vv 4b–5. Vocatives begin and end vv 3ab–5, which are thus characterized as having an introductory role in relation to the oracle as a whole. The divine saying formula in v 12 provides a caesura for the first half of the main oracle. An affirmation formula occurs near the end, in v 14b.

Douglas Stuart: Seven times in this prophecy the word '*blood*' or '*bloodshed*' (Hebrew, *dam* and *damim*) occur as characterizing the crimes against God's covenant that had been occurring routinely in Jerusalem. These words have a special idiomatic meaning in Hebrew that their usual translation does not entirely convey in English. They connote '*harm*' or '*hurt*,' and that is what much of **verses 1-16** is about: the **harm** or **hurt** done by people in power in Jerusalem (and by implication elsewhere in Judah) to those who have no power, such as the poor, the sick, the uneducated, etc. By extension, '*blood*' and '*bloodshed*' also come to mean in Hebrew anything '**violent**' or just simply '**vile**,' even if it does not actually involve causing physical harm to another person.

Iain Duguid: In this chapter, the prophet is called on to act as prosecuting counsel, making known to Jerusalem in detail her detestable ways, which form the basis for both the actuality and the immediacy of divine judgment. The comprehensive nature of her sins means that judgment is **necessary** and judgment is **now**.

Ralph Alexander: Though Israel's history of wickedness demanded discipline (**chs 20-21**), it was the abominations of contemporary Israel and her rulers that had ignited the punishment. Since the people had failed to see this fact, God directed Ezekiel to deliver three judgment messages to make this clear once more.

- The first detailed the manner in which the nation, led by her leaders in the capital city, Jerusalem, had broken the Mosaic covenant (**vv. 1-16**).
- The second emphasized God's burning judgment that would display the people's impurity (**vv. 17-22**).
- The third message stressed the failure of every aspect of Judah's society – especially her leadership – to follow God's ways (**vv. 23-31**).

I. (:1-16) THE FOCUS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT WAS THE MULTITUDE OF ABOMINATIONS COMMITTED BY JERUSALEM

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

Daniel Block: The internal structure of the first oracle is clear:

- (1) The call for Jerusalem's arraignment (**vv. 1–2**)
- (2) The summons to Jerusalem (**v. 3**)
- (3) The announcement of the charges (**vv. 4–5**)
- (4) The presentation of the evidence (**vv. 6–12**)
- (5) The announcement of the sentence (**vv. 13–16**)

A. (:2-5) Staging of the Trial –

Social Sins and Cultic Sins Lead to Guilt and Defilement

1. (:2) Call for Judgment of the Bloody City

Based on a Multitude of Abominations

*“And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city?
Then cause her to know all her abominations.”*

Constable: Another message came from the Lord instructing Ezekiel to remind the residents of the bloody city of Jerusalem about all their abominations (cf. **20:4**). A list of specific sins was necessary for him to pronounce judgment on them. Jerusalem was bloody because of all the blood its residents had shed, the blood of innocent people (cf. **Nah. 3:1**).

Shedding blood was Jerusalem's primary offense, according to this prophecy (cf. **vv. 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13**), and it had its roots in idolatry. The pagan religious practices that God's people had adopted did not curb their abuse of other people, much less encourage altruistic living. Idolatry even promoted the taking of other people's lives through human sacrifice. Whenever people disregard the revealed will of God, crimes of violence and bloodshed follow.

Daniel Block: As in **20:4**, the prophet is ordered to enter into legal process with his rhetorical audience, here identified as the bloody city (*‘ir haddāmīm*), the capital representing the state of Judah as a whole. The present expression is shocking, not

merely for its characterization of Jerusalem, but also for the company into which it places the city. Ezekiel seems to have borrowed this phrase from Nahum, who had in the previous century arraigned Nineveh as “*the bloody city*” par excellence. By borrowing this expression our prophet invites a comparison of the crimes being perpetrated in the Judean capital with Assyria’s brutal treatment of conquered peoples.

2. (:3) Charged with Social and Cultic Sins

“And you shall say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, A city shedding blood in her midst, so that her time will come, and that makes idols, contrary to her interest, for defilement!’”

Daniel Block: **Idolatry** and **bloodguilt** are particularly grave crimes because they strike at the foundation of Israel’s covenant communal life. The former, a violation of the first four terms of the covenant, undermine the nation’s vertical relationship with Yahweh; the latter, shorthand for all kinds of social ills, undermines the members’ horizontal social relationships. Together they declare the total absence of love for Yahweh and love for one’s neighbor, viz., a disregard for the Great Commandment.

3. (:4a) Condemned with Execution of Judgment Imminent

a. Guilty and Defiled

“You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made.”

b. End of the Line

“Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years;”

Peter Pett: So by their behaviour they had ‘*caused their days to draw near*’, the days when they had to give account, and had ‘*come to their years*’, the time when they would have judgment passed on them. Both had been hastened by their evil behaviour. They had no one to blame but themselves. And that is why God was making them a reproach in the eyes of the nations, a mockery to many countries, for these would mock at the desolation of Jerusalem and of Judah. Countries both near and far would mock because she had defiled her name and was full of violence and tumult, and had brought judgment on herself.

Daniel Block: The day of judgment, the appointment with Yahweh, is imminent.

4. (:4b-5) Castigated by the Nations

“therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mocking to all the lands.

Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you of ill repute, full of turmoil.”

Leslie Allen: The state of moral guilt and religious impurity that resulted from the capital’s behavior could not go unchecked by Yahweh as upholder of the social and

sacred obligations he had laid on his people. Their wrongdoing would catch up with them; in fact they were inviting the onset of retribution (cf. **Amos 6:3b**). Already evidence was not lacking of such reprisal from Yahweh's hand (cf. **Hos. 4:3**). . . . Loss of face was dreaded in Israelite culture, yet this had been what Jerusalem had incurred (cf. **16:57**). Jerusalem the golden, "*she that was great among the nations*" (**Lam 1:1**; cf. **Ezek 16:14**), had to learn to live with the consequences of a new reputation, for religious and social shortcomings.

Iain Duguid: The prophet begins by presenting his indictment in outline form (**22:3–5**): Jerusalem's sins involve both **social sins**—that is, sins against humanity (e.g., "*shedding blood*," **22:3**)—and **cultic sins**—that is, sins against God (e.g., the manufacture of idols, **22:3**). These two broad classes of sins have resulted in two respective consequences: social sins lead to "*guilt*" (*'āšam*, **22:4**), the forensic state of deserving punishment, while cultic sins lead to "*defilement*" (*tāmē'*, **22:4**), the ritual state of being unfit to appear in the presence of God. The combination of these in Jerusalem's case means that she has brought on herself her "doom," or more literally, "*her time*" (*'ittāh*, **22:3**); her days have come to a close, and the end of her years have come (**v. 4**).

Like a virus in the bloodstream, Jerusalem's defilement and guilt have built up to the point where they now initiate a life-threatening crisis. Now the hour of her judgment has struck. The result of that judgment will make Jerusalem into an "*object of scorn*" to the nations around her. Both those near at hand and those far away will mock her as being an "*infamous city*" (**22:5**), that is, famous for her cultic and social sins, which have led to her downfall.

Lamar Cooper: Because of its wicked, violent reputation, nations near and far made Jerusalem an object of scorn. The phrase "*O infamous city full of turmoil*" (**v. 5**) is specific in the Hebrew text and can be translated "*O defiled of the Name, abounding in tumult*." This literal translation shows the ungodly, violent reputation of Jerusalem. They defiled "*the Name*," meaning the person and character of God, especially his holiness. "*Name*" regularly was used with the definite article ("*The Name*") as a substitute for the personal name of God, Yahweh, which represented his holy nature and character.

Daniel Block: The accusation concludes with an elaboration of the nations' response to Jerusalem's fate. Those near (*haqqērōbôt*) and far away (*hārēḥōqôt*) represent a merismic word pair for "*all nations*" who mock (*yitqallēsû*) her for her "*defiled reputation*" (*tēmē'* at *haššēm*) and the "*magnitude of her tumult*" (*rabbat hammēhûmâ*). Although Ezekiel employs vocabulary different from Deuteronomy, the present statement reflects intense disappointment over Jerusalem's failure to achieve the Deuteronomic vision for the nation: to be exalted over the nations for praise (*tēhillâ*), fame (*šēm*), and honor (*tip'eret*) (**Deut. 26:19**; cf. **Jer. 13:11; 33:9**). Now she must prepare for the full force of the covenant curse: becoming the object of astonishment/horror (*šammâ*), a proverb (*māšāl*), and a byword (*šēnînâ*). Yahweh cannot stand idly by while life is cheapened and his claim to exclusive allegiance is

trampled underfoot. When he is through with the city the din of rebellion within her walls will have been exchanged for the external taunts of the nations.

**B. (:6-12) Presentation of the Evidence –
The Forgetting of God Leads to All Kinds of Sin**

1. (:6) Shedding of Blood Starts with the Rulers of Israel

*“Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power,
have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood.”*

Constable: In verses 6-12 Judah's rulers are the main focus of indictment. The rulers of Israel had been guilty of shedding blood, each in his own sphere of authority, through the misuse of power (cf. **Exod. 20:13**). Evidently judicial murders were common (cf. **2 Kings 21:16; 24:4**) as were child sacrifice (**16:21; 20:26, 31; 23:37**) and acts of personal violence.

Feinberg: This section (vv. 6-12) presents an itemized list of the moral arrears of the nation. The words are first addressed to the princes of Israel, the very ones were expected to uphold the dignity of the law, yet were the most to blame. Nor was this an occasional lapse, for according to their power (literally, arm) they carried out their wicked designs. With them might was right. Also, their actions were arbitrary in the extreme. The only restraint on their deeds of evil was the limit of their ability. . .

The basic cause of their wickedness was diagnosed as forgetfulness of God. Since God is at the center of all moral relations, all social and moral rights and proprieties are secure only when God is recognized in His sovereign rule. The application to our own hearts and our own day is obvious.

Daniel Block: vv. 6-12: This panel is held together by the repetition of key expressions: *lěma ‘an šěpok dām*, “in order to shed blood” (vv. 6, 9, 12); *bāk* (9 times) and its stylistic variant *bětōkēk*, “in your midst” (vv. 7, 9). Apart from the formulaic framework, this document subdivides into three parts:

- (a) an opening thesis-type statement (v. 6);
- (b) the catalogue of specific crimes (vv. 7–12a);
- (c) a concluding summary statement (v. 12b).

Underlying Ezekiel’s ministry is the assumption that Yahweh has revealed his will to his people, that this will is preserved in the traditional national legal codes, and that this law is binding for him and for his audience. These convictions determine the seriousness of the charges. The catalogue of evils portrays a nation in revolt, not against civil authority but against the divine Lord.

David Guzik: Instead of caring for families (**father and mother**) and the vulnerable of society, they used and despised them.

2. (:7-12a) Catalog of Specific Abominations

a. (:7a) Disrespecting Family Authority

“They have treated father and mother lightly within you.”

b. (:7b) Oppressing Foreigners

“The alien they have oppressed in your midst;”

c. (:7c) Exploiting the Most Vulnerable = Orphans and Widows

“the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you.”

d. (:8) Offending God by Disregarding Holiness

*“You have despised My holy things
and profaned My sabbaths.”*

Daniel Block: These two violations struck at the heart of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. While seven-day units of time are known from the ancient world outside Israel, the conception of the week and the sabbatical cycles is a wholly and all-pervasively Israelite innovation. All of life revolved around the Sabbaths. Indeed, the Sabbath was a gift to the nation, a sign (*’ôt*) of her covenant relationship with Yahweh (**Exod. 31:13–17**), analogous to the bow’s relationship to the Noachian covenant (**Gen. 9:12, 13, 17**), and even more to circumcision and the Abrahamic covenant (**Gen. 17:11**), since it called for a response. The weekly Sabbaths represented institutionalized reminders of God’s role in creation (cf. **Exod. 20:11**), as well as his gracious salvific actions on Israel’s behalf (cf. **Deut. 5:15**); the septennial sabbatical years should have reminded the nation of her total dependence on Yahweh for sustenance (**Lev. 25:1–7**). The Sabbaths served as **tests of faith**. Could the Israelites trust him to care for them even when, at his direction, they were not cultivating their fields? This generation of leaders obviously could not.

e. (:9a) Slandering Treachery

*“Slandering men have been in you
for the purpose of shedding blood;”*

f. (:9b) Blatant Idolatry

“and in you they have eaten at the mountain shrines.”

g. (:9c-10) Inappropriate Abominations

*“In your midst they have committed acts of lewdness.
In you they have uncovered their fathers' nakedness;
in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual
impurity.”*

Douglas Stuart: **Ritual sex** was another great attraction of idolatry. Most of the ancient Near Easterners believed that all things that came into being were born into being. This was a major tenet of their belief system. They believed that not only animals were born, but also plants. (This is the reason that they 'sowed their field with two kind of seed,' i.e., male and female seed as they thought of it; see **Lev. 19:19**.) What was born into being started, they believed, with sex on the part of the gods— specifically Baal and

Asherah, the god and goddess of fertility according to the Canaanites. They also thought that if a person bringing an offering to Baal and/or Asherah would have ritual sex with a prostitute at the shrine as part of worship (!) this would help stimulate the divine powers of nature to have sex, and thus more animals and crops would be born, and the agriculture would flourish. Outlandish as this sounds to us, it was the pinnacle of theology among the Canaanites—and was what the Israelites readily accepted at Baal-Peor.

h. (:11) Sexual Sins

*“And one has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife,
and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law.
And another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter.”*

i. (:12a) Financial Improprieties

*“In you they have taken bribes to shed blood;
you have taken interest and profits,
and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression,”*

Leslie Allen: vv. 9-12 -- the second block of accusations is a catalog of three types of social disorder. The first recalls **Lev 19:16**, a prohibition of slander that could become the basis of false accusation at a trial for a capital offense. A religious wrong follows, mentioned earlier at **18:6, 11, 15**, the eating of sacred meals at illicit shrines (cf. **Hos 4:13**). **V 9bβ** provides a headline (**Zimmerli** 458) for a series of five sexual crimes detailed in vv 10–11. They implicitly appeal to such traditions as are concentrated in **Lev 20:10–18** (cf. **Fishbane**, *Biblical Interpretation* 293). In Israelite thinking they stood on the borderline between social and sacred wrongs and partook of both: accordingly the term “*unclean*” is used of two of them. Three cases relate to incest, one to adultery and one, no less real a taboo in Israel’s culture, to intercourse during a wife’s period, while she was ritually unclean.

The third type of wrongdoing is mercenary. Bribery with a view to the fatal miscarriage of justice and capitalizing on another’s misfortune had featured in Israel’s legal traditions (see especially **Exod 22:24 [25]; 23:8**). Here it is accompanied with a general charge of racketeering. The switch to direct address paves the way for the final charge (to be repeated in **23:35**) of **forgetting Yahweh** (cf. **Hos 2:15 [13]**). Here too Yahweh’s revelation of his comprehensive will in Israel’s law codes is presupposed.

3. (:12b) Root Problem

“and you have forgotten Me,” declares the Lord God.”

Constable: At the heart of all this, the Jerusalemites had forgotten about Yahweh. This was the root problem, and the Lord presented it as the last nail in Jerusalem's coffin.

Feinberg: Since God is at the center of all moral relations, all social and moral rights and proprieties are secure only when God is recognized in His sovereign rule.

Peter Pett: They would, of course, have protested that they had not forgotten God. That the daily sacrifices were still offered, that they still gave some recognition to the God of Israel. But God's point was that they had not remembered Him as He was, a holy and righteous God. The Yahweh they 'worshipped' was but a pale, undemanding shadow of what He really was. And that applied to Ezekiel's listeners as well.

Daniel Block: When one realizes that "*to forget Yahweh*" is equivalent to abandoning the covenant, however, the theological significance of the foregoing catalogue of crimes becomes obvious. These offenses represent much more than the mere violation of specific articles of a legal code; they were symptomatic of the nation's, specifically the leaders', spiritual decline. For all their claims to security based on the covenant promises of Yahweh, their failure to keep the covenant stipulations had absolved Yahweh of all obligations. Nonetheless, as vv. 13–16 demonstrate, that Yahweh had been forgotten by his covenant partners did not mean that he had forgotten them.

**C.. (:13-16) Announcement of the Sentence –
The Failure of the Covenant Nation Results in Widespread Dispersion**

1. (:13) Convicted of Shocking Financial Corruption and Physical Violence

"Behold, then, I smite My hand at your dishonest gain which you have acquired and at the bloodshed which is among you."

Constable: vv. 13-14 -- The financial corruption and physical violence that marked Jerusalem disturbed God so greatly that He pictured Himself as striking His palm with His fist (an anthropomorphism). The hearts of the people would not be able to bear up under His coming judgment of these sins nor would they be able to maintain their physical strength.

Charles Dyer: God would strike His hands together (cf. 6:11; 21:14, 17) in derision against Jerusalem. The proud and insolent people who treated God's commands lightly would not be able to dismiss His judgment. Their courage would vanish when God would disperse them among the nations. Moses had warned Israel that national disobedience would eventually lead to dispersion (cf. Lev. 26:27-39; Deut. 28:64-68). Israel had defiled God's Law; now she would be defiled in the eyes of the nations. After the nation was dispersed she would understand the character of the God she had scorned and forgotten: *you will know that I am the Lord.*

2. (:14) Powerless before God's Unrelenting Wrath

*"Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong,
in the days that I shall deal with you?
I, the LORD, have spoken and shall act."*

3. (:15) Dispersed among the Nations

*"And I shall scatter you among the nations,
and I shall disperse you through the lands,
and I shall consume your uncleanness from you."*

MacArthur: Ezekiel saw not only the punishment in the immediate future, but the worldwide dispersion of the Jews still going on today, which continues for the purging of Israel's sins.

Leslie Allen: Verse 13 acts as the link between the accusation and the threat of punishment, summarizing the accusation by putting together the last charge (“*unjust gain*”) with the first (“*blood you have shed in your midst*,” cf. v. 3) in a reversed arrangement to form a **chiasm**. Because of these things the Lord will now act, dispersing Judah among the nations and scattering them through the countries (22:15). In this way, the Lord will bring an end to Judah's uncleanness (22:15). Though such a fate for the Lord's people would be “*defiling*” to the Lord in front of the nations, it was a necessary price to pay. As **Leslie Allen** puts it, the Lord's defilement through Judah's exile “was the lesser of two evils that he was prepared to endure as the price to pay for making his forgetful people remember who and what he was.”

But this scattering is not the only dimension of judgment threatened. Paradoxically, there appears also a “*gathering for judgment*,” as the house of Israel is gathered into Jerusalem, into the heart of the smelter's furnace, to experience the destructive impact of the full outpouring of the Lord's wrath (22:18–22). This is paradoxical not merely because “*gathering*” is the logical opposite of “*scattering*,” but also because the terminology of gathering is elsewhere normally used in a positive sense.

Ralph Alexander: The judgment would be threefold:

- (1) dispersion among the nations (v. 15a),
- (2) cleansing of Jerusalem's impurity (v. 15b), and
- (3) Jerusalem's desecration before all the nations by the Babylonians (v. 16a).

God's primary purpose in judgment, however, was to cause his people to know that he was the Lord, the only true God (v. 16b).

4. (:16a) Exposed before the Nations

“And you will profane yourself in the sight of the nations,”

5. (:16b) Recognition Refrain

“and you will know that I am the LORD.”

II. (:17-22) THE FURNACE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT DESTROYS WORTHLESS DROSS

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

A. (:18) Rejection Valuation – House of Israel is Dross

“Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver.”

Anton Pearson: Dross was a symbol of worthlessness (cf. **Ps 119:119; Prov 25:4; 26:23**).

B. (:19-22a) Refinery Process in the Furnace of God's Judgment

1. (:19) Gathered for the Purpose of Refining

"Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.'"

2. (:20) Melted by God's Wrath

"As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I shall gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I shall lay you there and melt you."

3. (:21) Gathered, Burned and Melted

"And I shall gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it."

Peter Pett: It is important to see that, unlike other Old Testament passages, the idea here is not that they will be refined, but that they will be **destroyed** as worthless dross.

4. (:22a) Melted in the Furnace of God's Judgment

"As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it;"

Daniel Block: The image of the refinery turns on its head Israel's view of itself as Yahweh's prized possession. Egypt had traditionally been perceived as the smelter in which the elect nation had been refined and transformed into the people of Yahweh (**Deut. 4:20; 1 K. 8:51; Jer. 11:4**). In a radical skewing of the image, Ezekiel casts Jerusalem in the role of Egypt. The nation may consider itself precious metal in God's sight, but this is a delusion. In order for the people to become what God wants them to be, they must be subjected again to the refiner's fire. This time, however, it is the fire of divine wrath.

C. (:22b) Recognition Refrain

"and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you."

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was Jerusalem labeled a **bloody city**?
- 2) Do we truly consider the committing of transgressions against the law of God to be **abominations**?

- 3) How had the leaders led the way in the nation pursuing such widespread iniquity?
- 4) When do we act as if we have **forgotten** our God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: These people had become so vile that God would pour out His wrath on everyone, including the prophets, the priests, the princes and the people. What we see here is this:

WHEN GOD POURS OUT HIS CHASTISING JUDGMENT ON HIS PEOPLE, HE IS POURING OUT WHAT IS DESERVED BECAUSE HIS PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN ABOMINABLE AND EVIL SIN.

One commentator said here is one of longest list of sins found anywhere in the Bible. Now there is a list of thirteen sins that show up in this chapter that we want to see. It is interesting that He lumps them together which means they are all very serious sins. There are social sins, sexual sins, religious sins, physical sins, verbal sins and judicial sins. These sins were committed by very religious people. In fact, God classifies these sins as “abominations” to Him:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| Sin #1 - Jerusalem had become a bloody city. | 22:2-6 |
| Sin #2 - God’s people mistreated their fathers and mothers. | 22:7a |
| Sin #3 - God’s people oppressed aliens. | 22:7b |
| Sin #4 - God’s people oppressed the fatherless. | 22:7c |
| Sin #5 - God’s people wronged widows. | 22:7d |
| Sin #6 - God’s people despised God’s holy things. | 22:8a |
| Sin #7 - God’s people despised God’s Sabbaths. | 22:8b |
| Sin #8 - God’s people committed slander. | 22:9a |
| Sin #9 - God’s people ate at idolatrous shrines. | 22:9b |
| Sin #10 - God’s people committed lewd acts. | 22:9c-11 |
| Sin #11 - God’s people had taken bribes. | 22:12a |
| Sin #12 - God’s people had injured their neighbors. | 22:12b |
| Sin #13 - God’s people had forgotten God. | 22:12c |

Lamar Cooper: In vv. 1–12 the pronoun “you” occurs twenty-one times, indicating that Judah was guilty of all charges, crimes, and sin. The pronoun “I” occurs eleven times, indicating that God, who is the speaker, would bring about the judgment on Judah. In response to the sins enumerated in vv. 1–12, God promised he would do five things. God’s first four responses are listed in vv. 13–16, and the final one is in vv. 17–22.

- First, God said he would “*strike*” his hands (v. 13) as a sign of extreme displeasure. This emotional response was especially appropriate considering the violence and injustices that had been described in vv. 1–12.

- Second, God posed a rhetorical question that presupposed a negative response. The question related to their will and endurance. The word “*courage*” (v. 14) literally means “*will*.” So the question was, “Will you have the will, resolve, and strength to stand against the enemy?” The implied answer was, “No, you will not!”
- Third, God warned that he would scatter them among the nations and “*put an end to [their] uncleanness*” (v. 15). This was a paradoxical statement because the foreign nations were considered unclean.
- The fourth response was that the scattered people would know that Yahweh is God by the acts of judgment present in their midst, such as extortion, violence, bloodshed, injustice, immorality, incest, and the multiplication of false religions.
- The fifth and final response was presented in the symbol of the smelting furnace (vv. 17–18). Judgment will be like a smelting furnace that burns away the dross and impurities, leaving the purified precious metal. This was a common figure used for purification in Scripture (see, e.g., **Isa 1:22, 25; 48:10; Jer 9:7; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2–3**). The smelting process was used to purify all kinds of metals (Ezek 22:18). In this analogy Jerusalem was the smelting furnace (v. 19), and Judah was the object to be refined (v. 20). The wrath of God supplied the heat (v. 21), and because of this judgment Judah would know God judged the nation (v. 22).

John Taylor: This chapter consists of three oracles, each beginning with the phrase, ‘*The word of the Lord came to me*’ (1, 17, 23). They may originally have been uttered on separate occasions, but they have been grouped together because they share the same theme of the **indictment of Jerusalem for her sins**. **May** describes the chapter in its present form as a three-point sermon by the final editor of Ezekiel, who is anxious that his contemporaries should take warning from the fate of Jerusalem.

- The first (2–16) condemns Jerusalem as the city of blood and catalogues the variety of sins, religious, sexual, social and judicial, which are found in her. The two most frequently used words are blood (2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13) and in you (6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16). The punishment for all this is to be dispersion among the nations, as if that will enable the Lord to consume away the city’s defilement from her (15).
- The second oracle (17–22) uses the metaphor of the smelting of silver, and this points to the long and painful agonies of testing which Israel is about to undergo. All the elements in the nation will be gathered together in Jerusalem and will there experience the fires of the wrath of God. There is no mention of any refined silver resulting from this process, though silver may be reckoned among the elements which make up Israel; but see below for a discussion of the passage. The verdict on Israel is that they are all dross (19).

- The third oracle (23–31) makes detailed criticisms of the different classes of Israelite society—the princes, the priests, the prophets, the nobles and the people of the land. All of them have failed in their responsibilities; not a man has been found who will stand in the breach. So the Lord will pour out upon them the due recompense for their misdeeds. Their fate is sealed.

TEXT: Ezekiel 22:23-31

TITLE: WHO WILL STAND IN THE GAP?

BIG IDEA:

GOD WILL UNLEASH DIVINE WRATH UPON HIS CORRUPT HOLY CITY

INTRODUCTION:

[Outline borrowed from sermon by **Michael Crawford**. This is the third oracle of judgment from chapter 22.]

This is a famous scripture text: “*Who will stand in the gap?*” The various categories of leaders are taken to task for their promotion of sin, idolatry, social injustice and any number of other transgressions that cause a nation to spiral downward away from allegiance to God. Once again, it should be no surprise that judgment is deserved; judgment is coming soon; and judgment will be severe on Jerusalem.

Galen Doughty: Leaders are held to a higher standard by God than the people they lead. Ezekiel demonstrates the principle here that the behavior of the people is a result of the behavior of the leaders. When leaders are corrupt they corrupt the people. All are guilty before God, leaders and people alike. Therefore all will be judged and punished for violating God's covenant.

Michael Crawford: The situation portrayed here in the Promised Land with its focus in the capital city of Jerusalem applies to a covenant people who should demonstrate a fully integrated political, judicial, revelatory and worship culture. Everything is out of whack and the Lord speaks words of indictment and condemnation as He exposes corruption, oppression and destructive behavior on all levels of society.

Leslie Allen: The final oracle in this series of three, vv 23–31, reasons back from consequence to cause. The catastrophe of 587 b.c., was an outworking of divine indignation (vv 24, 31). The tradition of covenant curse or blessing whereby rain was the reward of loyalty to Yahweh and drought was a reprisal for unfaithfulness (cf. **Lev 26:4, 19; Deut 11:14, 17; Amos 4:7**) is here taken up by way of metaphor. Fallen Jerusalem is rhetorically bidden to reflect on the fact that its experience had been nothing less than divine judgment.

Derek Thomas: A society is only as good as its leaders. Various people held power in ancient Israel, including kings, civil servants, military leaders, priests, prophets, rich landholders and the wise men. The fall of the Roman Empire is laid at the door of bad government. Roman skill at government soon gave way to expediency when later emperors tried to force revenue out of people who could not pay. Bad leadership explains the fall of Jerusalem, too.

Lamar Cooper: This passage depicts the tragic and total disintegration of every area of leadership that should have given moral and spiritual guidance to Judah. Their failure in these areas made judgment inevitable. No one escaped arraignment for responsibility of the moral and spiritual delinquency of the nation. . .

Those who have places of leadership also are doubly responsible. They are responsible for their own lives, but they also are responsible for those whom God places under their charge. When those who lead distort or misrepresent the truth of God, they not only deceive themselves but others also (**22:23–31**; cf. **Heb 13:17**; **1 Pet 5:1–5**).

III (:23-31) THE FAILURE OF JERUSALEM'S LEADERS DEMANDS GOD'S IMMEDIATE AND SEVERE JUDGMENT

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

A. (:24-29) Comprehensive Indictment of Jerusalem

1. (:24-25) Summary Indictment

a. (:24) Evident Culpability of the Nation

“Son of man, say to her, 'You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.'”

Feinberg: the land had had neither human tending nor the blessing of God in rain. According to Old Testament promise rain was one of the blessings in the material realm which attended a walk of obedience. It was withheld to turn their hearts back to the Lord.

Constable: Judah's moral uncleanness had accumulated because it had not benefited from God's periodic cleansing of the land through its leadership.

Peter Pett: God gives warning that the rains which were the lifeblood of the land will fail in ‘*the day of indignation*’, the day of His anger (compare **Isaiah 5:6**; **Zechariah 14:17**). Notice the comparison of the falling of rain with the cleansing of the land. This will be taken up in **Ezekiel 36:25**. As the rain fell and life was renewed it was seen as a purification and a regeneration. (This would later be central in the teaching of John the Baptist). But for this land in its evil there was to be no purification, no regeneration. It is in direct contrast with the ‘*showers of blessing*’ in **Ezekiel 34:26** producing great fruitfulness.

b. (:25) Primary Failure Attributed to False Prophets Exploiting the People

*“There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst,
like a roaring lion tearing the prey.
They have devoured lives;
they have taken treasure and precious things;
they have made many widows in the midst of her.”*

Pooler: *The conspiracy*: A contrivance, or framing among themselves a design, to speak all alike flattering, smooth words, and give out promises of peace and safety, when there was no peace.

2. (:26-28) Indictment of All Classes of Rulers

a. (:26) Indictment of the Priests --

Blurring the Distinction Between the Holy and the Profane

*“Her priests have done violence to My law
and have profaned My holy things;
they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane,
and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and
the clean;
and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths,
and I am profaned among them.”*

Daniel Block: This verse represents the only text in **chs. 1–39** that casts members of Ezekiel’s own social class, the priesthood, in a negative light. Here Ezekiel charges the religious functionaries with a series of crimes, all related directly to the discharge of professional duties.

First, they are accused of violence toward Yahweh’s Torah. This is one of only six occurrences of the verb *ḥāmas*, “to treat wrongly, to do violence to,” in the entire OT, and one of only two occurrences of the phrase *ḥāmas tōrâ*. The unusual association of such a strong verb with the Torah highlights the priests’ blatant disregard for the substance and intent of the Mosaic law. Although the present context places the emphasis entirely on ceremonial aspects of the Torah, presumably their crimes extended to violations of ethical regulations as well (cf. **Mal. 2:5–9**).

Second, they have desecrated the *godāšîm*, which in Ezekielian usage includes both sacred objects and donations. While these first charges are borrowed directly from Zephaniah, the next three are new, and may be viewed as expansions on the second.

Third, they neglected to maintain sacred and profane distinctions. Although the language plays on the same roots (*qdš*, *ḥll*) as the previous charge, this charge derives ultimately from **Lev. 10:10**, which occurs immediately after the account of Nadab and Abihu’s use of alien fire before Yahweh.

Fourth, they failed to instruct the people in the regulations concerning ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness. Sacred-profane and clean-unclean issues often overlap. However, the latter tended to involve diet, hygiene, and other practices affecting health (**Lev. 11–15**). The accusation of neglect in pedagogical duties touches on an issue that receives surprisingly little attention in the Pentateuch. The charge to Aaron in **Lev. 10:11** to teach the Israelites all the statutes spoken by Yahweh through Moses is the most explicit. But Moses places this burden on the tribe of Levi in his final blessing: “*They shall teach your ordinances to Jacob, and your law to Israel*” (**Deut. 33:10**).

Fifth, they have led the way in the neglect of the Sabbaths, referred to earlier in v. 8. The odd expression “*to hide the eyes from,*” whose form recalls **Lev. 20:6**, denotes not only personal violation of the Sabbaths but also a failure to prosecute offenders of the Sabbath laws.

Peter Pett: The priests also come under heavy criticism. Doing violence to the Law may suggest that they have distorted it in their teaching (as the Pharisees would later) or it may signify that they have done violence to it by repressing it and not teaching it at all. The profaning of holy things suggests carelessness in their approach to them, and a tendency to treat them lightly. This is amplified by pointing out that they did not distinguish what was holy according to the Law from what was common, and that they failed to teach the people what was ritually ‘clean’ and what was ‘unclean’. This failure would go along with idol worship.

David Guzik: *They have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy:* This was one of the important jobs of the priests of Israel. They were to help the people understand how the law of God applied to their daily lives by declaring things and conduct as **holy** or **unholy**, as **unclean** or **clean**. But they did not know the difference themselves and so could not instruct the people they were intended to serve.

Mike Miller: There IS a difference between the holy and the unholy.

- A. There ARE things that are CLEAN and there are things that are UNCLEAN!
- B. Holiness has to do with the conformity of our life to God and his ways.
- C. Holiness is a measure of how much our life reflects the truth about God to others.
- D. Holiness is about what is inside AND what is outside. 1. Some focus on the inside and some focus on the outside – but true holiness includes BOTH at the same time.
- E. So then holiness must be considered in every area of our life and what others see and know about us.

b. (:27) Indictment of the Political Rulers –
Destructively Seeking Dishonest Gain

*“Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey,
by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain.”*

Leslie Allen: By a terrible Jekyll and Hyde transformation the civil authorities who should have been shepherds with the welfare of their flock at heart changed into wild beasts preying on the sheep (cf. **34:8**).

c. (:28) Indictment of the Prophets –
Covering Up for Corrupt Leadership

*“And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them,
seeing false visions and divining lies for them,
saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the LORD has not spoken.”*

Douglas Stuart: False prophets outnumbered true prophets during most of Israel's history (cf. **1 Kin. 18:22; Jer. 23:9–40**), and true prophets were often suppressed because their message was one of judgment rather than complacency (e.g., **Amos 2:12; 7:10–17**). Thus **verse 28** says that the prophets “*whitewash*” (“plastered them with untempered mortar,” v. **28**) the sins of the various leaders, instead of condemning them as they ought.

3. (:29) Indictment of the People of the Land –
Oppressing the Vulnerable and Denying Justice

*“The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery,
and they have wronged the poor and needy
and have oppressed the sojourner without justice.”*

Lamar Cooper: What kind of people would such leadership produce? It should be no surprise that the people were extortioners, robbers, oppressors, the inhospitable, and subverters of justice. Their society was a showcase of violence, greed, graft, indifference to suffering, and general neglect of God's word. There was no discipline in the homes (**22:7**). Moral and sexual perversions and indiscretions were commonplace (**22:9–11**). Crime and general lack of moral restraint was the order of the day (**22:12**).

B. (:30) Futile Search for a Rebuilder / Advocate

1. Recruitment Effort = Focused Internally

“And I searched for a man among them”

2. Job Description = Critical Roles

a. Rebuilder

“who should build up the wall”

Ralph Alexander: The current context argues that there was no person to take the lead and lead the nation into confession and a resulting righteous life among the people that would turn away God's wrath.

b. Advocate

“and stand in the gap before Me for the land,”

Daniel Block: The accusations against the nobility of Judah climax with Yahweh's expression of dismay over the absence of spiritual leadership in the nation's critical hour. To clarify the divine disposition, Ezekiel borrows a metaphor from his older contemporary, Jeremiah, who was commanded to scour the streets of Jerusalem in search of anyone who practiced justice and pursued truth (**Jer. 5:1–6**). The image of Yahweh searching for someone to man the breach is military. *peres* denotes a hole in the city wall, resulting either from neglect or from assault by the enemy's battering rams. Unless the gap was quickly repaired or armed men were stationed in the gap, the invader would have easy access to the city. What kind of person the figure of speech

anticipated is not specified. On the basis of the Jeremianic antecedent, he must have been looking for someone who would stand up for justice, call a halt to oppression, break the spiral of increasing violence, and appeal for repentance. If only there had been a voice to announce the certain judgment of God in the face of their criminal activity, to warn the people of Yahweh's approach (cf. **Ezek. 3:17; 33:7**). But like the false prophets in **13:5**, the leaders were all too preoccupied with their own affairs to worry about the welfare of the city.

3. Urgency of the Search = High Stakes

"that I should not destroy it;"

4. Futility of the Search = No Viable Candidates

"but I found no one."

Wiersbe: God searched among His people for one person in authority who would stand in the gap so that the enemy wouldn't penetrate the wall and invade the city, but He found none.

Constable: Moses had been a "gap man," in his day (**Exod. 32:11; cf. Gen. 20:7**). He had turned aside the Lord's wrath from the Israelites with His intercessory prayers. God responded to Moses' pleas for mercy because the people were still malleable enough to repent. He did not respond to Jeremiah's prayers for mercy because the Judahites were now hardened in opposition to His will (**Jer. 7:16-17; 14:11-12**).

C. (:31) Fiery Divine Wrath Justifiably Unleashed

*"Thus I have poured out My indignation on them;
I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath;
their way I have brought upon their heads,' declares the Lord God."*

Feinberg: With the entire nation so given over to every displeasing act, and no one to intervene for them, judgment alone remained for them. So sure was this visitation that Ezekiel thrice expressed it as having already occurred. The judgment had to overtake them, and it did in the calamitous fall of the kingdom and monarchy in 586 B.C. Since Israel's true King and Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, was rejected in His earthly ministry, the effects of this disaster go on to this hour.

Morgan: Thus, the reprobation of Israel was vindicated, not only on account of its pollution, but in order to its ultimate restoration, for there was no force in her which could lead her back to the God from Whom she had departed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does our culture fail to differentiate between **the holy and the profane**?

- 2) What type of responsibility must leaders take for the **moral direction** of the nation?
- 3) What are some of the practical ways in which one could **stand in the gap** today for our local jurisdiction, our city, our country?
- 4) What type of accountability should we be preaching in light of the coming day of judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: The text divides into two uneven parts: a survey of the corruption that has characterized the population, particularly the leaders (vv. 24–29), and a summary of Yahweh’s response to that moral declension (vv. 30–31). In an earlier oracle Ezekiel had lumped together prophets, priests, elders, king, and princes for a brief denunciation (7:26–27); now, in another case of resumptive exposition, he returns to some unfinished business. The present grouping of leaders is reminiscent of Micah’s eighth-century protests against the prophets (including seers and diviners) who lead people astray, judges who pervert justice, and priests who provide instruction for a price (Mic. 3:5–12). Even more striking are its affinities with Zeph. 3:3–4, which attacks in order wicked princes, judges, prophets, and priests. Ezekiel may even have crafted this oracle as an intentional expansion of this seventh-century prophet’s message. In any case, it offers further evidence of his familiarity with his professional predecessors.

MacArthur: Ezekiel and Jeremiah were faithful, but apart from them God sought a man capable of advocacy for Israel when its sin had gone so far. But no one could lead the people to repentance and draw the nation back from the brink of the judgment that came in 586 B.C. (Jer 7:26, 36; 19:15). Only God’s Messiah, God Himself, will have the character and the credentials sufficient to do what no man can do, intercede for Israel (cf. Is 59:16–19; 63:5; Rev 6). He was rejected by them in His earthly ministry, so the effects of this judgment continue today, until they turn to Him in faith (cf. Zec 12:10, 13:1).

Tom Hill: False Prophets: Their Shameless, Insidious Conspiracy

As Ezekiel explained to Israel their sinfulness, he specifically identified the presence of a conspiracy of prophets and their sinful leadership. He described the behavior of the false prophets, princes, leaders, and the ruling people. They:

- killed many husbands, making many widows;
- violated God’s Law;
- profaned God’s holy things;
- failed to distinguish between holy and profane things;
- made no difference between clean and unclean things;
- hid their eyes from God’s Sabbaths;
- profaned God among the people; and

- like ravening wolves, they shed blood and destroyed souls for dishonest gain.

The offenses Ezekiel described sound as current as today's television, radio, and print publications. Ungodly men and women, who proclaim themselves as God's messengers, support one another in robbing the Church of Godly leadership. For example,

- Boards of Directors close their eyes to sin and corruption in the ministries they direct.
- These same Boards support figureheads who dangerously weaken the Church.
- Church boards defend pastors whose lives do not reflect the purity and grace of Jesus.
- False messages of peace and prosperity flood our nation and other countries as well.
- Religious television and radio broadcasts proclaim an untrue message of hope.
- Books and magazines publish these misleading messages.

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TEXT: Ezekiel 23:1-49

TITLE: TWO SISTERS OF HARLOTRY AND THEIR HORRIBLE JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

THE ABOMINABLE SINS OF PERSISTENT SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY DEMAND SEVERE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Woodhead: This chapter continues with the Lord's displeasure of Israel's sins. It is another long parable of spiritual harlotry similar to that which the Lord gave us in chapter sixteen. **Chapter sixteen** focused on the breaking of marriage vows between Israel and Jehovah's sacred covenant with the Jews. This chapter will discuss Israel's worldliness particularly with treaties and alliances with other nations. These alliances were treated by the Jews as being stronger for security and safety than the total dependency they should have had on God. They represent a desire to free their souls away from God, seeking to satisfy themselves, apart from His commands, with practices He forbade. He faults them particularly with her spiritual sins. While the references here will be to sexual immorality the imagery actually is "spiritual fornication" or leaving the genuine God of Creation for pagan occultic non-gods. Scripture uses sexual lust as a metaphor for idol worship (**Ezekiel 16:15-34**). The imagery employed here is vivid with the illustration of sexual immorality through prostitution which closely resembles Israel's departure from the genuine (sexual intercourse ordained by God in a committed marriage). They left for that which did not love her or have her best interest at heart. She preferred the cold heart of prostitution to the warm loving secure relationship to the God of the universe that called her out from the people groups of the world. There are many illustrations that God gave Ezekiel to describe the Jew's sins. When all are assembled in this book as they are they only comprise a small reflection of the disappointment and displeasure the Lord experienced with them.

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Iain Duguid: the prophet harnesses all of the emotional impact of a graphic portrayal of sexual perversion to drive home the point that Jerusalem's coming destruction is both the deserved and the inevitable consequence of her past actions.

Douglas Stuart: The chapter is an allegory about the offensive disobedience of the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah), with regard to their lack of trust in the Lord and their willingness to seek peace, security, and religion from the great international powers of the day, Assyria and Babylon. Behind the allegory is the common metaphorical language of ancient international treaties and of Israelite prophets that likened unfaithfulness to the Lord to adultery and, more commonly, prostitution (Hebrew, *zanah*, vv. **3, 7, 8**, etc.). Israel—either north or south or both—could be imagined as the wife of the Lord, cheating on Him with other gods and/or

nations by her political and religious infidelity. To a considerable extent **chapter 23** follows and complements **chapter 16**, although it does not seem to be the case that these two chapters are merely parts of what was once a single long allegory. More likely, at various times and perhaps even for various audiences, two separate but comparable prophecies were delivered about Israel's history.

It is important to appreciate the fact that God expected His people to depend on Him alone for their political security among the nations as well as for their worship. He was their national God as well as the personal God of each Israelite. They were forbidden to try to obtain by diplomacy what He had promised to give them if they would have faith in Him. Thus, just as they were not to depend in any way on other gods, so they were not to depend in any way on other nations. The prophets frequently attacked the tendency in both north and south to try to find stability, prestige, security or strength by alliances with other nations (e.g., **Hos. 7:8–12; Is. 30:1–5; Jer. 42:18–22**).

Unfortunately, the temptations were irresistible to Israel. What others had, she wanted. What others did, she copied. . .

In their own eyes they weren't wrong. In God's eyes, they were not only wrong, but completely disgusting! They were His special covenant people blessed with all sorts of advantages and opportunities to be a light to the nations. Instead they had completely forgotten Him (v. 35). They were His bride sworn to love only Him. Instead, they cheated on Him constantly. To themselves, they seemed attractive. To Him, they were lewd. So no matter what they thought of themselves, God knew what they were and what they deserved.

Derek Thomas: The sinfulness of Israel and Judah, focused on their respective capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem, has been portrayed in terms of an allegory of two fallen women: Oholah and Oholibah. The depth of the treachery, sinking into the mire of prostitution and adultery, is shocking. God's Old Testament church has committed the gravest of transgressions against the covenant. She has violated the bond of marriage.

Peter Pett: The final judgment of Jerusalem was fast approaching, and in this parable is provided the justification for it. It depicts in its intensity the depths to which God's people had fallen and shows why they had to be judged. Yet it does not hide from the fact that they were like that from the very beginning. There had never been a long period when they had been worthy. However, God had been gracious to them in their unworthiness, but now their sinfulness has come to fruition. Their iniquity was now full. The chapter is difficult to commentate on in depth because it is so sordid, for it is seeking to bring out the disgusting state of the people. But where God has spoken we must seek to understand.

I. (:2-4) INTRODUCTION OF THE ACCUSED HARLOTS = SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM

“The word of the LORD came to me again saying,”

A. (:2) Common Origin

“Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother;”

MacArthur: “*One mother*” refers to the united kingdom, while “*two women*” refers to the divided kingdom.

Douglas Stuart: “*Daughters of one mother*” (v. 2) underlines Israel and Judah’s common origin as a unified nation. Prostitution (“*harlotry*”) in Egypt and “*their youth*” (v. 3) refers to the nation’s lack of faithfulness during its idolatrous years in Egypt and the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula as described in Exodus and Numbers particularly (cf. **Ezek. 20:5–21**). They were “*Mine*,” that is, the nations belonged to the Lord, presumably as His wives (v. 4). Neither Ezekiel nor anyone in his audience would have assumed that this imagery of the Lord’s two wives meant that God favored polygamy. Polygamy was never outlawed in Bible times, and they would have known many men who had more than one wife (as Jacob, their ancestor had). The allegory simply makes use of that familiarity with polygamy to symbolize the history of a divided nation. “*Sons and daughters*” (v. 4) are the towns, cities, and populations that increased in number as God blessed His people in the Promised Land.

B. (:3) Common Offense

*“and they played the harlot in Egypt.
They played the harlot in their youth;
there their breasts were pressed,
and there their virgin bosom was handled.”*

Peter Pett: Their nationhood had begun in Egypt, and it had been an unhappy beginning. The picture of Israel in Egypt was not a pleasant one. They had worshipped a selection of foreign gods, and that worship had led them into sexual perversion and evil living. They had allowed themselves to be manhandled by what was unworthy. They had fallen not only into slavery but into degradation and idolatry.

C. (:4) Capital City Identifications

*“And their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister.
And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters.
And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.”*

Constable: Oholah was the name of the older sister (lit. “*her tent*,” or “*she who has a tent*,” probably a reference to her pagan tent shrines), and she represents Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel. Oholibah was the younger sister (lit. “*my [or ‘a’] tent is in her*,” probably a reference to the temple), and she represents Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah. Thus the Lord associated these two kingdoms with their unauthorized and authorized places of worship, respectively. One of Esau’s wives was Oholibamah, meaning “*tent of the high place*” (**Gen. 36:2**).

Peter Wallace: the point of the similarity of the names is that Samaria and Jerusalem are fundamentally **similar**: like Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Douglas Stuart: The allegory of the sister cities begins by emphasizing their long history of promiscuity and identifying them as Samaria and Jerusalem. Then the story of Samaria is told first, Oholah (Samaria) being the elder sister in the story. Historically, Jerusalem was founded by not later than 4000 b.c., according to carbon-14 dating, while Samaria was built more than three millennia later by the Israelite king, Omri (885–880 b.c.; 1 Kin. 16:21–28). Thus Jerusalem was much older than Samaria. But as Samaria “died” first (destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 b.c. as opposed to Jerusalem’s “death” at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 b.c.) and because Samaria embraced full idolatry and international dependencies far earlier than Jerusalem, it is treated in the story as if it were “older.”

Daniel Block: The present image is artificially created in accordance with the requirements of the allegory. For this prophet, the name “Israel” represented the entire undivided people of God. However, in order to reflect the actual history of the nation, which had for centuries been divided into two kingdoms, the covenant between Yahweh and all Israel was best portrayed as a marriage to two sibling wives. Thereby both their **ethnic** and their **theological unity** are affirmed.

II. (:5-10) SAMARIA’S HISTORY OF HARLOTTRY (OHOLAH)

A. (:5a) Violation of Covenant Relationship

“And Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine;”

B. (:5b-7) Unfaithful Liaisons with Assyria

“and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, her neighbors, 6 who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. 7 “And she bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom were the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself.”

Iain Duguid: Not content with the Lord, she traded her attentions elsewhere. She lusted after the Assyrians, seeking to enter a covenant with them, a politico-religious alliance that implied a repudiation of trust in the Lord as her sole provider. What attracted her to the Assyrians was their power and prestige. They all appeared to her as warriors—horsemen and charioteers, governors and commanders, dressed in splendid garments of blue (**23:6**).

The historical background of this assertion is not hard to trace. From around 841–840 b.c., Israel was involved in an alliance with Assyria when Shalmaneser III received a substantial tribute from Jehu. Climbing into bed with Assyria may have seemed the logical—perhaps the only possible—political option to Israel’s leadership, but it was also tantamount to a rejection of trust in the Lord in favor of Assyria’s idols, with which Israel now defiled herself (**23:7**). It was a return to her former way of life in Egypt,

from which the Lord had redeemed her (23:8). The consequences of her lifestyle choice were severe, yet fitting. The Lord gave her over into the hand of her lovers, the Assyrians (23:9). The very things that attracted her to them rebounded against her. Their warrior power was exerted against her, and far from clothing her in similar manner to themselves they stripped her naked and killed her (23:10).

Daniel Block: Whether or not these officers are listed in descending order of rank, in Oholah's eyes they all qualify as *baḥûrê hemed, ṣhoiše* desirable men, attractive candidates who can try to satisfy her insatiable lust. Her total lack of restraint is emphasized by the threefold repetition of *kol*, "all," in v. 7. To concretize the offense Yahweh says she defiled herself ... with all their images. Many delete *bēkol gillûlêhem niṭmā'â* as an intrusive reference to idolatry in a context that is otherwise overwhelmingly political. However, *gillûlîm* need not be restricted to images of deity. Here they represent men, a conclusion confirmed by vv. 13–14, which, in an exposition of this phrase, replace the *gillûlîm* with *ṣalmê kaśdîm*, "images of Chaldeans."

C. (:8) Consistent with Her Harlotries in Egypt

*"And she did not forsake her harlotries from the time in Egypt;
for in her youth men had lain with her,
and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her."*

D. (:9-10) Condemned to Suffer Abuse and Disgrace

1. (:9) Punished by Her Paramours

*"Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers,
into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted."*

2. (:10a) Punished In Horrible Ways

a. Stripped of Modesty and Respect

"They uncovered her nakedness;"

b. Stripped of Children

"they took her sons and her daughters,"

c. Slaughtered

"but they slew her with the sword."

Derek Thomas: The lesson, for those who serve sin, seems to be that sin always has the last word. Those who give themselves to unlawful sexual gratification will find that, though the pleasure may be momentarily satisfying, the reward is invariably death: the death of disease, broken relationships and guilt.

3. (:10b) Punished by Disgrace

*"Thus she became a byword among women,
and they executed judgments on her."*

MacArthur: The northern kingdom of Israel was a harlot, in a spiritual sense, by seeking union for fulfillment and security with idolatrous, young, wealthy, attractive Assyria. Assyria turned on her (v. 10), conquered her, and deported Israel in 722 B.C. (2 Ki 17).

Leslie Allen: vv. 5-10 -- The political involvement of the northern kingdom with Assyria in the eighth century b.c. is interpreted negatively, as it was by Hosea. For Hosea it spelled a fundamental lack of faith in Yahweh—deserting him in favor of “lovers” (Hos 8:9; cf. 5:13; 14:3). Ezekiel develops this imagery in terms of the sexual attractiveness of macho Assyria, a veritable world power with all its impressive trappings. He categorizes Israel’s subsequent overtures to Egypt, made in order to secure liberation from Assyria (cf. 2 Kgs 17:4; Hos 7:11; 12:2[1]), as a further manifestation of a deep urge toward inconstancy. This urge met its providential nemesis in the fall of Samaria and the end of the northern kingdom. The victors’ indulgence in their fruits of victory, the rape and killing of women and the selling of children, is woven into the allegory, as is Israel’s loss of face in the sight of other nations.

John Taylor: The Hebrew had never found it easy to resist the temptations and allurements of more sophisticated civilizations than his own, whether they were the fleshpots of Egypt or the dashing gallants of the Assyrian cavalry regiments. But Israel’s reward was very different from her expectation. Having been possessed and used, she was then despised and exposed to public ridicule, and finally savaged and destroyed.

III. (:11-21) JERUSALEM’S HISTORY OF HARLOTRY (OHOLIBAH)

A. (:11) Multiplied Harlotries of Jerusalem – Surpassing Samaria

“Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister.”

Douglas Stuart: Since Ezekiel’s fellow exiles in Tel-Abib were Judeans, they would take pride in the fact that the Davidic dynasty still ruled in Judah in the person of Zedekiah, that any power attacking Judah would have to contend with a well-fortified Jerusalem, and that their continuity of traditions with the past was intact, since unlike now-destroyed Samaria, their nation was still going strong, still enjoying the well-deserved (of course) blessing of the Lord.

All this was wrong. Judah was odious to the Lord. Jerusalem was a disgusting city. They should have been abjectly ashamed of themselves rather than proud—praying for forgiveness rather than congratulating themselves on their fine lineage. Thus when the allegory of **chapter 23** gets around to the story of Oholibah/ Jerusalem, it gives no encouragement at all to the audience. The character they identify with is even worse than the character they’ve just been hearing about (Oholah, i.e., Samaria).

Peter Wallace: The people of Jerusalem had participated in the mocking of Samaria. Their northern neighbors had not worshiped God aright! Israel, at best, worshiped Yahweh with the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. And during the corrupt years of the

Omrises (Ahab's family) they had worshiped Baal – and (it seems) even the gods of Assyria. And sure, we had some bad kings in Jerusalem – Ahaz and Manasseh even committed idolatry in the temple! But Josiah fixed all that! We are God's holy people – living in God's holy city. We are not like Samaria! Ezekiel says, "that's true – you're worse!"

B. (:12-13) Harlotries with Assyria

"She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 And I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way."

Iain Duguid: Oholibah is not merely like her sister; she is worse than her sister. Nor is this depravity the result of ignorance: Her sister "saw" and yet still became more depraved in her lust, committing more adulteries than her sister (23:11). She first sinned in exactly the same way with the Assyrians (23:12, which closely recapitulates 23:5–6), and then added to her little black book the Babylonians (23:14). She was worse in her wantonness than her sister not merely in the number of her lovers (two as against one) but in the nature of their relationship. She was attracted to the Babylonians by a mere wall depiction; entranced by the vision of them she herself sent messengers to Babylon to get them (23:16). She was thus not merely willing to be seduced but was herself the active seductress. They thus became idols come to life for her: Like the idols of the house of Israel in 8:10, they are described as "*portrayed on a wall, figures of Chaldeans*" (23:14). Though they may be attractively dressed up, they are merely an old idolatry warmed over.

C. (:14-18) Harlotries with Babylonia

1. (:14-16) Seduced

"So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, 15 girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth. 16 "And when she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea."

Peter Pett: These gorgeous cultic pictures painted on Babylonian walls had become familiar to Ezekiel since coming to Babylonia, and may possibly have been reproduced in some small way, through Babylonian influence, in Jerusalem. They were a vivid means of portraying the way that Jerusalem had been seduced by Babylonian sophistication and had become wrapped up in Babylon, like young women falling in love with a photograph of a uniformed officer.

2. (:17-18) Shamed

"And the Babylonians came to her to the bed of love, and they defiled her with their harlotry." And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them."

*And she uncovered her harlotries
and uncovered her nakedness;”
Then I became disgusted with her,
as I had become disgusted with her sister.”*

Leslie Allen: vv. 14-18 -- The second phase of Judah’s political involvement was with Babylonia, Assyria’s successor as the eastern world power. The glamor of Babylon is described in terms of architectural ornamentation. Doubtless Ezekiel and his audience had seen such painted bas-reliefs on Babylonian buildings, and the account is embroidered by the contemporary reference in the interests of communication with his hearers. **Hab 1:6–11** reflects the tremendous impression the Babylonian army made on Judah. Underlying **v 16** may be a tradition of secret negotiations with Babylon, whether in Hezekiah’s reign (cf. **2 Kgs 20:12–15**) or in Jehoiakim’s (cf. **2 Kgs 23:34–24:1**). Judah’s subsequent disenchantment is clothed in the psychological phenomenon of sexual revulsion (cf. **Gottwald**, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth* 305–6), which for the prophet illustrates the restlessness of those who refuse to find their rest in Yahweh. The narration of this second phase of Judah’s infidelity is drawn to a close by mention of Yahweh’s abhorrence. The partner who sadly “*observed*” at the end of the first phase (**v 13**) is now stung to a stronger reaction, which with its reference back to the northern kingdom bodes ill for Judah.

John Taylor: **Verse 17** reflects the pendulum-like swing from a pro-Babylonian policy to an anti-Babylonian policy that marked Judah’s political history during the last hundred years before the exile. Discovered (**18**, av, rv) is well translated in rsv with the words carried on openly and flaunted. The references to Egypt in **19–21** may possibly reflect contemporary pro-Egyptian intrigues (cf. **Jer. 37:5**), but it is not necessary that it should be so interpreted. The dominant thought is the influence of Judah’s Egyptian upbringing.

D. (:19-21) Harlotries with Egypt

1. (:19-20) Seduced

*“Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth,
when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt.
And she lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of
donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses.”*

Daniel Block: The strength of Yahweh’s passion over Oholibah’s conduct is reflected in the shocking portrayal of the third phase of her whoredoms. Now she has come full circle. As she recalls her youth in Egypt, the mature woman’s addiction takes her back to where it all began, only with intensified energy. The obscenity of the description accords with the unrestrained prurience of Oholibah’s actions.

Constable: vv. 17-21 -- After she became a vassal of Babylon, she became disgusted with the Babylonians and turned away to seek help from Egypt (cf. **Jer. 2:18; 6:8; 37:5-7; Lam. 4:17**). The Lord also became disgusted with her, as He had with her sister. Nevertheless she persisted in her immoral conduct that she had learned in Egypt.

She lusted after the Egyptians that pursued her like donkeys and horses in heat (cf. **Jer. 2:24; 5:8; 13:27**). Donkeys and horses were proverbial for their strong sexual drive (cf. **Jer. 2:24; 5:8; 13:27**), and the Lord used these animals as a figure for the Egyptians' potency that attracted the Israelites.¹ Jerusalem returned to her old lover, namely, Egypt.

Lamar Cooper: Judah's political prostitution was presented in explicit sexual terminology. This idolatry produced the same revulsion by God that prompted him to annihilate their forefathers in the wilderness for the worship of the gods of Egypt (**v. 21; Exod 32:11–18**). Judah lusted for her lovers whose "*genitals were like those of donkeys, and whose emission was like that of horses*" (**v. 20**). These proverbial phrases were intended to show divine contempt for those attracted by the military power portrayed by reference to sexual potency.

2. (:21) Shameless

"Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth."

Leslie Allen: vv. 19-21 -- The third phase, hinted at in **v 17**, relates to Egypt and brings the account down to the present. Judah's overtures to the ambitious Hophra, which Judeans at home and doubtless abroad viewed positively as the answer to all their problems, are invested with a negative aura, as a return to Egyptian bondage (**v 3**) and also as the history of the northern kingdom disastrously repeating itself (**v 8**). The coarseness of the description in **v 20** leaves no doubt that for Ezekiel and his God the political alliance stank. The direct address of **v 21**, which continues in the next section, is both rhetorical and real in that Ezekiel was speaking to exiled Judeans. It creates a passionate conclusion.

Peter Pett: They are pictured as looking back with longing to when their breasts were admired and were heavily fondled. They want this to happen again. Their concentration is on the sensual rather than the spiritual.

IV. (:22-35) FOUR MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM (OHOLIBAH)

A. (:22-27) Savaged by Her Former Lovers

"Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord God,"

Douglas Stuart: "*Therefore*" (Hebrew, *lākēn*, **v. 22**) is legal language, a standard way of introducing the judgment sentence in a prophetic passage dealing with God's judgment for breaking His Law. The lovers Judah came to hate ("*from whom you have alienated yourself*") will serve as God's instruments of punishment. In **verse 23**, the Babylonians and Chaldeans are two names for the same nation. Pekod, Shoa, and Koa were Aramean tribes, small nations east of the Tigris that were now part of the Babylonian Empire and whose populations presumably served in considerable numbers in the Babylonian army. Ezekiel sometimes mentions such obscure, distant lands and peoples in order to convey

to Israel the idea that “*the whole world*” is or will be against them (cf. **chs. 38 and 39**). In the conquering Babylonian army will also be Assyrians—the group that conquered Samaria—when the foe takes Jerusalem captive. The enemies’ harsh “*justice*” will constitute God’s delegated judgment (v. 24). It will include mutilation (“*They shall remove [cut off] your nose and your ears*”), death (“*your remnant shall fall by the sword*”), enslavement (“*They shall take your sons and your daughters*”), and the burning of the city (“*devoured by fire,*” v. 25). Nothing of her former glory, symbolized here by clothes and jewelry, will be left, and thereby Jerusalem will learn not to think about “*Egypt*”—her idolatrous, dependent origins—any more (**vv. 26–27**).

Lamar Cooper: **vv. 22-35** -- This passage contains four messages of judgment to come upon Oholibah (Judah, especially Jerusalem).

- First, her lovers would become the instruments of judgment against her. The Babylonians, with other conquered vassals, would attack Jerusalem (**vv. 22–27**). They would mutilate her, strip her, and take her away.
- Second, she would be despised by those who were formerly her lovers (**vv. 28–31**). Disloyalty to God leads to idolatry and ultimately is expressed in contempt for all involved.
- Third, she would suffer the same fall as her sister Oholah. Jerusalem would be destroyed and her citizens taken captive because of the wrath (cup) of God (**vv. 32–34**).
- Fourth, she would bear her sin, abandoned of any source of help (v. 35). Because Jerusalem forgot God, she was left alone. Greater punishment for sin does not exist than to be isolated in a time of judgment and despair.

Robert Lawrence: This passage (**verses 22-35**) contains four messages of judgment to come upon Oholibah (Judah, especially Jerusalem).

- a. God would bring the Babylonians to punish Judah just as He brought the Assyrians to punish Samaria (**vv. 22–27**).
- b. God would allow the people they hated to ravage their land and destroy Jerusalem and the temple (**vv. 28–31**).
- c. Next, she would suffer the same fall as her sister Oholah - the cup He hands them will be large and deep and they will have to drink it (**vv. 32–34**).
- d. Judah would bear their own sin, abandoned of any source of help (v. 35).

1. (:22-24) Onslaught of Judgment from Former Lovers

a. (:22) Initiation of Judgment

“Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side.”

b. (:23) Identification of the Attackers

“the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.”

- c. (:24a) Implements of Warfare
“And they will come against you with weapons, chariots, and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet;”
- d. (:24b) Imposition of Judgment
“and I shall commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs.”

2. (:25-27) Oppression of Judgment from Former Lovers

- a. (:25a) Delegated Jealousy and Wrath
“And I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath.”
- b. (:25b) Disfigurement, Separation and Consumption
“They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire.”

Constable: Her enemies would cut off her nose and her ears. This was an ancient Near Eastern punishment for adulteresses, which was understandable since these women typically adorned themselves with nose-rings and earrings. This appears to have been a method of mutilating enemies and prisoners of war as well. This punishment would make Jerusalem grotesque, unappealing, and repulsive to other nations. Cutting off the noses and ears was one example of the mutilation of prisoners captured by their enemies.

Iain Duguid: This combination of divine and human judgment is further developed in the following verses. The Lord says, *“I will direct my jealous anger against you, and they will deal with you in fury” (23:25)*. As Jerusalem’s sins were worse than her sister’s, so also will her punishment be. She will not only be stripped but also disfigured, and her children will not only be taken from her but will also fall by the sword and be consumed by fire (23:25). The goal of this judgment is a proper amnesia: forgetting the prostitution begun in Egypt (23:27). Her lovers have now become her enemies, who will strip her and plunder her (23:28–29). As she followed in the pattern of her elder sister, so now she will share her elder sister’s fate and drink from the same bitter cup of sorrow, all the way down to its dregs (23:32–34). In her shame, she will tear out the bodily members that led her into sin in the first place, her breasts.

- c. (:26) Denuding
“They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels.”

d. (:27) Detoxification

“Thus I shall make your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.”

Leslie Allen: Overshadowing this whole operation would be the figure of Yahweh, Ezekiel discloses in vv **22, 24b–25aa** and **27a**, at the beginning, middle and end of the pronouncement. It would be the reprisal of a cuckolded husband (cf. v **4**) provoked to jealousy. The human enemies would be given free rein to put their own cruel standards into operation. Such was the noose into which Judah had rashly put its head by dallying with the Egyptians. The ghost of Egypt (cf. v **19**) had to be laid to rest once and for all. Judah’s dream was to turn into a waking nightmare.

B. (:28-31) Stripped Naked for Her Idolatry

“For thus says the Lord God,”

Douglas Stuart: Delivered to her enemies (exiled, v. **28**), Jerusalem will be “*naked*.” Hebrew *gālāh* means either “naked” or “exiled/exposed,” and thus it and its synonyms are used often in the prophets as metaphors for exile, as here in **verse 29**. Judah’s harlotry (promiscuous unfaithfulness, v. **30**) requires that she drink from Samaria’s “cup,” that is, her same fate (v. **31**).

1. (:28) Abandoned to Her Enemies

“Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated.”

2. (:29) Abused and Exposed

“And they will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries.”

Constable: The Lord also announced that He would turn Jerusalem over to those whom she had come to hate, namely, the Babylonians. They would hate her, rob her of her property, and leave her naked and ashamed (in 586 B.C.).

3. (:30-31) Aligned with the Harlotries and Punishment of Samaria

*“These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations,” because you have defiled yourself with their idols.”
You have walked in the way of your sister;
therefore I will give her cup into your hand.”*

C. (:32-34) Scorned and Sorrowful as She Drains the Cup of God’s Judgment

“Thus says the Lord God,”

Douglas Stuart: The short cup poem that follows (vv. 32–34) is a type of taunt song or mocking song (cf. **Is. 37:22–29; Ezek. 29:3–5**) used to “rub in” the reality of Judah’s coming fate. Indeed, near the end of the song, the people’s coming misery is described in the symbolism of the cup’s breaking into pieces and lacerating (tearing up, rather than “tearing at”) Oholibah’s breasts. Everything she has done will backfire on her. Her sins will produce not pleasure, only hurt. She should have loved the Lord only (v. 35), but having rejected Him and gone into prostitution, she will, having been tried for harlotry and found guilty, be punished to the full extent of the Law.

Lamar Cooper: The third message was a reminder that the “cup” he had given to her sister Oholah (Samaria) contained the wrath of God’s judgment that also would be given to Judah (vv. 32–34). The first strophe of these verses describes the size of the cup and the consequences of drinking its contents (e.g., scorn, derision) because it holds much (v. 32). The second strophe describes the drunkenness and sorrow that are the consequences of the ruin and desolation that resulted from drinking the cup (v. 33). The final strophe describes the anguish of the finality of judgment (v. 34). The “cup” of God’s wrath is a common feature in the Old Testament prophet who proclaimed God’s judgment on Israel and Judah (**Isa 51:7, 22; Jer 25:15–17, 28; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2**). The motif of the cup places Ezekiel in “a long prophetic chain that was to culminate in Jesus, who absorbed in his own person the horror of God’s judgment accepting it from his hand without a shudder (**Mark 14:36**).” [Leslie Allen]

John Taylor: The reference to her cup (31) is the connecting link which leads on to the poem about the cup of Samaria (32–34). This is a strange little stanza: it does not appear to say very much that has not already been said, and its interpretation is made more difficult by textual uncertainties. Its main impact is made by its striking language and pregnant phrases, as so often in this type of Hebrew poetry. To render it in English demands so much paraphrase and interpretation that the effect, especially of the 3:2 metre, is usually lost. rsv tries to keep close to the Hebrew; jb renders it wordily but well. Its starkness may be judged by this **literal rendering**:

*Cup of-your-sister you-shall-drink
(which is) deep and-wide.
She / it / you-shall-be for-laughter and-derision
much to-contain.
Drunkenness and-anguish you-will-be-full-of,
cup-of-waste and-desolation.
Cup of-your-sister, Samaria,
you-will-drink it and-drain (it);
And its-pieces you-shall-break(?)
and-your-breasts you-shall-tear-apart.*

1. (:32) Scorned – Emphasis on the Size of the Cup

*“You will drink your sister's cup, Which is deep and wide.
You will be laughed at and held in derision; It contains much.”*

2. (:33) Sorrowful – Emphasis on the Effects of Drinking the Cup

*“You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,
The cup of horror and desolation,
The cup of your sister Samaria.”*

Peter Pett: The point of the song is that she is drinking what she has brought on herself, and drinking deeply to the derision of others, and will thus end up in pathetic need and despair. Her end will be in desperation. Those who keep bad company will reap the consequences.

3. (:34) Staggered – Emphasis on the Finality and Brutality of Drinking the Cup

*“And you will drink it and drain it.
Then you will gnaw its fragments And tear your breasts;”*

“for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord God.”

D. (:35) Sowing What She Reaped by Forgetting Her Covenant God

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

1. Root Problem

“Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back,”

Constable: Jerusalem would bear the Lord's punishment for her lewd and immoral behavior because she had abandoned Him. This short message identifies the root problem in Israel's apostasy: she had forsaken Yahweh.

2. Retribution

“bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.”

**V. (:36-49) JUDGMENT ON BOTH SISTERS --
SUMMARY JUDGMENT FOR HARLOTRIES**

A. (:36-45) Statement of the Charges

“Moreover, the LORD said to me,”

Lamar Cooper: Seven “*detestable practices*” were reviewed (**23:36–44**) prior to the verdict (**vv. 45–49**). These practices or “*abominations*” restate all former charges presented in **chaps. 20–23**. These “*detestable things*” relate to spiritual infidelity, moral impurity, and political indiscretion. The list includes desecration of the Sabbath (**v. 38**), desecration of the temple (**v. 39**), forbidden foreign alliances (**vv. 40–41**), adultery (**vv. 42–44**), innocent bloodshed (**v. 45**), child sacrifice (**vv. 46–47**), and idolatry (**vv. 48–49**).

1. (:36) Call to Judgment

“Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah?”

Then declare to them their abominations.”

2. (:37-39) Catalog of Indiscretions

a. (:37) Idolatry – Including Child Sacrifice

“For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food.”

Douglas Stuart: In one sense, the allegory saves the worst for last. It specifies that Israel’s idolatry included child sacrifice (v. 37) and the desecration of the temple (v. 38), charges not yet mentioned in the chapter. Moreover, it stresses the extent to which Israel—north and south—had aggressively sought the services of foreign nations (vv. 40–44) rather than merely acceding to diplomatic overtures from them.

Derek Thomas: This is one of the most amazing truths in the Scriptures: that, as Christians, we share in the closest possible relationship with Jesus Christ. It is an intimacy analogous to the ‘one flesh’ relationship in a marriage. It is the highest expression of love and intimacy. It is a relationship bound by the most solemn obligations of fidelity and trust. To break this relationship is to violate the most precious thing we possess. It is a crime of the highest order. In the realm of marriage, adultery is the hardest sin to forgive. In the spiritual realm, its offence is of the greatest significance. If we imagine the pain brought upon an offended partner by the violation of marriage that adultery brings, we can begin to understand the reaction of God to the sins of his people. It is a violation of the covenant.

b. (:38-39) Defiling the Sanctuary and Profaning the Sabbaths

“Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths. 39 For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house.”

Peter Pett: Guilt piled on guilt. Not only had they offered their children to Molech, they had done it on the sabbath and had then gone to God’s sanctuary as though they had done nothing wrong, indeed no doubt feeling how holy they had been. This was syncretism with a vengeance, for they were so far wrong that they no doubt expected Yahweh to be pleased with what they had done. So can superstition destroy true religion. But God was far from pleased. He was furiously angry. All that He had patiently taught them had been thrown aside. Northern Israel was involved in the defiling of the sanctuary because what remained of them had now found refuge in Judah and they were equally guilty.

Jeff Meyers: When I mention the word or say the fact of they have defiled, they have used it for a purpose that it was not intended. They have changed, like it says, they *defiled the sabbath*. They were not longer obeying those sabbath laws. They were no

longer utilizing the temple for what it was intended for. They were using it for their own good and their own personal agenda. Ladies and gentlemen, the only entity that Jesus Christ shed his blood for was the church, and when you use the church for your own personal agenda, you have prostituted the church, and today there are many people who use their position and their "churches" to propagate their agenda and not the gospel. They do it under the guise of the church. Anytime you're watching national news, a lot of times there is somebody who is always introduced as "the Reverend So-and-so." Aha, just because you've got a title doesn't mean you're propagating the gospel. Just because you have a position as the pastor of a church doesn't mean you're propagating the gospel. Oftentimes we, like the Israelites, we hide behind our churches, we hide behind our titles and at the end of the day all we're propagating is our personal, carnal agendas. What did you have in Israel? They said, "Oh, but I'm a priest. I'm a prophet. I work in the temple." And the Lord says, "Yeah, but you've defiled it. You've profaned it."

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/22221193317741.pdf>

3. (:40-44) Seductive Solicitations of International Liaisons

a. (:40-42) The Attraction

“Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came-- for whom you bathed, painted your eyes, and decorated yourselves with ornaments; 41 and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it, on which you had set My incense and My oil. 42 And the sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads.”

Constable: These daughters had sent to other nations and invited ambassadors to come to them to make treaties (cf. **Deut. 17:14-20**). They had made themselves as attractive as possible, like a prostitute does for her lover. They even used the things that they should have used only for the worship of Yahweh to entice desert lovers (e.g. the Arabians, Moabites, and Edomites).

The whole atmosphere of the reception was like that of a drunken orgy. The same Hebrew word, *saba'im*, can mean "Sabeans" and "drunkards" (v. 42), and both meanings could have been intended (double entendre). These foreign lovers gave the Israelites the wages of a prostitute including bracelets and crowns.

b. (:43-44) The Astonishment

“Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, 'Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus?' 44 But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women.”

Douglas Stuart: Verses 40–44 depict symbolically Israel’s history of self-destructive international diplomacy, like a prostitute sending out invitations and making herself attractive to men (cf. **Jer. 4:30; 2 Kin. 9:30**). In **verse 41** “*My incense and My oil*” symbolizes the blessings of God being used wrongly—incense and oil being the prostitute’s toiletries which she used to make herself attractive to her lovers even though they had been obtained with her husband’s money. In **verse 42** “*Sabeans*” reflects a Hebrew original (from the root *sbz*) better rendered “*drunks*”—that is, drunken, dirty tent dwellers, caravaners (“*from the wilderness*”), and other lowlife (“*men of the common sort*”). These brought jewelry as payment for their illicit sex. Although the prostitute is “*worn out*” or “*old*” (Hebrew, *balah*, **v. 43**) lovers still want her (nations still see Israel as a valuable conquest).

4. (:45) Confirmation of Judgment

“But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.”

John Taylor: The righteous men can hardly be the lovers of **verses 22–24**, even though the nations will eventually be the instruments of God’s judgment. It must mean that those who judge the two sisters will judge them righteously. The stress is on the way the judging will be done, not on who will do the judging.

B. (:46-49) Sentencing Judgment Pronounced

“For thus says the Lord God,”

Daniel Block: The lengthy oracle against Oholah and Oholibah concludes with a summons to the executioners, identified vaguely as *qāhāl*, “*assembly*,” here “*army*,” and the committal of the women to be terrorized and plundered. The nouns *za’āwā*, from “*to terrorize*,” and *bāz*, from “*to plunder*,” prove that the prophet’s attention has shifted from the women to the cities they represent. In terms reminiscent of **16:40–41**, **v. 47** lists the ruthless tactics that will be employed by the assembled agents of judgment: stoning, hacking up women with swords, slaughtering children, and burning houses. **Vv. 48a** and **49a** declare the twofold divine objective in this outpouring of violence: to purge (*hišbît min*) the land of the women’s contaminating lewdness and to impose on them the guilt/punishment of their wicked behavior. When this occurs, Ezekiel’s audience will acknowledge Yahweh.

1. (:46) Mob Justice

“Bring up a company against them, and give them over to terror and plunder.”

Peter Pett: Men can be very unpleasant when they get together in drunken mood and egg each other on, and the picture here is of the fallen women being tossed about and humiliated and degraded in a gathering of drunkards. It is the final depiction of their degradation which will be followed by their punishment.

2. (:47) Brutal Devastation

*“And the company will stone them with stones
and cut them down with their swords;
they will slay their sons and their daughters
and burn their houses with fire.”*

3. (:48) Goal of Deterrence

*“Thus I shall make lewdness cease from the land,
that all women may be admonished
and not commit lewdness as you have done.”*

Daniel Block: the concluding parenetic appeal reminds the readers of this oracle that in God’s eyes **adultery is an abhorrent evil**, not only because it perverts the sex act but especially because it violates the covenant bond of marriage. Apart from the marital covenantal commitment, all sexual activity is prostitution, and rather than offering lasting satisfaction, illicit intimacy yields contempt and disgust. Ezekiel’s own application of the lesson of Yahweh’s case against Jerusalem to his immediate audience points the way to its significance for God’s people today. The fate of Jerusalem serves as a warning for the corporate community of faith as well as for individual members of that community. Marital infidelity is self-destructive, and brings upon one the wrath of God.

4. (:49a) Accountability for Harlotries and Idolatry

*“And your lewdness will be requited upon you,
and you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols;”*

Daniel Woodhead: The gross sin of turning away from God and replacing Him with worthless idols will no longer be practiced. All the women engaging in these lewd activities will have been chastised. Meaning that Israel, represented by the two prostitutes in the parable will not engage in these practices any longer and the surrounding nations will learn a lesson from Israel’s downfall. Even if the surrounding nations continue to worship idols they will not do so with the same degree of profligacy as Israel did. They will not be disloyal to their own particular idols either as they seek to separate themselves from Israel’s sins, seeing what Israel’s God did to satisfy His vengeance for their idolatry. They all shall know that this was from Jehovah the Lord.

5. (:49b) Recognition Refrain

“thus you will know that I am the Lord God.”

Lamar Cooper: While most parables and messages concerning sin in the Old Testament seek to produce repentance, that is not so here. The message closed with a note of finality.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do you see evidence of God turning our sins and our areas of unfaithfulness into our punishments?
- 2) Why didn't Judah (Jerusalem) learn the necessary lessons from the harlotries and judgment of the northern kingdom (Samaria)?
- 3) How have we become calloused to an understanding of how God views our sin as disgusting and abominable?
- 4) Do we tend to think of ourselves more favorably than we should? How can we have an accurate appraisal of ourselves ... of our country ... etc.?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: In historical terms the accusations of vv 11–21 fall into three parts, relating to Assyria (vv 11–13), Babylonia (vv 14–18) and Egypt (vv 19–21). The first two come to a peak with subjective statements of Yahweh's reactions in vv 13 and 18b, while in v 21 their counterpart is the direct address of the guilty party. The personal references to Yahweh are prefaced with mention of his initial involvement in v 4 and capped by his resolves to punish in vv 22, 24b–25aa and 27a, at the beginning, middle and end of the judgment section. . .

Vv 36–49 are clearly meant to round off the chapter. They read as a judgment oracle and mostly revert to the motif of the two sisters of vv 2–4. The effect is that of an overall inclusion, especially as the sisters are mentioned in the third person, as in vv 2–4 (and 5–20). Vv 36–45 consist of two types of accusation, religious (vv 36–39, 45) and political (vv 40–44). The arrangement provides an inclusion, the issues of adultery and loss of life (vv 37a, 45). Vv 36–45 have been supplemented in vv 46–49 with a prediction of punishment that is also a proof saying (cf. v 49b). Both sisters are addressed in vv 48b–49, while throughout vv 36–49 feminine plural references are interspersed with masculine ones. The former phenomenon provides a vivid conclusion, while the latter exhibits simply a dropping of the imagery. . .

The links that Judah forged with Egypt in a last, desperate attempt to avert Babylonian doom are denounced in the strongest of terms. Sexuality, about which Israel could be as coy as any Victorian, is used as a blatant weapon of communication, to convey the emotional distaste of Yahweh to this expedient. Its "potential to offend is, of course, its very point" (Stuart 220). Significantly the most repulsive sexual language is reserved for associations with Egypt. It is a vehement effort to convince a constituency who did not want to believe the truth the prophet brought.

Along with sexuality, theological history is used to interpret contemporary politics, in a culture where politics and religion were regarded as two sides of one coin. First, the Exodus traditions are used to remind the Judean exiles that Egypt is the enemy of God and that the purpose of the Exodus was to get his people out of Egypt's clutches and safe within the covenant relationship. By the present political link-up the Judeans in the homeland were not only trespassing outside that relationship, but putting the clock back to pre-Exodus times in an involvement that was not of God and constituted an act of infidelity to him. The temptation to harness Judah's wagon to Egyptian power was an illicit one.

The second lesson the prophet draws from history is the experience of the northern kingdom, which too had flirted with Egypt, only to meet its end at the hands of the power of the east. The parallel is no random one: it moves in a theological orbit already familiar to Judah. Ezekiel adopts the prophetic and deuteronomistic interpretation of the fall of Israel, that behind the thrust and parry of that phase of international politics lay the sovereign will of the covenant God. He does not hesitate to reapply this interpretation to contemporary politics and to predict in Yahweh's name reprisal against a people whose policies time and time again revealed not only a lack of allegiance to him but an espousal of human power. It was to be—and this is Ezekiel's third lesson—the end of the long road of two centuries of sordid Judean history, as first Assyria, then Babylon and now Egypt had been the pin-ups of the moment, to whom Judah had given her heart. But to fall away from the living God was to fall into the hands of that living God, a fearful thing (**Heb 3:12; 10:31**).

Iain Duguid: Understanding the ancient marital metaphor. What shall we say about this envelope? Perhaps in the face of contemporary revulsion, we do well to recognize how accurately it communicated truth within its own cultural context. It relied on certain cultural commonplaces. It assumed

- (1) the idea of the capital city as the “wife” of the deity,
- (2) the idea that political alliances with foreign nations were a breach of that covenant relationship, analogous to adultery,
- (3) the idea that multiple adultery on the part of a woman was shocking and perverse, and
- (4) the idea that the appropriate punishment for adultery was death (**Lev. 20:10**).

If those presuppositions are affirmed, then Ezekiel makes his case with considerable logic and great emotional power that the city of Jerusalem has become polluted by her adultery and God is entirely justified in bringing in the agents of his choice. To be sure, attention is uniquely focused in this chapter on the punishment of the adulteress rather than that of her lovers, but the remaining chapters of Ezekiel make it clear that the other nations will not escape God's judgment either (**Ezek. 25–32; cf. 21:30–32**).

Daniel Block: The **affinities** between **Ezek. 16** and **23** are striking:

- (1) Length. The forty-nine verses devoted to a unitary theme here is matched (and exceeded) only by **ch. 16**.

- (2) Structure. Following the standard introductory formula, both chapters contain
- a short general opening statement (16:2–5; 23:2–4)
 - that sets the stage for a rather lengthy indictment (16:6–34; 23:5–21),
 - followed by the sentence, in both instances beginning with *lākēn* plus vocative plus citation formula (16:22–43; 23:22–35),
 - and concluding with a coda (16:44–63; 23:36–49).
- (3) Theme. Both highlight the passion of Yahweh in the face of Israel’s unfaithfulness to his covenant, expressed in the insatiable lust after other lovers.
- (4) Genre. Both oracles are a mixed genre, being cast in the form of a *rib*, with Yahweh functioning as prosecutor and judge. In both, however, the case against Israel/Jerusalem is developed by means of an extended allegory, comparing Israel’s insatiable pursuit of other allegiances with an adulteress’s sexual craving.
- (5) Style and vocabulary. In keeping with the theme, these oracles are dominated by the language of prostitution (*znh*) and lewdness (*zmm*). If this chapter is recognized as the locus classicus for bawdy vocabulary, it is because it has intensified the sex-related imagery of **ch. 16**.

However, these similarities should not obscure the **significant differences** between the two.

- (1) In **ch. 16** the defilement of Jerusalem is caused primarily by cultic harlotry; here it is political.
- (2) In **ch. 16** Jerusalem’s abominable past is traced to her roots in Canaan; here it goes back farther, to her youth in Egypt.
- (3) In **ch. 16** Jerusalem’s sister Samaria is mentioned only briefly; here an entire section (**vv. 5–10**) is devoted to her biography, and in the end her fate is linked with that of Jerusalem.
- (4) In **ch. 16** Jerusalem functions primarily as the object of others’ gaze; here Jerusalem is the subject ogling at the figures of males.
- (5) In **ch. 16** the story of the city concludes on a positive note, with the covenant relationship between Yahweh and city restored and the city acknowledging him; here neither occurs.

David Thompson: This chapter is an in your face, explicit chapter in the Bible that is designed to shock and warn God’s people. It is a graphic picture of sexual perversion, aimed straight at Israel and Judah and us. There is no other chapter quite like it.

GOD USES TWO SISTERS TO ILLUSTRATE ISRAEL AND JUDAH’S UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD AND HER ADULTEROUS HARLOTRY AND PROSTITUTION THAT WOULD BRING HER TO HORRIBLE JUDGMENT.

These two pursued their immoral behavior at a very young age. Now one would naturally think that they would at some point get sick of this lifestyle, but not these two. They started at a young age and loved being a prostitute to old age. . .

There will be many who one day will get before God and learn that the object of their affections become the agents of their judgment. Some will have devoted themselves to

things that were not right or godly and those very things will be the basis for their judgment. Some will lose rewards because they lived their entire lives focused on that which was evil. Some will lose heaven for the same reason.

TEXT: Ezekiel 24:1-27

TITLE: *DAY OF RECKONING FOR JERUSALEM –
THE BOILING POT / REFRAINING FROM MOURNING*

BIG IDEA:

**DESPITE HER FALSE SECURITY, JERUSALEM EXPERIENCES THE
DEVASTATION OF DESERVED JUDGMENT**

INTRODUCTION:

This climactic chapter at the heart of the book of Ezekiel brings us finally to the Day of Reckoning for Jerusalem. After repeated prophecies emphasizing the reasons for judgment, the certainty of imminent judgment and the devastation that would transpire, the precise day is now revealed. The first half of the chapter unfolds the allegory of the burning pot of choice meat. The second half presents the surprising application from the death of Ezekiel's wife where there was to be no outward mourning over the profaning of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. But all was not doom and gloom. The final two verses open the door to a new chapter in the ministry of Ezekiel. His lips are now unsealed to proclaim judgment on Israel's enemies and the eventual restoration under the end times kingdom.

John Taylor: With these verses we come to the climax of all that Ezekiel has been trying to say in the previous twelve chapters. His main purpose, as we have noted, has been to justify the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. We called this collection of oracles 'Objections to Judgment', and we have seen arguments raised and demolished one by one and accusations made against both the past and the present conduct of the people of Jerusalem. There is hardly anything more that can be said. The hour has come. Judgment is about to fall.

Alexander: This is a pivotal chapter in the development of the book. Till now Ezekiel has variously proclaimed the Lord's coming judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. He has systematically answered each argument against the impending judgment. Nothing remained except for the enactment of that discipline recorded in this chapter. The beginning of Babylonia's siege of Jerusalem was described. Then Ezekiel prophesied against the foreign nations who had abused Judah and mocked her during her judgments (25:1—33:20). These foreign nations would be judged for their wicked attitude and actions toward Judah. However, the hope of future restoration and blessing would be promised to Judah.

Daniel Block: The māšāl of the boiling cauldron challenged Jerusalemite illusions of security. The residents of the city perceived themselves as the choice portions of meat specially selected for a sumptuous banquet. By implication the exiles in Babylon represented the discarded offal. In refutation of this illusion, what would have initially been greeted as a favorable figure is turned into a frightening literary caricature.

Yahweh assumes the role of the cook who calls for the wood to be piled on and the fire to be stoked as hot as possible. But he is not interested in preparing a meal; his mind is only on destruction. In his rage he pours the contents of the pot onto the fire. Lest any shred of hope remain, the fire is stoked so hot that every vestige of meat or broth in the pot is burned and the vessel purified of its defiling contents. Residence in Jerusalem offers no security; it guarantees only destruction and judgment. Even as Ezekiel speaks (24:2) the fire is being lit. Nebuchadnezzar has arrived and has begun to lay siege to the city. Her fate and that of her inhabitants is sealed. They may compose clever proverbs and take delight in songs celebrating their privileged place under the sun, but they are deluded. Yahweh has spoken; he will have the last word.

I. (:1-14) PARABLE OF THE COOKING POT – SIEGE OF JERUSALEM HAS ARRIVED AND IT IS ALL CONSUMING

“And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying,”

Leslie Allen: The message reception formula of v 1, which recurs at v 15, identifies vv 1–14 as an overall unit.

Constable: The Lord instructed Ezekiel to note permanently the day that this revelation came to him, because it was the very day that Nebuchadnezzar began his siege of Jerusalem. This day fell in January (cf. 2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; 52:4). Block dated it as January 5, 587 B.C., but most scholars follow Parker and Duberstein and date it as January 15, 586 B.C. Ezekiel's ability to announce the beginning of the siege from Babylon validated his ministry as a prophet.

John Taylor: vv. 1-14 -- The section begins therefore with a command from God to the prophet to note down the day, for it was the day when the siege would begin (1, 2). This is followed by a poetical allegory about a cauldron being set on a fire, symbolizing the city's state of siege (3–5). Then comes a prose statement consisting of two short oracles, each beginning with the words, ‘Woe to the bloody city!’ (6, 9), which enlarge upon and interpret the allegory and at the same time introduce the idea of the cauldron's symbolical rustiness.

A. (:2-5) Enactment of the Parable – Boil the Pot of Choice Meat

1. (:2) Precise Dating of Siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar

*“Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day.
The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.”*

Peter Pett: When he informed those who came to hear him there would certainly be some doubt, but eventually messengers would arrive who would confirm the grim news. Then they knew that this man indeed spoke from God.

2. (:3-5) Parable Details

a. (:3) Boil Water in a Pot

“And speak a parable to the rebellious house, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Put on the pot, put it on, and also pour water in it;”

Peter Pett: Note the continued use of ‘*rebellious house*’ for Ezekiel’s hearers. It was not only Jerusalem that was in rebellion against God but almost the whole house of Israel. If they did not hear and repent they would share the fate of Jerusalem.

Wiersbe: God called Judah a “*rebellious house*” not only because they broke His laws and violated His covenant, but also because Zedekiah had broken his treaty with Babylon and incited the displeasure of Nebuchadnezzar.

Galen Doughty: Is the pot a simple pot that anyone would use in their homes or is Ezekiel referring to a pot the temple priests would use when they cooked the meat from the fellowship offerings sacrificed on the altar in the temple? It is unclear but it is possible this is the case. If it is the pot of the priests then the symbolism of the pot is it is holy but now has such a deposit in it that it cannot be cleaned anymore except by melting it down. Judah had been holy to the Lord but now is so unclean it can no longer be saved. It needs to be melted down in order to be clean again.

b. (:4) Boil Choice Pieces of Meat

“Put in it the pieces, Every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; Fill it with choice bones.”

Daniel Block: From the description, Jerusalem would be a remarkable feast for Nebuchadnezzar and his armies. “The cook does not appear to be fixing an ordinary dinner; rather, an extraordinarily sumptuous meal is implied by the emphasis on the quality and quantity of meat being prepared.

Wiersbe: The image of the cooking pot takes us back to **Ezekiel 11:1-13** where the Jewish leaders boasted that the Jews left in Jerusalem were better than the Jews taken off to Babylon. The Jerusalem Jews were the best “*cuts of meat,*” while the Jews in Babylon were only the scraps!

c. (:5) Boil It Vigorously

“Take the choicest of the flock, And also pile wood under the pot. Make it boil vigorously. Also seethe its bones in it.”

Jamieson: So far from the city proving an iron, caldron-like defense from the fire, it shall be as a caldron set on the fire, and the people as so many pieces of meat subjected to boiling heat. See **Jeremiah 1:13**.

B. (:6-14) Explanation of the Parable

1. (:6-8) Total Culpability

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

Leslie Allen: It functions as a **judgment oracle** with two parts, **accusation (vv 6–8)** and **pronouncement of punishment (vv 9–14)**, each part being introduced by a messenger formula.

- a. (:6) Universal Defilement Requires Indiscriminate Judgment
*“Woe to the bloody city,
To the pot in which there is rust And whose rust has not gone out
of it! Take out of it piece after piece, Without making a choice.”*

Peter Pett: But the city was like a copper cauldron (**Ezekiel 24:11**) which was rusty. And its rust had not been removed from it. It was not fit for its purpose, and the rusty scum would form, the scum which represented the blood-guiltiness of Jerusalem with its violence and its child sacrifices (**Ezekiel 22:1-16**). Thus the rust affected pieces of flesh must be brought out piece by piece as the city was slowly taken. ‘No lot has fallen on it’. The removal is to be indiscriminate and not by selection. Fate cannot be manoeuvred, they can only helplessly submit to it.

Feinberg: Some translate the word as ‘*scum*,’ but ‘*rust*’ is correct. It was a symbol of the corrosion and corruption of the city and may have represented the blood of victims slain through intrigue and oppression.

Galen Doughty: God says empty the pot piece by piece without casting lots for the pieces. No cross reference explains this practice but I surmise this was a practice of the priests with the dedicated meat from the sacrifices. The priests would cast lots for who got what piece, letting "God decide" who got to eat what part of the sacrifice that was dedicated to the Lord. Jerusalem is so unholy and her pot so encrusted that no one should cast lots for the contents of the pot. Empty it!

The city is filled with bloodshed. This is a consistent theme in Ezekiel. The bloodshed is not from the Babylonians but from the rich and powerful in Jerusalem. They have sacrificed their children to Molech on the altar of Topheth but Ezekiel's other references to bloodshed indicate many used murder as a means to gain wealth and power, taking what they wanted from those they had killed. Ezekiel says they even poured the blood of the slain on bare rock so that it would not be covered and not on the ground where it could be absorbed. They stained the land with the blood of the murdered and slain and so defiled it.

Iain Duguid: Thus far the expectations of the audience have been moved in a positive direction. But in a classic twist, typical of the genre of parable, what ought to be a tasty sacred meal is, in fact, a foul, profane mess. The “*choice pieces*” and “*the best of these bones*” from the “*pick of the flock*” (**24:4–5**) turn out to be nothing but defiled filth (*ḥel’ātā*, **24:6**). This filth that is inside her will not “*come out*” (*yāšā’*; **24:6**; niv, “*go away*”), a phrase that has a double meaning. In terms of the imagery of the pot, the filth that will not come out reflects the frustration of a burned-on mess that cannot be removed. On the level of the metaphorical meaning, “*come out*” is precisely what Jerusalem’s inhabitants hope to do at the end of the siege.

As in **chapter 11**, however, the pot will not protect them; they have defiled the city by their evil and so they (the filth) will not come out from her safely. Their only exit from the pot will be when they are “*brought out*” (Hiphil of *yāšā’*) for judgment (**24:6**; cf. **11:9**). Nor will this judgment be partial, with some selected to die and some to live, as when the lot was cast over the two goats on the Day of Atonement, with one chosen for the altar and the other to be driven off into the desert (**Lev. 16:8**). No lots will be cast over the pot, for all the meat is destined for the same end, reprobation (**Ezek. 24:6**). There will be no escape.

b. (:7-8) Unjust Bloodshed Calls for Unmitigated Wrath

*“For her blood is in her midst; She placed it on the bare rock;
She did not pour it on the ground To cover it with dust.
8 That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance,
I have put her blood on the bare rock,
That it may not be covered.”*

Constable: Blood was in Jerusalem's midst like the blood of a sacrifice that had not been drained out on the ground and covered up (atoned for) as the Law prescribed (**Lev. 17:13**). Israel's sins were open for all to see, like blood on a bare rock (cf. **Isa. 3:9**). Not only was Jerusalem a city that had shed much innocent blood, but it was an unacceptable sacrifice to God because of the blood that was in it.

Wright: The blood in **Ezekiel 24:7** is that of murder, wrongful conviction, and human sacrifice. Blood unjustly shed cries for vengeance (**Genesis 4:10**; **Job 16:18**).

Leslie Allen: So blemished was the city that extremely harsh measures had to be taken to remove the blemishes. Accordingly the cooking process was to be only stage one of Jerusalem's experience of nemesis. The capital had undergone nothing yet by comparison with its eventual doom. In the second part of the section the inevitability of this fate is explained with fresh reference to the blood of **v 6**. The blatant taking of life in the capital was a crying shame. Like Abel's blood in **Gen 4:10** (cf. **Job 16:18**), it cried out for vengeance. Yahweh himself had seen to it that the powerful moral process of retribution took its course and that no cover-up was possible to impede Jerusalem's exposure to vengeance. Retribution is expressed as an inexorable process at work in society, triggered by wrongdoing (cf. **Wevers** 141). Here that impersonal process is helped along by Yahweh's personal intervention.

2. (:9-11) Total Consumption

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

a. (:9-10) Stoke the Flames

*“Woe to the bloody city! I also shall make the pile great.
Heap on the wood, kindle the fire, Boil the flesh well,
And mix in the spices, And let the bones be burned.”*

Constable: All this symbolized the fierceness of the attack on Jerusalem and the many people that would die there.

Wiersbe: The only way to pure the city was to burn it and make it a great funeral pyre (**Ezek. 24:9-10**). He judged the people in the city (the “select pieces of meat in the pot”) and then burned the pot as well!

b. (:11) Scorch the Pot

*“Then set it empty on its coals, So that it may be hot,
And its bronze may glow, And its filthiness may be melted in it,
Its rust consumed.”*

Constable: Then Ezekiel was to empty the pot of its contents and replace it on the coals, with the fire burning hotly under it, so it would glow and all the impurities in it would burn up. This represented the continuing purification of Jerusalem after all the Jews had left it. It would remain empty, and that condition would free it from all sinful pollution for many years to come. The rust represented the uncleanness of Jerusalem that God would cleanse by using the Babylonians to burn it.

Peter Pett: This cauldron, the blood-filled city, with its contents is doomed. God Himself will make of it a great burnt up pile. So the command comes to heap on wood, blow on the fire to make it burning hot, and then to overcook the flesh and the broth until it is spoiled and to burn the bones. Then once the spoiled flesh and broth are removed the cauldron is to remain on the fire as it grows hotter and hotter, until the copper is red hot, the filth within it becomes molten, and its rust is consumed. It is a picture of total destruction.

3. (:12-13) Total Contamination

*“She has wearied Me with toil, Yet her great rust has not gone from her;
Let her rust be in the fire!
In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I would have cleansed you,
Yet you are not clean, You will not be cleansed from your filthiness
again, Until I have spent My wrath on you.”*

Peter Pett: With all the effort the filth is not removed. It is so deeply ingrained that it is fire-resistant. That is why this time there is no hope for Jerusalem. Its sin is too great and too deeply imbedded. . .

The rust and filthiness in the cauldron represents the lewdness of Jerusalem/Judah. God had attempted to purge her again and again (for example through the prophets and through the defeats and deportations in 605 and 597 BC), but she was still not purged. Now God recognised that every effort would only fail until He had exacted full judgment on them, until He had shown them the fullness of His anger by the total destruction of Jerusalem and a period in exile away from their land when hope will seem almost to be gone.

Clarke: *Lewdness:* A word that denominates the worst kinds of impurity; adultery, incest, &c., and the purpose, wish, design, and ardent desire to do these things. Hers were not accidental sins, they were abominations by design.

4. (:14) Total Commitment to Judgment – No Relenting

*“I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I shall act.
I shall not relent, and I shall not pity, and I shall not be sorry;
according to your ways and according to your deeds I shall judge you,’
declares the Lord God.”*

Peter Pett: God added His seal to what was to happen. Now nothing could prevent it for He had determined it. He had spoken, and so it would come about (**Isaiah 55:11**). He stressed that this time there would be no alteration in His purpose. He would not go back to how things were before, or withdraw from His purpose, He would not spare, He would not have a change of mind. He would act towards them exactly as they deserved. They would receive what their behaviour merited.

David Thompson: God ends this section by saying six things:

- 1) I have spoken. **24:14a** - This is God’s Word on the matter. God is always true to His Word.
- 2) I will act. **24:14b** - When God says He will do something, He will do it. Circumstances do not prevent God from doing what He says He will do.
- 3) I will not relent. **24:14c** - When God purposes to judge, He will not relent.
- 4) I will not pity My people. **24:14d** - Many people have a false idea about God’s mercy. Their idea is that God is too merciful to ever do something negative to His own people.
- 5) I will not be sorry over My people. **24:14e** - God offers His grace but when His people refuse to turn to Him for it, He will ultimately judge and not feel sorry for it.
- 6) I will judge you according to your deeds. **24:14f** - Unfortunately, this is what most people want. They want God to judge them on the basis of their deeds. God says fine. You won’t turn to Me for help, that is exactly what I will do.

This is a declaration of God.

Leslie Allen: Yahweh’s will was by no means vindictive: it was the materializing of a force activated by Jerusalem’s wrong behavior. The Babylonian invaders stood as the final link in a moral chain of cause and effect.

Wiersbe: God warned the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that they weren’t the “meat” – they were the butchers! They were guilty of shedding innocent blood and God would judge them for their sins. If they weren’t “cooked” in the cauldron of Jerusalem, they would eventually be slain by the swords of the Babylonian soldiers. Even if they escaped the city, they would be caught and killed.

II. (:15-24) REFRAINING FROM MOURNING – RESPONSE TO THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL’S WIFE APPLIED TO THE LOSS OF THE TEMPLE AND THE CITY OF JERUSALEM

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

Constable: The preceding parable pictured the siege of Jerusalem itself. The symbolic acts that Ezekiel performed next, evidently on the same day, represented how the exiles were to respond to the news of Jerusalem's siege.

Leslie Allen: Vv 15–24 comprise

- (a) a divine command to the prophet to engage in a symbolic action (vv 16, 17); and
- (b) a report of the prophet’s compliance (v 18);
- (c) the people’s request for an explanation (v 19); and
- (d) the sequel, a proof saying that applies the symbolic action to the people in a message of judgment (vv 21–24).

A further proof saying in vv 25–27 continues the foregoing; it is a personal message to the prophet. . .

Structurally vv 16–24 are controlled by a quite rigid **parallelism**. The announcement of Yahweh’s removal of Ezekiel’s wife (v 16a) coordinates verbally with the parallel announcement of the loss of the temple in v 21a, and thematically with the loss of family members in v 21b. Three pairs of instructions to the prophet in vv 16b–17 are echoed chiastically in vv 22b–23a.

A. (:16-17) Command to Refrain from Outwardly Mourning Death of the Prophet’s Wife

1. (:16) Unnatural Command in Response to Death of Wife

“Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come.”

2. (:17) Unchanged Behavior = No Signs of Mourning

“Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache, and do not eat the bread of men.”

Peter Pett: So Ezekiel was to abjure all the **normal signs of mourning**. He was not to wail loudly (**Micah 1:8** see also **Mark 5:38**). He was not to begin a period of official mourning. He was to continue to wear his priestly turban (**Ezekiel 44:18; Exodus 39:28**), although in periods of deep distress that would normally be removed and the head covered in dust and ashes (compare **Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 4:12; Job 2:12**). He was not to take off his sandals (compare **2 Samuel 15:30; Isaiah 20:2**). He was not to cover his lips (veil the lower part of his face - compare **Micah 3:7; Leviticus 13:45** of a leper). He was not to take part in a mourning feast, a wake (**Jeremiah 16:7**). He was not to show signs of mourning.

B. (:18-19) Compliance and Request for Explanation

1. (:18) Compliance of Ezekiel

*“So I spoke to the people in the morning,
and in the evening my wife died.
And in the morning I did as I was commanded.”*

David Guzik: This was a great loss to Ezekiel, one that many have suffered. The title, *the desire of your eyes* (**Ezekiel 24:16**), points to a dear and loving relationship. Throughout the book, Ezekiel is presented to us as a man of deep feeling and emotion who often mourned and wept over the fate of Jerusalem and Judah. He certainly was deeply affected by this sudden loss of a dear companion and spouse.

2. (:19) Request for Explanation by the People

*“And the people said to me,
‘Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?’”*

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel has the opportunity to give the divine interpretation and so to carry out his prophetic task, functioning as Yahweh’s witness. A **double blow** is to befall the exiles. First, the temple is to be desecrated as a consequence of the coming fall of Jerusalem. The temple had immense significance in Judah’s religion-based culture as the visible guarantee of divine goodwill. The formal Songs of Zion celebrated the aura of inviolability the temple gave to Jerusalem (**Pss 46, 76, 87**; cf. **78:68, 69**), and their informal versions attested the people’s devotion to it (**Pss 84, 122**). It stood as the bastion of the community’s present life and future hopes. Now, however, this visible link between Yahweh and his people (“*my ... your*”) was to be severed. Second, just as Ezekiel had lost his wife, so the fall of Jerusalem was to mean the deaths of members of the exiles’ families. In 597 b.c. people of significance had been deported as hostages to insure Judah’s loyalty; evidently their children had been left behind. Hopes of fond reunion were dashed by the forecast. Ahead lay only the total breakdown of society, attested in the loosing of its religious moorings and in the damning of its hopes vested in the next generation.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel’s unorthodox conduct in light of his grief inevitably drew questions. The people asked, “*What do these things have to do with us?*” (**v. 19**). The question is ironic. With it, the people unknowingly spoke of their own deaths. The fall of Jerusalem resulted in the desecration and destruction of the temple. Jerusalem suddenly “died,” as had Ezekiel’s wife, and with it the temple and worship. The temple was characterized as the “*delight*” of their eyes (**vv. 20–21**), the same words used to describe the prophet’s wife in v. 16.

Besides the loss of the temple, they lost another “*delight*,” namely, their sons and daughters (**v. 21**). Like Ezekiel, those in Jerusalem would be unable to mourn because they would immediately be taken away as captives to Babylon. For the captives to lament could be perceived as seditious. Therefore they would, like the prophet, be

forced to “groan quietly” (v. 17). When this happened, it was to be a confirmation of the truth of God’s word and the integrity of Ezekiel (v. 24).

C. (:20-23) Application: No Mourning for the Death of the Temple

“Then I said to them, ‘The word of the LORD came to me saying,’”

1. (:21) Unspeakable Loss

*“Speak to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God,
‘Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary,
the pride of your power,
the desire of your eyes,
and the delight of your soul;
and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind
will fall by the sword.’”*

David Guzik: We note how God referred to the temple that had become an idol and false source of hope for Judah:

- *Your arrogant boast*, thought to guarantee their security.
- *The desire of your eyes*, that most precious to them.
- *The delight of your soul*, that which delighted them most.

Peter Pett: The significance of the sanctuary to the exiled, and to all Israel, is brought out. It was their pride and joy when they were at their most powerful, it was the place to which their eyes turned in longing, it was the place their soul yearned for. But it was to be so no more, for it had become a defiled sanctuary, a place where many gods were worshipped. And yet it had been and should have been His!

And they were not to mourn for it, nor for their sons and daughters who would be slain by the sword, rather were they to mourn for their sins which have brought it about. Their moanings must be because of their iniquities, not because of the lost temple and the destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

We probably cannot even begin to conceive what the temple in Jerusalem meant to the people of Israel. It depicted all their past, it was their present, it represented all their hopes for the future. It was the one thing that stood firm in an uncertain world, the one ‘guarantee’ of such a future. It was the one permanency when all else was changing. But although they had clung to the temple of Yahweh, they had not clung to Yahweh, they had allowed Him to be submerged under a multiplicity of gods. And so now the temple was to go. And they were not to mourn for it.

2. (:22-23a) Continue Normal Behavior

*“And you will do as I have done;
you will not cover your mustache,
and you will not eat the bread of men.
And your turbans will be on your heads
and your shoes on your feet.”*

Douglas Stuart: Mourning was not appropriate in cases of **capital punishment**. When God commanded that someone was to die for his crimes, it was not expected that people would regret carrying out the punishment by mourning the dead. Many passages in the Pentateuch call for capital punishment (e.g., **Ex. 21; Lev. 20, 24; Num. 35; Deut. 24**), but none demand mourning for the person executed for his crimes.

Thus while Ezekiel had every right to mourn for his wife whose life God had not ended in wrath, the Israelites had no right to mourn for Jerusalem whose existence was being symbolically brought to an end most certainly in wrath. Ezekiel's wife died of illness. Jerusalem died because of its sins against God. Ezekiel had a right to mourn his undeserved personal loss but did not. The Israelites had no right to mourn for their well-deserved national loss and could not (**v. 24**). . .

Obedying God's command not to mourn for his wife could not have been an easy thing for Ezekiel. Not to mourn dead relatives was almost surely considered the equivalent of an insult by the ancient Israelites. His beloved was dead, and he was showing no sadness. The one who had loved, supported, and cared for him for years was suddenly taken from him, and he couldn't show her the final respect that was considered fitting evidence of love and gratitude.

Nevertheless neither Ezekiel nor any of his countrymen could afford to concentrate on their individual, personal interests at this time. A much greater matter was at hand, a great turning point in history: the end of the covenant people in the Promised Land and the destruction of Jerusalem, God's chosen city. People had to come to their senses and leave behind less significant things. The work of God was what they needed to focus on, and they needed to follow Ezekiel's example not to let anything intervene to keep them from that. Jesus, in a somewhat similar context where paying attention to God's plan needed to be elevated above otherwise legitimate personal concerns said "*Let the dead bury their dead*" (**Matt. 8:22**). This wasn't cruel, insensitive advice. It was necessary. Our personal concerns must not keep us from responding to God's direction. What's happening in His kingdom doesn't wait for us to get around to doing something about it. What He has ordained in history can't depend upon our deciding whether it is convenient for us to pay attention to it.

3. (:23b) Refrain from Outward Mourning

*"You will not mourn, and you will not weep;
but you will rot away in your iniquities,
and you will groan to one another."*

D. (:24) Recognition Refrain

*"Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you;
according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes,
then you will know that I am the Lord God."*

Key verse in the book of Ezekiel.

David Guzik: The consistent purpose of God throughout the book of Ezekiel is the revelation of Himself even through tragedy and crisis. In all their unexpressed sorrow, there would be a revelation of the **Lord GOD**.

III. (:25-27) CRUSHING OF JERUSALEM (FALSE SECURITY) OPENS THE DOOR TO FUTURE REVELATION (NEW HOPE)

A. (:25) Removal of False Security

“As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes, and their heart's delight, their sons and their daughters,”

B. (:26-27a) Revelation of New Hope

“that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears? 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be dumb no longer.”

Constable: Evidently Ezekiel was not to deliver any more prophetic messages to his fellow exiles, after he made the explanation in **verses 20-24**, until he received word of the destruction of the temple and the capture of the remaining Judahites. This message reached him five months later (**33:21**). His enforced dumbness must have been limited to prophecies concerning Israel, however, because **25:1—33:20** contains oracles against foreign nations, some of which are dated during the siege of Jerusalem.

Peter Pett: But he will not be wholly silent meanwhile. There would yet be three years before the final end. Meanwhile he will have prophecies to give to the nations, and as he proclaims them in the direction of the various countries his awed watchers will hear and understand. They will understand firstly that there was now no word of Yahweh for Jerusalem. All that could be said had been said, and God had no further message for them. It would be a pregnant silence. But they would also receive a hint of hope. For the fact that God was acting against those countries that took advantage of Israel's misfortune would demonstrate that God was not totally finished with Israel and had not totally forgotten them. Thus the silence was both pregnant and awesome, but it was not final.

This demonstrates that the messages to the nations have not just been fitted in here in order to find a place for them. Rather they are an essential indication of the fact that while there was no further word for Israel, in the midst of their current misfortunes they had not just been forgotten. He was still watching over their concerns. God's judgment may be severe, and would be final for Jerusalem, but it was not to be final for the whole of Israel. God still had further purposes towards them, which the remainder of the book will deal with.

Wiersbe: From this point on, the prophet was free to speak as he felt led, and at the same time, the focus of his ministry shifted. He had exposed the nation's sins and

announced her judgment. Now he would announce God’s plans for the Gentile nations, including victorious Babylon; and then he would minister hope to the Jewish exiles and share with them visions of the kingdom yet to come.

C. (:27b) Recognition Refrain

“Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”

Daniel Block: That day will be marked by two significant events: Yahweh will pull the rug out from under the people by removing the ground of all their hopes, and he will vindicate his prophet by confirming his sign value for the nation.

Iain Duguid: Here ends the first lesson, we might say—the lesson of inevitable and incredible judgment poured out on sinners. The prophet’s dumbness will be ended, and God’s favor will once again be extended toward his people. This promise marks a shift in the nature of Ezekiel’s proclamation. In the chapters that follow, it will be time for the prophet to speak words of judgment on the surrounding nations, Israel’s enemies (**chs. 25–32**), and then, when the promise of the removal of dumbness is fulfilled (**ch. 33**), words of hope to God’s chosen people (**chs. 34–48**).

Daniel Block: Ironically, looking beyond the immediate tragedy, even the bad news would turn out to be good. To be sure, news of the loss of temple and city will shock the exiles and challenge all their theological presuppositions. But Ezekiel’s relentless pronouncements of judgment had emphasized the need for the old order to be totally dismantled before the nation could be reconstituted. The fall of Jerusalem would mark the end of the old and be the prerequisite for the new. In the process the sign value of Ezekiel himself would become apparent. First, the report of the refugee, that Jerusalem had fallen, would provide factual proof for Ezekiel’s exilic audience of his authenticity as a true prophet of Yahweh and the veracity of the divine word he proclaimed (cf. **2:5**). Second, the freeing of his mouth would open up the possibility of a new genre of message. Heretofore his tied tongue had symbolized the monotonously judgmental tone of his pronouncements. Only when he received an order from Yahweh could he speak, and, with the exception of a few glimmers of hope attached to oracles of judgment, there had been no room for another kind of message. All that would change when the city fell. Third, potentially at least, the loosening of Ezekiel’s tongue signaled the beginning of a new relationship with his audience. He could finally assume the normal prophetic (and priestly) role of interceding with Yahweh on behalf of his people to avert his wrath, rather than serving simply as a messenger of divine fury. His role as herald and sign (*môpēt*) of God’s judgment (**24:24**) would be transformed into herald and agent of divine grace (**24:17**). According to the last affirmation in this oracle, and the last in the long series of judgment messages that had begun in **4:1**, Ezekiel could take comfort also in knowing that that event would mark the beginning of a new knowledge of Yahweh in Israel.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would the Jews have responded to the change in perspective from being viewed as choice meat to defiled and discarded ashes.
- 2) What was the significance of the rust in the pot?
- 3) Why did God want His people to refrain from mourning over the fall of Jerusalem and the profaning of the temple?
- 4) How can we exhort people to properly respond to the coming judgments of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: GOD WAS SO ANGRY AT HIS PEOPLE FOR THEIR REBELLION THAT HE WOULD NOT PERMIT EZEKIEL TO BE SAD OR SHOW REMORSE WHEN HE Poured OUT HIS WRATH ON THEM.

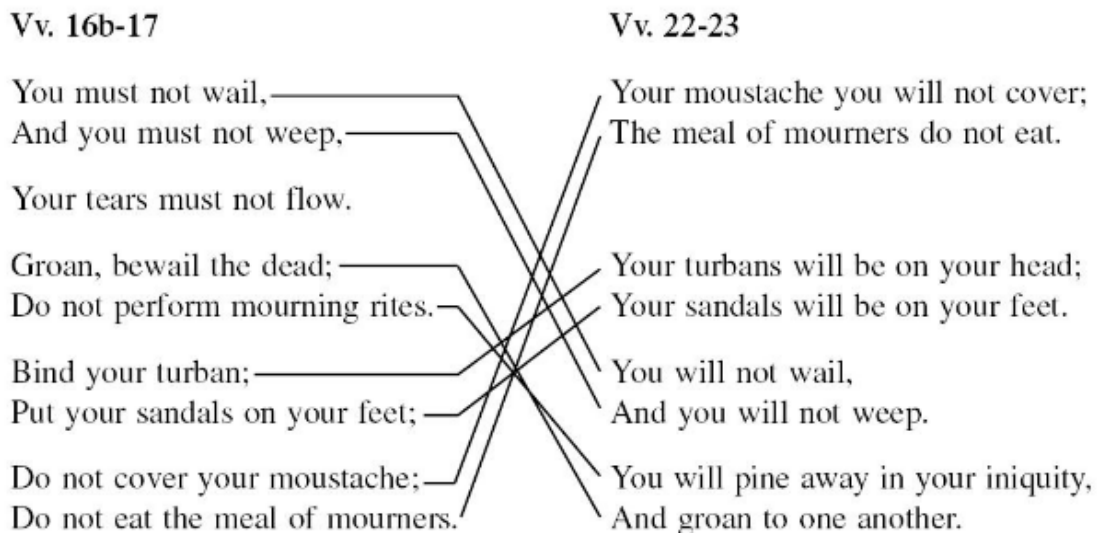
Galen Doughty: When false teaching has been the basis of our thinking and acting and it has allowed us to continue to justify our sinful behavior we are in the same danger the Jews were in during the siege of Jerusalem. We refuse to see the truth because the lie has become our truth. When the false teaching is finally exposed as a lie we are left stunned and bereft of any intellectual and spiritual framework within which to understand the terrible events that have happened to us and God's discipline for our sin. That is what happened to the Jews. The generation that came out of Jerusalem into exile in Babylon struggled to understand the destruction of the city and the temple. The generation born in exile in Babylon was ready when Cyrus told them they could return to Jerusalem and go rebuild the temple. Are we in danger today in the USA of not seeing God's judgment that is coming because we falsely believe America is somehow blessed and protected by God? I pray not!

God tells Ezekiel that a fugitive fleeing from the destruction of Jerusalem will come to Ezekiel after the city has fallen and tell him the news. At that time God says Ezekiel's mouth will be opened and he will speak to the people and no longer be silent. He will be a sign to the people that Jerusalem's fall and the temple's destruction is the Lord's doing. It appears from these verses that after Ezekiel explains why he is not grieving over the death of his wife as a sign to them that they will be in such shock over Jerusalem's fall they will not grieve either. God tells him to be silent. He is not to speak until a fugitive from Jerusalem's destruction brings him news of the city's fall. Then he will speak to the people again. In **Ezekiel 33:21** on January 5, 585, some six months after Jerusalem's capture a fugitive reports that the city has been destroyed. It is difficult to tell when Ezekiel began his silence but it could have been as early as this prophecy which would have been January 10, 588. That's almost three years of not speaking!! Does Ezekiel mean he did not speak to anyone during that time or does he mean he did

not speak to the people as the Lord's prophet? The situation is confusing. However, the reality is no matter which option is true Ezekiel did not prophesy during the siege of Jerusalem. God's judgment had been pronounced. There was no more possibility for repentance left to the Jews. That is the chilling message behind Ezekiel's silence. God's people could not reach God or speak to him to even repent. That time had passed. He had turned away from them as they had turned away from him!

Douglas Stuart: A cooking pot is a common thing, and cooking meat in a pot is a simple matter. There is nothing complicated or extraordinary in Ezekiel's enactment prophecy. Likewise there was nothing really complex or extraordinary in what God was doing to Jerusalem. He was going to punish it in accordance with His covenant promises to punish His people if they sinned against Him. The people of Judah crammed into the closed-up city now surrounded by the Babylonians undoubtedly thought otherwise. Their emotions and plans were probably quite complex, involving all sorts of popular misconceptions about God's mercy and love, fueled by the encouraging preaching of the many false prophets in the city. Most of them must have thought that they were quite extraordinary, as their "*we are the meat*" boast (cf. **11:3**) suggested. They were, after all, in the only city in all of Syria-Palestine that had successfully held out against the Assyrians 113 years earlier (**2 Kin. 18:17–19:36**). They were, more over, inside the city God had specially chosen (**Deut. 12:5, 11**) and where David had been promised a "*son to rule forever*" (**2 Sam. 11–16**). But they misunderstood their own importance and their wishful thinking blinded them to their coming fate. Misapplying the promises of God, they conveniently ignored their own sin and thought themselves essential to God's plans. Little did they realize how odious they had become in God's eyes. They who were once choice meat had become scum.

Daniel Block: Outline of Structure – comparing vv. 16b-17 to vv. 22-23:



Ezekiel and his wife function as surrogates for Yahweh and the temple, respectively. What the woman is to the prophet, the temple is to Yahweh, "the delight of his eyes" (vv. [16](#), [21](#)).

Feinberg: “I Will Profane my Sanctuary”

No human heart could fathom what this act meant to the heart of God. God had condescended to make Himself known in His temple, accepting godly worship there, ordering the ritual, and protecting the sacred place from foreign intruders. But when sin mars the spiritual value of temporal ordinances, God casts them off, for at greatest sacrifice God always maintains the righteous requirements of His law. That is why Christ died even though it broke the heart of God and Christ. How much does it mean to you and Me? Does it command our conformity to His will in every aspect of life?

TEXT: Ezekiel 25:1-17

TITLE: PROPHECIES AGAINST NATIONS CLOSE TO JUDAH

BIG IDEA:

MISTREATMENT AND MALICE TOWARDS ISRAEL BY SURROUNDING PROUD PAGAN NATIONS WILL BE PUNISHED BY GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Here we see the beginning of the second main section of the Book of Ezekiel. The earlier chapters had dealt with the Fall of Jerusalem. Now the prophet turns his attention to external enemies. Judgment begins at the house of God, but it then extends beyond the borders of Israel. This should actually be a comfort to God's people. The four foreign nations targeted in this first set of prophecies were either related by bloodlines to Judah or were bordering nations. They were all cited for their attitudes towards God's chosen people (including pride, hatred, and revenge) that justified divine wrath. It is remarkable that **chapters 25-32** fail to target Babylon for judgment; Babylon will end up conquering these other nations that are mentioned. Other prophets will have specific messages for Babylon.

Leslie Allen: The tradition of issuing oracles against foreign countries or cities is an ancient one in Israelite prophecy (cf. **Clements**, *Prophecy and Tradition*, 58–61). The tradition was well maintained in the prophetic books, each of the major books having a distinct and lengthy section devoted to this genre (cf. **Amos 1–2**). The present collection in **chaps. 25–32** begins with a cluster of five short oracles directed against four of Judah's neighbors, Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia. Form-critically they are all proof sayings developed from judgment oracles by the addition of the recognition formula. Each is introduced by the messenger formula and proceeds from reasoned accusation (עַן "because") to a logical verdict (לְכֵן "therefore") and the closing recognition formula. . .

The end of **chap. 24** gave a hint that the tide of Yahweh's dealings with his people was to turn. That hint is taken up in this chapter, the first part of a series of foreign oracles. Its role is to bring reassurance to the Judeans, in a roundabout way. The chapter virtually takes up a host of communal laments for Yahweh to intervene on his people's behalf. Israel has been overwhelmed by crisis, and their enemies have taken advantage of the situation and derided them—and thereby done despite to Yahweh's own concerns (cf. **Pss 74:7, 10, 18, 22; 79:1, 4, 10, 12**).

Iain Duguid: The nations around Judah are addressed in **clockwise order**, starting with Ammon in the Transjordan to the east of the northern kingdom of Israel, and moving south to the other Transjordanian foes, Moab and Edom. After that, the prophet turns his attention west to Philistia in the southern coastal plain and then north to the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Lamar Cooper: Those who oppose God and his people never gain by their opposition. The prophecies against foreign nations show both God’s concern for the redemption of all people and his determination to judge sin wherever and whenever the standards of his word are violated (**25:1–32:32**).

I. (:1-5) PROPHECY AGAINST AMMON

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

A. (:2-3a) Authoritative Word of Prophetic Judgment

“Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them, 3 and say to the sons of Ammon, 'Hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God,'”

Douglas Stuart: The Ammonites are perhaps mentioned first in this section of oracles against foreign nations because the only previous such oracle was also about Ammon (**21:28–32**). At any rate, nothing we know about the Ammonites would suggest that they are mentioned first because of their prominence or the severity of their enmity to Israel or the like.

The Ammonites occupied the territory east of the Jabbok River, on the fringe of the Arabian desert. They had a long history of enmity to Israel, starting with their support for hiring the false prophet Balaam against Israel (**Deut. 23:3–6**). They were one of the oppressors in the days of the Judges (**Judg. 3:13; 10:6–11:33**) and Saul (**1 Sam. 11**). David fought them (**2 Sam. 10, 12**), and in the days of Jehoshaphat they attacked Judah (2 Chr. 20). Ammonite enmity against Israel continued through the days of Jehoiakim (609–598 b.c.; **2 Kin. 24:2**), that is, into Ezekiel’s day.

Lamar Cooper: The Ammonites were known for their excesses in idolatries (**1 Kgs 11:7, 33**), cruelty (**Amos 1:13**), pride (**Zeph 2:9–10**), and opposition to God’s people (**Deut 23:3–4; Judg 3:13; 1 Sam 11:1–3; 2 Sam 10:1–14; 2 Kgs 24:2; Neh 4:3, 7–8**). They were among the bitterest enemies of Israel and Judah, a somber testimony to the ungodliness that Lot and his daughters brought with them when they left Sodom. The daughters thought there was no one to carry the family name. They did not look to God for a solution but instead made their father drunk, then had sexual relations with him and became pregnant by him (**Gen 19:30–36**). Their descendants became enemies of all that was good and godly (v. 2).

B. (:3b) Charge = Reason for Judgment = Indictment

“Because you said, 'Aha!' against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into exile,”

Douglas Stuart: After the typical introduction (v. 1), Ezekiel is told to “set” his “face against” (i.e., show clear opposition to) the Ammonites (v. 2) and to condemn their delight at the fall of Jerusalem (“*My sanctuary*”), the desolation of Judah (“*the*

land”), and the exile of the Judeans (“*the house of Judah*”) in **verse 3**. Their “*Aha!*” (v. 3) was the virtual equivalent of our modern “Oh boy,” “Wow,” or “Hooray.” In **verse 6**, clapping and stamping are actions accompanying rejoicing over the misfortune of God’s people. The Ammonites, long enemies of Israel and Judah, were certainly taking pleasure in seeing Judah’s final downfall in 586 b.c.

Derek Thomas: The lesson is one of failure to appreciate that the fall of a neighbour is one that can befall us too, apart from the grace of God. Every time we see another fall into sin, even if he is our enemy, we should show no gleeful delight, but rather compassion and thankfulness: compassion, for we are to love even our enemies, and thankfulness that ‘There go I, but for the grace of God.’

C. (:4-5) Punishment = Description of Judgment = Sentence

“therefore, behold, I am going to give you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they will set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they will eat your fruit and drink your milk. And I shall make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the sons of Ammon a resting place for flocks.”

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel prophesied four coming judgments upon the Ammonites. First, they too would be taken captive. They would not escape unscathed the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar. Their land would be occupied by the desert tribes of Arabs who lived to the east of the Ammonites (v. 4). Second, their capital, Rabbah, would be destroyed. It would no longer be a great city but would become a habitation and pasture for camels (v. 5). The former capital, Ammon, would be desolate and overgrown after visitation of God’s judgment (see **21:25**). The reason for this judgment is restated. Ammon gloated and rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem (v. 6).

D. (:5b) Recognition Refrain

“Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

Leslie Allen: Hitherto punisher of a disobedient covenant people, Yahweh reveals himself as their patron, now that judgment has been carried out. The land was a third entity in the triangular covenant relationship and functioned as the gauge of its healthy or sorry state. Accordingly desolation of the land and expulsion from it featured in the punishment of his people. Now, with surprising grace, Yahweh proposes to leap to their defense. The oracle against Ammon clearly functions as an affirmation of support for the Judeans. The motifs of territorial desolation and deprivation were to boomerang into Ammon’s experience.

Iain Duguid: As a result of this judgment the Ammonites “*will know that I am the Lord*” (**25:7**). This **recognition formula**, which occurs over sixty times in Ezekiel as a whole, is a dominant theme in these foreign nation oracles. The nations will recognize the Lord’s sovereignty when he acts to judge not only his own people but them as well. In so doing, he will demonstrate that he is the only one with power to judge or to deliver; in the face of the Lord’s fury, their gods are impotent to save them.

II. (:6-7) PROPHECY AGAINST AMMON CONTINUED

“For thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:6) Charge

*“Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet
and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel,”*

Leslie Allen: The previous message is reinforced by another, supplementary one. It reflects more emotion in its description of Ammon’s insulting behavior: hand, foot and inner being had joined forces in a totality of opposition. In reprisal total extinction is threatened for the body politic. The harshness of the verdict corresponds to the depth of feeling aroused in the accusation.

B. (:7a) Punishment

*“therefore, behold, I have stretched out My hand against you,
and I shall give you for spoil to the nations.
And I shall cut you off from the peoples
and make you perish from the lands;
I shall destroy you.”*

Lamar Cooper: Third, Ammon would be plundered by the nations around them. They would become a spoil of war. Fourth, the country would disappear from the family of nations. Jeremiah predicted a return of the Ammonites (**Jer 49:6**), suggesting that perhaps his prophecy referred to an earlier occasion. The truth of Ezekiel’s prophecy is a matter of historical record. Ammon, as a nation, no longer existed after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar and plunder by Bedouins from the east (v. 7). The fate of Ammon confirmed the truth of the messages of judgment announced by his prophets.

C. (:7b) Recognition Refrain

“Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

III. (:8-11) PROPHECY AGAINST MOAB

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:8) Charge

*“Because Moab and Seir say,
‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations,’”*

Douglas Stuart: Moab had been dominated politically and militarily by Israel and Judah throughout much of its history, and undoubtedly its people roared with approval at the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian armies. Thus they could exult that “*Judah is like all the nations*,” subject to Babylonian control, beaten, no longer in a position to give Moab any trouble (v. 8). Their sin is thus in arrogantly thinking that Yahweh was

unable to deliver His people. As a result, their great cities will fall (v. 9), and they, like the Ammonites, will be invaded and occupied by desert Arabs (v. 10). The fate of Moab and Ammon, so long linked in Bible history (cf. **Gen. 19:30–38**) will once again be remarkably similar.

Iain Duguid: The oracle against Moab (**25:8–11**) charges them with saying, “*Look, the house of Judah has become like all the other nations*” (v. 8). The irony is that there was not a little truth in that statement: Judah had indeed in large measure become like the nations in the way she lived, giving herself over to idolatry (**20:32**). But it could never be true in the sense in which Moab had intended, so that this statement is nothing short of blasphemy on her lips. They meant, “Judah’s fall demonstrates that her claims to elect status by the Lord are worthless; she is a reject nation, thrown onto the scrap heap of history along with her god.” [**Greenberg**] Instead, it is Moab who will be utterly destroyed, along with Ammon. They are the ones who will be left unremembered on the stage of world history, along with their gods, thus demonstrating the reality and uniqueness of the Lord’s existence and sovereign power to act (**25:10**).

B. (:9-11a) Punishment

*“therefore, behold, I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of its cities,
of its cities which are on its frontiers, the glory of the land,
Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim,
and I will give it for a possession, along with the sons of Ammon,
to the sons of the east,
that the sons of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations.
Thus I will execute judgments on Moab,”*

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel prophesied that God would expose the flank or border of Moab to invading forces. Towns on the usually well-guarded frontier especially were vulnerable. If the Moabites could not protect their border, the whole country would be at risk (v. 9). The people of Moab were to suffer a similar fate as the Ammonites. They would be overtaken by the desert people to their east and would not be remembered in the family of nations (vv. 10–11). This prediction also was historically accurate. The Moabites like the Ammonites ceased to exist in the family of nations.

The judgment of God on Ammon and Moab is a commentary on the tragic consequences of wrong choices (vv. 1–11). Lot never dreamed that when he chose to live in Sodom that the choice would affect his descendants forever. His children born to him in an immoral union with his daughters became bitter enemies of God’s people and Abraham’s descendants (**Gen 19:1–18**). After such punishment, all will “*know that I am the Lord*” (**Ezek 25:11**). Both the Ammonites (v. 7) and the Moabites will finally realize that there is no god but the God of Judah.

Derek Thomas: The Moabites had failed to perceive that Judah’s downfall was an act of judgment. Rather, they had depicted it as a sign of weakness. They had failed to reckon on the power of God. They had assumed that Judah’s God was one they could safely ignore. Should he exist at all, he was of little significance to them. Countless numbers

of people live in this way, in defiance of the reality of God. *‘It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’* (**Heb. 10:31**), warns one New Testament writer; but it falls on deaf ears. . .

It has to be said that one of the reasons why Moab saw Judah as *‘like all the other nations’* was Judah’s own fault. Judah was suffering because she was experiencing the punishment of God due to her sin and waywardness. Her witness to the nations had been one of compromise and worldliness.

C. (:11b) Recognition Refrain

“and they will know that I am the LORD.”

IV. (:12-14) PROPHECY AGAINST EDMOM

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:12) Charge

“Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them,”

Lamar Cooper: There was a natural enmity between Edomites, Esau’s descendants, and Israelites, Jacob’s descendants (**v. 12**). That enmity was perpetuated in successive generations by memory of the deception of Jacob that had cost Esau his birthright (**Gen 25:29–34**) and blessing (**27:1–40**). The Edomites would never forgive or forget what they had lost by Jacob’s treachery (**Gen 27:41–46**). Like the Moabites and Ammonites, they were a warring (**Gen 27:40**), idolatrous (**2 Chr 25:14, 20**), proud (**Jer 49:16–17**), cruel (**Amos 1:11–12**), and vengeful (**Ezek 25:12–14**) people.

B. (:13-14a) Punishment

*“therefore, thus says the Lord God,
I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it.
And I will lay it waste; from Teman even to Dedan they will fall by the sword.
And I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel.
Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger
and according to My wrath;”*

MacArthur: Reference is to key Edomite towns. Teman was possibly 200 mi. E of the Dead Sea in the Arabian Desert in the northern expanse of Edom’s territory. Dedan was maybe located 100 mi. S of Teman, yet far E of the Red Sea.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel prophesied that the whole country would be laid waste (**v. 13**). Teman was the extreme northern district of Edom while Dedan was in the south; thus the mention of these two cities was a way of referring to the whole nation. Both Isaiah (**34:5–17**) and Jeremiah (**49:7–22**) have lengthy denunciations of Edom that describe the consequences of judgment as rendering it a desolate, empty place. The entire Book of Obadiah predicts the doom of Edom for conspiracy against the Hebrews, who were

their kinsmen. So Ezekiel predicted that the Hebrews would be the “hand” by which God’s anger and wrath would be administered to Edom. The prophecy was fulfilled when Edom finally was defeated by the Maccabees and incorporated into the Jewish state (vv. 13–14).

Douglas Stuart: Edom, west and south of the Dead Sea, was a small nation that had steadily been Israel’s enemy since the time of the hostility between Jacob and Esau, from whom Israel and Edom were descended (**Gen. 25**). **Verse 12** mentions Edom’s taking vengeance against Judah, the details of which are more precisely known from the Book of Obadiah. After the siege of Jerusalem began, Judah was no longer in a position to keep Edomite raiders from attacking southern Judean cities and towns. Edom quickly took advantage of the situation to annex Judean territory to itself. Moreover, Edomites attacked Judeans fleeing the Babylonians after the invasion of Judah in 588 b.c. (**Obad. 14**).

Edom’s punishment will be in line with that of Ammon and Moab: desolation, population decimation, and destruction of its major cities in war (**v. 13**). Particular stress is paid to the Lord’s vengeance against Edom in **verse 14**. This is not petty vengeance but the exercise of the Sovereign’s responsibility to take action against His vassal’s enemies (Hebrew, *nāqam*). In this case, what is predicted is a vengeance “*by the hand of My people Israel*,” in the manner also described in Obadiah (vv. 17–21). That is, Judah would in the future retake not only the territory it had lost to the Edomites in 588–586 b.c. but would in fact dominate all of Edom once again. Then Edom would know what God calls here “*My anger...My fury...My vengeance.*”

Iain Duguid: The Edomites (**25:12–14**) seem not merely to have gloated over the downfall of Judah but to have actively participated in it. The brief statement of **verse 12** that “*Edom took revenge on the house of Judah*” is fleshed out in more detail in the book of Obadiah. There Edom is accused of aiding and abetting the Babylonians, seizing Judah’s wealth, cutting down the fugitives, and handing over the survivors (**Obad. 11–14**). Although they were from a biblical perspective close kin of the Israelites (**Num. 20:14–15; Deut. 23:7–8**), they had no compassion on their brothers. Moreover, instead of the Lord’s judgment on his people putting the fear of Israel’s God into their neighbors, they viewed it simply as an opportunity for personal gain and the settling of old scores. The result of their seeking revenge on Judah, however, will be God’s execution of vengeance on them, using his own people to do so (**Ezek. 25:14**).

C. (:14b) Alternative Recognition Refrain

“thus they will know My vengeance,” declares the Lord God.”

V. (:15-17) PROPHECY AGAINST THE PHILISTINES

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:15) Charge

“Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with

scorn of soul to destroy with everlasting enmity,”

B. (:16-17a) Punishment

*“therefore, thus says the Lord God,
Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines,
even cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.
And I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes;”*

Lamar Cooper: So God promised to act for Israel and execute a “*great vengeance*” against Philistia (v. 17). That vengeance included cutting off the Kerethites (v. 16), one of two fierce fighting forces once employed by David (2 Sam 8:18) as his personal army. The other group also employed by David was called Pelethites. So God promised to cut off the best of the fighting forces of the Philistines and to destroy the remnant of the sea coast that was their homeland.

Douglas Stuart: The Philistines were a people originally from the Greek coasts and islands of the Aegean Sea who after a failed attempt to settle in Egypt concentrated their population along the Mediterranean coast of Palestine. They became Israel’s main enemy during the days of the Judges, and their military successes against Israel were so great that by the time Saul and Jonathan fell in battle against them (1 Sam. 31) they were threatening to take virtually all of Israel’s territory and become the new tenants of the Promised Land. David subdued them completely, but their hostility to Israel never abated, and they looked for any chance to break free from the subjugation they had endured so long. The Babylonian invasion of 588 b.c. provided just the moment for them to deal vengefully and take vengeance “*with a spiteful heart*” (v. 15).

Accordingly, God promises that He will simply cut them off from their former homeland (v. 16) and take “*great vengeance*” (“*furious rebukes*”) on Philistia. This prophecy, like all the others, certainly came true. We find virtually no record of Philistine civilization after the time of the Maccabees (the second century b.c.) in Palestine, even though it was the Philistines who gave their name to the region (Philistine = Palestine).

John Taylor: These inhabitants of the southern part of the coastal strip of Palestine were also inveterate foes of Israel during her early history, but they had no ties of kinship and were originally Mediterranean ‘sea peoples’ from the Aegean. David finally broke their military ascendancy but they continued to cause occasional trouble during the monarchy, though we have no record other than this oracle of their hostility at the time of Jerusalem’s fall. The Cherethites, who were regularly linked with them, may well be etymologically the same as the Cretans, as lxx translates. David employed them in his standing army of mercenaries, and it is likely that ‘*the Pelethites*’ who shared this duty with them were Philistines under a slightly different name. The punishment pronounced on them for their vengeful wrongs done against Jerusalem (doubtless they too sided with Babylon) is expressed in the form of a play on words: I will cut off (*hikrattî*) the Cherethites (‘*et kērētîm*). After Maccabean times, the Philistines completely vanished from sight as a people and only the names of their cities remained.

Derek Thomas: The Philistines had become war-mongers; revenge and retaliation characterized the way they lived. The trouble spots of the world today, together with nations whose history is ingrained with hatred for past wrongs, need to take note that the Lord of the nations knows and sees all. He will not tolerate it forever.

C. (:17b) Alternate Recognition Refrain

“and they will know that I am the LORD when I lay My vengeance on them.”

* * * * *

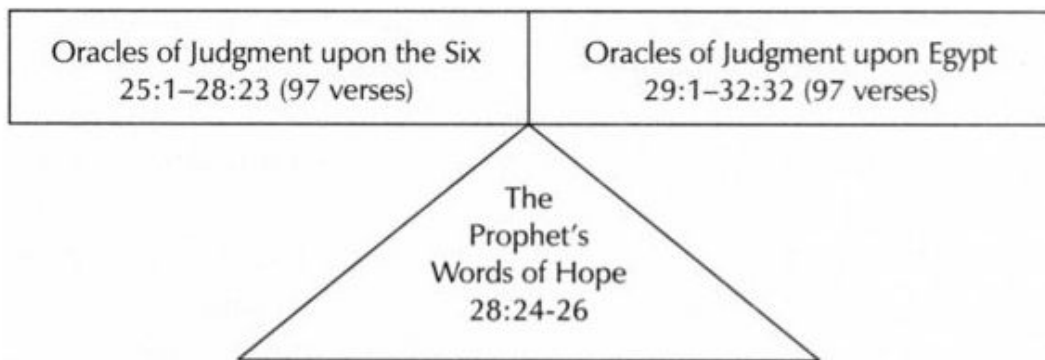
DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why so much attention to prophecies related to other countries? In what ways had they corrupted God’s people?
- 2) Do we tend to rejoice in the misfortunes and failures of others?
- 3) Should other nations today take note of how God holds countries accountable for their mistreatment of Israel?
- 4) Why is vengeance reserved for the Lord? Why does He use His people sometimes as instruments in executing that vengeance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: the function of these oracles is not simply to provide a transition between oracles of judgment against Judah and messages of hope for the nation. The nations addressed by Ezekiel all represented the enemies of Israel. Thus a divine pronouncement of judgment on them also served as a backhanded message of hope. Evidence for this understanding is found in the broad symmetrical structure of these oracles. Positioned at the center of this section is the key that unlocks the entire unit. The words of hope inserted in **28:24–26** function as a fulcrum, dividing Ezekiel’s oracles against foreign nations into two sensitively balanced halves, virtually identical in length (see the diagram).



This large section (**chs. 25–32**) displays other signs of deliberate structuring as well. It is dominated by the **number seven**. Seven nations/states are addressed: Bene Ammon (**25:1–7**), Moab (**25:8–11**), Edom (**25:12–14**), Philistia (**25:15–17**), Tyre (**26:1–28:19**), Sidon (**28:20–23**), and Egypt (**29:1–32:32**), a pattern reminiscent of Amos’s proclamations against nations foreign to the northern kingdom in **Amos 1:3–2:5**. But no effort is made to reduce these oracles to a common length. The prophecies against Egypt are equal in length to the sum of the previous six. Even among the latter there is great variation, from the short prophetic vignettes against Bene Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and Sidon, to almost three chapters devoted to Tyre. Seven mini-oracles are incorporated into the first half.⁸ Seven oracles against Egypt are preserved in **29:1–32:32**, signaled by the sevenfold occurrence of the word-event formula. Seven date notices break up the oracles.

Leslie Allen: Politics and religion were interlocked in the ancient world. In political terms these nations were expediently climbing onto the Babylonian bandwagon and expressing their allegiance to the victorious world power in opposing Judah. However, such a political move struck at the heart of the victimized nation and triggered religious reactions. Loss of face seems to have been an excruciating experience in Israelite culture—and Israel’s God took tender notice of such deep feelings (cf. **Joel 2:26b, 27b**). . . The divine and the human are here inextricably intermingled, as passion-filled grievances find a hearing and promise of vindication at the law court of their patron (cf. **Luke 18:1–8**). Throbbing beneath the surface of the text and surprisingly never verbalized is the Ezekielian motif of the profanation of Yahweh’s name involved in the fate of the covenant nation (cf. **20:9; 36:20–23**). Part of the clearing of that name was the repeated declaration of this chapter that he would intervene in Judah’s world and make human experience a witness to divine justice and truth.

Iain Duguid: So what message is contained in these foreign nation oracles for the Judean listener?

(1) They are being assured that God does not operate on a double standard, whereby he judges only Israel’s sins while the nations are free to behave as they like. Judgment may begin with the house of God, but it doesn’t end there. The outpouring of God’s wrath extends not simply to the rebels in his own house but also to all those who refuse to

recognize his sovereignty. They too must come to “*know that I am the Lord*”; that is, they must and will ultimately acknowledge that he is the only true God, the one who holds the nations in the palm of his hand, who raises up kingdoms and brings them down again according to his own good pleasure (cf. **Isa. 40:15–24**).

(2) In spite of the outpouring of God’s wrath on his people, they nonetheless remain his people, who are infinitely precious to him. It is noteworthy that the charge leveled against each of the foreign nations in **Ezekiel 25** is that they have persecuted or insulted God’s chosen people, and thereby insulted God. To take God’s people lightly is never a safe thing to do in the Old Testament. In spite of the pattern of sin among Abraham’s offspring, God’s word to Abraham was still effective: “*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (**Gen. 12:3**). Those who rejoice over Israel’s downfall—even over her downfall at the hands of the Lord himself—are simply inviting a curse on their own heads, a curse that Ezekiel pronounces effective.

(3) Ezekiel’s Judean hearers are reminded that God has his own consistent designs behind all the events of history, the prime purpose of which is to bring glory to himself. Judgment will fall on these nations who mock and abuse Judah in her hour of distress for the same reason that it fell originally on Judah herself: The Lord will thereby be recognized as a powerful and holy God, who acts in and through history.

This consistency of design on God’s part is itself a message of encouragement to God’s people. The one who said, “*Whoever curses you I will curse,*” is the same one who said, “*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” If the first statement is still operative, then so also is the second. The fact that this goal had not yet been achieved indicated to the people of Judah that God’s purposes were not yet at an end as far as their nation was concerned, no matter how bleak her future outlook may have seemed from a human perspective.

Charles Dyer: The siege of Jerusalem had begun; it was only a matter of time till her destruction would be complete. So Ezekiel turned from Jerusalem to give messages against those nations surrounding it. If God would not spare His own people because of their sin, how could the nations around her hope to escape His judgment? God’s judgment began in Israel (**chaps. 4-24**), but it would extend from there to other nations (**chaps. 25-32**).

God’s judgment on these nations is based on the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. **Gen. 12:1-3; 15**). Those who bless the descendants of Abraham will be blessed, and those who curse the descendants of Abraham will be cursed. Ezekiel pronounced God’s curse on seven countries that contributed to Judah’s downfall.

The first three – Ammon, Moab, Edom – formed the eastern boundary of Judah; the fourth nation, Philistia, was on her western boundary. Tyre and Sidon, cities of Phoenicia, were the principal powers north of Judah; Egypt was the major power to the southwest. God’s judgment would extend out from Judah in all directions.

TEXT: Ezekiel 26:1-21

TITLE: *PROPHECY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE*

BIG IDEA:

WAVES OF INVADING NATIONS (BEGINNING WITH KING NEBUCHADNEZAR) WILL UTTERLY DESTROY TYRE WHO HAD HOPED TO PROFIT BY JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

One cannot overstate the magnitude of this prophecy of devastation against the most prominent Gentile city of Ezekiel's day = Tyre. The minute details of judgment were fulfilled in such a way that there could be no doubt regarding the Lord's sovereignty over the affairs of nations and the truth of His divine word. Nations who rejoice at the downfall of Israel will have to answer to the judgment of her covenant Sovereign.

Leslie Allen: Tyre expects a shift of power as new leader of the western states. In Yahweh's name the prophet dashes such hopes, countering its attitude with corresponding reprisals point by point. Tyre would become victim of a relentless sea of foes, at Yahweh's behest. The predicted reversal of its proud claims would bring proof of Yahweh's power. In principle it would also reveal him as a patron of his covenant people, their new ally after his previous enmity.

Feinberg: The Phoenicians were vitally interested in material civilization, were industrious, resourceful, skillful in the arts and craft, adventurous as seamen; in fact, they were the famous mariners of antiquity. Sidon was the preeminent city at first, but Tyre attained its position in part by her strong natural location, situated as she was on the mainland and on a row of islands not far from the shore. Tyre means rock. She was the commercial center of the Mediterranean world. . .

Tyre's exclamation at the fall of Jerusalem manifested unfeeling exultation over the calamity of Israel, as she looked for self-enrichment through the fall of God's people as a commercial rival (see **Prov. 17:5**). Tyre rejoiced over Jerusalem's ruin because free passage for her caravans would mean greater prosperity in trade. Taxes were doubtless levied by the Jews, here called the gate of the peoples, on caravans from the north to the south (Egypt). When Judah was strong and subjugated Edom, she controlled the caravan routes to the Red Sea, thus hindering the Phoenician tradesmen from gaining all the profit they hoped for. First and last, Tyre was actuated by commercial greed, and that at a time when far weightier matters were in the balance.

Daniel Block: the progression evident in the four parts is both logical and chronological.

- Section A deals in general terms with the ultimate cause of Tyre's demise, the judgment of Yahweh.

- Section B highlights the immediate cause and the human agency by focusing on Nebuchadnezzar and his forces.
- In view of Tyre's public role, Section C deals appropriately with the response of the international observers to her fall.
- Section D completes the city's biography by describing her descent into Sheol. She has passed from the scene for good.

I. (:1-6) DASHED HOPES OF TYRE PROFITING FROM JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION

A. (:1) Authoritative Word of Prophetic Judgment

"Now it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, that the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

John Taylor: This oracle therefore was uttered scarcely a month after the news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles. It could well have been triggered off by the unsympathetic remarks of some Tyrian traders who were passing through Tel Abib when the exiles were still smarting under the news of the disaster.

B. (:2) Charge

"Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,'"

Constable: Divine judgment would come on this city-state because its people rejoiced at Jerusalem's destruction (cf. **25:3; Gen. 12:3; Prov. 15:5b**). According to other prophets, the Tyrians had also sold Jews as slaves to the Greeks and Edomites (**Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10**).

The Tyrians viewed Jerusalem's destruction as advancing their commercial interests. They viewed the Judeans as rivals more than as enemies. The Tyrians controlled the sea routes, but Judah had controlled the land routes. Controlling trade routes enabled a nation to impose tolls and so obtain revenue. Now Jerusalem would cease to compete with Tyre for this income. The Babylonians thus opened Jerusalem's gates to Tyre.

Iain Duguid: This oracle against Tyre is distinctively different from the other oracles against the foreign nations. The remainder of the nations immediately surrounding Israel (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and—after Tyre—Sidon) set themselves up in opposition to God's people. Tyre, however, thought to substitute herself for God's city, Jerusalem, and take her place.

Morgan: God is against any nation whose life has become so materialized by commercial prosperity that she can rejoice over the calamities of other nations, because such calamities increase her opportunities of barter and amassing of wealth....Any nation to-day which gauges her attitude towards other nations by what their rise or fall may contribute to her wealth has God against her.

C. (:3-6a) Punishment – Fivefold Description

“therefore, thus says the Lord God,

1. (:3b) Divine Opposition

“Behold, I am against you, O Tyre,”

Daniel Block: Tyre’s fate is not merely the result of a conflict between two peoples. Yahweh, the divine patron of Judah, will stand up in defense of his own city.

2. (:3c) Deployment of Multiple Invasions by a Variety of Enemy Nations

*“and I will bring up many nations against you,
as the sea brings up its waves.”*

Alexander: The siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar lasted for thirteen years (ca. 586-573 B.C.). Under King Ba'ali II, Tyre accepted Babylonian suzerainty and was ruled by 'judges.' However, when Babylonia declined in power, Tyre regained her independence once again. This brief freedom lasted till the second 'wave' of destruction brought her into submission to the Persians around 525 B.C. Tyre's remaining history demonstrated the continuing 'waves' of conquerors: the resistance to Alexander the Great, eventuating in her collapse; her initial resistance to the Seleucid kingdom of Antiochus III, terminating in her becoming part of that kingdom; her submission to Rome; and her fall to the Saracens in the fourteenth century A.D., after which she never again regained any importance. God was faithful to bring the 'many nations' against Tyre in successive 'waves' of conquest.

Peter Pett: The picture of the sea crashing against the shore is a vivid one. The sea was ever seen by Israel as an alien element, a destructive and powerful force. And it would overwhelm Tyre in the form of powerful armies, leaving it deserted and barren. The prophecy was literally fulfilled through the activities of Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great and others.

3. (:4) Destruction and Devastation

*“And they will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers;
and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock.”*

Lamar Cooper: Alexander the Great led the third "wave" of God's judgment that destroyed the walls of fortified Tyre in 332 B.C. He was the first to conquer both parts of the city in battle. He did so by blockading the city with 210 ships, enlarging the causeway from the mainland to the island, and then attacking the island fortress by land and by sea.

4. (:5) Despoiled by the Nations

*“‘She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea,
for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord God,
‘and she will become spoil for the nations.’”*

Constable: Fishermen would someday use the site as a place to spread their nets to dry. The picture Ezekiel presented was that of the debris of the mainland city being pushed out into the sea where it would become a flat surface. Tyre would become spoil for the nations. Formerly she had spoiled the nations by taking their money in exchange for the commodities that she had traded. Furthermore, Tyre's daughters (her dependent villages on the mainland) would also fall in battle. The fulfillment of this prophecy would convince many of the Tyrians that Yahweh was the true God.

David Thompson: This city would be so uninhabited that fishermen would dry their nets in the very place where this great city was once located. Now fishermen do not go into downtown cities to spread out their nets and dry them. They need room to lay out the nets. The prediction is Tyre would be so leveled that fishermen would be able to spread out their nets where the city once stood.

5. (:6a) Death by the Sword

*“Also her daughters who are on the mainland
will be slain by the sword,”*

Lamar Cooper: God promised to bring six judgments upon Tyre (**vv. 3–6**).

- First come words usually associated with military engagements. Many nations would “*come against*” the city (**v. 3**). The proliferation of the military opponents of Tyre was pictured as unrelenting waves pounding the city.
- Second, Ezekiel stated evidence of divine opposition to Tyre (**v. 3**). The emphasis of the text literally states, “*Behold [I am] coming against you,*” which calls attention to the events of judgment as having been divinely orchestrated.
- Third, the walls of Tyre would be destroyed (**v. 4**). In spite of all those who fought against Tyre, it was not until its conquest by Alexander the Great that this prophecy was fulfilled. Nevertheless, the prediction did come true.
- Fourth, God promised that the island fortress would become a pile of rubble that would be scraped away. There would be no trace of the once-invincible city. Only a bare rock where fishermen would dry their nets would mark the spot (**v. 4**).
- Fifth, Tyre, known for its commercial and political power, would be an object of plunder for all the nations (**v. 5**).
- Sixth, the city on the mainland also would be destroyed and the area ravaged by the sword (**v. 6**).

Nations who distinguish themselves as special centers of evil and ungodliness receive special attention as objects of God’s judgment. Such nations in history also received special attention in the Word of God. Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon all share this dubious distinction. Egypt was used as a byword for the slavery of sin, immorality, and idolatry. Babylon is a byword for godless government, and Tyre is a byword for pride and self-sufficiency (**26:1–6**).

D. (:6b) Recognition Refrain

“and they will know that I am the LORD.”

II. (:7-14) DESTRUCTIVE FORCES OF KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

“For thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:7) Military Might of God’s Instrument of Judgment = King Nebuchadnezzar

“Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great army.”

Constable: This would be the first "wave" of conquest, and the Lord described it more fully than the later ones. Nebuchadnezzar would come against Tyre with a great army, besiege the city, break down its walls, and slay many of the Tyrians. After defeating Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar proceeded north and attacked Tyre and its neighboring towns for thirteen years, beginning that same year.

Peter Pett: Nebuchadnezzar may have been the ‘*king of kings*’, but the idea is that the supreme king does Yahweh’s bidding.

B. (:8-12) Military Mission of King Nebuchadnezzar

“He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a mound against you, and raise up a large shield against you. 9 "And the blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. 10 "Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. 11 "With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. 12 "Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water.”

Constable: Tyre's enemies ("*they*") would take much spoil from the city and would push its physical remains into the sea (cf. **Zech. 9:3- 4**). God accomplished this by the hand of Alexander the Great who used the rubble from the mainland town to widen the causeway (mole) to the fortress on the peninsula.

Peter Pett: There is a deliberate attempt here to demonstrate that Tyre, with all her pride and claims, is really inferior compared to this supreme king who is Yahweh’s instrument.

Feinberg: The *pillars* spoken of were actually obelisks, and were probably those mentioned by the historian Herodotus as erected in the temple of Heracles at Tyre. One was of gold and the other of emerald, which shone brilliantly at night, and were

dedicated to Melkarth, god of Tyre (cf. **1 Kings 7:15**). These impressive pillars would be demolished by the invader.

Daniel Block: the core (vv. 8–12) is framed by strong theological affirmations of Yahweh's role, within the context of which the human activity is to be interpreted. This rhetorical strategy also highlights the conviction that, while Nebuchadnezzar may imagine himself to be operating sovereignly, and may appear to pursue his military tactics with impunity, his independence is more apparent than real. He is merely a tool in Yahweh's hands. . .

It is apparent from these verses [10-12] that the prophet envisions complete success for the invader. The scene of enemy forces rushing through the breach in the wall and stampeding through the city, destroying everything in sight, is painted in bold but realistic strokes. The last line in v. 10 is the key: the enemy will take the sea fortress by storm as if it were an ordinary walled city on the mainland. The dust raised by stampeding horses and racing chariots will darken the sky like a cloud. The din of neighing and snorting horses, the clatter of wheels on rocks, the noise of charioteers beating the sides of their vehicles, and the shouts of the invaders will cause the ground to tremble and the walls to shake. The scene of general devastation continues in v. 11 with the entire city crushed under the trampling horses' hooves, its population fallen to the sword, and the pillars of support toppled to the ground. Involved in the razing of the city are also the plundering of its wealth, the smashing of its walls, and the demolition of its magnificent homes. The final act is to dump all the rubble, reduced here to stones, timbers, and debris (*'āpār*), into the sea.

C. (:13-14) Mashed Mound of Crushed City of Tyre

1. (:13) Silenced of Any Joy and Revelry

*“So I will silence the sound of your songs,
and the sound of your harps will be heard no more.”*

David Thompson: Tyre was a place of entertainment and revelry. This was a great place for the arts. They had beautiful music. They had orchestra music and they had talented singers. There were songs and harps. God says I will put an end to all of it.

2. (:14) Stripped Down to the Bare Rock

*“And I will make you a bare rock;
you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more,
for I the LORD have spoken,” declares the Lord God.”*

Douglas Stuart: 'Shall never be rebuilt' might be better translated 'will not be built-up again,' that is, 'will not go back to its former state,' and does not imply that the island of Tyre would never again have any buildings or inhabitants at all."

Peter Pett: The prophecy looks far into the future, when Tyre's destiny would be fulfilled. In the end all merriment and music would cease as it became unpeopled and Tyre would disappear from history, and its proud island fortress would become a bare

rock for fishermen to spread their nets on. History records how, after long centuries, this was indeed literally fulfilled. Such was the end of the glory of Tyre. And it happened at Yahweh's word.

Galen Doughty: In Ezekiel's day Tyre consisted of two parts, a mainland city and port where much of the population lived and an island surrounded by great walls linked to the mainland by a causeway. This may be the meaning of the reference to "*out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets.*"

III. (:15-18) DISGRACED LAMENTATION OVER THE FALL OF TYRE

"Thus says the Lord God to Tyre,"

Leslie Allen: Tyre's downfall is viewed from another aspect, that of a funeral lament put in the mouths of Tyre's maritime partners. It has the effect of sealing the city's doom: its fall is irrevocable.

A. (:15-16) Panicked Reaction of Tyre's Maritime Partners

*"Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst?
Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes, and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment, and be appalled at you."*

Lamar Cooper: The "coastlands" (v. 15) refers to the neighboring states that were vassals of Tyre and therefore depended on the city for their own security.

Feinberg: Tyre as the mother city sent her priests to her colonies, so there were both political, commercial and religious ties between them.

Constable: The Lord also revealed that other towns would tremble when they heard of Tyre's overthrow. These were Tyre's vassals along the coast and among the islands that depended on Tyre for their prosperity and protection. Tyre had colonies in many Mediterranean coastal regions: Cyprus, Rhodes, Malta, Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and Africa. The rulers of these communities would go into mourning and would fear because of what had overtaken their mother city (cf. **Job 2:11- 13; Jon. 3:6; Rev. 18:9**). They would abdicate their thrones and submit to the enemy invaders.

B. (:17-18) Fearful Lamentation of Tyre's Maritime Partners

*"And they will take up a lamentation over you and say to you,
'How you have perished, O inhabited one,
From the seas, O renowned city, Which was mighty on the sea,
She and her inhabitants,
Who imposed her terror On all her inhabitants!'*

*Now the coastlands will tremble On the day of your fall;
Yes, the coastlands which are by the sea Will be terrified at your passing.”*

Constable: They would lament Tyre's fate and bemoan the destruction of such a mighty sea power, and they would acknowledge their own fear at the fall of Tyre. This brief lament is in the characteristic *qinah* or funeral dirge rhythm described previously. The Tyrians had rejoiced over Jerusalem's fall (v. 2), but these vassals demonstrated more wisdom by recognizing that the fall of Tyre meant judgment for them.

Daniel Block: Given the terror she had spread all around, the maritime nations might have rejoiced over the demise of their rival and commercial overlord. Instead they express shock, trembling (*hārad*), and dismay (*nibhal*). For all her brutality, Tyre had represented stability, and places such as Carthage had flourished under her leadership. No doubt when they saw her go they realized not only that they too were vulnerable, but also that their continued prosperity depended on the establishment of entirely new trading patterns.

IV. (:19-21) DESTINED FOR EXTINCTION

“For thus says the Lord God,”

Leslie Allen: The companion piece now makes explicit the truth that Yahweh will have been at work in the fall of Tyre. It points overtly and constantly to Yahweh's activity. In so doing it means to shed light on the previous oracle. If the rehearsal of mourning rites served to seal Tyre's doom, even more does this portrayal of a descent to Sheol in premature death. The crumbling of the war-ravaged island into the sea would be both fact and symbol. The sea was a powerful image of chaos and death (cf.

Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions* 59–61). Tyre was to join the dead in Sheol, becoming a nonentity as they were, and to exchange the land of the living for the land of the nether places. The once virile city would leave behind an uninhabited ruin (vv 19a–20aγ). Fallen, it would not stand (v 20b, cf. vv 15, 18). The “*never again*” of v 21b echoes and intensifies the close of the first half of the overall unit (v 14). This sealing of Tyre's fate in irrevocable finality (cf. **Jenni**, *ZAW* 65 [1953] 14) is meant to assuage the passionate feelings of Ezekiel's fellow exiles.

Douglas Stuart: Then the prophecy reverts to a concluding direct quotation of the Lord speaking to Tyre, in which its future is likened to drowning (v. 19) and to death in hell (v. 20). The “*Pit*” is the actual term used, a common synonym in the Old Testament for hell as the place of death (“the next world” in a general, unspecified sense) rather than necessarily as a place of torment (cf. 31:14; 32:17–32). Tyre's death and consignment to the Pit will result in “*glory in the land of the living*” (v. 20), a way of saying that the absence of this arrogant, slave-trading nation will be a divine blessing to the earth.

Verse 21 sums up: The rocky spot where Tyre once was will be a horrible thing to behold (“*a terror*”), the city itself now nonexistent, nowhere to be found. This, again, is the language of the curses of desolation, well known from both the Mosaic covenant

curses of **Leviticus 26** and **Deuteronomy 28–32** and from the other Old Testament prophets.

A. (:19) Two Images of Desolation and Irrelevance

1. Uninhabited City

*“When I shall make you a desolate city,
like the cities which are not inhabited,”*

2. Underwater and Forgotten

*“when I shall bring up the deep over you,
and the great waters will cover you,”*

B. (:20-21) Termination in the Pit of Extinction

“then I shall bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I shall make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I shall set glory in the land of the living. 21 I shall bring terrors on you, and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again,” declares the Lord God.”

Constable: Terrors would overtake the people, and the city would exist no longer even though others tried to find it (cf. **27:26-35**). They would search for the city on its former site but would discover that it was not there. In other words, it would enjoy no continuing importance in history. Today only a small fishing village exists on the site, and sailors use the rocks to dry their nets (cf. **v. 14**).

Daniel Block: Unlike the surrounding nature religions, in which one of the deities (Baal in Canaan, Tammuz in Babylon) was thought to die each autumn and be banished to the netherworld, where he remained until his annual resurrection in the spring, when Yahweh banishes someone to Sheol and closes the door to the Pit, it is sealed. No one consigned to Sheol ever returns.

Galen Doughty: God says he will make Tyre like a city no longer inhabited. The ocean waves will cover its houses and walls. He will bring Tyre down to the pit, literally the dungeon or well, and to those who lived long ago and are no more. In other words God is going to wipe out Tyre and her city and her inhabitants will be like cities long since destroyed and never settled again. They will not return or be rebuilt, but be only a memory. God will bring Tyre to a horrible end and she will be no more, never to be sought and never to be found again.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why so much focus on the destiny of the nation of Tyre?

- 2) How does the Lord always have the last laugh when nations rise up against Israel?
- 3) How can God use wicked nations as instruments of His divine judgment?
- 4) What would have been the reaction of the exiles to such a prophetic word of judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: The chapter may be outlined as follows:

1. Date and introduction (vv. 1–2)
2. Tyre to be conquered by many nations (vv. 3–6)
3. The destruction to be wrought by the Babylonians (vv. 7–14)
4. Lament over Tyre’s great fall (vv. 15–18)
5. Tyre in the pit of hell (vv. 19–21)

Daniel Block: It is obvious from **Ezek. 26–28** that the exilic prophet had a special interest in Tyre. He devotes more time to this city-state than to any of the nations addressed in **ch. 25**; further, he has more to say concerning Tyre than any other prophet. Is this a case of perverted patriotism? Is Ezekiel showing himself a true son of his people, rejoicing over Tyre’s doom with the same *schadenfreude* that the Tyrians had expressed over Jerusalem’s fall? Or does he fear the influence of Tyrian idolatry over his poor compatriots back home in Judah if Tyre should be successful in its anti-Babylonian adventures? Neither suggestion satisfies. The first clue to Ezekiel’s special fascination with Tyre is found in the oracle itself. The opening gleeful “*Aha!*” over the fall of Jerusalem (**26:2**) suggests that the Tyrians welcomed Judah’s demise as an opportunity to expand their own commercial interests. Jerusalem could serve Tyre as an important trade center on the route from Phoenicia to the Red Sea and the southern Arabian peninsula. But for Ezekiel the significance of Tyre in God’s scheme of things lay elsewhere. Like Jeremiah’s, this prophet’s underlying assumption was that Babylon had been appointed by Yahweh to fulfill a special role in the history of his people. Because Yahweh had selected Nebuchadnezzar as his agent of judgment upon Judah, an attempt by any nation to thwart Babylonian activity in the Levant was perceived as defiance against the irrevocable divine decree. When Jerusalem finally fell in 586, the only states that were still resisting the Babylonians were Egypt and Tyre. It is not coincidental, therefore, that of the foreign nations addressed by Ezekiel, these two are singled out for the brunt of his oracular volleys.

Peter Pett: Oracles against Tyre continue throughout the next three chapters in some detail. Tyre seems to have exalted itself to godlike status, its kings making huge claims, and it exulted in the destruction of Jerusalem because Jerusalem was a trade rival. It was indeed so strong that it took Nebuchadnezzar the next thirteen years to subdue it. But it had to recognise that it had no hope. It was under the sentence of Yahweh.

Tyre was a famous seaport divided into island and mainland harbours, and protected by mountains. Its merchant seamen roved widely throughout the ancient world, and it was renowned for its glassware and dyed materials. The island and mainland were connected by a causeway built by Hiram I in the tenth century BC, and the island provided a perfect and strong refuge in times of invasion. It was mentioned in the Amarna letters, at times maintained close relations with Israel and Judah, and was very prosperous. It was, however, regularly subjugated by the Assyrians, who captured the mainland city, and as a wealthy seaport it had had to pay high tribute. It was about a hundred miles from Jerusalem, a journey of a few days by camel. No worthwhile empire was going to leave it alone for long. It was a source of great riches, famed for its imports and exports in a world where sea-going was seen as exceptional.

The oracles can be divided into five, the oracle of her destruction (**Ezekiel 26:1-21**), an oracle likening her to a foundering sea-vessel (**Ezekiel 27:1-36**), an oracle about the self-exaltation and downfall of her king as '*nagid*' (prince) (**Ezekiel 28:1-10**), a lament over the fate of the king of Tyre (**Ezekiel 28:11-19**), and an oracle against Sidon (**Ezekiel 28:20-26**). The number of the oracles and their content reveal the important position that Tyre held in the ancient Near Eastern world, and the status that she accorded herself.

Leslie Allen: **Chap. 26** follows the agenda of the previous chapter. It functions as a response to shattered nerves, to people who cry out in poignant despair and raise impotent fists against cruel taunts. The prophet brings Yahweh's response to the sobs of the exiles, coming to them where they are and ministering to their immediate needs. As the laments of the Psalms abundantly testify, God takes into account each stage of human disorientation, even the feelings of angry frustration, ignoble as they may seem to the detached observer. The stops and starts of these oracles and their evident linking in a redactional chain illustrate how often the prophet had to revert to the one theme with repeated assurance to hearts that needed to hear it over again. Only as Ezekiel's readers appreciate the emotion-ridden setting of these oracles, can they put into focus their vehemence as that of a pastoral message of comfort.

Yahweh did not retract the necessity of Jerusalem's fall, but it was a private matter between him and his people. If others reacted thereto, a seemly response was in terms of uneasy awe (cf. **vv 15-18**). There was no place for the raucous triumphalism that brought agony to the exiles' raw and sensitive spirits, adding insult to injury and exposing them to utter loss of face. Yahweh's retaliatory threat rings out from different perspectives. Divine self-revelation (**vv 1-6**) and divine activity (**vv 19-21**) would bring reprisal, using human means to bring it about (**vv 7-14**) and getting human voices to testify in awe to its implementation (**vv 15-18**). The God who has chosen what is weak in the world also shames the strong by evidence of his power, so that no human being may boast in his presence (**1 Cor 1:27-29**).

David Thompson: We come now to one of the most amazing predictions that Ezekiel ever made. This is one of the most remarkable predictions in the entire Bible. In fact,

this prediction was fulfilled so accurately that people to this day still marvel.

The primary point of this prophecy is this:

GOD DIRECTS EZEKIEL TO GIVE A SPECIFIC JUDGMENT PREDICTION CONCERNING THE COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF TYRE.

You will notice from **verse 1** that this prophecy is dated. It was given in the eleventh year on the first of the month. The eleventh year was 587-586 B.C. and it was in the spring. This would date this very close to the actual time that Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Now let's set the **historical context** for this.

- 1) Ezekiel is living and writing at a time when the Jewish people were in captivity to the Babylonians.
- 2) One of the most impressive cities in the world that was non-Jewish was the city of Tyre.

In fact, Tyre was the most powerful and successful city-state in the Mediterranean world. It was located north of Israel on the Mediterranean coast. This is important to realize.

Tyre was like New York on the Atlantic coast. It was a big time city on the Mediterranean coast. **Dr. Ironside** said it was "renowned as a city of pleasure lovers who lived in independence of God" (*Ezekiel*, p. 175).

According to **verse 2**, what happened was Tyre started laughing and mocking at the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed and had fallen. Tyre was probably the most impressive Gentile city in existence at the time. . .

Now let's track what historically happened to Tyre. **Dr. C. I. Scofield** said, "The fate predicted for Tyre is unique and has been remarkably fulfilled" (*Scofield Reference Bible*, NASV, p. 1138). We want to break this down into six prophetic fulfillments:

(Prophetic Fulfillment #1) In 573 B.C., approximately 2-3 years after the prediction was made by Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar began a 13 year assault on Tyre. He broke down the gates of Tyre, only to find the majority of people gone. The people, sensing trouble, in part due to Ezekiel's prediction, had relocated and moved to an island in the Mediterranean, about a half mile from shore. They reconstructed a new city on the island which would stand for many more years. Nebuchadnezzar's attack of Tyre started a couple of years after Ezekiel made the prediction, but it was not until 573 B.C. that he destroyed the mainland city. There is an ancient Babylonian tablet that does indicate that Nebuchadnezzar himself did have a presence in Tyre during its siege (**Moshe Greenberg**, *Ezekiel 21-37*, p. 532).

(Prophetic Fulfillment #2) In 332 B.C., approximately 241 years later, Alexander the Great decided to conquer the new reconstructed city of Tyre that was on the island. His

logistical problem was that the new Tyre was a mighty “Alcatraz-like fortress” located out in the sea. It had huge walls surrounding the island. Alexander was a brilliant military strategist, who decided to scrape all of the ruins of old Tyre into the sea and use the ruins as a means of constructing a bridge out to the new Tyre. In the process of constructing this bridge, he literally scraped the old Tyre bare and the stones and the timber and the debris was thrown into the water (**26:12**). Alexander ended up conquering the already ravaged new city of Tyre.

(Prophetic Fulfillment #3) In 314 B.C., approximately 260 years later, Antigonus, one of the successors of Alexander the Great, in his continued efforts to control the Eastern provinces launched another successful military attack against the already ravaged new city of Tyre.

(Prophetic Fulfillment #4) In 690 A.D., approximately 1000 years later, the island of Tyre was taken over by Muslim Arabs. It remained in their control until it was conquered and destroyed by the Mamelukes in A.D. 1291. According to **Ezekiel 26:3-5**, God said He would cause “*many nations*” to attack in one wave after another, which He literally did.

(Prophetic Fulfillment #5) Today, the island, once known as Tyre, is nothing more than a bare rock sitting in the Mediterranean Sea. It is primarily used by fishermen as a place to dry their fishing nets, which is exactly what is predicted in **Ezekiel 26:5**. **Dr. Ironside** said, “So literally has this prophecy been fulfilled that even at this very day the rocky island on which Tyre once stood is not in exactly the same condition as foretold here. It is still a place for the spreading of the nets of fishermen...” (*Ezekiel*, p. 176).

(Prophetic Fulfillment #6) The old city of Tyre has never been found nor rebuilt. This was clearly predicted in **Ezekiel 26:14, 21**. The remains of ancient Sidon (Tyre’s sister city) have been discovered and a flourishing city stands on the old site, but “the remains of ancient Tyre” have never been found and much of it is in the sea “under Alexander’s causeway” (**C. I. Scofield**, *Ibid.*, p. 1138).

Every one of Ezekiel’s prophecies came true literally just exactly as he predicted. As **A. C. Gaebelein** said, “History confirms all that is written here” (*Ezekiel*, p. 171). Now how could a man come up with such amazing predictions against one of the most successful cities in the world? The only possible answer is this prediction is from God. God not only knows everything past and present. He not only knows the future; He controls the future. He controls everything.

Now why did all of these bad things happened to Tyre? The reason is because she mocked Israel. She mocked Jerusalem. When you mock Israel and mock Jerusalem, you mock God.

TEXT: Ezekiel 27:1-36

TITLE: THE SHIPWRECK OF TYRE – PRECURSOR TO THE TITANIC

BIG IDEA:

BOASTING IN PROSPERITY AND PROMINENCE BRINGS GOD'S DEVASTATING JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Tyre was the economic hub for worldwide commerce. She boasted in her vast wealth and influence. Here she is pictured as a magnificent vessel constructed from the most impressive materials, manned by an expert crew, protected by powerful mercenaries, laden down with a wide array of valuable merchandise as she trades with the most powerful nations of her day. Yet her false security and arrogant trust in her own invincibility cannot protect her from the reach of the arm of God's devastating judgment. Broken apart by the waves of divine wrath, all of her glory perishes before grieving onlookers who await a similar fate for their rejection of God's sovereign rule.

Peter Pett: In this oracle Tyre, who is seen as describing herself as '*perfect in beauty*', is likened to a mighty ship which being overloaded will finally become a wreck and will sink beneath the waves at which all will bewail her loss. It is in the form of a poem, with a prose section inserted. The poetic metre is found in **Ezekiel 27:3-9** and **Ezekiel 27:25-36**. In the previous oracle it was her **greed** that was condemned, here it is her **vanity**. Tyre had great pride and conceit in herself, and this was a further reason for her judgment by God (compare **Psalms 10:4**; **Proverbs 6:17**; **Proverbs 8:13**; **Proverbs 16:18**).

Galen Doughty: This lament is mostly a description of Tyre's trade with the many nations of the Mediterranean basin and the vast amount of goods and products that came through her because of her trade. This is similar in tone to John's lament against Babylon-Rome in **Revelation 18**. Ezekiel gives us historical insight into the scope of the trade of Tyre and the geography of the ancient Biblical world in the early part of the 6th century B.C. . .

This lament of Ezekiel's needs to be seen as an eschatological lament, expressing God's final judgment upon Tyre. Historically Tyre was attacked by Babylon and finally surrendered but was not destroyed. Alexander sacked the city two centuries later but it was rebuilt under the Seleucids. By Roman times Tyre was once again a busy seaport, so in biblical times it was never completely destroyed like Babylon was.

Feinberg: The record of Tyre has a peculiar relevance for our day, for those areas in which she excelled and was the envy of the entire ancient world are precisely the fields in which every modern nation seeks superiority. But Tyre has a message for our age, and it is that riches without God are unable to satisfy the heart of man and often keep

many from dependence upon God. Has not this spirit invaded the church, and does it not pervade the lives of too many Christians?

Derek Thomas: This section highlights the danger of pride and the sense of invulnerability that comes with it. Tyre boasted: *'I am perfect in beauty'* (27:3). This is the claim of conceit and arrogance. Scripture warns that it was pride that led to the downfall of both Uzziah and Hezekiah (2 Chron. 26:16; 32:26). It is pride that prevents sinners from seeking after God (Ps. 10:4). God says of it, *'I hate pride'* (Prov. 8:13). It is the precursor to destruction (Prov. 16:18), as the next section of this chapter relates.

(:1-3a) PROLOGUE

"Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

"And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre; 3 and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, 'Thus says the Lord God,'"

Daniel Block: Tyre is portrayed as the ruler of the seas, occupying the entrances of the seas. In this context the verb yasab, which normally means 'to sit, dwell,' speaks of occupying with authority, that is, ruling.

Leslie Allen: The importance of the introduction is that it gives a divine orientation to the fall of the great city-state of Tyre. This was to be no mere human phenomenon whose repercussions would ripple through the consciousness of Tyre's neighbors and partners. The fate of Tyre was divinely ordained. The lament form essentially looks back to past glory from the perspective of present disaster. Here the usage is typically prophetic, serving the function of a prophetic announcement of doom by speaking as if that doom had already occurred. Tyre's present position of affluence as supplier of goods to the world around (v 3a), secure as it seemed, was destined not to last. Tyre had two harbors, a natural one on the north side of the island and an artificial one on the south (Katzenstein, History 11, 14, 154). From them its merchant ships traveled the Mediterranean.

I. (:3b-7) BUILDING AND BEAUTIFYING THE SHIP – ITS CONSTRUCTION

A. (:3b-4) Arrogance of Magnificence and Worldwide Impact

1. (:3b) Basking in Her Beauty

"O Tyre, you have said, 'I am perfect in beauty.'"

Constable: The Lord instructed Ezekiel to write a lamentation over Tyre, though presently it was renowned for its seafaring and commercial leadership in the world. Tyre's neighboring kings sang the first dirge over Tyre's demise (26:15-18), but Ezekiel was to utter the one in this chapter. The destruction of sinners always moves the heart of God, and it should also move the hearts of His spokespeople.

Tyre had taken great pride and conceit in itself, and this was another cause of its judgment by God (cf. **26:2**; **Ps. 10:4**; **Prov. 6:17**; **8:13**; **16:18**). Like Jerusalem, it considered itself perfect in beauty (**Lam. 2:15**; cf. **Ezek. 28:1-17**; **Rev. 3:17**).

2. (:4a) Boasting of Her Vast Influence

“Your borders are in the heart of the seas;”

David Thompson: Her borders were the seas. In other words, she did business all over the world. **Moshe Greenberg** said, “Tyre serves as middleman for the world, transferring products to and from the most distant ports” (*Ezekiel 21-37*, p. 548). There is no question that various places of the world depended on Tyre for their survival and success. This is the problem, the nations of the world depended on Tyre and not God.

3. (:4b) Basking in Her Beauty

“Your builders have perfected your beauty.”

Constable: Ezekiel described Tyre as a large, beautiful merchant ship. He used this figure to portray Tyre's pride and her prominence and dominance as a maritime power.

David Guzik: Prosperous and glistening on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Tyre was a proud city. They saw themselves as a city without limits (*your borders are in the midst of the seas*) and full of beauty (*your builders have perfected your beauty*).

B. (:5-7) Assembled from the Finest Materials

1. (:5a) Her Planks

“They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir;”

2. (:5b) Her Mast

“They have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.”

3. (:6a) Her Oars

“Of oaks from Bashan they have made your oars;”

4. (:6b) Her Deck

“With ivory they have inlaid your deck of boxwood from the coastlands of Cyprus.”

Daniel Block: Her **sail** was like a flag. Fundamentally, *nes* denotes a standard or flag raised on a hill around which marshaled troops would rally. Accordingly, this sail served as a symbol of Tyrian self-assurance and pride. Wherever the ship traveled observers would recognize her and marvel at her beauty.

5. (:7a) Her Sail

“Your sail was of fine embroidered linen from Egypt so that it became your distinguishing mark;”

6. (:7b) Her Awning

“Your awning was blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah.”

Constable: The wood ("planks") was "fir" (probably pine or cypress) from the Mount Hermon region, and the mast was a strong cedar from Lebanon. Likewise her "oars" were of the best strong "oaks from Bashan," and her "decks of boxwood (or cypress) from ... Cyprus" contained beautifully "inlaid ... ivory." Her "embroidered ... linen sail" had come "from Egypt," which was famous for its linen products (**Gen. 41:42; Prov. 7:16**), and it had become Tyre's distinguishing flag or banner.

The "awning" over the deck, or possibly the deck itself, was an attractive combination of "violet (or blue)" and "purple" colors, and it came from "Elishah" (Italy, Sicily, Carthage, Cyprus, and Syria all being possibilities). In other words, Tyre's development as a city-state came through obtaining the finest materials of her day by trading with the producers of those materials.

II. (:8-11) MANNING THE SHIP – ITS CREW

A. (:8) Rowers and Pilots

1. Rowers

“The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers;”

Charles Dyer: The earliest Phoenician ships each had 50 oarsmen and were quite fast. The later commercial ships were much longer and had a crew of up to 200 with two or three banks of oars on each side.

Wright: All Phoenician coastal cities mentioned here.

2. Pilots

“Your wise men, O Tyre, were aboard; they were your pilots.”

B. (:9) Mechanics and Traders

1. Mechanics

“The elders of Gebal and her wise men were with you repairing your seams;”

Clarke: Those who repaired their vessels; *paying*, as it is termed, pitched hemp into the seams, to prevent the water from oozing through.

Galen Doughty: Veteran craftsmen from Gebal or Byblos were on board, shipwrights and carpenters who caulked the seams of the ship and kept her seaworthy.

2. Traders

“All the ships of the sea and their sailors were with you in order to deal in your merchandise.”

John Taylor: The description of every lavish detail of the trading vessel that represents the city of Tyre is expressed as an elaboration of Tyre's opinion of her own matchlessness: *'I am perfect in beauty'* (3).

C. (:10-11) Mercenaries as the Protective Force

1. (:10) From Persia, Lud and Put

*"Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war.
They hung shield and helmet in you;
they set forth your splendor."*

2. (:11) Sons of Arvad and the Gammadim

*"The sons of Arvad and your army were on your walls, all around, and
the Gammadim were in your towers.
They hung their shields on your walls, all around;
they perfected your beauty."*

Galen Doughty: Many nations used mercenaries in ancient times when they did not have the population to field a large standing army. Ezekiel says Tyre used this practice to defend the city. Tyre was rich enough it could hire the best soldiers from the nations around it. Ezekiel's picture is of a fabulously wealthy and beautiful city whose influence was felt by many nations from the eastern Mediterranean coast all across the Great Sea.

Daniel Block: In addition to the crew, on board the ship Tyre was a contingent of mercenary military personnel, referred to as *hêlêk*, "your army," and more closely defined as *'anšê milhamtêk*, "your men of war." Their presence on board the merchant ship probably reflects Tyre's current war with Nebuchadnezzar, and the heightened need to protect her precious cargo from marauding pirates.

III. (:12-25) WORLDWIDE TRADING PARTNERS FOR THE SHIP – ITS CARGO OF MERCHANDISE

A. (:12-15) Trading with Mediterranean Areas and Asia Minor

*"Tarshish was your customer because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth;
with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they paid for your wares. 13 "Javan, Tubal, and
Meshech, they were your traders; with the lives of men and vessels of bronze
they paid for your merchandise. 14 "Those from Beth-togarmah gave horses and
war horses and mules for your wares. 15 "The sons of Dedan were your traders.
Many coastlands were your market; ivory tusks and ebony they brought as your
payment."*

Leslie Allen: Between the description of the ship's construction and crew and the reference to its setting sail fully laden in **v 25b** has been inserted a bridging account of its cargo. For this purpose an extant commercial catalog of trading commodities and their sources has evidently been used. It has been written up into a prose account of Tyre's trade relations with other parts of the world. In this context it functions virtually

as a cargo list, although strictly the trading city of Tyre is in view rather than the metaphorical ship.

B. (:16-17) Trading with Palestinian Regions from South to North

“Aram was your customer because of the abundance of your goods; they paid for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and rubies. 17 "Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traders; with the wheat of Minnith, cakes, honey, oil, and balm they paid for your merchandise.”

C. (:18-19) Trading with Syria

“Damascus was your customer because of the abundance of your goods, because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth, because of the wine of Helbon and white wool. 19 "Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal; wrought iron, cassia, and sweet cane were among your merchandise.”

D. (:20-22) Trading with Arabia

“Dedan traded with you in saddlecloths for riding. 21 "Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were your customers for lambs, rams, and goats; for these they were your customers. 22 "The traders of Sheba and Raamah, they traded with you; they paid for your wares with the best of all kinds of spices, and with all kinds of precious stones, and gold.”

E. (:23-24) Trading with Mesopotamia

“Haran, Canneh, Eden, the traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad traded with you. 24 "They traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of many colors, and tightly wound cords, which were among your merchandise.”

Peter Pett: The list ends with a miscellany of places and products. It could have gone on and on. Haran was on the main route from Nineveh to Aleppo, and after the fall of Nineveh became the capital of Assyria until taken by the Babylonians. Canneh was in Mesopotamia, probably in the area of the middle Euphrates. Eden may be connected with Beth-Eden - see **Amos 1:5** - and Bene-Eden, ‘*sons of Eden*’ - **2 Kings 19:12**; **Isaiah 37:12**, which were probably the Aramean state of Bit-Adini, south of Haran. Or it may be related to Hindanu (‘Iddan) on the middle Euphrates. Sheba was in eastern Arabia, but ‘*the traders of Sheba*’ may hint at a well-known trading station in Mesopotamia. Asshur (Assyria) was in Mesopotamia, and Chilmad unknown. They exchanged garments, carpets, and finely crafted clothing materials.

Douglas Stuart: The particular materials mentioned as being traded were characteristic of their respective geographical areas as far as we know, but hardly limited to them. Thus it would be incorrect to assume, for example, that the products mentioned in connection with Israel and Judah in **verse 17** are the only ones, or even the dominant ones, that were exported in Old Testament times. The point is rather that through Tyre moved the varied, splendid products of dozens of nations, so that it was an economic crossroads of unparalleled prestige.

Iain Duguid: Nor was her beauty merely cosmetic. The merchant ship Tyre is depicted as a highly efficient business machine, trading in all kinds of costly goods. The seemingly interminable list of her trading partners, whether borrowed from an extant source or modeled after that form, makes clear the astonishing array of her wares. The cargo list seems to be organized by geographic areas, starting with Mediterranean locations and those in Asia Minor (27:12–15) and moving on through Palestinian regions from south to north (27:16–17) to Syria (27:18–19), Arabia (27:20–22), and finally Mesopotamia (27:23–24). [Zimmerli] By covering all points of the compass and virtually every imaginable precious commodity, the picture is established of Tyre as the commercial crossroads of the world, the Hong Kong of the ancient Near East.

F. (:25) Summary

*“The ships of Tarshish were the carriers for your merchandise.
And you were filled and were very glorious in the heart of the seas.”*

Peter Pett: Instead of camels, the ‘ships of the desert’, Tyre used seagoing ships for carrying their merchandise.

David Thompson: Tyre was doing business worldwide. She had control of the world. The world loved her and did business with her. It was the biggest and best and most successful city in the world.

David Guzik: The impressive list of peoples, places, trading, and merchandise shows what an economic powerhouse Tyre was. The absence of any mention of God shows that they cared only for business, with no regard to God their creator and redeemer.

Galen Doughty: This whole section paints a picture of the vast network of trade that Tyre oversaw. She was not a military power instead her influence was through the goods and services that she exchanged with nations and peoples from the western Mediterranean like Tarshish to the spice caravans from southern Arabia. Her power was not in her armies but in her markets. Tyre also had power in her navy and trading vessels. Empires like Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander coveted Tyre in order to control her trade. Conquering empires like the Babylonians often used conquest to gain wealth and treasure. Tyre used her ships and markets to amass wealth through trade. The problem was if you destroyed Tyre one would severely impact the economies of the eastern Mediterranean and even all the way into Mesopotamia and diminish the long term opportunity for wealth through trade. Ezekiel recognizes Tyre's value to the nations all over the Middle East, including Israel and Judah.

IV. (:26-36) SINKING THE SHIP – ITS CATASTROPHE

A. (:26-27) Reversal of Fortunes

1. (:26) Destruction of Her Invincibility

*“Your rowers have brought you into great waters;
The east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas.”*

Daniel Block: For all her fiscal accomplishments, Tyre had dared to oppose Babylon, and in so doing had taken her stand against Yahweh and his inexorable purposes for the nations. Inasmuch as this dirge is presented as the very oracle of God, his silence is more apparent than real. His hand may be hidden, but it is present in the east wind that blows upon that ship. Indeed, the east wind is his breath, blowing on the high and mighty, reducing them to nothing (cf. **Isa. 40:24**). In her apparent invincibility, Tyre represented the glory of human achievement. Because her successes were driven by avarice and pursued in defiance of God, however, she could not stand. The Lord of history always has the last word.

David Thompson: - God will cause their rowers to bring them into deep, destructive waters

2. (:27) Drowning of Her Glory

*“Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise,
Your sailors, and your pilots, Your repairers of seams,
your dealers in merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you,
With all your company that is in your midst,
Will fall into the heart of the seas on the day of your overthrow.”*

Constable: This great ship (commercial empire) was headed for shipwreck.

John Taylor: In the very place where Tyre was thought to be supreme, in the midst of the seas (cf. verse 4), she was overtaken by disaster. The powerful east wind (cf. **Ps. 48:7**) broke her up and she foundered, taking with her all her crew and her armies and her merchandise (is it significant that this comes first in the list?). The countryside (**28**, rsv; lit. the ‘*open spaces*’; av suburbs), which had supplied many of those on board, will be shattered at the sound of the sailors crying for help and all the shipping world gathers to lament the loss of such a stately craft. For the signs of mourning in **verses 30, 31**, see **7:17f**.

B. (:28-32) Reaction from Onlookers

1. (:28-31) Bitter Mourning

“At the sound of the cry of your pilots the pasture lands will shake. 29 and all who handle the oar, the sailors, and all the pilots of the sea will come down from their ships; They will stand on the land, 30 and they will make their voice heard over you and will cry bitterly. They will cast dust on their heads, they will wallow in ashes. 31 Also they will make themselves bald for you and gird themselves with sackcloth; And they will weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning.”

2. (:32) Shocked Lamentation

“Moreover, in their wailing they will take up a lamentation for you And lament over you: ‘Who is like Tyre, Like her who is silent in the midst of the sea?’”

Constable: They would lament the demise of this great commercial empire regarding it as the mightiest power of its kind on the earth. Thus we have a lamentation within a lamentation (cf. v. 2). Tyre had satisfied the materialistic desires of many nations and kings. These onlookers would wail because Tyre's "ship" had sunk.

C. (:33-36) Repercussions of Her Demise

1. (:33-34) Bankrupt of Wealth and Impact

a. (:33) Former Prosperity and Economic Impact

*“When your wares went out from the seas,
You satisfied many peoples;
With the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise
You enriched the kings of earth.”*

b. (:34) Fallen into Oblivion

*“Now that you are broken by the seas in the depths of the waters,
Your merchandise and all your company
Have fallen in the midst of you.”*

Peter Pett: Now the poem contrasts what they accomplished with what they have come to. They went out over the seas and satisfied the world with their merchandise and their trading riches, but now they have been broken up by those seas, and all their wealth is engulfed by the sea, along with their ship's company. Triumph has turned into disaster because she exalted herself, and challenged Yahweh.

2. (:35-36) Boasting Transformed into Derision

a. (:35-36a) Trading Partners Terrified and Hissing

*“All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you,
And their kings are horribly afraid;
They are troubled in countenance.
The merchants among the peoples hiss at you;”*

Wiersbe: Tyre's agents, brokers, traders, and customers will feel the repercussions of the sinking of the ship. People will stand on the shore and lament the end of the vast, mercantile system that gave them jobs, income, and security. Some of the merchants will “whistle” or “hiss” when they hear the news (27:36), probably as a shocked response to the tragedy. However, the word can mean “to hiss in scorn or derision,” suggesting that some of the leaders in the business network are happy to see Tyre fall. They cooperated in the system because they had to, but now perhaps they would have opportunity to build their own network and make a greater profit. This great lamentation is an advance demonstration of what the whole world will do when Satan's system, “Babylon the great,” collapses before the Lord returns to establish His kingdom (Rev. 18:17-19).

b. (:36b) Tyre Terrified and Wiped Out

“You have become terrified, and you will be no more.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you apply the lesson of “*Pride goes before a fall*” to your own life?
- 2) What does it look like to **live for eternity** instead of putting your confidence in worldly wealth and influence?
- 3) How does this passage inform your **value system**?
- 4) How vulnerable are nations when they assert their own sovereignty and independence from the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: The chapter may be outlined as follows:

1. Command to Ezekiel to lament Tyre (vv. 1–3a)
2. Poetic description of ship and crew (vv. 3b–11)
3. Prose geography of trading destinations (vv. 12–24)
4. Poetic description of shipwreck and mourning (vv. 25–36)

What is the point of such a long poem in the Bible? Certainly it is not to teach us principles about how to lament, or how to identify the factors that contribute to the rise and fall of trading nations, or the like. No, the point is really profoundly simple: God controls the destinies of the world’s nations. Because this is so, people of true faith everywhere in all ages have been able to endure the hardships of war and conquest, economic misery and political oppression, and other national trials and disasters, knowing that what nations choose to do is not what determines human destiny. No matter how evil one nation may be to another or to its own citizens, God will ultimately destroy those earthly states hostile to Him and will re deem His people into a heavenly kingdom. This basic confidence in the Lord’s sovereignty over human history is the common denominator of many biblical passages, and so important, if simple, a truth that it must never be taken lightly. Without this confidence, world events can easily be misinterpreted to imply the absence or weakness of God, and the hopelessness of those who trust in Him. Just the opposite is, fortunately, the case.

Peter Pett: Tyrian ships had keels (unlike Egyptian ships) and carried large cargoes. A document from Ugarit (c 1200 BC) refers to one as having a cargo of 450 tonnes as though it was nothing unusual. It would thus have to depend largely on sail power with oars only used for a fairly short time in emergency situations. As regards rigging, the Tyrian ships in the time of Ezekiel, as seen in Assyrian representations, had one mast

with one yard and carried a square sail. The planks, masts and yards were made of fir, pine or cedar, and the sails of linen, but the fibre of papyrus was employed as well as flax in the manufacture of sail-cloth. The sail had also to serve "for an ensign". The flag proper does not seem to have been used in ancient navigation. Its purpose was served by the sail.

Leslie Allen: **Chap. 27** is a brilliant exercise in communication. Tyre, queen of the sea with her merchant and naval fleets, and center of an advanced economic, political and artistic culture, was obviously there to stay. Its fall to the Babylonians was unthinkable. Ezekiel challenges this assumption by recourse to a type of lateral thinking, the use of analogy, in this case a metaphor. Metaphor can function as a pedagogical tool, as when the scientific educator describes the atom as a miniature solar system. It "can provide a rational bridge from the known to the radically unknown, to a changed context of understanding" by providing a new framework of reference (**G. Petrie**, *Metaphor and Thought* 440–441). By speaking of one thing in terms of another new horizons may be opened up. A "strong metaphor ... suggests new categories of interpretation and hypothesizes new entities, states of affairs and causal relations" (**Soskice**, *Metaphor and Religious Language* 62). The initial material about the construction and crew of this magnificent ship is meant to prepare for the real point: Tyre is the Titanic, doomed to shipwreck. The poem's sudden switch to the motif of shipwreck in **vv 25b–26** is eloquent evidence of this intent. The ship metaphor superimposes the powerful negative notion of shipwreck, especially for those like Ezekiel's audience who were landlubbers, having little to do with the sea. A new, emotive factor is introduced, which is able to dislodge the powerful positive images that Tyre suggested. From this perspective its glory only makes its fall heavier and more ignominious. A sense of doom is reinforced by clothing the poem in the form of a funeral lament. . .

Yahweh's purposes on earth were to be worked out inexorably, and not even Tyre could stand in his way. In opposing Babylon, Tyre stood against Yahweh, and so could not stand. With the certainty of prophetic revelation, the dirge form proclaims its inevitable doom. How are the mighty fallen! Inspired by this chapter, **John the Seer** was later to proclaim the fall of Rome, "*who is seated upon many waters*" (**Rev 17:1**), and the sure demise of its commerce-based empire. Human power, invincible as it seems in any given culture, meets its match in the Lord of history.

Daniel Block: hubris carries within itself the seeds of one's own destruction. This parable is one of the most imaginative of Ezekiel's extended metaphors. Its effectiveness derives not only from the propriety of the figure but especially from the ironies in the story. The sea, the source of Tyre's power and protection, turns its back on her and becomes Yahweh's agent of doom. For Ezekiel Tyre is the supreme illustration that "*pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*" (**Prov. 16:18**). However, this oracle is not intended only as a warning for the city, once so proud. The emphasis on eyewitnesses and the detailed description of their responses highlights the paradigmatic value of her experience. Let all the high and mighty of this world beware, lest they share the fate of Tyre.

David Thompson: We are in one of the most amazing sections in Ezekiel. Tyre was the most magnificent merchant city of the world when Ezekiel was on earth. She was a prosperous city; she was a beautiful city and she was a loved city. She was proud and God says you are going down; in fact, you are nothing more than a “sinking ship.”

This is the truth about any nation, state, city or individual. If someone becomes proud and does not humble himself before God, God will eventually break it and sink it and destroy it. That is a key lesson to learn from Tyre.

NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL OR PROSPEROUS SOMETHING IS IN THIS WORLD, ONE WHO PROUDLY TRUSTS IN SELF AND NOT THE LORD WILL EVENTUALLY BE TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY DESTROYED. . .

Now Tyre was the biggest and best city in the world. It was the ultimate place of worldliness and satanic activity. In fact, **verse 3** says it was the “*merchant of the peoples to many coastlands.*” Tyre was the best the world had to offer. It was prosperous and proud. It did not trust in God; it trusted in self.

TEXT: Ezekiel 28:1-26

TITLE: *PROUD KING OF TYRE STRUCK DOWN (ALONG WITH SIDON)*

BIG IDEA:

GOD STRIKES DOWN ARROGANT POLITICAL LEADERS (MOTIVATED BY SATAN) WHO BOAST IN THEIR WEALTH AND GLORY WHILE RESTORING ISRAEL TO A SECURE FUTURE IN THE PROMISED LAND

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter concludes the judgment prophecy against Tyre by focusing on her proud king while adding corresponding judgment to her sister city Sidon. While the prophet is describing the historical realities that will befall these pagan leaders, he also has in view the activity of Satan which motivates their opposition to God's kingdom agenda. These purging judgments of the enemies of Israel who mock God's Word pave the way for the eventual restoration of God's people. Israel will dwell securely in the Promised Land.

Keil: As the city of Tyre was first of all threatened with destruction (**ch. xxvi.**), and then her fall was confirmed by a lamentation (**ch. xxvii.**), so here the prince of Tyre is first of all forewarned of his approaching death (**vers. 1-10**), and then a lamentation is composed thereon (**vers. 11-19**).

Anton Pearson: From the city, the prophet passes to its ruler, as a representative of the genius of the community, the embodiment of the spirit of the proud commercial city. King and people constitute a corporate solidarity, the pride and self-deification of which are doomed.

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel's necessary task was to counter a mood of optimism among the Jewish exiles. Stunned as they were at Jerusalem's fall, they were evidently clutching at a straw offered to them by their fellow exiles from Tyre. With a shift of confidence, they imagined that Tyre's resistance to the besieging Babylonians might mean a turning of the tide for them. The prophet reacts to this chauvinist reading of current affairs with a divine no. Yahweh was working in a more radical way. The old order had to go completely before a new day of salvation and blessing could dawn. **Vv 2-10 and 12-19**, rhetorically addressed to one termed Tyre's ruler and king, respectively, are two striking attempts to communicate this political and theological truth.

MacArthur: This section [**vv. 1-19**] concerning the king of Tyre, is similar to **Is 14:3-23** referring to the king of Babylon. In both passages, some of the language best fits Satan. Most likely, both texts primarily describe the human king who is being used by Satan, much like Peter when Jesus said to him, "*Get behind Me, Satan!*" (**Mt 16:23**). The judgment can certainly apply to Satan also.

I. (:1-10) DOWNFALL OF TYRE'S PROUD KING

*"The word of the LORD came again to me saying,
'Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre,
Thus says the Lord God,"*

Constable: Ezekiel was to speak an oracle to the contemporary leader (Heb. *nagid*, prince, ruler, king) of Tyre in the Lord's name, probably King Ethbaal II (also known as Ittobaal II and Ithobalus II, ca. 590-573 B.C.). As usual in political affairs, the king often represents the kingdom he served, and even other kings that preceded him, who possessed the same characteristics that he did. In this case, a spirit of pride marked the king as well as his nation.

Peter Pett: This new oracle comes with a deliberate contrast between 'a prince' in contrast with a Sovereign Lord. The King of Tyre is to recognise that before the Lord Yahweh he is but a 'prince', a warleader subject to an overall commander, as the early 'princes' of Israel were to Yahweh. It is a deliberate downgrading of the king because of the king's own upgrading of himself.

A. (:2b-5) Puffed Up with Pride

1. (:2b) Puffed Up by Superior Ego

a. Boast = "I am a god"

*"Because your heart is lifted up And you have said,
'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, In the heart of the seas';"*

Feinberg: As probably nowhere else in Scripture, pride is set forth in this chapter as the destroying sin.

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel is simply highlighting Ittobaal's arrogance metaphorically by portraying him as one with far too high an opinion of himself, somewhat like saying, "Well, look who thinks he's God almighty!"

b. Reality = "You are a man"

*"Yet you are a man and not God,
Although you make your heart like the heart of God—"*

2. (:3) Puffed Up by Superior Wisdom

*"Behold, you are wiser than Daniel;
There is no secret that is a match for you."*

Peter Pett: he claimed to have supernatural knowledge, to a knowledge of all secrets greater than Daniel's, and that Ezekiel is deriding him for it, while agreeing that he has a certain kind of wisdom. There is wry sarcasm here, for had he been a knower of all secrets he would have known the secret of his own downfall.

Anton Pearson: This may be the Dan'el of the Ras Shamra tablets (cf. on **14:14, 20**); or the Biblical Daniel.

3. (:4-5) Puffed Up by Superior Wealth

*“By your wisdom and understanding
You have acquired riches for yourself,
And have acquired gold and silver for your treasuries.
By your great wisdom, by your trade
You have increased your riches,
And your heart is lifted up because of your riches—“*

Daniel Block: Significantly, God did not condemn the prince of Tyre for the possession of riches, but for how those riches corrupted him. Significantly, the prophet castigates him neither for his shrewdness nor for his amassed wealth. Neither brilliance nor riches is reprehensible; the problem arises in his response. The wisdom that had brought him his wealth led to hubris. It was this inordinate pride that provoked Yahweh’s ire.

B. (:6-10) Struck Down by Strangers

(:6a) Authoritative Word of God

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:6b-8) Triumph Turned to Tragedy –

Slain in the Heart of the Seas Where Once You Reigned in Glory

a. (:6b) Charge of Pride

“Because you have made your heart like the heart of God,”

b. (:7-8) Punishment

1) (:7) Lose Your Wisdom and Splendor

*“Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you,
The most ruthless of the nations. And they will draw their
swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your
splendor.”*

2) (:8) Lose Your Life

*“They will bring you down to the pit,
And you will die the death of those who are slain
In the heart of the seas.”*

Peter Pett: His whole attitude towards Yahweh and towards his own exalted status, and that of his city, was such that he had brought on himself his own punishment. He had set his heart to be one among the gods, so he and his people would be destroyed by men, by ‘strangers’, by the most terrible of the nations (Babylon - **Ezekiel 30:11; Ezekiel 31:12; Ezekiel 32:12**). He had claimed to be perfect in beauty, a beauty revealed in wisdom, as one who shone before the world, so this beauty will be destroyed by the swords of men, and this brightness defiled by men, and he will go down into the grave where all men go. He will die as so many of his seamen have died before him, swallowed up by the sea, which in his case is represented by the enemy

hosts. (Although many would no doubt be tossed into the harbour and literally be swallowed up by the sea). Such will be his ‘god-like’ end.

Leslie Allen: The place where Tyre ruled the waves in commercial power would become the place of its downfall. This ironic reversal would be the final proof of the falsity of present claims. The event would overtake Tyre and its ruler with an unanswerable counter argument. As to the reality of such a future event, Ezekiel pledges God’s own promise.

2. (:9-10a) Significance Transformed to Insignificance –
Ending up as a Nobody When You Thought You Were a Somebody

a. (:9) Crushing of Pride

*“Will you still say, ‘I am a god,’ In the presence of your slayer,
Although you are a man and not God,
In the hands of those who wound you?”*

b. (:10a) Punishment = Disgraceful Death

*“You will die the death of the uncircumcised
By the hand of strangers,”*

Keil: The whole of this threat applies, not to the one king, Ithobal, who was reigning at the time of the siege of Tyre by the Chaldeans, but to the king as the founder and creator of the might of Tyre (**vers. 3-5**), i.e. to the supporter of that royalty which was to perish along with Tyre itself. It is to the king, as the representative of the might and glory of Tyre, and not merely to the existing possessor of the regal dignity, that the following lamentation over his fall refers.

Anton Pearson: For the Phoenicians, who practiced circumcision (**Herodotus II. 104**), to die like the despised uncircumcised was a great shame (cf. **Ezk 31:18; 32:19, 21, 24ff.**).

(:10b) Authoritative Word of God

“For I have spoken!’ declares the Lord God!”

Douglas Stuart: Here we see portrayed, then, something that ancient people knew very well: the forcible death of a king. But it is not Tyre’s population that will bring this about. It is God. From all we can reconstruct, the people of Tyre loved their king. He was the centerpiece of Tyre’s policies, the leader of this most successful of city-states. He symbolized their own prestige in the world, and they identified their own values and expectations with his. We must therefore appreciate the fact that this prophecy against Tyre’s king is also a prophecy against the city of Tyre and its population corporately.

II. (:11-19) LAMENT OVER THE DOWNFALL OF TYRE’S KING = TYPE OF SATAN

*“Again the word of the LORD came to me saying,
‘Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre,*

and say to him, Thus says the Lord God,”

Peter Pett: ‘*Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me --.*’ The introduction demonstrates that this is a new oracle, in the form of a lamentation. . .

This oracle is in the form of a lamentation for the King of Tyre, with his great, exaggerated claims and his certain destruction. There are no good grounds for applying it to Satan except in the sense that extreme evil and arrogance stems from him. It rests on a ‘glorified’ view of Eden based on man’s own estimate of what is desirable, riches and wealth, and must probably be seen as illustrating the extravagant claims of the King of Tyre in connection with the primeval ‘garden’, as interwoven with the story of Eden to bring out that he was but human and had shared in the fall.

David Guzik: The idea of a prophet speaking to the spiritual ruler or authority *behind* an earthly ruler is also present in **Isaiah 14**, where the description of the King of Babylon seems to go beyond any earthly king and describes Satan himself (**Isaiah 14:12-14**). We also see this idea in **Daniel 10:10-20**, where the angel Michael described his battle with a spiritual opponent he called the *prince of Persia*.

Feinberg: As he viewed the thoughts and ways of that monarch, he clearly discerned behind him the motivating force and personality who was impelling him in his opposition to God. In short, he saw the work and activity of Satan, whom the king of Tyre was emulating in so many ways. . .

Although the ruler of Tyre deserved the punishment awaiting him, the prophet was commanded by God to take up a lamentation over him. Let it never be forgotten that God does not delight in judgment. It is His *strange work* (**Isa. 28:21**), whereas the work in which He delights is salvation and redemption.

Leslie Allen: Rather like the ship metaphor of chap. 27, it superimposes negative imagery of ruined grandeur on Tyre’s cultural success and self-confidence. Despite regrettable difficulties of interpretation in so many of its details, the general picture of Paradise lost shines through clearly. Tyre was not self-made, but as a created entity owed its prosperity and glory to divine endowment. Yet privilege had not been matched with moral responsibility. “*Violence*,” ever a besetting sin in the prophetic vocabulary, had accompanied its rise to power. The tragic truth was that Tyre’s wrongdoing contained the seeds of its own destruction, which Yahweh’s intervention would encourage to germinate and grow into a baneful harvest. Three times it is stressed that moral failure must result in loss of fortune and in subjection to a terrible fate. Moreover, there is a religious theme that seems to run through the oracle. The monarch in his role as priest-king is evidently accused of misrepresenting true religion, despite the strong religious basis of his rule.

Lamar Cooper: Numerous interpretations have been proposed for this passage, differing in the way the figurative language is construed and the source for the imagery. Some see the figures as simply **metaphorical**, describing the king of Tyre with various

images, stated in bold and exaggerated terms. Others identify the form as **allegory**, in which another real or simply familiar character (i.e., Satan or a pagan god) is directly addressed, making the connection to the king of Tyre more indirect or inferred. For the imagery some suppose a source in ancient Near Eastern ideology and myth, especially that which was known to be associated with Tyre. Others find the source in either a loose rendering of the Genesis creation account of the fall of humankind or in supposing alternative accounts of the fall known through tradition. A variant of this approach, favored by several of the church fathers, is to understand for the background of the lament an account of the fall of Satan not given in Scripture but alluded to elsewhere, especially in **Isa 14:12–17**. Ezekiel would have been relying on his listeners/readers' familiarity with such an account, and they would have understood the **comparison between the fall of Satan and the fall of the king of Tyre**. The difficulty of the text makes it unwise to insist upon a particular interpretation, but the latter traditional view appears to the present writer to account best for the language and logic of the passage.

A. (:12b-15) Lament over Squandered Potential

1. (:12b) Perfection of Wisdom and Beauty

“You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.”

Ralph Alexander: more literally, *“the one sealing a plan.”* As Tyre's king and mastermind of the city's commercial sea traffic, it is certainly easy to understand how he would be known as the one who established and approved the function of affixing a seal – a plan that enabled the city to become the maritime leader of its day.

2. (:13) Preference of Environment and Adornment

a. Preference of Environment

“You were in Eden, the garden of God;”

Ralph Alexander: Through comparison with the account of man's Fall in **Genesis 3**, this passage is understood to portray Satan as the one who was behind the actions, thoughts, and motives of the king of Tyre. This king was simply a tool of Satan, probably indwelt by Satan.

Peter Pett: The connection between this and the original Eden is found in the name, in the fact of the garden, in the presence of a cherub, in the fact of the king's being *‘created’*, and in his final fall and expulsion. The Israelites would recognise immediately that this whole scenario diminished him to being simply a created and fallen man.

Douglas Stuart: The lament God inspires Ezekiel to sing over the king of Tyre contains a series of metaphorical references to the story of the **Garden of Eden** and to the **mountain of God**. The king is compared to a guardian angel at the mountain and, in a way, to Adam himself in the garden. The comparisons are not exact, but imagistic—overtones and general allusions rather than straight one-for-one correspondences to the

garden story. The allusions to the mountain of God (e.g., vv. 14 , 16) reflect a poetic theme in the Old Testament in which the mountain represents God’s abode.

Central to the lament is the idea of a great fall from an idyllic existence. That, after all, is partly what the Garden of Eden story is all about. The lament contains the usual components: direct address to the dead, eulogy of the dead, a call to mourning, and an expression of the magnitude of the loss to the survivors.

Lamar Cooper: The statement “*you were in Eden, the garden of God*” (v. 13; cf. 31:8–9) must mean that the king of Tyre is being compared to someone who was in the garden of Eden. The verses describe someone in an exalted position who was favored by God but who became corrupt and lost that position. This could describe the first man, Adam. Yet even granting the figurative nature of language, it seems that **something more than a human creature is in view**. Perhaps Adam was a “*model of perfection,*” “*full of wisdom,*” and “*perfect in beauty*” (v. 12), but Scripture never describes him as such. Nor does it speak of him as adorned with “*every precious stone*” (v. 13). The difficulty, however, is that no one else is described in such terms either. Some suggest that adornment with precious stones is an allusion to the Jewish high priest (**Exod 28:17–20**), but such a confusion of images would hardly communicate a coherent message.

b. Preference of Adornment

*“Every precious stone was your covering:
The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond;
The beryl, the onyx, and the jasper;
The lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald;
And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
Was in you.
On the day that you were created They were prepared.”*

Peter Pett: The stones listed are nine (**three sets of three** indicate completeness and perfection), and were reminiscent of the high priest’s breastplate except that there were twelve stones (**Exodus 28:17-20**).

Charles Dyer: Ezekiel described the beauty and perfection of Satan as God originally created him (vv. 12-15a). He was the model of perfection, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. God did not create Satan as some prime minister of evil. As with all God’s Creation, Satan was a perfectly created being – one of the crowning achievements in God’s angelic realm.

3. (:14) Privilege of Function and Fellowship (Access to God’s Presence)

*“You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.”*

David Guzik: This tells us that Satan, before his fall, was one of the privileged angelic beings surrounding the throne of God (cherubim were seen before in **Ezekiel 1**). The cherubim surrounding God's throne cover it with their wings (pictured in the mercy seat of **Exodus 25:20** and **37:9**, the representation of God's throne). Satan was one of those covering cherubim.

Lamar Cooper: Especially significant is that the one addressed was “*anointed*” (v. 14) and “*ordained*” as “*a guardian cherub*” by the God who was speaking through Ezekiel (v. 14) and that he previously dwelt not on the earth (v. 17) but “*on the holy mount of God*” and “*walked among the fiery stones*” (v. 14). Such descriptions make it unlikely that a strictly human creature is in view.

Charles Dyer: The cherubim (pl. of cherub) were the “inner circle” of angels who had the closest access to God and guarded His holiness (cf. **10:1-14**). Satan also had free access to God's *holy mount* (**28:14**), heaven, and he *walked among the fiery stones* (cf. v. 16). . . Others have identified the “*fiery stones*” with God's fiery wall of protection (cf. **Zech. 2:5**). They see Satan dwelling inside or behind God's outer defenses in the “inner courts” of heaven itself. This view is possible, and the word translated “*among*” (*mitok*) can have the idea of “*between*” or “*inside*.” Whatever the exact identification, Ezekiel was stating that Satan had access to God's presence.

4. (:15) Perfection of Character and Morality

*“You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created,
Until unrighteousness was found in you.”*

B. (:16-18) Lament over Sinful Attitudes and Actions

1. (:16) Judged for Sinful Violence

a. Charge

*“By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;”*

b. Punishment

*“Therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.”*

2. (:17) Judged for Shameful Pride

a. Charge

*“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.”*

b. Punishment

*“I cast you to the ground;
I put you before kings, that they may see you.”*

Ralph Alexander: The sin of the king of Tyre was pride that arose from the splendor he achieved through his vast commercial traffic (**vv. 15-17**; cf. **vv. 2-5**). The king's obsession for material gain opened the city to all the evils prevalent amid those involved in commercial traffic. He became filled with violence (**v. 16**). His wisdom was dulled by the glitter of wealth and splendor. He became proud (**v. 17**). He also profaned his sanctuaries, a reference most likely to the idolatries practiced in the temple of Melkart (**v. 18**).

3. (:18) Judged for Shady Business Practices

a. Charge

“By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries.”

Anton Pearson: The king desecrated the temples which made Tyre a holy island, bringing about their destruction through his own sin. He fell below the standard of the truth his religion had preserved for him.

b. Punishment

*“Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you;
It has consumed you,
And I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you.”*

Leslie Allen: **Vv 16–18** present an emphatic threefold account of human sin and divine punishment. In each case a double sin meets a double reprisal. In the reference to commerce (**vv 16, 18**) contemporary reality mingles with the tradition. Commerce gave rise to oppression and to the arrogance (cf. **vv 2, 5**) that is the stepchild of privilege, and to perverse use of the gift of wisdom. The religious allusion in **v 18aβ** is not clear: it may be a reference to the pagan religion of the priest-king.

Douglas Stuart: It is especially instructive to note the emphasis placed in the lament on the way that the king's “trading” is linked with his arrogance and iniquity (**vv. 16 and 18**). God's intent through Ezekiel is not to suggest to us that all business is bad, but the way Tyre's king did business was evil. His problem was greed, and that is one of the reasons for the involvement of Garden-of-Eden overtones in the lament. What Adam and Eve were tempted to try to get was equality with God (**Gen. 3:4**). That is exactly what Tyre's king wanted, too. Whatever he personally may have thought of himself, the passage makes it clear that his actions were those of a person seeking such wealth and power as to be his own god. Personal power, dominance of others, conspicuous wealth—these are goals that corrupt people, no matter what their origins.

Lamar Cooper: Who, then, was the person whose character was like the king of Tyre that fulfilled the elements of **vv. 12–17**? The serpent was known for his craftiness (**Gen 3:1**), his deceit, and his anti-God attitude (**3:4**), leading humanity to sin (**3:6–7**). Elsewhere he is presented as a deceiver (**Rev 12:9; 20:2**), an instigator of evil (**John**

13:2, 27), one who seeks worship as a god (Luke 4:6–8; 2 Thess 2:3–4), and one who seeks to get others to renounce God (Job 2:4–5). He appears as an angel of God (2 Cor 11:14) and as the father of lies and violence (John 8:44), distorts Scripture (Matt 4:6), opposes believers (2 Cor 2:11), and finally is judged (Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20–21; 20:13–15). Therefore the conclusion that the figure behind the poetic symbol is the serpent (also known as the adversary, the devil, Satan; Rev 12:9) is a logical one.

C. (:19) Reaction to Divine Judgment

1. Reaction of the Observing Nations

“All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you;”

2. Reaction of the King of Tyre

“You have become terrified, and you will be no more.”

III. (:20-24) CORRESPONDING JUDGMENT ON SIDON = SISTER CITY

*“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,
‘Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, prophesy against her,
and say, Thus says the Lord God,’”*

Constable: Another oracle concerning Sidon, Tyre's neighbor about 20 miles to the north, came to the prophet from the Lord. God may have condemned Sidon because of its close association with Tyre, though it was responsible for its own actions.

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel's audience knew that Sidon was the “second city” to Tyre in those days, a city of significant influence if not the leading city in Phoenicia. It was useful for them to hear that the prophecies against Phoenicia were not limited to Tyre. Sidon, too, would come under God's judgment.

A. (:22b) Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment

1. Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment = Manifesting God's Glory

*“Behold, I am against you, O Sidon,
And I shall be glorified in your midst.”*

Derek Thomas: No immediate reason is given for Sidon's judgement, but we may assume that the city had sided with Tyre, perhaps contributing to Judah's downfall to the Babylonians.

2. Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD,”

3. Divine Opposition and Purpose of Judgment = Manifesting God's Holiness

*“when I execute judgments in her,
And I shall manifest My holiness in her.”*

B. (:23-24) Specific Judgments on Sidon and Relief for Israel

1. (:23) Specific Judgments on Sidon

a. Pestilence and Death and the Sword

*“For I shall send pestilence to her and blood to her streets,
And the wounded will fall in her midst
By the sword upon her on every side;”*

b. Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

2. (:24) Relief for Israel

a. Removal of Enemy Irritation and Injury

*“And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling
brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned
them;”*

b. Recognition Refrain

“then they will know that I am the Lord God.”

Peter Pett: As so often Ezekiel again reminds Israel that God has yet a future for them (**Ezekiel 11:17-20; Ezekiel 14:11; Ezekiel 16:60-63; Ezekiel 18:30-31; Ezekiel 20:41-44**). In all that is happening He has not deserted them, indeed in the final analysis He only purposes good for them. There is no mention of judgment. This is now seen as technically accomplished, and He looks beyond to future blessing.

IV. (:25-26) PROMISE OF RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:25-26a) Regathering for the Purpose of Secure Living in the Promised Land

1. (:25a) Regathering Israel to Manifest God’s Holiness

a. Regathering

*“When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples
among whom they are scattered,”*

McGee: One reason that so many theologians are believed when they say that God is through with the nation Israel is because God’s people are not acquainted with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the minor prophets. The theme song of these prophets is that **God is not through with Israel as a nation.**

b. Manifesting Holiness

*“and shall manifest My holiness in them
in the sight of the nations,”*

2. (:25b-26a) Secure Dwelling in the Promised Land after Purging Judgments

a. Secure Dwelling in the Promised Land

“then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant

*Jacob. And they will live in it securely;
and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely,”*

Constable: After the Babylonian Captivity some Israelites returned to live in the Promised Land, but they did not live there in safety. In fact, the Jews have never yet lived safely in their own land. Fulfillment awaits the return of Jesus Christ and His millennial kingdom.

- b. Purging Judgments of Israel’s Enemies
*“when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them
round about them.”*

B. (:26b) Recognition Refrain
“Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.”

Douglas Stuart: God, on the other hand, knew *“the end from the beginning”* and knew what He was planning to do for His people. Thus He announces in **verse 26** that Israel would return from captivity in fulfillment of the ancient promises of **Leviticus 26** and **Deuteronomy 4** and **30**, would rise to greatness, and would dwell securely again in the Promised Land. This blessed series of events would follow necessarily upon the subjugation of the nations that opposed Israel, as **verse 27** states, and as the immediate context (oracles against foreign nations) reminds us. Once again, the ultimate result would be God’s glorification, as this time not merely the foreign nations but Israel itself would *“know that I am the Lord.”*

Iain Duguid: Indeed, God will demonstrate his **holiness**—the distinctiveness of his being—not only by judging the nations but also by once again gathering his own people to the Promised Land. He will demonstrate his **power** by giving them peace and security in the land promised to the patriarchs in the sight of the nations all around (**28:25**). The people will once again be able to build houses and plant vineyards (**28:26**), long-term projects that speak of settled security. Then all nations will see that Israel is God’s people and he is their God, which has been the goal of his covenant relationship with them from the outset (**Ex. 6:7**). This point is underlined in the modified version of the recognition formula used. Instead of the usual “then they will know that I am the Lord,” the oracle closes, *“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God”* (**Ezek. 28:26**). Paradise, which the king of Tyre claimed and lost, may still be regained by God’s own people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What areas of divinely granted privilege and blessing can become a source of pride for you?
- 2) What can you learn about Satan from this passage?

3) Is God against acquiring great wealth or more concerned with your attitudes and actions regarding acquiring and stewarding such wealth?

4) How did this prophecy minister hope to the exiles in Babylon in Ezekiel’s day?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jamieson: The concept of the **Garden of Eden** presents one of the major difficulties in interpreting this section as Tyre's literal human king. A possible solution may be found in understanding ancient Near Eastern temples. These ancient temples normally encompassed a large enclosure with a garden, not just a building (cf. **van Dijk**, p. 117). If the term for 'God' in this phrase is understood as 'god,' then perhaps 'Eden, a garden of a god,' was an expression used metaphorically to describe the splendor of the temple complex of Melkart, the 'king of the city' (which was the meaning of the god's name), with whom Tyre's human king was seeking identity. Though this interpretation is a hypothesis (as are all others), normal cultural hermeneutics may aid in the explanation of the text and should not be ignored. It is readily admitted that this phrase '*you were in Eden, the garden of God*' is the most difficult obstacle to the interpretation of the king of Tyre as the literal king of the city. The above, however, is certainly a plausible understanding of the phrase.

Daniel Block:

Table 5. A Comparison of Ezekiel 28:1–10 and 28:11–19		
	vv. 1–10	vv. 11–19
Genre	judgment speech	lament (<i>qînâ</i>)
Literary style	standard narrative prose	elevated prose
Addressee	<i>nēgîd šōr</i> , “prince of Tyre”	<i>melek šōr</i> , “king of Tyre”
Issue	the arrogant claim	the glorious reality
Manner of punishment	through agents	by Yahweh himself
The role of the nations	agents of judgment	witnesses of judgment

Like many of Ezekiel’s previous oracles, this collage of prophetic statements affirms several basic theological principles.

First, no nation stands outside the scope of divine sovereignty. Like the nations in previous oracles, Sidon too must submit to the Lord of history.

Second, when the Lord intervenes in human affairs, he does so to manifest his own glory and holiness. A recognition of this principle (which will be developed much more fully later) delivers one from an undue anthropocentrism, which views the world as revolving around oneself. As affirmed by our Lord’s own prayer, the agenda that drives

God and that should motivate his people is the sanctity of his name and the recognition of his sovereignty. Both are affected by the well-being of his people.

Third, God keeps his covenant. Ezekiel's people may be languishing in exile, but God has not forgotten his promises to the patriarchs. Accordingly, a holistic vision of Israel's future must involve both a restoration of the people's status as Yahweh's servant, and a return to the land promised centuries ago.

David Thompson: The King was a puffed up, arrogant, power-crazed maniac who became very delusional about himself. It was this arrogance that would cause God to destroy him. There is no question that when a political leader begins to arrogantly exalt himself, he is satanic. Satan was behind this political leader's arrogance because it was a satanic arrogance that ultimately will get Satan destroyed. The key point of this chapter is this:

GOD WILL EVENTUALLY DESTROY ARROGANT POLITICAL LEADERS WHO MOCKED HIM AND HIS WORD AND HE WILL DESTROY SATAN WHO WAS CONTROLLING THESE POLITICAL LEADERS AND IN THE END, HE WILL BLESS THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

There are 20 descriptions given here about Satan.

Description #1 - Satan had the seal of perfection. **28:12a**

Satan was the sum total of the creative genius of God. He was the prototype of perfection. **H. A. Ironside** said many people used to ask why God created the Devil. The answer is He didn't. He created a beautiful spirit being that was the sum total of the perfection of God.

Description #2 - Satan was full of wisdom. **28:12b**

God gave Satan the perfect intellect filled with knowledge and wisdom. He certainly was created with a mental ability to not only discern right from wrong, but the best from the good. God gave him mental skill in every area.

Description #3 - Satan was perfect in beauty. **28:12c**

God made him a beautiful being. He was a being who would shine bright with splendor and beauty. He was perfect on the inside and outside.

Description #4 - Satan was in Eden. **28:13a**

God let Satan live in the most beautiful of all places that He created on this earth. He was in the most wonderful, majestic place that was designed by God.

Description #5 - Satan was beautiful. **28:13b**

The exact identity of each gemstone is not clear; but Satan was dazzling. There is a comparative list given in **Exodus 28:17-20** in regard to the nation Israel. There is another list given in **Revelation 21:18-20** that describes the New Jerusalem. We may

assume that Satan originally had priestly and heavenly beauty at the highest level. He had royalty and beauty.

Description #6 - Satan was created. **28:13c**

Satan is not God and he is not the creator. He is a created being. He had been created by God and he owed God his thanks for being created as such a marvelous being.

Description #7 - Satan was musical. **28:13d**

The Hebrew words “*settings and sockets*” are literally “*tambourines and timbrels*.” The word “*setting*” refers to a merriment musical instrument. The Arabic word means drum (**BrownDriver-Briggs**, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 1074). The Hebrew refers to a hollowed out instrument that could contain beautiful stones. These words imply that God originally created Satan with a musical acumen second to none. Satan was created with a capability of using his musical skills at a very unusual level to praise God. Satan has great musical ability and talent and he did not lose that ability after he fell; he changed its emphasis. Satan uses his musical ability to oppose God and His Word.

Description #8 - Satan was the anointed cherub placed in this position by God. **28:14a**
God made Satan the highest ranked angel in His creation.

Description #9 - Satan was on the holy mountain of God. **28:14b**

Satan was permitted access to the throne of the living God. This was the government center of God. Think of it, Satan had exposure to the very place where God governed.

Description #10 - Satan walked in the midst of the stones of fire. **28:14c**

Satan literally walked in purity in the most sacred of places. He walked in the presence of God.

Description #11 - Satan was blameless in his ways from the day he was created. **28:15a**

Satan was created without any blemish. He had no flaws in any way or in any area.

What this means is that Satan’s sin was “self-generated.”

Description #12 - Satan was blameless until unrighteousness was found in him. **28:15b**

Outwardly it did not look like Satan had any flaws, but inwardly he was filled with pride. He was not content with what God made him. He wanted to be God. God uncovered his sin. Satan did not admit it or go to God and confess it; God uncovered it.

Description #13 - Satan was abundant in trade and violence and he sinned. **28:16a**

Notice Satan was involved in “*abundance of your trade*.” This definitely indicates that Satan is involved in world wealth and involved in all violent things connected to it. Satan was filled with violence and hatred against God.

Description #14 - Satan was cast out as profane from the mountain of God. **28:16b**

God banished Satan from His mountain. His initial judgment was that God expelled him from His presence at His holy throne.

Description #15 - Satan has been destroyed by God from being a cherub. **28:16c**
No longer does God permit Satan to be seen as His anointed cherub.

Description #16 - Satan was lifted up because of his beauty. **28:17a**
There is a satanic arrogance to beauty and success.

Description #17 - Satan was corrupted by his wisdom. **28:17b**
There is a satanic arrogance to education. Education that tries to remove the God of the Bible is satanic.

Description #18 - Satan will be cast down to the ground for all kings to see. **28:17c**
This will be the ultimate moment of his humiliation. All will see him as nothing.

Description #19 - Satan will be burned for all iniquity, unrighteousness and religious profanity. **28:18**
Satan is ultimately going to be cast into the Lake of Fire (**Rev. 20:10**). God will permit all to see him cast into the “*Everlasting Lake of Fire*.”

Description #20 - Satan will be appalling to all people who knew him and he will be terrified and will cease to exist forever. **28:19**
Satan will be seen for what he is and he will come to a horrible end and he, himself, will be terrified.

TEXT: Ezekiel 29:1-21

TITLE: THE FATE OF EGYPT

BIG IDEA:

IMAGES OF A CAPTURED MONSTER CROCODILE AND A BROKEN REED SPEAK TO THE DEMISE OF EGYPT AS GOD REASSURES HIS PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

After finishing his prophecy against Tyre and Sidon, the prophet turns his attention in chapters 29-32 to the fate of the powerful nation of Egypt. Israel's history with Egypt was long and complicated. After her earlier bondage and exodus, at different points God's covenant people were tempted to turn away from trust in God to reliance upon this impressive world power. Here God promises to judge Egypt, disperse her people for an intensive forty year period of desolation and then regather her into a much diminished nation. Meanwhile Israel should be encouraged regarding her own future as God raises up a powerful horn and unleashes renewed boldness and acceptance of divine prophecy.

Feinberg: Chapters 29-32 deal with one theme: judgment on Egypt. This is the longest of the prophecies in Ezekiel against any nation. Some find three distinct prophecies in the four chapters (29-30; 31; 32); others, seven. Apart from 29:17-21 (dated 571 B.C.), all the prophecies against Egypt belong to the period 587-585 B.C., shortly before and after the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The time was one in which there was a temporary restoration of Egyptian power, only to be followed by ultimate decline. With the rise of the Persians, Egypt became a Persian satrapy and, in turn, was dominated by Greeks, Romans and Mamelukes.

Robert Lawrence:

- Much more attention is given to Egypt than any of the other nations. There are seven messages directed toward Egypt.
- Much of the long-standing hostility Israel had toward Egypt can be traced to the time of the Egyptian bondage.
- Even beyond that time Israel was always caught between Egypt and other powers in Mesopotamia that were struggling for world domination. (**Jeremiah 46:1-26**)

Daniel Block: the threefold occurrence of the recognition formula, "*Then they will know that I am (the Lord) Yahweh*" (vv. 6a, 9a, 16). Since this formula usually signals the end of a demonstration oracle/proof saying in Ezekiel, a tripartite division is evident: A, 29:3-6a; B, 29:6b-9a; C, 29:9b-16. Dividing the text this way has the added advantage of keeping cause and effect together, particularly in the second and third subdivisions, where *ya'an*, "because," introduces a protasis, to be followed by the apodosis signaled by *lākēn*, "therefore." Each segment contains features found in the

earlier oracles against the foreign nations in **25:1–26:6, 8** the formal similarities increasing as one moves from A to B to C. But the order of shared elements is reversed, so that A has the closest affinity to the oracles against Tyre (**26:1–6**) and Sidon (**28:20–23**), B to the oracles against Edom (**25:12–14**) and Philistia (**25:15–17**), and C to the oracles against Ammon (**25:2–7**) and Moab (**25:8–11**).

Matt Basel: Egypt represents the temptation to find our hope and stability in the power, might, and self-sufficiency of this world. Power may temporarily give hope and purpose but in the end it will be destroyed by God and those who rest in it will be destroyed as well. Our hope cannot be in this world, but waiting for God to recreate a new world.

I. (:1-6a) THE FATE OF THE PROUD MONSTER CROCODILE

(:1-3a) Prologue

1. (:1a) Dating of the Prophecy

“In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month,”

Peter Pett: This prophesy took place in January 587 BC almost a year after the siege of Jerusalem had begun. It was Egypt that had been partly responsible for Zedekiah’s rebellion, contrary to Yahweh’s specific command (e.g. **Ezekiel 27:6-11**), and who therefore had to bear part responsibility for it.

2. (:1b) Authoritative Word of the Lord

“the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

3. (:2-3a) Target of the Prophecy

“Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. 3 Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord God,'”

Galen Doughty: The Pharaoh at the time of Ezekiel's prophecy is Hophra or Apries as the Greeks called him. He rushed to intervene against Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem but the Babylonians repulsed him in 587 and Hophra left Zedekiah to his fate. This is probably the setting for Ezekiel's prophecy and the images of Egypt left in the desert and falling in the open field in these verses. Hophra, as did his predecessors, relied heavily on Greek mercenaries to field his armies.

A. (:3b) Divine Opposition to the Monster Crocodile Due to Pride

1. Divine Opposition against the King of Egypt

“Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt,”

Derek Thomas: There can be no more terrifying words than these: ‘*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “I am against you ...”*’ (**29:3**). When the psalmist sought for the ultimate expression of his assurance he put it in these terms: ‘*God is for me*’ (**Ps. 56:9**). Paul was to pick up the words and draw the obvious conclusion: ‘*If God is for us, who can be against us? ... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor*

demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:31, 38–39). This is the ultimate truth: God is either **for us** or **against us**.

2. Domain of the Monster Crocodile

“The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers,”

Wiersbe: Pharaoh was compared to a ferocious crocodile, guarding the waters of the land—the Nile and all the canals—and attacking anybody who dared to challenge his claims.

Lamar Cooper: The metaphor of **v 3ayb** obviously categorizes the Pharaoh as a malevolent despot, but the nature of the metaphor is not certain. Is the king portrayed as a crocodile or in terms of the sea monster, the mythological chaos god defeated at the creation of the world, called Leviathan or Rahab in the Old Testament? . . . It is probable that both conceptions are in view, and that this particular crocodile is larger than life and invested with mythological overtones (**Fohrer** 166, Eichrodt 403, **Boadt**, Ezekiel’s Oracles 27–28).

3. Deceived by Pride = His Root Problem

“That has said, 'My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it.'”

Keil: Pharaoh calls himself the creator of the Nile, because he regards himself as the creator of the greatness of Egypt. This pride, in which he forgets God and attributes divine power to himself, is the cause of his sin, for which he will be overthrown by God.

Morgan: The Nile was in every way the secret of the wealth and power of that land and people. Here Pharaoh is represented, not as worshipping the River, but claiming to possess it, and to have created it.

B. (:4) Dramatic Capture of the Monster Crocodile

*“And I shall put hooks in your jaws,
And I shall make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales.
And I shall bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,
And all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales.”*

Constable: The Lord promised to remove Pharaoh and his people from their land, as a fisherman pulls a crocodile out of the water with hooks. He would remove the river-dragon along with the lesser fish that would cling to it. These fish may refer to the neighbor nations and allies of Egypt that relied on her, or probably to the people of Egypt, since the Nile represents the land. Normally the Egyptians caught crocodiles by placing “*hooks in [their] jaws*,” and then dragging them onto land where they killed them. In the delta region of Egypt, the Egyptians worshipped the crocodile as a god, Sebek, which they believed protected their nation (cf. **32:2; Ps. 74:13; Isa. 27:1; 51:9**).

Thus God promised to destroy Pharaoh, Egypt, and the god supposedly responsible for their protection.

Feinberg: The fish spoken of were the followers of the king. The king would involve his people in his fall because of their loyalty to him.

C. (:5) Disgraceful End of the Monster Crocodile = Abandoned in the Wilderness, Unburied and Ravaged

1. Abandoned

*“And I shall abandon you to the wilderness,
you and all the fish of your rivers;”*

2. Unburied

*“You will fall on the open field;
you will not be brought together or gathered.”*

3. Ravaged

*“I have given you for food to the beasts of the earth
and to the birds of the sky.”*

Constable: The Lord would carry the dragon into a wilderness along with its dependent fish where they could not return to water. There the beasts and birds would devour Egypt. Hophra (588-569 B.C.) would not receive a royal burial, which was extremely important to the Pharaohs and all the Egyptians. History records that Ahmose II (Gr. Amasis), another Egyptian leader, strangled Hophra and took his place.

Peter Pett: The great crocodile and the fish will be left stranded out of their own environment, in the waterless wilderness. Thus they will collapse and die, unable to rally themselves against the enemy, and the scavengers, both beast and bird, will arrive to tear them apart and eat them. Pharaoh and all his allies will be desolated and the Nile god and the other gods of Egypt will not be able to help them.

David Guzik: Pharaoh and Egypt would be disgraced, treated as something that others prey and feed upon. The great concern for burial and memorial among the pharaohs is evident from their still existing tombs. God promised their disgrace would be so great it would be as if they were not buried at all.

D. (:6a) Recognition Refrain

“Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD,”

Daniel Block: For all his arrogant pretensions, the glorious lord of the Nile is no match for Yahweh, who toys with him as a fisherman plays with his catch, then throws him away as carrion, unfit for human consumption. In the end the decisive action is

performed not by Hophra but by Yahweh, and when he is through all boastful claims will be silenced; even the Egyptians will acknowledge him as supreme.

II. (:6b-9b) THE FATE OF THE SPINELESS, UNRELIABLE, BROKEN REED

A. (:6b-7) The Accusation

1. (:6b) No Backbone = Spineless

*“Because they have been only a staff made of reed
to the house of Israel.”*

Feinberg: The first reason given for the indignation of the Lord against Hophra was his inordinate pride. Here the second reason for the visitation was set forth: Egypt had betrayed and disappointed the confidence Israel had placed in her. Instead of a firm and dependable support to Israel, Egypt had proved to be a staff of reed.

Daniel Block: The judgment of Egypt moves into a second phase in v. 6b. The metaphor changes, the charges against Pharaoh become specific, and his interference in Israelite affairs becomes the critical issue. Vv. 6b–7 are taken up with the accusation, and like the previous segment, these verses divide into two parts: the accusation (vv. 6b–7) and an announcement of judgment (vv. 8–9a).

2. (:7) Broken Commitments = Unreliable and Broken

*“When they took hold of you with the hand,
You broke and tore all their hands;
And when they leaned on you,
You broke and made all their loins quake.”*

Constable: But when the Judahites had relied on the Egyptians as their supporting staff, this ally had broken, and had even injured God's people (cf. **2 Kings 18:21; Isa. 36:6; Jer. 37:7**). As a crutch, Egypt was worse than useless, like *"a staff made of reed."* The Israelites, of course, should not have trusted in Egypt, but this did not excuse the Egyptians for breaking their covenants with Israel.

Peter Pett: This is the final act which brought down Yahweh's wrath on them, that Egypt had promised to be a strong staff on which Israel could lean, but had turned out to be a mere reed which broke when it was leant on, bringing great harm to Israel. Egypt was in fact a land of reeds, which grew along the Nile and its tributaries, and God says that they were symbolic of what Egypt really was. Thus they must be taught the lesson that they have let down Yahweh's people, and are therefore accountable to Yahweh. God takes constant account of what is done to His people.

Wiersbe: The Egyptians had a reputation for making promises and not keeping them (**2 Kings 18:20–21; Isaiah. 36:6**).

Lamar Cooper: Leaning is part of the Old Testament vocabulary of faith: God's people had once again turned elsewhere for the support they should have sought in him and his will (cf. **Isa 36:6, 7**). So nothing but ill could have come from this spiritual adventure. Divine reprisals were to be meted out on the Egyptian tempter and his realm, in the

form of a devastating attack, which would bring home to the Judeans the truth taught in this oracle.

B. (:8b-9a) The Announcement of Judgment

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:8b) Destruction by the Sword

*“Behold, I shall bring upon you a sword,
and I shall cut off from you man and beast.”*

2. (:9a) Desolation for the Entire Land

“And the land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste.”

C. (:9b) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

III. (:9c-16) YAHWEH’S PLANS FOR EGYPT

A. (:9c-12) Yahweh’s Immediate Plans for Egypt

1. (:9c) Presumptuous Boast

“Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine, and I have made it,’”

2. (:10-12) Punitive Consequences

a. (:10a) Divine Opposition

“therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers,”

b. (:10b) Devastation

*“and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation,
from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia.”*

Constable: The Lord repeated that He would devastate Egypt for her pride and self-sufficiency. The whole land would suffer destruction, from Migdol, in the northeast delta, to Syene, in the south near modern Aswan, and to the very border of Ethiopia, at the extreme southern end of the land. Ancient Ethiopia (Cush, Nubia) corresponds to modern southern Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, and northern Ethiopia.

c. (:11) Depopulation

*“A man’s foot will not pass through it,
and the foot of a beast will not pass through it,
and it will not be inhabited for forty years.”*

d. (:12a) Desolation

*“So I shall make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of
desolated lands.”*

Wiersbe: This is a prophecy of the coming of the Babylonian army to Egypt where they would fulfill God's Word and destroy man and beast as well as ravage the land (**Jer. 43:8-13, 46**). The people would either be slain or scattered and the land would be left "utterly waste and desolate" (**Ezek. 29:10**).

e. (12b) Divine Sentence

"And her cities, in the midst of cities that are laid waste, will be desolate forty years;"

Peter Pett: The desolation would go on for 'forty years'. 'Forty years' was a standard period for trial and testing meaning a fixed and fairly long period, and parallels the period for bearing iniquity endured by Judah (**Ezekiel 4:6**). Thus Egypt would suffer a fairly long period of desolation and weakness, probably at the hand of their enemies.

Feinberg: The period between Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt and Cyrus' victory was about forty years, so the forty years are understood as the period when Babylon was supreme over Egypt. Ezekiel, unlike Isaiah (**19:18-25**), does not relate Egypt to Messianic times.

f. (:12c) Dispersion

"and I shall scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands."

Daniel Block: Yahweh will transform the land into an utter wasteland. Ezekiel employs a series of rhetorical devices to highlight the thoroughness of the devastation.

- First, he heaps up **terms for desolation**, using the plural of intensity *lēhorēbôt* (lit. "into wastes"), and conjoining the cognate nouns *horēbôt* and *hōreb* (lit. "wastes and waste").
- Second, he proclaims the **ruination** of all Egypt. Like Israelite "from Dan to Beer-sheba," the expression "from Migdol to Syene as far as the border of Cush" defines the borders of the country. Migdol, "Fortress Tower," treated as the northernmost military outpost, is probably to be identified with the remains discovered one kilometer north of Tell el-Kheir, east of the Suez Canal. Syene (modern Aswan), on the First Cataract of the Nile, was the site from which campaigns into Nubia were launched, a fact reflected in the explanatory Nubian frontier (*gēbūl kūš*).
- Third, he announces the **cessation of all normal creaturely activity** in Egypt. The feet of neither humans (*ādām*) nor animals (*bēhēmā*) will pass over or traverse (*ābar*) the land.
- Fourth, with twin superlatives, he declares the **unprecedented scope of the disaster** (v. 12). Among ruined cities and countries, Egypt will set a new standard of devastation.
- Fifth, twice he announces that the ruination will last **forty years**. The figure recalls **4:4-8**, according to which Ezekiel was to lie on his right side, one day for every year that Judah was to be exiled, but the number is also reminiscent of the duration of Israel's wilderness wanderings, the purpose of which was to

eliminate a faithless generation (**Num. 14:20–35**). Yahweh’s goal here is presumably similar—to punish a generation that had dared to interfere with Yahweh’s plans for Judah and the Babylonians.

- Sixth, in terms reminiscent of earlier warnings of the deportation of Judah’s population, Ezekiel **predicts the exile of Egypt’s population** among the nations and countries of the earth. The prophet’s vagueness and hyperbolic style contrast sharply with the detail and realism with which Jeremiah describes the same events. In **Jer. 43–44** the senior prophet speaks specifically of Nebuchadnezzar attacking Pharaoh’s palace at Tahpanhes, burning the temples of the Egyptian gods, shattering the obelisks of Heliopolis, and bringing disaster to the Jewish exiles in that land.

B. (:13-16a) Yahweh’s Long Range Plans for Egypt

“For thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:13) Regathering the Egyptians

“At the end of forty years I shall gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered.”

Daniel Block: Yahweh will not be angry with Egypt forever; on the contrary, when this generation has been punished he will be roused to action on the nation’s behalf.

2. (:14-15) Rebuilding Them as a Diminished Nation

“And I shall turn the fortunes of Egypt and shall make them return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin; and there they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowest of the kingdoms; and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I shall make them so small that they will not rule over the nations.”

Constable: Forty years after Egypt fell to the Babylonians, the Persians, who had by that time defeated the Babylonians, allowed the Egyptians to return to their homeland. This was the foreign policy of the Persians under which the Israelites were also able to return to their land.

Daniel Block: The people may be regathered and the kingdom reestablished, but Yahweh will ensure that they never regain their past glory; Egypt will remain a “*low kingdom*.” The great nation that had held ruled over others will itself become a vassal state. To whom Egypt will be subject is not indicated, but it cannot be Nebuchadnezzar since he will be gone long before the forty-year limitation has expired. Perhaps Ezekiel already anticipates the rise of Persia, whose domination over Egypt was succeeded by Greek and Roman empires. But he probably thinks only of **Yahweh** as Egypt’s suzerain. He is the subject of the actions in **vv. 13–15**; he will keep the nation small (*šēpālā*) so it never again imposes its power over the nations (or indulges in the hollow boasting of **vv. 3, 9**).

3. (:16a) Reminding Israel of the Futility of Trusting Egypt

“And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt.”

David Guzik: One reason God would bring Egypt low and **diminish them** was so that Israel would no longer put their misplaced trust in Egypt. The lowly, diminished state of Egypt would **remind them of their iniquity when they turned to follow them.**

Lamar Cooper: This political shrinkage was to be Yahweh’s way of preventing his people’s backsliding. . . reaffirm the truths of the earlier oracles: the inevitable harvest of national arrogance and the need for a true faith in God that resists temptations to look elsewhere for salvation.

C. (:16b) **Recognition Refrain**

“Then they will know that I am the Lord God.”

IV. (:17-21) YAHWEH’S WAGES FOR NEBUCHADNEZZAR – EGYPT TO BE GIVEN TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR AS PAYMENT FOR EXECUTING DIVINE JUDGMENT AGAINST TYRE

(:17) Prologue

1. Dating of the Prophecy

“Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month,”

Peter Pett: This is a late oracle introduced here, because it also refers to Tyre, so that it would not be too far from the Tyre oracles, and because it gives information about who would cause desolation to Egypt as described in the first oracle. It is dated on new year’s day 571/0 BC some time after the raising of the siege of Tyre, some sixteen years after the previous oracle.

2. Authoritative Word of the Lord

“the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

Lamar Cooper: vv. 17-21 -- Their content functions as a supportive statement of the downfall of Egypt and so as a confirmation of the work of God in the world of political power, and as an assurance that his destructive work was a precursor of salvation for his people. Yahweh would effect his providential will, clearing obstacles from his people’s and his own path (cf. v 16; 28:24) before he brought rehabilitation and honor (v 21; cf. 28:25–26). He was to use his lordship of history as a means of fulfilling his covenant purposes (cf. Rev 11:15–18).

A. (:18) Reason for the Payment

“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare.

But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it.”

Peter Pett: The continual wearing of helmets, and the continual demands of the heavy siege had had their effect. The soldiers felt totally ill-used and exhausted.

Daniel Block: These expressions could refer to the chafing effects of helmets and armor, but since the Babylonian strategies involved a siege rather than a battle, it is preferable to think in terms of the backbreaking work involved in carrying out a siege. The baldness and raw shoulders were the effects of carrying the vast amounts of dirt required to construct siege mounds and ramps, and probably also an unsuccessful attempt to build a causeway to the island fortress.

Douglas Stuart: In ancient times armies were not paid as they are today. Soldiers might receive a small allowance along with their rations, but it would have been foolish to join an army just for the pittance paid as wage. Instead, a special incentive system made army life attractive and often exciting. Soldiers successful in battle were allowed to take and keep anything they could lay hands on and carry away. Many battles took place at or near large cities or in prosperous lands where wealth was concentrated. Indeed, ancient wars of conquest were launched precisely so that the conquerors could acquire the wealth of other nations. After defeating an enemy, an army would dig into the spoils. Those fortunate enough to find gems, precious metals, or other great valuables among the possessions of their defeated foes might become instantly rich. Almost all could at least supplement their income handsomely.

Lamar Cooper: Essentially Yahweh takes over responsibility for the situation from Nebuchadnezzar, who functioned as Yahweh’s agent. Pastorally, of course, Yahweh is lifting the blame from Ezekiel’s head and shoulders.

B. (:19-20) Reward for Nebuchadnezzar

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:19a) Divine Gift of Egypt

“Behold, I shall give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

2. (:19b) Despoiling of Her Wealth

“And he will carry off her wealth, and capture her spoil and seize her plunder;”

3. (:19c) Deserved Wages for Military Service

“and it will be wages for his army.”

4. (:20) Divine Agent of Judgment

“I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed,

because they acted for Me,' declares the Lord God."

David Guzik: There was a real sense in which Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon **worked for** God as His instruments of judgment. It was completely within God's rights to reward these workers according to His will and wisdom.

C. (:21a) Reassurance to the Nation of Israel

1. Renewed Power

"On that day I shall make a horn sprout for the house of Israel,"

Constable: When Nebuchadnezzar later defeated Egypt, the defeat would provide hope for Israel, because Egypt was Israel's ancient enemy. Evidently Nebuchadnezzar invaded and defeated Egypt about 568-567 B.C. It would be as though a horn began to grow on Israel, the sign of new strength to come (cf. **1 Sam. 2:1; 1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 92:10; Jer. 48:25**).

Peter Pett: A horn is the symbol of strength and power (**1 Samuel 2:1; 1 Kings 22:11; Psalms 92:10; Jeremiah 48:25**). It was the means by which animals exerted their superiority. Thus in some way Israel were to be given strength at the time of the invasion and victory. Indeed Ezekiel himself may be that horn, for they would begin to listen to his words and take heed to them, and learn Who Yahweh really is. And in the end that was Ezekiel's purpose.

Alternately it may refer to one of the leaders whom Yahweh would use in their restoration. It does not matter which one. All were horns given by Yahweh, all looking forward to the great Son of David yet to come (**Ezekiel 34:23-24; Ezekiel 37:24**).

Galen Doughty: The horn that will grow in the house of Israel on that day is difficult to identify. In 570 the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon with Jehoiachin were well into their third decade of captivity. A horn signifies strength. God says he will open Ezekiel's mouth at that time. Is Ezekiel still silent in 570? That doesn't make sense according to **33:21** which says a man came to Ezekiel in Babylon and declared Jerusalem has fallen. At that time Ezekiel speaks again after his silence. It is possible this reference to God opening Ezekiel's mouth is to more prophecy. The temple prophecies are given in 572. I wonder if the horn refers to Zerubbabel who would have been born in captivity in Babylon and who was to lead the exiles back to Jerusalem in 538. He is also featured prominently in the writings of the post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah. If he was born in 570 he would have been 32 years old when he led the exiles back to Jerusalem. It is only speculation but it is an interesting theory.

MacArthur: Cf. **23:25, 26**. God caused Israel's power to return and restored her authority as the power in an animal's horn (cf. **1Sa 2:1**). Though other nations subdued her, her latter end in messianic times will be blessed.

Ralph Alexander: The symbol must refer to the strength and encouragement that Israel was to receive when she observed God's faithfulness to execute his judgment on her

enemy, Egypt, in accord with both these prophecies and the Abrahamic covenant (**Gen. 12:3**). At this time Ezekiel’s mouth would be opened among the exiles to proclaim God’s purposes and workings more freely, since the exiles would be more ready to listen. Through these events the Israelites who had not yet understood would perceive that the God who was accomplishing these mighty acts in faithfulness was the Lord their God (v. **21**).

2. Renewed Boldness and Acceptance of Prophecy
“and I shall open your mouth in their midst.”

Feinberg: With the fall of Egypt the affairs of Israel would rise. With such fulfillment of his prophecies Ezekiel’s message would be all the more heeded. He may have felt constrained before this because of the unbelief of his people, but now he could command confidence and boldness in speaking for God to the people. Prophecy was meant to glorify God, to warn and comfort the people, and to minister to the servant of God at the same time.

D. (:21b) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When does your ego get you into trouble?
- 2) How does placing our confidence in anyone or anything other than the Lord prove to be unreliable and harmful?
- 3) Why didn’t the Lord completely wipe out Egypt for all time?
- 4) What type of hope does this passage provide for Israel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: I propose the following outline for the first oracle against Egypt:

- a. Preamble (29:1–2)
- b. Yahweh’s Disposition toward Pharaoh (29:3–9a)
 - (1) The First Statement (29:3–6a)
 - (a) The Charge of Hubris (29:3)
 - (b) The Divine Response (29:4–6a)
 - (2) The Second Statement (29:6b–9a)

(a) The Charge of Treachery (29:6b–7)

(b) The Divine Response (29:8–9a)

c. Yahweh’s Intentions concerning Egypt (29:9b–16)

(1) His Immediate Plans (29:9b–12)

(2) His Long-range Plans (29:13–16)

Galen Doughty: It is unclear what Ezekiel means by the **forty years** of Egyptian captivity. Historically there is no record of it. However, his statement that Egypt will no longer be a power among nations after this forty year period was literally fulfilled. It never again regained its influence. The reference to returning the captive Egyptians to Upper Egypt is also curious. The center of population in the Persian, Greek and Roman times shifted to Lower Egypt. By New Testament times Alexandria on the Mediterranean Coast was the chief city in Egypt. The population was dominated by Greeks however and not native Egyptians. There was also a large contingent of Jews who lived there. Ezekiel could be referring to the fact that the native Egyptians would shrink in number and immigrants from other parts of the Mediterranean world would replace them. The population centers would shift north to Lower Egypt and the Nile Delta. Today, the same is true. Cairo is at the base of the Nile Delta and the other large cities of Egypt are in the Delta area. The population is made up mostly of Arabs not native Egyptians by race. It is also true that following the destruction of Jerusalem and the conquest of Egypt by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans the Jewish people never again looked to Egypt for solutions to their political and military problems. In that Ezekiel's prophecy has also been literally fulfilled. I believe the forty years of captivity for Egypt therefore must be some kind of **symbolic number** representative of Egypt's decline in influence over the nations and over Israel.

David Thompson: In the previous chapter we saw what God was going to do to Tyre and Sidon. They arrogantly defied God. They were a world dominant power who saw themselves as equal to God. They became proud of themselves and God says I have a prophetic plan for you in that I will destroy you.

Now things turn to Egypt. Egypt was known as a nation who persecuted and dominated Israel and made life miserable for the people of God. Egypt has been Israel’s enemy ever since the days of Exodus (1440 B.C.). She enslaved the people of God and she tried to exterminate Israel. . .

There is always an underlying animosity between the Egyptians and the Israelis.

God says I know it, I see it and I have not forgotten about that and Egypt will pay. God says Ezekiel, you go tell the Egyptians this very message.

BECAUSE OF WHAT THE EGYPTIANS HAVE NEGATIVELY DONE TO ISRAEL, GOD WILL JUDGE THE EGYPTIANS WITH A FEROCIOUS JUDGMENT.

Constable: Chart Ezekiel's Oracles in Chronological Order of History

EZEKIEL'S ORACLES AGAINST EGYPT IN THE CONTEXT OF EGYPT'S HISTORY		
Event	Date	Reference
Egypt's domination of Israel	605-609	
Babylonia's defeat of Egypt at Carchemish	605	
Egypt's offers of assistance to Israel against Babylonia	605-586	
The beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's second siege of Jerusalem	588	2 Kings 25:1; Ezek.24:1-2
Pharaoh Hophra's interruption of the siege of Jerusalem	588	Jer. 37:5-11
Ezekiel's first introductory prophecy against Egypt	587	Ezek. 29:1-16
Ezekiel's second prophecy describing Pharaoh Hophra's initial defeat and Egypt's ultimate desolation	587	Ezek. 30:20-26
Ezekiel's third prophecy comparing Egypt's fall to Assyria's collapse	587	Ezek. 31
The continuing siege of Jerusalem	587	Jer. 32:1-5
The fall of Jerusalem and King Zedekiah's capture	586	2 Kings 25:5-7
The exiles' reception of the news of Jerusalem's fall	585	Ezek. 33:21
Ezekiel's fourth prophecy in the form of a funeral dirge	585	Ezek. 32:1-16
Ezekiel's fifth prophecy—a summary lament	585	Ezek. 32:17-32
Ezekiel's sixth prophecy describing Egypt as Nebuchadnezzar's spoil for defeating Tyre	571	Ezek. 29:17-21
Ezekiel's seventh prophecy about the destruction of Egypt and her allies	571	Ezek. 30:1-19

TEXT: Ezekiel 30:1-19

TITLE: THE IMPACT OF THE DAY OF THE LORD ON EGYPT AND HER ALLIES

BIG IDEA:

**THE COMING JUDGMENT ON EGYPT PREFIGURES THE
ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD AND IMPACTS EGYPT'S ALLIES**

INTRODUCTION:

The fate of Egypt was revealed in **chapter 29**. Now this prophecy continues as Ezekiel makes the association with the Day of the Lord to show that there are both near term and eschatological implications. The promised devastation and desolation are not limited to the borders of Egypt – despite the eight specific major cities targeted here. God's judgment intentionally spills over to Egypt's supporting allies. The false hope and security of those who trust in human government and power continue to be stripped away. God uses His sovereign judgments to reveal His reign over all kingdoms in the accomplishment of His agenda. He will ultimately be known as the Lord of all.

Leslie Allen: Vv **1–19** are distinguished as a literary unit by the message reception formula and the formula of prophetic address in vv **1–2**; the former does not reappear until v **20**.

Constable: This oracle appears to be a mosaic of four separate messages. Note the recurrence of the introductory clause "*thus says the Lord God*" in **verses 2, 6, 10, and 13**. It pictures the day of judgment that will break on Egypt and its allies.

Derek Thomas: For the first time in Ezekiel we come across the phrase, '*the day of the Lord*' (**30:3**; cf. '*The day is near*', **7:7**). While the '*day of the Lord*' can sometimes refer to an event which is in the near future, it usually describes the consummation, the end of all time, when God will come to judge the world. Here the idea is of an event in the not too distant future, the ransacking of North Africa by the Babylonians, but it has to be understood that all of these passages are foretastes of the judgement that will come upon the world at the end of time.

Vawter and Hoppe: In context, this was an audacious statement. Imagine an exile from Judah, a third-rate Palestinian state whose future was very much in doubt, asserting that Judah's national deity is about to bring an end to Egypt! When Ezekiel spoke these words, Egypt had existed for two and a half millennia. The pyramids, the symbol of the achievements of that great civilization, had stood already for two thousand years. What Egypt did is without parallel in human history, ancient or modern. In the face of this, Ezekiel had the temerity to declare that Egypt, its cities, its rulers, and its people were vulnerable to the judgment of Judah's God. It was either outrageous delusion or great faith that led the prophet to utter this oracle of judgment against Egypt.

Daniel Block: This oracle paints a powerful picture of Yahweh's absolute sovereignty. The day of Egypt belongs to him. He, not Amon or Re or Ptah, is Lord of history, a point he will prove by invading Egypt a second time. On the day of his appointment with this great nation, neither gods, nor kings who perceived themselves to be divine, nor the assembled forces of this vast alliance would prevent his triumphant march through the land. All nations, even mighty Egypt, and all the forces of nature are subject to him. At his command the Nile dries up, fire passes through the land, and daylight turns to darkness. Nor is there hope for "*the people of the land of the covenant*" who look to Egypt for security. By joining with the neighbor to the south they cast their vote against Yahweh and sentence themselves to the same fate.

I. (:1-5) ASSOCIATION OF THE COMING JUDGMENT ON EGYPT WITH THE END-TIMES DAY OF THE LORD

(:1-2a) Authoritative Word of the Lord

*"The word of the LORD came again to me saying,
2 'Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord God, '"*

Constable: Of the seven oracles against Egypt, this is the only one that is undated. Most of the commentators assumed that Ezekiel gave it in 587 B.C., the same year as the first, second, and third oracles. But he could have given it in 571 B.C. after his sixth oracle (29:17-21). I think he gave it in 571 B.C., and that the writer placed it here in the text, after the other late oracle, because both of them contain specific references to Nebuchadnezzar. Knowledge that Nebuchadnezzar would be God's instrument in judging Egypt is helpful in interpreting the remaining oracles against Egypt. If this chronology is correct, this would have been the last prophecy that Ezekiel gave that this book records.

A. (:2b) Anguished Anticipation of the Coming Judgment

"Wail, 'Alas for the day!'"

Peter Pett: The awfulness of what is shortly to come on Egypt is brought out by the introduction, '*Howl, alas the day, for the day is near*'. And along with her will suffer those who are in alliance with her. These alliances help to explain how an invasion of Egypt could drive Pharaoh and his forces out of Egypt into allied lands, only to be allowed to return once peace negotiations have succeeded. It would seem that there was defeat on Egyptian soil, with large numbers being taken captive and carried off to Babylon, followed by a withdrawal into allied lands as Egyptian administration collapsed, until peace terms were agreed.

B. (:3) Doomsday Scenario of the Coming Judgment – the Day of the Lord

1. Closeness but with Eschatological Implications

*"For the day is near,
Even the day of the LORD is near;"*

It would seem that this oracle of judgment has both near term fulfillment and eschatological fulfillment in view.

Constable: "*The day of the Lord*" is any day in which God acts in a dramatic way in history. The phrase "*the day of the Lord*" usually describes an eschatological day, but that is not its meaning here as is clear from what follows (v. 9; cf. 7:7, 10; Lam. 2:21-22). This judgment would come on Egypt soon.

Daniel Woodhead: other passages state that Egypt will be desolate for forty years. That has never happened and it is most appropriately placed in the Millennial Kingdom. So when this passage (**Ezekiel 30:1-9**) states in verse three the day of Jehovah is near, it clearly is referencing the Tribulation. The Day of Jehovah is a familiar reference in the Old Testament and New Testament as well (**Isaiah 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Zechariah 14:1; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:2; II Peter 3:10**). Since that term is only used as a reference to a very particular event in all of human history it is appropriate to place the events in the first nine verses of this chapter as falling in the period of the Tribulation.

The judgment of Egypt is the beginning of the judgment of all Gentile nations. The beginning of these was Nebuchadnezzar's victories over Egypt and beginning with 586 B.C. the inauguration of the **Times of The Gentiles**. What is essential to realize with these judgments is the futile efforts of mankind to stop the judgment of God once it has commenced. That judgment will be so violent that it will overwhelm Egypt's neighbors, some of whom were Egypt's political, economic, and military allies (v. 30:5) Ethiopia adjoining Egypt on the south also known as Cush, will be fearful that she would be attacked next as Egypt's people will be killed and her treasures looted. For them Egypt is essentially a buffer between the Babylonians and themselves.

John Taylor: The *day of the Lord*, which has previously been announced only in relation to Israel (cf. 7:2-12), is now proclaimed as being the day when judgment by the sword will fall upon **Egypt**.

2. Catastrophic

*"It will be a day of clouds,
A time of doom for the nations."*

Wiersbe: Ezekiel probably had in mind God's judgment coming as a great, powerful storm upon Egypt, complete with dark and ominous clouds. "The Jews were led out of Egypt by a bright cloud (**Exodus 13:21**), but the Egyptians who once enslaved them will be under a dark cloud.

Daniel Block: First, the event is described as a dismal *day of clouds* (*yôm 'ānān*), which abbreviates Joel's version (**Joel 2:1-2**). Second, Ezekiel calls it a time for the nations. On first sight this ambiguous expression seems to refer to the invasion of Egypt by foreign nations as agents of Yahweh. However, from vv. 5-9, which may be

interpreted as an exposition of the last line in v. 3, it is evident that the nations are targets of divine wrath as well.

Feinberg: Egypt's judgment was the commencement of worldwide punishment on all nations, especially those around the land of Palestine from whom Israel had suffered much. Nebuchadnezzar's victories prepared the way for the realization of the universal empire of the Gentile monarch. The day of clouds, that is, of calamity and distress, in that hour was but a link in the chain that will ultimately lead to the climaxing judgment of all time.

C. (:4-5) Devastating Judgment Destroys Egypt's Foundations and Jeopardizes Her Supporters

1. (:4a) Devastating Judgment Impacts Ethiopia as well

*“And a sword will come upon Egypt,
And anguish will be in Ethiopia,”*

Charles Dyer: The news of Egypt's destruction would spread rapidly, causing panic among her allies. Messengers would travel in ships up the Nile River south to Cush to announce Egypt's defeat. The news would cause panic in Cush because they, having sided with Egypt against Babylon, would not, be vulnerable to attack. Anguish would take hold of them (cf. 30:4).

2. (:4b) Destruction of Egypt's Foundations

*“When the slain fall in Egypt,
They take away her wealth,
And her foundations are torn down.”*

Daniel Block: it is a day of humiliation: Egypt's *hāmôn* will be taken away. The choice of this ambiguous expression is deliberate. It means basically “noise, murmur, uproar,” but it may also denote “multitude, horde, troops, wealth,” and in a metaphorical sense, “*pomp, pride, hubris.*” This is a keyword in Ezekiel. Many treat the expression militarily in this context, viz., as a reference to the hordes of Egyptian and allied soldiers insolently opposing Yahweh, or economically, that is, “*wealth, a horde of possessions.*” Both are possible, but Ezekiel's concern for **hubris** in general in the oracles against the nations, especially Tyre and Egypt, and the specific reference to *gě'ôn 'uzzâ*, “*the pride of her strength,*” in this context (vv. 6, 18), point in a metaphorical direction.

3. (:5) Death to Egypt's Supporters

*“Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya, and the people of the land
that is in league will fall with them by the sword.”*

Constable: An enemy would invade Egypt, slay many of her people, take away her wealth, and tear down her national foundations. Her neighbor Ethiopia (Cush, Nubia) would despair when this happened because Ethiopia had strong ties to Egypt. Egypt's other allies would also fall: Put (on the African coast of the southern Red Sea), Lud

(Lydia in Anatolia), Arabia, and Libya (farther west on the Mediterranean coast of Africa).

Feinberg: Who are the *mingled people*? The reference is so general that a positive identification cannot be made. They have been understood to be the foreigners who served in the Egyptian army as mercenary soldiers (cf. **27:10; Jeremiah 25:20, 24; 46:9, 21**). Extrabiblical sources confirm the fact that Egypt made great use of hired soldiers from various nationalities. This is a possible, perhaps even a probable, interpretation of Ezekiel's meaning.

Galen Doughty: Egypt and all her allies, all the peoples who had sent her mercenaries and were allied with her in trade and political intrigue will fall. God will judge them all!

II. (:6-9) ALLIES OF EGYPT INCLUDED IN COMING JUDGMENT

(:6a) Authoritative Word of the Lord

"Thus says the LORD,"

Daniel Block: vv. 6-8 –

- First, their fall (*nāpal*) will occur in association with the collapse (*yārad*) of her own arrogant might, a typically Ezekielian expression for hubris.
- Second, their fall will occur by the sword within the land of Egypt. From Migdol in the north to Syene in the south, the land of Egypt will be filled with the slain of her allies.
- Third, they will share in Egypt's desolation, a point highlighted by the parallelistic and superlative construction of v. 7.
- Fourth, their demise is a divine act, an intended consequence of Yahweh's torching of Egypt. The construction suggests that the fire finally convinces them of Yahweh's involvement.

John Taylor: The next oracle enlarges on the fate of Egypt's allies and satellites: all her helpers are broken (**8**).

A. (:6b) Egypt Humiliated by the Fall of Her Supporters

*"Indeed, those who support Egypt will fall,
And the pride of her power will come down;
From Migdol to Syene They will fall within her by the sword,
' Declares the Lord God."*

Galen Doughty: vv. 6-9 -- God says Egypt will fall from Migdol on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta to Aswan in the south at the first great cataract of the Nile. From one end of Egypt to the other people will fall by the sword. Egypt will be desolate and ruined. All that remains today of ancient Egypt is ruins. The Egyptians will know that Yahweh is God when he sets fire to Egypt and all her allies are crushed. Egypt needed to be taught the lesson God taught them when he freed the Hebrew slaves in the exodus. Now 800 years later God must teach it to them again.

Feinberg: Man is ever slow to realize that in the hour of extreme need, the arm of the flesh is always disappointing. Egypt would find that every ally and every human confederate would be unavailing when God brought here into judgment.

B. (:7) Excessive Devastation and Desolation

*“And they will be desolate In the midst of the desolated lands;
And her cities will be In the midst of the devastated cities.”*

Leslie Allen: vv. 7-9 -- The superlatives for **destruction**, so telling that they were taken over in **29:12** (cf. **Zimmerli** 128, 130), describe a scenario that would be revelatory to its victims. The supplementary statement in v 9 imaginatively borrows from Isaiah’s oracle against Ethiopia in **Isa 18:1–2**. The detail of ambassadors sailing the Nile is used to help to draw a word picture of apprehension and dread.

C. (:8) Edification Purpose of God’s Judgment

1. Recognition Refrain

“And they will know that I am the LORD,”

2. Unleashing of Divine Wrath

*“When I set a fire in Egypt
And all her helpers are broken.”*

D. (:9) Ethiopia Terrified as a Result

1. Frightening News

*“On that day messengers will go forth from Me in ships
to frighten secure Ethiopia;”*

2. Fearful Anguish

*“and anguish will be on them as on the day of Egypt;
for, behold, it comes!”*

Peter Pett: What was to happen was inevitable. Nothing would prevent it.

III. (:10-12) AGENT OF JUDGMENT = NEBUCHADNEZZAR

(:10a) Authoritative Word of the Lord

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:10b) Agent of Judgment Identified as Nebuchadnezzar

*“I will also make the multitude of Egypt cease
By the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”*

Leslie Allen: The role of vv 10–12 is to accentuate the human and divine agencies at work against Egypt, combining to nullify Judean hopes. At Yahweh’s behest Nebuchadnezzar was to continue his conquests down into Egypt. It was Ezekiel’s way

of emphasizing that the Judeans had put their political and providential eggs into the wrong basket.

B. (:11) Agent of Judgment Described as Ruthless and Violent

*“He and his people with him, The most ruthless of the nations,
Will be brought in to destroy the land;
And they will draw their swords against Egypt
And fill the land with the slain.”*

C. (:12a) Results of God’s Judgment

*“Moreover, I will make the Nile canals dry
And sell the land into the hands of evil men.
And I will make the land desolate, And all that is in it,
By the hand of strangers;”*

David Thompson: Now **verse 12** has not completely happened yet. Some of the tributaries of the Nile have been dried up to the point where there are marsh lands and various pools of water. But as near as we may determine, a complete destruction has not yet occurred. **Revelation 16:4-10** clearly predicts that God will cause rivers to dry.

Feinberg: Apart from the Nile Egypt was nothing more than a barren wilderness. The worst calamity that could have befallen Egypt would be the desiccation of her river, for her life depended on the annual inundation of the land by the Nile.

(:12b) Authoritative Word of the Lord

“I, the LORD, have spoken.”

IV. (:13-19) ALL-ENCOMPASSING GEOGRAPHIC HIT LIST FOR THE COMING JUDGMENT

(:13a) Authoritative Word of the Lord

“Thus says the Lord God,”

John Taylor: Finally, in a grand display of geographical knowledge, the complete devastation of the land of Egypt is expressed by means of a welter of place-names.

A. (:13b) Purging of Idolatry and Arrogant Leadership

1. Purging of Idolatry

*“I will also destroy the idols
And make the images cease from Memphis.”*

Lamar Cooper: God would destroy the idols of Egypt (v. 13). This was a remarkable claim considering the scope of Egyptian religion. Elements of Egyptian religion are so complex and contradictory from one period to another that sweeping generalities would be difficult. Religion in Egypt developed out of a system of local village gods and lesser spirits whose purposes included both help and hindrance of humanity. These traditions

were preserved as some of these villages grew to become cities. Ptah was the god of Memphis; Atum, god of Heliopolis; Montu, god of Thebes. In the villages gods were associated with every area of daily life. There were gods to assist childbearing, household duties, harvest of crops; there were river gods and others. The gods at one point numbered more than twelve hundred.

2. Purging of Arrogant Leadership

“And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt;”

David Thompson: No longer will Egypt have a leader. During the Tribulation, all proud, arrogant political leaders will come under the judgment of God and will be hiding in caves (**Rev. 6:15**). When Jesus Christ reigns on this earth, political leaders will be put out of business.

3. Promotion of the Fear of God

“And I will put fear in the land of Egypt.”

B. (:14-18) Places Targeted for Judgment

1. (:14) Pathros, Zoan and Thebes

*“And I will make Pathros desolate,
Set a fire in Zoan,
And execute judgments on Thebes.”*

Constable: Specifically, God would desolate Pathros (Upper Egypt, between modern Cairo and Aswan, cf. **29:14**), He would burn up Zoan (Gr. Tanis), a chief city in the northeastern delta, and He would judge No (Gr. Thebes, modern Karnak and Luxor), Egypt's southern capital. All the towns mentioned in these verses were important religious centers as well as large cities.

Peter Pett: A wide range of cities in Egypt are mentioned to bring home the widespread nature of the devastation. Everywhere would be affected (compare for the approach **Isaiah 10:27-32; Micah 1:10-15; Zephaniah 2:4**). There is no order to the names, they are selected at random. The many gods of Egypt would be decimated and authority in the land would cease. There would thus be general fear over the whole land. The great cities would be desolated and many set on fire. Anguish would be everywhere. This would be invasion on a large scale. ‘Adversaries in the day time’ reflects this. The city gates would normally be open during the day, but closed at nights. At this time they would be permanently closed.

2. (:15-16) Sin, Thebes and Memphis

a. (:15a) Sin

*“And I will pour out My wrath on Sin,
The stronghold of Egypt;”*

b. (:15b) Thebes

“I will also cut off the multitude of Thebes.”

- c. (:16a) Egypt in General
“And I will set a fire in Egypt;”
- d. (:16b) Sin
“Sin will writhe in anguish,”
- e. (:16c) Thebes
“Thebes will be breached,
- f. (:16d) Memphis
“And Memphis will have distresses daily.”

Constable: God would also judge the people living in Sin (Gr. Pelusium), one of the northernmost strongholds of Egypt, and He would allow the walls of No (Thebes) to be breached and its people slain. Noph (Memphis) would also experience daily distress during the war.

4. (:17) On and Pi-beseth

- a. Young Men
“The young men of On and of Pi-beseth will fall by the sword,”
- b. Women
“And the women will go into captivity.”

5. (:18) Tehaphnehes

*“And in Tehaphnehes the day will be dark
 When I break there the yoke bars of Egypt.
 Then the pride of her power will cease in her;
 A cloud will cover her,
 And her daughters will go into captivity.”*

Daniel Woodhead: **Darkness** is a symbol of divine judgment throughout the Old Testament (**Exodus 10:15; 21-23; I Samuel 2: 9; Psalm 35: 6; 105: 28** etc.). In the New Testament darkness is also associated with Satan and his demons (**Ephesians 6:12**).

Leslie Allen: The strong language of destruction (and of exile in vv **17, 18**, etc) characterizes Egypt as a political nonentity in the face of Yahweh’s sovereign will.

Galen Doughty: Once again Ezekiel describes the destruction of the whole country from north to south, from Lower Egypt to Upper Egypt. Nothing will escape, including Thebes which was protected by the long course of the Nile from the sea some 700 kilometers up river. Memphis will be in constant distress as well as Heliopolis, the city of the sun just north of Memphis at the base of the Delta, and Bubastis, a temple city in the southeastern corner of the Nile Delta near Goshen. The three cities of Memphis,

Heliopolis and Bubastis or Pi-Beseth in Hebrew, were all temple cities, headquarters for the worship of major Egyptian gods. The true God will destroy them all. God says it will be a dark day when he breaks the yoke of Egypt and Tahpanhes or Heliopolis, will fall. Heliopolis was the center of the worship of the Egyptian sun god Amun or Amun-Ra. The yoke of Egypt probably refers to the Egyptian gods that tempted Israel from the very beginning all throughout her history. God will cover Egypt with clouds meaning judgment and her towns and people will go into captivity. Then all of Egypt will know that Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews is the one true and only God. He is the Lord of History and the nations not the false idols of Egypt.

Charles Dyer: By naming Egypt’s major cities God was saying that the strength of the entire nation would be ended, like the breaking of a yoke. She would be covered with clouds, a figurative way to express doom and judgment (cf. **Ezek. 30:3; 32:7-8; 34:12;** cf. **Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15**). As gathering clouds herald an approaching storm, so covering Egypt with clouds would herald her coming judgment. Major cities would be destroyed, and people in the villages would be taken into captivity.

C. (:19) Final Summary of Judgment

1. Certainty of Divine Judgment

“Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt,”

2. Recognition Formula = Purpose of Divine Judgment

“And they will know that I am the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How amazing is this prophecy in the context of how powerful Egypt was at the time and how weak Judah was in their banishment into captivity?
- 2) In what way does God’s execution of judgment through the human agency of King Nebuchadnezzar contribute to His self-revelation of His sovereignty over the nations?
- 3) What portions of this prophecy might open the door to eschatological application?
- 4) Why so much emphasis on specific cities within Egypt? What is the significance of mentioning those particular cities?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: Following the customary word-event formula and the formal address of the prophet in **vv. 1–2a**, the prophetic utterance proper breaks up into four segments,

each introduced with its own citation formula:

- a. The Announcement of the Day of Yahweh in Egypt (vv. 2b–5)
- b. The Effects of the Day of Yahweh on Egypt’s Allies (vv. 6–9)
- c. The Agent of the Day of Yahweh in Egypt (vv. 10–12)
- d. The Scope of the Judgment on the Day of Yahweh in Egypt (vv. 13–19)

David Thompson: This is a prophecy aimed straight at Egypt and it is not positive. It also cannot be viewed as having been ever completely fulfilled. It is true that the Babylonians did conquer much of this world, but there is nowhere in history that we may find everything fulfilled that is mentioned here. What this tells us is that it is yet to be fulfilled.

IN THE FUTURE GOD WILL DESTROY EGYPT AND HER FALSE RELIGION ALONG WITH HER ARAB ALLIES, AND THE ONLY EGYPTIANS THAT WILL SURVIVE WILL BE THE ONES SCATTERED AMONG OTHER NATIONS.

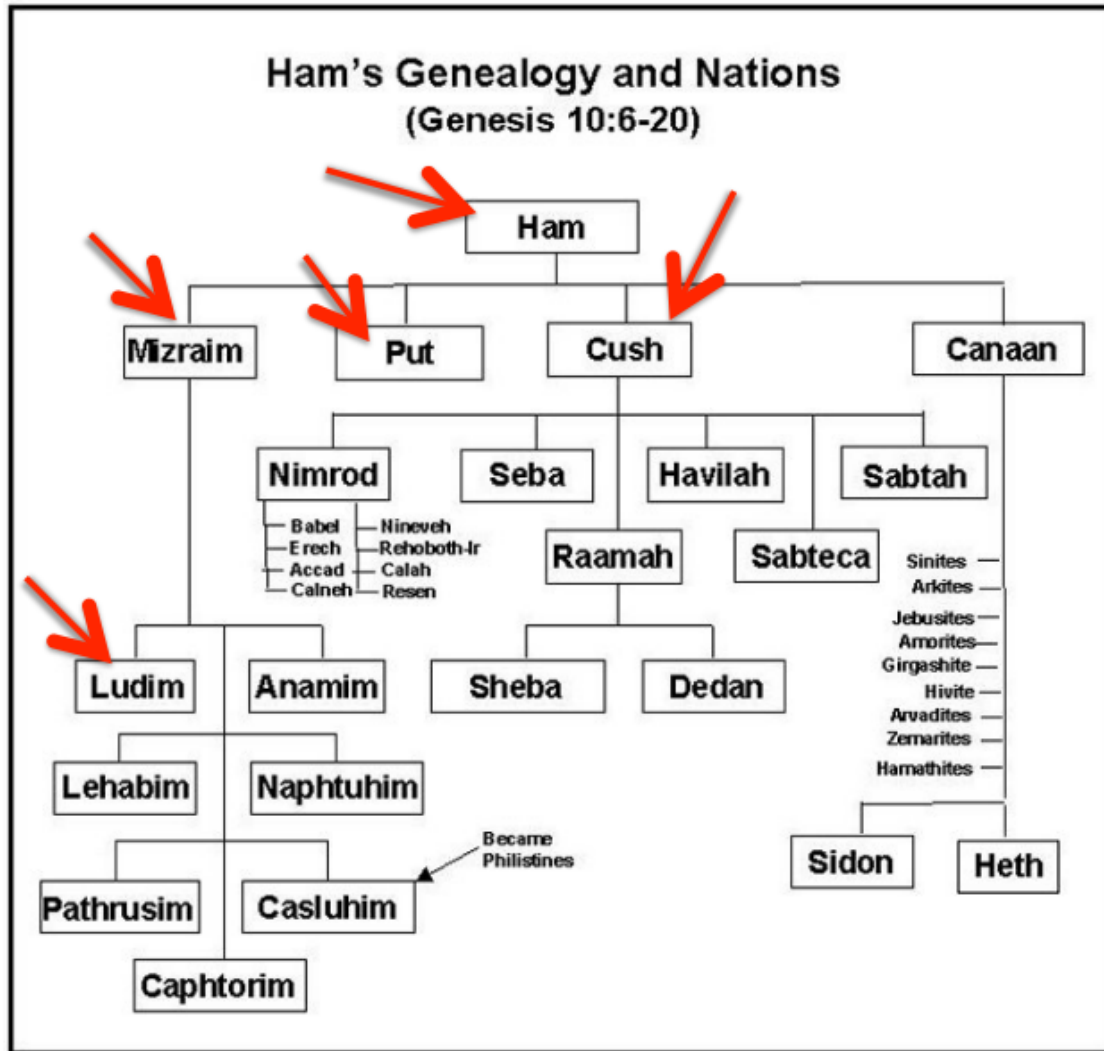
Douglas Stuart: The final subsection of the passage, **verses 13–19**, contains a catalog of Egyptian cities somewhat in the manner of the catalog of places with whom Tyre traded (**27:12–24**). Various forms of misery characteristic of the day of the Lord are mentioned here as what the cities of Egypt may expect. All of them are intended to apply to all of Egypt, although the style of the passage is to pair miseries with cities randomly, in a kind of literary collage. Idols will cease from Noph (Memphis, **v. 13**). This is a way of rejecting Egypt’s religion (cf. **Lev. 26:31**). The royalty (“*princes*”) will suffer, and the land will fear (cf. **Deut. 28:66–67**). In **verse 14** desolation, fire, and “*judgments*” will come to Pathros (upper Egypt), Zoan (Tanis, in the eastern Nile Delta), and No (Thebes). Sin (Pelesium, on the Mediterranean coast) and No (Thebes) are both mentioned twice in **verses 15–16** and linked with a variety of miseries characteristic of the wrath of God (cf. **Lev. 26; Deut. 28–32**). Memphis, first mentioned in the catalog in **verse 13**, is mentioned here again, completing a kind of concentric pattern of place names, thus giving the ancient hearer a feeling of extensive coverage.

Aven (Heliopolis; cf. **Gen. 41:15**) and Pi Beseth (Bubastis) were both important cities along the Nile, and with them the great threats of defeat in war and captivity are paired (**v. 17**). “*Darkness*” language is again used of the day of the Lord in **verse 18**, and the city named here is Tahpanhes, the city on the Suez Canal route where Jeremiah stayed after leaving Judah (**Jer. 43:7**).

Thus “up and down and all around” Egypt, as it were, the wrath of God will be felt. One of His purposes is to reveal Himself as sovereign among humankind, to be glorified even in the sight of His foes. Such things constitute part of God’s redemptive role in this world. The Egyptians, oppressors of the Israelites at many stages in their history, were defiant of the Lord, a deity whom they regarded as puny in relation to their “great” gods. As it had taken severe measures to teach the Egyptians that the Lord was supreme over them at the time of the Exodus, so it would be necessary for them to suffer His wrath again so that they might recognize His sovereignty (“*know that I am the Lord*”).

God’s purpose in speaking all these oracles against foreign nations through Ezekiel was the same: to get the faith and confidence of the nations—especially Israel—away from their idols, who could not save, and toward Himself, who alone could.

Daniel Woodhead:



Daniel Block: Verses 13–19 examine the disastrous day of Yahweh in Egypt from two perspectives.

- On the one hand, Ezekiel highlights **Yahweh’s personal involvement** in the punishment of the land. Speaking of Yahweh’s intervention in the first person, the prophet lists the following actions, most of which are familiar from previous oracles: “to execute punishments” (*’āsā šēpā’īm*, vv. 14, 19; cf. 5:10, 15; 11:9; 14:21; 16:41; 25:11; 28:22, 26); “to pour out my fury” (*šāpak ḥāmātī*, v. 15; cf. 7:8; 9:8; 14:19; 16:38; 20:8, 13, 21; 22:22; 36:18); “to destroy” (*he’ēbīd*, v. 13; cf. 26:7, 16; 32:13); “to terminate” (*hišbīt*, v. 13; cf. 16:41; 23:27; 48; 34:10, 25; also cf. 7:24); “to devastate” (*hēšīm*, v. 14; cf. 20:26; 30:12); “to break, smash” (*šābar*, v. 18; cf. 27:26; 30:21, 22, 24); “to set fire to” (*nātan ’ēš*

bě, vv. 14, 16; cf. 30:8, 26); “to cut off” (*hikrît*, v. 15; cf. 14:13, 17, 19, 21; 21:8, 9; 25:7, 13, 16; 29:8); “to put fear into” (*nātan yir’â bě*, v. 13).

- On the other hand, statements cast in the third person describe the experience from the **perspective of the victims**: “be no longer” (*lō’ yihyeh ’ôd*, v. 13; cf. 12:24); “writhe in pain” (*hûl tâhûl*, v. 16; cf. *halhālâ*, vv. 4, 9); “to be breached” (*nibqa’*, v. 16; cf. 13:11; 26:10); “to fall by the sword” (*nāpal baḥereb*, v. 17; cf. 5:12; 6:11, 12; 7:15; 11:10; 17:21; 23:25; 24:21; 25:13; 30:5, 6; 32:22, 23, 24; 33:27; 39:23); “to go into captivity” (*hālak baššēbî*, vv. 17, 18; cf. 12:11); “to be terminated” (*nišbat*, v. 18; cf. 6:6; 33:28); “to be covered with a cloud” (*kissâ ’ānān*, v. 18; cf. 30:3; 32:7; 38:9, 16); “the day be dark in” (*hāšak hayyôm bě*, v. 18; cf. 32:8). The cumulative effect of this assemblage of expressions should have put the fear of God into anyone who heard the oracle.

TEXT: Ezekiel 30:20-26

TITLE: ARMS BATTLE --
BREAKING THE ARMS OF PHARAOH AND STRENGTHENING THE ARMS OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

BIG IDEA:
ULTIMATE SUCCESS OR FAILURE COMES FROM THE ARM OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

The world powers of Egypt (under the leadership of Pharaoh) and Babylon (under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar) engage in some serious arm wrestling. But their military struggle does not ultimately depend on their own strength. It is the sovereign Lord who dictates the outcome by fracturing the arm of Pharaoh and strengthening the arm of Nebuchadnezzar.

Douglas Stuart: As a result, Egypt was helpless before the Babylonians, who were soon enough to conquer Egypt, just as they had conquered Palestine, and drive the Egyptians as refugees to other lands as well as taking some of them captive (v. 23). Babylon's power ("arms") would increase, but Egypt's would decrease (vv. 24–25). Egyptians would end up on the run or in captivity (v. 26). Again, the result would serve the Lord's end in displaying His sovereign power to the once-proud nation of Egypt (v. 26),

Iain Duguid: In the background of this struggle between two world powers, however, there is another actor. The "arm" that acts most frequently in the Old Testament is the **arm of the Lord**, notably in the Exodus, when he brought his people out of Egypt "by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut. 4:34). This formula is a constant refrain throughout the Old Testament; in this passage the arm of the Lord is not directly referred to, but the Lord's action is everywhere evident. He is the one who will break Pharaoh's arms and strengthen Nebuchadnezzar's (Ezek. 30:22, 25). It is the Lord's sword that Nebuchadnezzar will draw against Egypt (30:25). It is the Lord who will scatter the Egyptians among the nations (30:26). The clash of the superpowers is under his control.

Lamar Cooper: This message bears sober testimony in graphic detail to the events associated with the fall of Egypt. Ezekiel said that Pharaoh's arms would be broken (vv. 21–22, 24) and that his arms would fall limp (v. 25). This passage presents Pharaoh as helpless and unable to hold a weapon and therefore unable to defend against invading armies (v. 21). Additional references to the defeat of Egypt may be found in Isaiah (30:1–14), Jeremiah (37:5ff.; 46:1–26), and the writer of Kings (2 Kgs 24:7). The repetition of the ideas in the last four verses was for emphasis (Ezek 30:23–25). Egypt's devastation and its loss of standing in the family of nations is a constant

testimony to the truth of God's word (30:1–19). The great civilization would exist only in ruins and in historical records (30:20–26).

I. (:20-21) PAST INTERVENTION BY THE LORD TO BREAK THE ARM OF PHARAOH – LEARN THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

A. (:20) Introduction to the Prophecy

1. Dating of the Prophecy

“And it came about in the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh of the month,”

Iain Duguid: The date formula in 30:20 places it shortly before the fall of Jerusalem; the oracle itself rules out the possibility of any relief coming from the Egyptian direction, since the Lord has “*broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt*” (30:21). The historical background of this oracle lies in an apparent attempt by Pharaoh Hophra to intervene in the crisis of his day (Jer. 37:5); however, though this led to a withdrawal of Nebuchadnezzar's army in the short term, the hopes raised in the Judean capital were soon to be dashed. After dealing with the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar returned to finish what he had started in Jerusalem (Jer. 39:1).

Constable: Ezekiel received this oracle against Egypt on April, 29, 587 B.C., less than four months after the Lord gave him the first oracle (29:1-16).

2. Authoritative Word of the Lord

“that the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

B. (:21) Defeat of Egypt without Possibility of Recovery

1. Image of Breaking the Arm

“Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt;”

Charles Dyer: Ezekiel's point was to contrast the recent defeat suffered by Egypt (her one “*broken arm*”) with the still greater defeat she would suffer. She had been disarmed when she tried to intervene in Babylon's attack on Jerusalem, but she would later be destroyed by Babylon.

2. Impossibility of Healing

“and, behold, it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage,”

3. Incapable of Future Warfare

“that it may be strong to hold the sword.”

Iain Duguid: The defeat of Egypt is described in terms of a breaking of Pharaoh's arm (Ezek. 30:21). The “*arm*” in the Old Testament is the part of the body through which a person acts. It is therefore a symbol of **strength**: A strong arm enables effective action,

while a broken arm renders a person helpless (cf. **Job 22:9; Ps. 10:15**). The fundamental contrast in this oracle is between the broken arms of Pharaoh and the arms of Nebuchadnezzar that have been strengthened by the Lord (**Ezek. 30:25**). This bout is clearly not an equal contest. Ezekiel even anticipates potential objections that though Pharaoh's arm has been broken, it may be healed (**30:21**), or that though one arm has been broken Pharaoh still has another arm with which to fight (**30:22**). Even the faintest source of hope must be removed; the broken arm will not receive the medical treatment necessary for it to be healed. On the contrary, it will be broken again, along with the sound arm that remains (**30:22**). Egypt's power will be comprehensively destroyed, a prediction ultimately fulfilled in the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses in 525 b.c.

II. (:22-25a) FUTURE INTERVENTION BY THE LORD TO OPPOSE PHARAOH AND STRENGTHEN NEBUCHADNEZZAR – MAKE SURE THE LORD IS ON YOUR SIDE

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

Leslie Allen: the pronouncement of judgment may be understood in terms of three sections: a fourfold statement of Pharaoh's overwhelming defeat (**vv 22a–23**), a fourfold statement of victory and defeat (**v 24**) and a double statement of victory and defeat (**v 25a**).

A. (:22b-23) Total Defeat of Egypt Leading to Dispersion

1. (:22b) Divine Opposition

“Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt”

Daniel Block: Yahweh's fundamental disposition is expressed in the challenge formula, *“I am against Pharaoh, the king of Egypt!”* (*hinēni 'el-par 'ōh melek-miṣrayim*). This opposition will be demonstrated by Yahweh's breaking both of Pharaoh's arms. The imagery suggests that Pharaoh has transferred the sword to his left hand. Indeed, some see here an allusion to Egypt's two-pronged attack on Nebuchadnezzar's forces. The broken arm represents Hophra's land force, which has already been defeated, and the sound arm his navy, which is still actively engaged in the defense of Tyre. It seems Egyptian naval aid had made it possible for Tyre to withstand Nebuchadnezzar's siege for thirteen years. But when this arm is destroyed chaos will fill the land of Egypt and its population will be dispersed throughout the world (cf. **29:12**).

2. (:22c) Dual Breaking of Both Arms

“and will break his arms, both the strong and the broken;”

MacArthur: Both the defeat of Pharaoh Hophra (cf. **Jer 37:5ff**) and the earlier defeat of Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish (cf. **2KI 24:7; Jer 46:2**) are in view.

3. (:22d) Disarming

“and I will make the sword fall from his hand.”

4. (:23) Dispersing

“And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands.”

B. (:24-25a) Success and Failure Governed by the Lord

1. (:24) Contrast between Success and Failure Detailed

a. Success via Divine Strengthening of Nebuchadnezzar

“For I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand;”

b. Failure via Divine Fracturing of Pharaoh

“and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, so that he will groan before him with the groanings of a wounded man.”

Peter Pett: The success and failure of each side is in the hands of Yahweh. The one whom He strengthens will succeed, the one whom He prevents will fail. Thus because He would make the arms of the king of Babylon strong, and it was His sword that he would bear, the king of Babylon would succeed. And because he would ‘*break the arms*’ of Pharaoh, Pharaoh would be defeated and groan like a mortally wounded man.

Daniel Block: The effects of Yahweh’s action against the pharaoh go beyond neutralizing his power. The prediction that *he will groan* [lit. ‘*groan groanings*’] *before him like one slain* implies that Pharaoh himself will be killed.

2. (:25a) Contrast between Success and Failure Summarized

a. Success via Divine Strengthening of Nebuchadnezzar

“Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon,”

b. Failure via Divine Fracturing of Pharaoh

“but the arms of Pharaoh will fall.”

III. (:25b-26) PURPOSE OF THE LORD’S INTERVENTION – EMBRACE THE LORD’S SOVEREIGNTY BEFORE BEING FORCED TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIM VIA JUDGMENT

A. (:25b) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD,”

B. (:25c) Accomplished by Strengthening Nebuchadnezzar

“when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.”

C. (:26a) Accomplished by Scattering the Egyptians

“When I scatter the Egyptians among the nations

and disperse them among the lands,”

D. (:26b) Recognition Refrain

“then they will know that I am the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does God’s sovereignty over ultimate victory and defeat eliminate pride and diffuse false security?
- 2) What does it mean to you personally that the outcome in battle belongs to the Lord?
- 3) From where do you derive your confidence and strength?
- 4) Why do people fail to come to truly know the Lord until after His revelation of divine judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Derek Thomas: This is the fourth prophecy about Egypt and is dated in the eleventh year of the exile, that is, 587 B.C., the very time that the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem. No doubt some of Ezekiel’s compatriots anticipated, as did their relations in Jerusalem, a deliverance from Egypt. In the previous year news had filtered to the banks of the Kebar River that Pharaoh’s armies had distracted the Babylonian siege for a while, but the entire escapade was short-lived (**Jer. 37:5–11**). Pharaoh’s arm is broken: *‘It has not been bound up for healing or put in a splint so as to become strong enough to hold a sword’* (**30:21**).

Any hope now of another such attack is quickly put down by saying that Pharaoh’s other arm is to be broken also (**30:22**). Why is this? Because, *‘I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt’* (**30:22**). Pharaoh Hophra was defeated in war and finally assassinated by his own people, just as Jeremiah predicted (**Jer. 44:30**). The would-be conquerors became the conquered, suffering the same fate as Judah—defeat and exile (**30:23–26**). The Lord of history reveals himself in charge of these momentous international matters.

Alexander: The flexed arm was a common Egyptian symbol for the Pharaoh’s strength. Often statues or images of the Pharaoh have this arm flexed, wielding a sword in battle. A king with great biceps was especially a popular concept under the Saites Dynasty of Ezekiel’s day. In addition Hophra took a second formal title that meant ‘possessed of a muscular arm’ or ‘strong-armed’ ...

Galen Doughty: After Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in January of 588, Pharaoh Hophra marched out of Egypt to the aid of Zedekiah to keep Babylon in check. Nebuchadnezzar briefly halted the siege of Jerusalem and moved to repulse Hophra's forces. Whether they fought or not is unclear. However, Hophra did withdraw his forces and return to Egypt after his encounter with Nebuchadnezzar's army. He did not interfere in Babylonian affairs in Judah again. Hophra was killed in 570 in a conflict with his own regent, Ahmose. God completely broke his power and the power of Egypt and fulfilled the Word of his prophet.

When Hophra marched out of Egypt to aid Zedekiah against Babylon hope surged in Judah that the siege was going to be lifted and Judah delivered from Nebuchadnezzar just as God had delivered King Hezekiah from the siege of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. This was what the court prophets of the official theology were prophesying in Jerusalem. God revealed to Ezekiel in Babylon and Jeremiah in Jerusalem that no such rescue was in Judah's future. In fact God would break the power of Egypt to do anything for Judah. As Ezekiel said, the Lord had put his sword in the hand of the King of Babylon. Judah's hope in Egypt was smashed.

David Thompson: God would scatter the Egyptians among the nations and when He does this, all will know He is God and He did this.

Now we know that some of these things have not happened yet and the reason we know this is because of **Revelation 17-18**. Here again Babylon is front and center. So even though some of the things have occurred, not all has occurred yet.

We believe that the vast majority of things will occur in the Tribulation, when the Antichrist sweeps down into Egypt (**Daniel 11:41-43**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 31:1-18

TITLE: *THE FELLING OF THE MIGHTY TREE*

BIG IDEA:

IF THE POWERFUL NATION OF ASSYRIA CAN SUFFER SUCH A HUMILIATING DEMISE, HOW MUCH MORE THE ARROGANT NATION OF EGYPT

INTRODUCTION:

This allegory of the felling of the mighty tree recounts the demise of powerful Assyria in order to apply its message to arrogant Egypt. What a majestic cedar tree was Assyria in its prime! Her beauty was unprecedented and her influence was far reaching. Despite her prideful boasting, she actually owed her beauty and power to the design and direction of her Creator God. But her humiliating demise left her rotting in Sheol alongside the lowest and most disgraced nations. Death has a sobering leveling effect. As God used Babylon to humble Assyria, so He would use King Nebuchadnezzar to bring down Egypt from her lofty heights.

Leslie Allen: The oracle is explicitly directed against Pharaoh and his army. Accordingly, the poem of vv **2b–9** has the role of an implicit accusation, which becomes explicit in the rephrasing of v **10**. After the direct rhetorical question of v **2b**, the story is told of a magnificent tree, a mythological cosmic tree. From v **10** the story takes a sinister turn as the tree is accused of pride and wickedness, and Yahweh describes how he had it cut down and humiliated. In vv **15–17** the ritual mourning for the tree and its descent to Sheol are related, while v **18** returns to the present and to direct address in a threat of future punishment that echoes the language of Sheol used earlier. V **18** has a summarizing role, presenting the chapter in a nutshell and with greater clarity. . .

Outright denial does not necessarily change an opponent's mind. Here Ezekiel was faced with the task of persuading his fellow exiles to forget their optimistic hopes that Hophra's military forces would be a match for the Babylonians besieging Jerusalem. He shrewdly begins by sharing their positive assessment of Egypt. Pharaoh was indeed the embodiment of a world power, magnificent in its impression of permanence. As such, he corresponded to the cosmic tree of ancient lore, filling his observers' horizon with his fascinating prestige. Essentially, however, his continued vitality was derived from a source outside himself, like the subterranean water supply of the cosmic tree. This element of contingency struck a warning note for those with ears to hear. The virtual hymn to Pharaoh suddenly turns into an oracular pronouncement of punishment for his lofty pride. The scenario changes into woodcutters at work, leaving a fallen giant of a tree, like some California redwood, lying inert and powerless over an enormous expanse of ground.

Douglas Stuart: The purpose of the allegory is to reassure the faithful among the exiles and all subsequent readers that God does not judge His own covenant people without also having a plan to punish the rest of the world, and nations who oppose His will surely get their deserved fate.

To the Judeans of Ezekiel's day Egypt was a giant and they were a dwarf. They needed encouragement, especially at a time when their little capital city—all that remained of their nation—was surrounded by enemy troops while huge, prosperous Egypt enjoyed respect among the nations of the world. But Egypt's time would come. It was big, and it would fall hard.

Iain Duguid: Pride once again precedes a fall from grace. In all the vivid word pictures used by Ezekiel in the oracles against the foreign nations, the nature of the glorious object described contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. Tyre was a majestic ship, but is now sunk (**ch. 27**). Her king was as glorious as the first man, a semi-divine being in the Garden of Eden, but like Adam he was driven out (**28:1–19**). Pharaoh is a crocodile of mythical proportions, but will be hunted down like an ordinary reptile (**29:1–16**). Here now, Egypt is a great world tree, but it will be felled by the cosmic lumberjack.

John Taylor: This chapter has a clear unity, indicated both by its subject-matter, the allegory of the cedar tree and its fall, and by the introductory and closing phrases in verses **2a** and **18d**. It is in three sections: the poem of the magnificent tree to which Pharaoh is likened (**2–9**), and two prose oracles describing its downfall at the hand of foreigners (**10–14**) and its descent into Sheol (**15–18**). The date given in **verse 1** is a further two months on from that of the previous oracle (30:20) and is June 587 b.c.

Wiersbe: The argument the prophet presented was simple. Egypt boasted in its greatness, yet Egypt wasn't as great as Assyria, and Assyria was conquered by Babylon. Conclusion: if Babylon can conquer Assyria, Babylon can conquer Egypt.

I. (:1-9) MAGNIFICENT COSMIC TREE -- GREATNESS AND POWER OF ASSYRIA TO BE COMPARED TO ARROGANT EGYPT

(:1-2a) Introduction to the Prophecy

1. Dating of the Prophecy

“And it came about in the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first of the month,”

2. Authoritative Word of the Lord

“that the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 ‘Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude,’”

Daniel Block: The prophecy is prefaced with a command to Ezekiel to speak to Pharaoh and his **hubris**. In the oracles against Egypt, *hāmônô* is usually interpreted as “*his people*,” that is, the military forces, or the wealth of Pharaoh. While both will

undoubtedly be implicated in the king's demise, in contexts like this, with the attention focused on the persona of the pharaoh, and the central issue being his **pride**, the term refers primarily to his "**pomp, arrogance, insolence.**" This prophetic agenda is suggested by the opening rhetorical question, "*To whom do you [sg.] compare in your greatness?*" but overtly expressed in the charges in **v. 10**.

**A. (:2b) Challenge to Egypt's Arrogance –
Key Rhetorical Question Setting up the Comparison to the Fall of Assyria**

"Whom are you like in your greatness?"

Lamar Cooper: This poem begins with recounting the **fall of the king of Assyria**, who is compared to a **cedar of Lebanon**. The cedars of Lebanon were known for their height and durability. These trees grew taller than all other trees (**vv. 3, 5**), a symbolic reference to Assyria's former position of world dominance. All the birds nested in the cedar (**v. 6**), a reference to the small nations that became dependent on Assyria. This "*tree*" was a model of beauty and majesty for all to see (**v. 7**). None of the cedars in the garden of God could rival it (**v. 8**). "*Garden of God*" is a reference to Eden (**v. 9**) but also represents the whole world order as initially created by God. Assyria was the greatest nation in world history up to the point of its rise as a dominant world power. The point of the image of the tree in **vv. 3–9** is to present the matchless splendor and power of Egypt.

B. (:3-4) Testimony to Assyria's Greatness

1. (:3) Compared to a Majestic Cedar Tree in Lebanon

*"Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon
With beautiful branches and forest shade,
And very high; And its top was among the clouds."*

Daniel Block: the reference to **Assyria** is not as out of place as is often imagined. The context requires a symbol of imperial greatness with which Egypt could be compared. No standard would have been more suitable than Assyria, whose memory would surely still have been alive in the minds of Ezekiel and his hearers. After all, this great cedar had been felled within their lifetime. That Ezekiel viewed Assyria as the imperial power par excellence is confirmed in the next oracle, which places Assyria at the head of the list of those who welcome the pharaoh to Sheol (**32:22–32**).

2. (:4) Cultivated by Extensive Water Channels Impacting Surrounding Nations

*"The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.
With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place,
And it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field."*

Leslie Allen: After the initial question the poem of **vv 3–9** divides into three strophes, **vv 3–4, 5–6** and **7–9**, each of which begins with the size of the tree and moves to the supply of water (cf. **Parunak**, Structural Studies 401–2). The rhetorical question concerning Pharaoh in his military might gives way to an allegory of a cosmic tree. The

parallel is a flattering one, and by it Ezekiel is empathizing with the dreams of his compatriots. The beauty and height of the tree and its unfailing water supply (cf. **Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13**) are admiringly described.

C. (:5-6) Testimony to Assyria's Impact on Other Nations

1. (:5) Spread of its Empire

*“Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field
And its boughs became many and its branches long
Because of many waters as it spread them out.”*

2. (:6) Security Provided to Other Nations

*“All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs,
And under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth,
And all great nations lived under its shade.”*

Leslie Allen: The second strophe develops like the first, but moves to the tree's cosmic dimensions, alluding to the political power wielded by its Egyptian representative. The royal application of the tree imagery is evident in the reference to “*nations*.”

Daniel Block: But these branches have more than aesthetic significance; like the cedar of **17:23**, this tree offers shelter for animals. All kinds of birds nest in its boughs, and all the land creatures bear their young beneath it. The last line of v. 6 betrays the political agenda of the allegory. All the great nations also congregate in its shadow. The picture of the tree is obviously being drawn from the idealized perspective of the Assyrian emperors themselves. In reality the nations incorporated into the Assyrian empire were annexed by force. Those who had experienced the brutality of the Assyrian hordes would scarcely have portrayed them this way. But anything is possible in art, particularly in self-description. In this imaginative literary cartoon, Assyria (Egypt) may view itself as the benevolent patron of the entire world.

D. (:7-9) Summary of Assyria's Majestic Beauty

1. (:7) Beauty without Boundaries

*“So it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches;
For its roots extended to many waters.”*

2. (:8) Beauty Unrivaled

*“The cedars in God's garden could not match it;
The cypresses could not compare with its boughs,
And the plane trees could not match its branches.
No tree in God's garden could compare with it in its beauty.”*

Douglas Stuart: in **verses 8–9**, the tree is praised as more impressive even than the trees of the Garden of Eden. It is important to understand that this is **hyperbole**—purposeful exaggeration to make a point. In the lament-style allegories found so frequently in Ezekiel, the greatness of a nation (whether real or merely selfishly imagined) is portrayed in high tones as a prelude to the description of the tragic fall.

Here the poetic tone is ironic. What **verses 3–8** describe is not reality as God sees it, but reality as Egypt sees it. It thinks itself the greatest of God’s creations (**v. 9**). We know from Egyptian religious texts that the Egyptians did indeed think exactly that of themselves.

3. (:9) Beauty Derived from God

a. Created Beautiful by God’s Design

“I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches,”

b. Cause for Jealousy among the Nations

“And all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it.”

Daniel Block: **V. 9** reminds the hearer that, like the trees in the garden, the great cedar’s glory is not of its own making; Yahweh has endowed it with the kind of superlative beauty that would evoke jealousy (*qinnē’*) among all the other trees in the garden. This theological comment is often considered intrusive, but it serves an important rhetorical function in assuring the hearer of the divine imprimatur on the cedar’s grandeur and eliminating any hint of wrongdoing on the part of the tree. Assyria (Egypt) draws its vitality and glory immediately from the subterranean waters, but they derive ultimately from God.

II. (:10-14) REVERSAL OF FORTUNES DUE TO PRIDE – TREE CUT DOWN BY KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God,”

John Taylor: This oracle gives the reasons for the cedar’s downfall (**10**), describes its ruin (**11, 12**) and adds the intention that motivated God in effecting such a catastrophe (**14**). The all-too-familiar pattern of pride preceding downfall comes out in **verse 10** (cf. Tyre, **28:2**; Babel, **Gen. 11:4**), and this is described as wickedness (**11**), a positive wrongdoing which incurs guilt, not simply a human failing to which all are excusably prone. The result is that God casts it out, just as he expelled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. So, deprived of God’s favour and protection, the cedar is a prey to the most terrible of the nations (**12**; cf. **28:7**; **30:11**; **32:12**) and is cut down and scattered all over the land. The birds and beasts which once sheltered under its branches will prey on its remains (**13**), and the event will prove an object lesson to all other nations not to aspire to such heights, because nations are human and human beings have no end but that which is common to all, the nether parts of the earth and the pit (**14**). Death is the great equalizer and the surest antidote to an excess of ambition. Even the Egypts of this world, who have success stories despite their godlessness, need to be taught the lesson that may be hidden in **verse 9** that I (Yahweh) made it beautiful. The prosperity of the wicked is, in the last analysis, all due to the mercy and goodness of God.

A. (:10b) Problem = Pride

“Because it is high in stature,

*and it has set its top among the clouds,
and its heart is haughty in its loftiness,”*

Daniel Block: Ezekiel’s literary portrait of the cedar was painted with totally positive strokes. The great tree Assyria was impressive in its height, magnificent in its beauty, and beneficent in the protection it offered to the creatures and the nations. In fact it had been planted in the garden by Yahweh himself. If the allegory contained any negative hint at all, it was the jealousy of the rest of the trees in the garden over this cedar’s grandeur. But this was their problem, not the cedar’s. Thus Ezekiel has toyed with his audience, drawing them into the mind of the rhetorical addressee and impressing them with his virtues. Suddenly, without warning, he jolts them with a radical reinterpretation of the scene. This cedar is not to be admired but condemned. The purpose of the hymn of praise was not to entertain but to prepare the stage for the divine woodcutter.

B. (:11-13) Retribution = Rejection

1. (:11) Agent of Judgment

*“therefore, I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations;
he will thoroughly deal with it.
According to its wickedness I have driven it away.”*

Daniel Block: The divine response to this hubris is announced. . . Yahweh declares that Pharaoh will be handed over to a chief [*’él*, lit. “*ram*”] of nations. In Ezekiel’s mind the “*ram*” is undoubtedly Nebuchadnezzar, the emperor over many nations. As the agent of divine justice, he will punish Egypt in a manner commensurate with its arrogance. The last verb of **v. 11**, banished, returns the prophet’s gaze to the paradigmatic tree, Assyria, whom Yahweh has already driven away. If Pharaoh wants to compare his greatness with that of Assyria, let him do the same with his demise.

2. (:12) Abandoned as Worthless

*“And alien tyrants of the nations have cut it down and left it;
on the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen,
and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land.
And all the peoples of the earth have gone down from its shade and left it.”*

C. (:13-14a) Lesson = Lowliness

1. (:13) Reality of Ruin

*“On its ruin all the birds of the heavens will dwell.
And all the beasts of the field will be on its fallen branches”*

Feinberg: There is something sad about the felling of a stately and majestic tree; how much more is this true when the reality represented is a mighty nation with its many people. Those nations that had formerly looked to her for sustenance, encouragement and protection realized soon enough the futility of expecting any help from that quarter. In spite of their previous dependence upon Assyria, the nations that viewed her fall were ready to take advantage of her ruin. Like vultures upon carrion they were

prepared to make the most of the downfall of that very power which had so recently been their mainstay and reliance.

2. (:14a) Prevention of Pride

*“in order that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature,
nor set their top among the clouds,
nor their well-watered mighty ones stand erect in their height.”*

Daniel Block: vv. 12-14 -- The divine action recedes into the background while the actions of third parties against the tree take center stage. The agents of divine punishment are identified as Foreigners (*zārīm*), and described as *“the most barbarous of nations.”* They are portrayed as rough lumberjacks, who chop the tree down and leave it lying on the mountains, its broken branches strewn up and down the mountains, valleys, and ravines of the land. The fall of the cedar also means the end of its beneficent protective role. *“All the peoples of the earth”* abandon it. Instead of building their nests in its branches and bearing their young under its boughs, the birds and the animals sit exposed on its fallen remains.

D. (:14b) Destiny = Death

*“For they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath,
among the sons of men, with those who go down to the pit.”*

Leslie Allen: V 14 stands aside from the narrative as an interlude. It extends the horizon of the judgment into a warning to all other nations who are tempted ambitiously to follow Egypt’s lead and soar away from their roots. In so doing, they virtually forget their grounding in a source of life not inherently their own (*“watered trees,” “irrigated trees”*), and so forget too that creaturely mortality is their lot (cf. v 17).

Daniel Block: The last line of v. 14 functions rhetorically to correct all who are tempted in their greatness to forget their mortal humanity. In consigning (*nātan*) them to death and the netherworld Yahweh reaffirms that he always has the last word. The sentence for the proud is simple: **death**. Far from symbolizing life and offering shelter to living creatures, such trees go down to the netherworld, where they will join the *bēnē ’ādām* (lit. *“sons of man”*) and all those who descend to the Pit. In other words, the depths to which the arrogant are cast will be commensurate with the heights to which they have aspired.

III. (:15-18) FINAL RESTING SPOT IN SHEOL – NO BETTER OFF THAN THE DREGS OF SOCIETY

“Thus says the Lord God,”

John Taylor: The concluding oracle deals with the reactions of her contemporaries to Egypt’s demise. As with the sinking of the Tyrian merchant ship, there is general consternation that a nation so mighty could be so humbled. What chance had lesser

nations like themselves? The world of nature will mourn for her: the deep (Heb. *těhôm*) grieves and the many waters are stopped; Lebanon is clothed in mourning and the trees wither away as in a drought (15). The nations, too, shake with the reverberation of its fall; all the noblest kingdoms, typified by the phrase, the trees of Eden (16), take comfort from the realization that just as they have flourished and died, so the great cedar-tree of Egypt has come to a similar end.

Feinberg: The Prophet Ezekiel not only described the condition and activities of Assyria during its power and earthly existence, but he also followed the ruined power after death. The aim of the writer was to present the effect of the judgment of Assyria and, through it, the more immediate subject of the impending judgment on Egypt and the rest of the nations. Just as mourners cover their heads when they are in mourning, so the Lord Himself inaugurated the mourning over the fall of great Assyria.

A. (:15-17) Reaction of the Nations

1. (:15) Mourning over Assyria's (Egypt's) Descent into Sheol

*“On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations;
I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers.*

*And its many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it,
and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it.”*

Daniel Block: The emphasis in the present text is on Yahweh's total control, not only over the fate of the cedar (Assyria, and secondarily Egypt), but also on the reactions of the nations.

2. (:16) Momentary Comfort over the Removal of Such a Powerful Adversary

*“I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall when I made it go down
to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the well-watered
trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, were comforted in the
earth beneath.”*

3. (:17) Matching Fate

*“They also went down with it to Sheol to those who were slain by the
sword; and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the
nations.”*

Douglas Stuart: In verses 15–18 the allegory moves on to imagine Egypt in hell (Hebrew, *šē.ōl*) with other nations or groups who died for their sins against God. This is not a literal picture of hell, but a figurative one, as an appreciation of the allegory requires. The first result of Egypt's death as a great nation, symbolized by the tree's fall, is worldwide mourning (v. 15). The nations would feel the loss of their counter part—and would also fear lest the same thing happened to them. In the language of the allegory the worldwide mourning is indicated by a stoppage of the flow of the world's waters and a sympathetic wilting of the world's trees. Other “trees,” already in hell, take some comfort in the fall of the “tree” of Egypt (v. 15), a tree whose fall scares and affects other nations on the earth (v. 16). Egypt's allies are in hell, too (v. 17, “those

who were its strong arm”), in the allegory—they would not escape while Egypt suffered at the hand of the Babylonians just as Egypt would not escape while Palestine likewise suffered. Egypt’s fall will be like that of the Garden of Eden (which is imagined as being destroyed here after Adam and Eve will join the “*uncircumcised*” (a way of referring to all those who have rejected God) and “*those slain by the sword*” (those punished by God through the intermediation of the Babylonians and others He unleashed on evil nations, v. 18).

B. (:18) Application of the Parable to Egypt

1. Comparison to Trees in Garden of Eden

“To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness?”

2. Condition in Death = No Better than the Lowest Elements of Society

a. Leveled in Death

“Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath;”

b. Legacy of the Disgraced

“you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword.”

Derek Thomas: **Uncircumcision** is a word used in the prophets to depict uncleanness, defilement and unworthiness (cf. **Jer. 9:25, 26**).

3. Condemnation of Pharaoh and the People of Egypt

“So is Pharaoh and all his multitude!” declares the Lord God.”

Lamar Cooper: All that was said to this point has laid the foundation for the conclusion in v. 18. If Assyria, with its splendor, power, and majesty, could not escape the judgment of God, neither would Egypt. The same fate that befell Assyria would befall Pharaoh, who would be Egypt’s fallen “*cedar*” (v. 18). The story of the cedar revisits several familiar themes that occurred in the prophecies against foreign nations.

- First, God hates pride because it leads people and nations to ruin (**Ezek 27:3; 28:1–2; Prov 16:18**).
- Second, the mighty fall as do the weak (cf. **27:27–36**). When the mighty fall, it is also a loss for the weak and dependent.
- Third, the fall of the tree was a reminder of the mortality of human beings and individual accountability to God (cf. **3:16–21; 18:1–32**).

Daniel Block: With the direct address of the pharaoh and the restatement of the opening question here, Ezekiel jolts his hearers back to reality. He has not been simply presenting a satirical allegory of the Assyrians whose might had once terrorized the world. Pharaoh is the problem. If he perceives himself as the heir of the Assyrians’ imperial might, then let him also share in their fate and the fate of all other glorious trees, including those of Eden. As the Assyrians had experienced, so the netherworld

will reduce him to the lowest common denominator—rather, the lowest uncommon level. Pharaoh will be consigned a place to lie (*šākab*) in Sheol among the uncircumcised and the criminal victims of the sword. The final statement declares unequivocally the prophet’s intent in this oracle. While the satirical tale may have described the fate of the Assyrians, it is directed at Pharaoh and his hubris. Yahweh’s concluding signature seals not only the oracle but also the pharaoh’s fate. In so doing Ezekiel seeks to undermine his fellow exiles’ hopes in all Egyptian enterprises against the Babylonians in Judah.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How the mighty have fallen! What does this allegory say to the proud and pompous?
- 2) What parallels do you see between Assyria and Egypt?
- 3) What is the impact of the fall of Egypt on the surrounding nations?
- 4) What will be your legacy after death?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: Overall, the chapter may be outlined as follows:

- Poem comparing Egypt to a splendid great tree (vv. 2–9)
- Prose description of the tree cut down by Babylon (vv. 10–14)
- Prose description of the tree’s fall to hell (vv. 15–18)

Iain Duguid: It was the Lord who had raised Egypt to her elevated status (“*I made it beautiful with abundant branches,*” **Ezek. 31:9**), but she considered her attainments something of which to be proud (**31:10**). The Lord can just as easily cast her down, as the personal pronouns indicate: “*I handed it over ... I cast it aside*” (**31:11**). The agency of execution is human (“*the ruler of the nations,*” **31:11**), but the instructions come from on high. Broken and shattered, the tree no longer provides shade and protection for the birds and the beasts, as a king might for his people (**Lam. 4:20**); instead, its fallen branches are merely a convenient resting place for them (**Ezek. 31:13**). Just as her height was unparalleled in her time, so it will never again be surpassed; for all the dominant nations that come after her will share her mortality, treading along with her the way to destruction, bound for the underworld (**Ezek. 31:14**).

The cosmic scale of the tree is matched by cosmic mourning at its fall and descent into Sheol, the home of the unworthy dead. The cosmic springs are shut up, while Lebanon,

the home of the mighty cedar, is darkened (**31:15**). The heights and the depths, the sources of light and subterranean water, are thus both clothed in mourning, a state also affecting those in between.

The nations of the world trembled at the sound of the tree's fall, whose echoes reverberated even into the underworld. Those of its predecessors who had envied it, described as "*the trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon*" (**31:16**), were gratified in its sharing of their demise, while those who had allied themselves to it went down with it to Sheol (**31:17**). There they joined those killed by the sword, whose unpeaceful end was thought in some way to carry over to their state beyond death. Ezekiel brings out the point of the word picture explicitly in **31:18**. Though Egypt's splendor and majesty were unrivaled in all the powerful nations who went before (i.e., the "*trees of Eden*"), she too will share their fate in the underworld among those outside the peaceful community, among the uncircumcised and those slain by the sword.

Wiersbe: The Lord allowed Assyria to achieve greatness because He had a work for her to do. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had rebelled against the Lord, so He used the Assyrians to chastize them and conquer their land (722 B.C.). In the days of King Hezekiah, the Lord used the Assyrians to discipline the kingdom of Judah, but He didn't allow them to take Jerusalem (**Isa. 37; 2 Kings 19; 2 Chron. 32**). God is sovereign over the nations and is able to use even the pagan peoples to accomplish His purposes.

TEXT: Ezekiel 32:1-16

TITLE: *LAMENT OVER THE FALL OF PHARAOH AND OF EGYPT*

BIG IDEA:

GOD PROMISES TO UTTERLY DESTROY PHARAOH AND EGYPT

INTRODUCTION:

Two final laments in **chapter 32** conclude the prophetic judgment uttered against Egypt. In the first lament (**vv. 1-16**) the focus begins on the demise of Egypt's leader (**vv. 1-10**); and then in **vv. 11-16** broadens to describe the demise of the land and its occupants. There is no way that God is going to forget to execute His promised judgments. Egypt is proud and powerful but no match for the one who rules over all nations. Once again the instrument of God's judgment will be the king of Babylon. The imagery of a captured crocodile is followed by the darkening of celestial lights and the devastation caused by the sword of Babylon.

Constable: The sixth and seventh oracles concerning Egypt are lamentations: over the fall of Pharaoh (**vv. 1-16**), and over the destruction of his imperial power (**vv. 17-32**).

Leslie Allen: The emphasis is not on Babylon's defeat of Egypt, but on Egypt's defeat at the hands of Yahweh. Did the exiles even now cling to a hope that Egypt would not tolerate Babylonian control of Palestine and Syria, but would retaliate in a counterthrust? As in earlier oracles, Ezekiel grants that Egypt is larger than life in its military and economic power and influence. However, a distinctive metaphor, used already in **chap. 29**, cuts it down to size. Just as the description of Tyre in terms of a veritable Titanic revealed the island fortress in a new and negative perspective, so here does the chaos monster metaphor for Egypt. If Egypt is a mighty dragon, one might say, Yahweh is cast in the role of St. George! Yahweh is quite capable of fighting and winning a cosmic battle against such a foe.

Douglas Stuart: This lament has an unusual perspective in that it is spoken almost entirely predictively in the first person by God Himself, much in the manner of a judgment sentence or curse prediction. Most laments speak about and/or to the subject but not so strongly from the divine voice, and they are more retrospective. Nevertheless, the four lament elements are present: direct address to the (future) dead; eulogy of the dead (mainly **v. 2** here); call to mourning (**v. 16**, prose conclusion); and evaluation of the loss to the survivors (**vv. 9-10** especially).

Peter Pett: No ancient empire in the Near East compared with Egypt. Others came and went but Egypt seemed to go on and on. Always it was there, the one certainty in a changing world. At times it might have seemed somewhat weakened, but it would rise from its weakness and become strong again. It always had to be taken into account. It was like its own pyramids. It seemed bound to last forever.

So the idea that this was at an end would shake the ancient world. And as far as Israel were concerned the point was that it was Yahweh who was doing it. He alone was more permanent and more powerful than Egypt. He had watched it from the beginning and now He was calling an end to its ways. It would never again be the principle actor in events. Only Yahweh would go on forever, He and the people whom He had chosen. The final restoration was in His hands.

(:1-2a) PRELUDE – INTRODUCTION TO THE LAMENT

A. (:1a) Dating of the Prophecy

“And it came about in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month,”

Douglas Stuart: The date of this oracle is the end of the twelfth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (and Ezekiel), that is, late 586 b.c., just weeks after the news reached the exiles in Tel-Abib that Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians (cf. **33:21**). Many must have been very disheartened, and surely Ezekiel himself would not have relished the news, even though it confirmed the accuracy of his preaching of the last dozen years. Perhaps now some in his potential audience would actually pay some attention, and another oracle against Egypt would be heard with more open ears.

B. (:1b) Authoritative Word of Prophecy

“that the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

C. (:2a) Lamentation Commanded

“Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him,”

I. (:2b-10) SHOCKING DEMISE OF PHARAOH

A. (:2b) Rebellious and Chaotic Sea Monster on the Political Scene

1. Perception vs. Reality

*“You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations,
Yet you are like the monster in the seas;”*

David Thompson: Everything you were involved in you muddied. This person was not refreshing to any. He stirred up trouble and dirt everywhere he went. In the Bible, you do not want God to classify you as some sea monster. Whenever God refers to someone as some sea monster, it is typically in the context of what He has crushed or what He intends to crush (**Is. 27:1; 51:9-11; Ps. 74:13**).

Charles Dyer: pictures Pharaoh’s ferocity and seeming invulnerability.

2. Promoter of Chaos

“And you burst forth in your rivers,

*And muddied the waters with your feet,
And fouled their rivers.”*

Daniel Block: The actions of this monster are both rebellious and chaotic. He snorts with his nostrils and flails his feet, stirring up the waters. The verb muddied (*rāpas*) links this text with **34:18–19**, in which pugnacious rams and male goats foul the drinking waters by trampling in it with their feet, preventing the rest of the flock from drinking. While Ezekiel might have portrayed Pharaoh as a royal shepherd, in keeping with common ancient Near Eastern custom, the present picture is anything but pastoral. Here the concrete actions represent defiance against Yahweh. The prophet’s lament represents a rejection of the noble leonine imagery for the Egyptian king in favor of the sinister and repugnant figure of the crocodile.

Feinberg: The Egyptian king disturbed the even tenor of the life stream of the nations around him.

B. (:3-8) Record of Egypt’s Fall

“Thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:3b-4) Death – Taking Him Captive to Expose Him to a Cruel Death

a. (:3b) Captured

*“Now I will spread My net over you
with a company of many peoples,
And they shall lift you up in My net.”*

Douglas Stuart: Armies of the nations will catch this animal (Egypt) in a net (v. 3) and leave it on the dry land to die, bleeding everywhere—a great death indeed (vv. 3–6; cf. **29:3–5**, which has similar vocabulary and imagery).

b. (:4a) Cast on the Open Field

*“And I will leave you on the land;
I will cast you on the open field.”*

Feinberg: The threat to leave the sea monster on the land implies that it would be rendered powerless, as a fish is out of water. Moreover, the birds of heaven and the beasts of the whole earth would feed on the carrion (cf. predictions in **Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:17-18**). If Egypt had any confidence in her size or power, this would prove to be no deterrent to the visitation from the Lord upon her.

c. (:4b) Carcass Feast for the Birds and Beasts

*“And I will cause all the birds of the heavens to dwell on you,
And I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you.”*

Daniel Block: The sea monster may throw his weight around in the water where he is at home, but on land he is out of his element. Under the hot desert sun he will quickly perish and become food for scavenging buzzards and jackals.

2. (:5-6) Desecration – Trashing His Carcass

*“And I will lay your flesh on the mountains,
And fill the valleys with your refuse.
6 I will also make the land drink the discharge of your blood, As far as
the mountains,
And the ravines shall be full of you.”*

Daniel Block: The prophet has painted a disgusting if vivid picture of the earth drinking the excrement, blood, and other body fluids that are discharged when an animal is slain. One can scarcely imagine a more ignominious death.

3. (:7-8) Darkness – Turning Out His Lights

*“And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken their
stars;
I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give its light.
8 All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you
And will set darkness on your land,’ Declares the Lord God.”*

Lamar Cooper: Pharaoh’s judgment also would be part of the eschatological Day of the Lord. He would be snuffed out or extinguished like a shining star (vv. 7–8). On that Day of the Lord, Egypt, like all other nations, will be judged by God (**Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14; Isa 13:10; 34:4; Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12; 8:12**).

Douglas Stuart: Verses 7–8 contain the **darkness language** characteristic of prophecies of the day of the Lord, already seen in Ezekiel in **30:3** and **30:18**.

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s announcement that he will impose darkness on Pharaoh’s land carries a double meaning. On the one hand, reminiscent of the plague of darkness in **Exod. 10:21–24**, the sun, moon, and stars will cease to shine on Egypt. On the other, just as David was perceived as the *nēr yiśrā’el*, “*lamp of Israel*” (**2 Sam. 21:17**), so the pharaoh, the monster of the seas, was viewed as the light of Egypt. With his death darkness will strike the entire land. The signatory formula at the end of v. 8 puts Yahweh’s own imprimatur on the announcement.

C. (:9-10) Reaction of Horror among the Nations

*“I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction
among the nations, into lands which you have not known.
10 And I will make many peoples appalled at you, and their kings shall be
horribly afraid of you when I brandish My sword before them;
and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, on the day of
your fall.”*

Douglas Stuart: “If mighty Egypt can fall, what about us?” is the point of **verses 9–10**, which depict the fear Egypt’s conquest by the Babylonians will engender in many other nations yet to feel Babylon’s oppression.

John Taylor: vv. 9-15 -- This section begins with a prose interpolation (9, 10), which abandons the figurative language that has gone before and describes the consternation which will be felt by other nations when they see the fate of the Egyptians. The combination of captivity (9; rsv *carry you captive* is preferable to *bring thy destruction*, av, rv, especially as the words that follow imply some kind of exile) and the sword (10) is enough to make the nations fear for their own lives in case they are the next victims due for judgment. This leads in to the next poem (11–15) which takes up the well-used theme of the sword of the Lord (cf. 21:9; 30:25) which is put into the hands of the king of Babylon to be wielded against the Egyptians. So great will be the slaughter and devastation that Egypt will be uninhabited by either man or beast, and verses 13–15 vividly describe the land in such a state. The waters will be unruffled by foot of man or hoof of beast; they will be clear and will flow as smoothly as oil through the devastated countryside. There will be no man left in Egypt to know that I am the Lord (15), so unless we take this as a conventional, stereotyped ending to an oracle of this kind, we must suppose it to refer to the watching nations who alone will benefit from the sight of such an act of God.

II. (:11-15) SHOCKING DEMISE OF EGYPT

“For thus says the Lord God,”

Wiersbe: Here the prophet repeated the prophecy that the sword of Babylon would leave Egypt desolate and that all of Egypt’s pride and pomp would vanish.

A. (:11b-12) Devastation of Egypt

*“The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you.
12 By the swords of the mighty ones I will cause your multitude to fall;
all of them are tyrants of the nations,
And they shall devastate the pride of Egypt,
And all its multitude shall be destroyed.”*

B. (:13-14) Destruction of Egypt

*“I will also destroy all its cattle from beside many waters;
And the foot of man shall not muddy them anymore,
And the hoofs of beasts shall not muddy them.
14 Then I will make their waters settle,
And will cause their rivers to run like oil,’ Declares the Lord God.”*

Douglas Stuart: Desolation will be Egypt’s fate (v. 13, suggested by the absence of man and beast; cf. 29:8; Jer. 33:10, 12; etc.). With no one around in the desolate land, the usually muddy Nile and its streams will run clear and fast (“*like oil*,” v. 14).

Daniel Block: In biblical and Jewish tradition the motif of streams running with oil usually speaks of paradisiacal peace and prosperity.

C. (:15) Desolation of Egypt

1. Comprehensive Divine Judgment

*“When I make the land of Egypt a desolation,
And the land is destitute of that which filled it,
When I smite all those who live in it,”*

2. Recognition Refrain

“Then they shall know that I am the LORD.”

Feinberg: Again the Lord emphasizes that the ultimate purpose in His dealings with Egypt, indeed with all nations, is that all may realize His supreme authority, power and deity.

Daniel Block: Following the divine signature at the end of v. 14, the prophecy arrives at a formal conclusion with an expanded version of the **recognition formula**. Now we learn Yahweh’s ultimate goal in humiliating Egypt: the universal acknowledgment of his person and his involvement in human affairs. Three aspects of the divine activity are reviewed:

- desolating the land (*nātan šēmāmā*),
- emptying it of its contents, and
- striking down its inhabitants (presumably human).

With this intensification of divine judgment, Egyptian history will run its course, causing its remaining inhabitants and the people of the world to recognize the hand and person of Yahweh.

Constable: This oracle also looks forward and anticipates a still future day of the Lord when God will humble all proud enemies of His people (cf. **Joel 2:30-31; 3:15; Amos 8:9**).

(:16) POSTLUDE – CALL TO MOURNING

*“This is a lamentation and they shall chant it.
The daughters of the nations shall chant it.
Over Egypt and over all her multitude they shall chant it,
declares the Lord God.”*

Daniel Block: The text concludes with a colophon that provides four kinds of information concerning the foregoing oracle.

(1) Its genre. This is a *qînā* lament composition, reflecting its central concern: **death**. The superscription had identified the victim as “*Pharaoh, king of Egypt*” (v. 2); now, by the principle of corporate solidarity, the reference is expanded to Egypt as a whole.

(2) Its use. The composition was not written primarily as literature to entertain or to be stored in the archives of the exilic community, but to be chanted, suggesting public oral group activity.

(3) Its chanters. The women of the nations are to mourn the death of Egypt by chanting this lament. Ancient funeral rites often involved professional mourners, usually women, who chanted the dirge over the deceased.

(4) Its referents. The last line identifies the deceased as Egypt and its entire pomp or horde or wealth (*hāmôn*). With the concluding signatory formula Yahweh pounds the final nail into the nation's coffin.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can one's perception be so far off from reality (e.g. lion vs. sea monster)?
- 2) What type of judgment should political leaders expect when instead of serving their constituency they promote chaos and destruction?
- 3) What aspects of this prophecy might have eschatological fulfillment?
- 4) How would you characterize the reaction of the surrounding nations?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: Once again the purpose of an oracle against a foreign nation is God's determination to reassure His people that they are not alone or forgotten in their sufferings and to assert the certainty that His own glory will eventually be recognized. Babylonian armies were merely His minions; Nebuchadnezzar himself was merely His lackey in the task. Egypt's coming fate—that of a once-great but now impotent nation—would remind all who thought about it of how God's will would be accomplished on the earth. We should be reminded of God's greatness, then, by Egypt's history. The fact that after Nebuchadnezzar finished with it, Egypt never again reclaimed its greatness should be an encouragement to all who trust in the Lord. If His promise was true in this case, will it not be true in all others?

Iain Duguid: The lion and crocodile are two mighty beasts, who appear all-powerful (32:2). Indeed, both images were regularly appropriated by the pharaohs as positive self-descriptions.

Yet in spite of their strength, both may be hunted and killed. Though Pharaoh considers himself like a lion, the great Hunter has him in his sights. Once more through human agency ("with a great throng of people," 32:3), the Lord will cast his net over Pharaoh, a method of hunting suitable to either crocodiles or lions (cf. 19:8). His corpse will be

thrown to the ground to provide a home and food for the birds of the air and beasts of the field, much as was the fallen cosmic tree in **31:13**. At this point, the scale of Pharaoh's demise takes on semimythical proportions: His body is big enough to be spread on the mountains and fill the valleys, his blood enough to water the land and fill the ravines (**32:5–6**).

The images of cosmic darkness and universal mourning are invoked, both of which were present in the previous oracle (**31:15–16**). In an echo of the penultimate Exodus plague on Egypt, the plague of darkness (**Ex. 10:21–22**), the heavens will be darkened, and sun, moon, and stars will fail to give light (**Ezek. 32:7**). The peoples will be appalled, and their kings will shudder because of the scale of Egypt's devastation, fearing for their own lives (**32:9–10**).

In this final onslaught against Egypt, the king of Babylon will shatter her pride (**32:11–12**). The night of the first Passover was a mere firstfruits in comparison to this full harvest of God's judgment, for on that occasion only the firstborn of human beings and animals died (**Ex. 12:29**). Here, however, all people and animals are cut off from the land (**Ezek. 32:13**). The demise of the great animal-human of **verse 2** is underlined by the ceasing of his thrashing around, muddying the streams (**32:13**). Now the waters of Egypt will flow as clear and smooth as oil, untroubled by any disturbance (**32:14**). Egypt will once again recognize the sovereign power of the Lord when he acts to strike down all who live there, this time with no exceptions (**32:15**). The lament is prepared; all that waits is the execution of the divine decree (**32:16**).

Daniel Block: The oracle against the pharaonic monster contains few new theological lessons. Like the previous oracle, and the oracles against Tyre, it warns the readers in every age against hubris, the pride (*gā'ôn*) and pomp (*hāmôn*) with which humans celebrate their own magnificence. Humans who imagine themselves as noble masters of their own destiny (the lion) are monsters (*tannîm*) in the eyes of God. If he was able to vanquish the mythical monster, surely no human can evade his judgment. He who turned the lights on in the heavens in the first place is able to turn them off at will. And if he exercises such control over the great luminaries in the sky, surely he is able, at the snap of his finger, to snuff out the light of mortals.

The oracle affirms that Yahweh is the Lord not only of individuals but also of history. The rise and fall of nations may appear attributable to charismatic and gifted leaders, but behind all international movements one must acknowledge the supreme hand of Yahweh, who alone fixes the times and seasons of their lives, sets the limits to their conduct, determines the nature of their downfall, appoints the agents of judgment, and in the process accomplishes his goal: the universal recognition of his power and his person.

David Thompson: Now we have all been to graveside services and at graveside services you try to say something nice and encouraging about the individual. Just imagine standing by a graveside and having some prophet say—this person was a monster totally destroyed by God and his memory and his annihilation should be a warning not to

follow his evil and destructive ways.

That is, in all reality, what Ezekiel was to say to Pharaoh.

God says you speak this directly to him and you tell him this:

BECAUSE OF WHAT EGYPT HAS DONE AGAINST ISRAEL, GOD IS GOING TO UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY DESTROY THE EGYPTIAN LEADER AND THE EGYPTIAN PEOPLE.

Ralph Alexander: Two months had passed since the exiles in Babylonia had learned of Jerusalem's fall seven months earlier. As they began to comprehend that the Lord did exist and had been faithful to destroy Jerusalem even as he had said, they perhaps wondered whether God would be faithful to punish the heathen nations as he had declared. Conversely Egypt had seen the collapse of Jerusalem and Judah, and Egypt may have begun to gloat in pride over her own survival and power. Lest, on the one hand, the Egyptians think that God would not follow through to judge them and, on the other hand, the exiles begin questioning their new understanding of God's faithfulness to his word, Ezekiel delivered this funeral dirge for Egypt in March 585 B.C. . .

vv. 11-16 – These verses help interpret the imagery just described. The slaughter of Egypt would occur at the hands of the Babylonians, the most ruthless of all peoples (**vv. 11-12**). Everyone and every place would be touched, including the great Nile. When all life had disappeared, then the Nile would cease to be stirred up and would flow as smoothly as oil (**vv. 13-14**). Only then would Egypt's pride be shattered (**v. 12**). Pride is a terrible plague in anyone's life. So much did God care for Egypt that in his grace he brought this severe judgment so that they might finally realize that the Lord was the only true God and would turn to him (**v. 15**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 32:17-32

TITLE: *SECOND LAMENT: EGYPT HITS BOTTOM IN SHEOL*

BIG IDEA:

DESCENT INTO SHEOL ELIMINATES ALL BOASTING FOR EGYPT AS SHE IS NO BETTER OFF THAN ANY NATION THAT WAS JUDGED FOR VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION:

The judgment oracles directed against the powerhouse nation of Egypt trace her demise all the way down to the humiliating stripping of all prestige and privilege alongside the uncircumcised in the bowels of Sheol. There is no longer any cause for boasting in beauty or power or wealth or impact on the world scene. She is mocked and reviled by those former terrorist nations who have already been vanquished by Babylon.

Peter Pett: The descriptions here are not to be thought of as illustrating what the afterlife will be like. The ancients looked on death as the end of life leading to a shadowy half-existence. They could not conceive of nothingness, but did not look for anything joyous beyond the grave. Man went into the grave, and the combination of all graves combined was called Sheol. It was like some huge unearthly interconnected burial chamber, and those who were there were but shadows, enduring a joyless non-existence. Notice that they all lie there. It is not a place of movement and life. And here the nations themselves are seen to be present as well as their population. It is not to be taken too literally.

It is the place to which all nations go, and it has opened its mouth to receive the nations subjugated by Nebuchadnezzar, for many have fallen by the sword, and by pestilence and famine, and now they endure their end. And Egypt will share their fate.

Galen Doughty: **Sheol** in the Old Testament is a shadowy place where the dead go. They have no real existence and at this time in Israel's history Sheol does not represent eternal life or eternal punishment. It appears that Ezekiel is not talking here about Sheol being like Hades or Gehenna in the New Testament, a place of punishment. The hordes of Egypt will lose their life and all the blessings of life. However, there is a hint of the pit or the grave being a place where there is suffering and pain. The beginnings of the New Testament concepts of the Hades and Paradise sides of Sheol may be here but it is tentative at best.

Feinberg: The king of Egypt was seen as descended into Sheol where the other nations would address him, speaking to him to taunt him because now he is on the same plane as they. . .

In reading this chapter, one cannot fail to be impressed with the monotony of the oft-reiterated punishment from the Lord on one nation after another. There is nothing beautiful in the matter of sin, for it is sin then judgment, just as effect follows cause. And think of the boundless and unrelieved calamity of it all. Such awaits every soul out of Christ.

Iain Duguid: The final oracle against Egypt, and the final oracle in the sequence of oracles against the nations, sums up everything that has gone before by means of a comprehensive tour of the underworld, which is to be Egypt's new home. . .

Though all these other nations were once mighty and had administered a reign of terror while they lived, now they bear the reproach for their iniquity. A place of punishment—*“the pit”* (32:24)—is prepared for all such, and Pharaoh certainly qualifies to join the club (32:28). For the time of the Lord's appointing, he too spread terror in the land of the living (32:32), but soon he will become merely a part of the terror that is the land of the dead. The Sovereign Lord has spoken (32:32).

(:17) PRELUDE TO THE LAMENT

A. (:17a) Dating of the Prophecy

“And it came about in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month,”

David Guzik: This last of the seven prophecies against Egypt also happened in the **twelfth year**, the year after the fall of Jerusalem. Most agree that since no month is specifically mentioned, this happened the same month as the previous oracle (**Ezekiel 32:1**). This would be about two weeks later.

B. (:17b) Authoritative Word of Prophecy

“that the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

I. (:18-21) HUMILIATING RECEPTION AS EGYPT DESCENDS TO SHEOL

A. (:18) Mourning Commanded as Egypt Descends to Sheol

*“Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and bring it down,
her and the daughters of the powerful nations,
to the nether world, with those who go down to the pit;”*

Constable: The meter of this mourning song is two plus two rather than the three plus two meter of the more common funeral dirge (the *qinah* meter). Thus while this lament is similar to the one in the preceding oracle (**32:1-16**), it is not exactly the same.

Feinberg: Whatever excellence Egypt may have imagined herself to possess would be as nothing, for her body would be consigned to the grave as with all the rest.

Leslie Allen: The *“mighty nations”* are the three to be enumerated as the poem is developed. The phrase ארץ תהתיות *“land of nether places”* here and in v 24, with its

intensive genitive plural and contextual distinction from Sheol proper (vv 21, 27) seems to refer to a deeper level, the lower regions (**Tromp**, Primitive Conceptions 181; cf. **Isa 14:15**). Egypt was to occupy a place that distinguished it from the generality of those who went down to the Pit or Sheol. Such a concept is found in **Isa 14:15–20**, and Ezekiel may be depending on that text and developing it.

John Taylor: As this section is another funeral dirge (cf. **32:16**), Ezekiel is commanded to chant it as a kind of incantation which will have the effect of sending Egypt and her multitude down into the nether world.

B. (:19) Boasting Eliminated as Egypt Descends to Sheol

1. Preeminence Gone

“Whom do you surpass in beauty?”

Peter Pett: Egypt’s boasts were ended. She had exalted herself and her beauty, but where was it now? She lay in the grave with the lowest of the low, the uncircumcised nations. Such was her beauty. And she and other famous nations shared Sheol together. Her people were numerous, but the sword had delivered them to the pit, drawn there by those slain by the sword before her. The dead attract the dead, and Egypt as it was was dead.

2. Privilege Removed

“Go down and make your bed with the uncircumcised.”

Constable: Even though Egypt had been unsurpassed in her beauty as a nation, she would lie in the grave with the most ordinary and barbarian dead nations. God would not favor Egypt over the uncircumcised peoples that she proudly disdained.

Daniel Block: The actual words of greeting are taunting and harsh, challenging Egypt’s self-esteem as the most delightful nation on earth. . . The Egyptians would have found this announcement of their fate shocking. The nation that perceived itself as the epitome of culture, greatness, and glory is hereby sentenced to the most ignominious fate in the netherworld.

C. (:20) Violence Slaughtered as Egypt Descends to Sheol

“They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword.

She is given over to the sword;

they have drawn her and all her multitudes away.”

D. (:21) Reputation Mocked as Egypt Descends to Sheol

*“The strong among the mighty ones shall speak of him and his helpers
from the midst of Sheol,*

They have gone down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.”

MacArthur: The prophet followed Egypt and her people beyond the grave. The king of Egypt is addressed by the other nations in “Sheol,” taunting him as he is on the same

level with them. This shows that there is conscious existence and fixed destiny beyond death. See **Lk 16:19-31**.

Daniel Block: The actual words of greeting are taunting and harsh, challenging Egypt's self-esteem as the most delightful nation on earth.

II. (:22-30) VANQUISHED ROSTER OF FORMER VIOLENT POWERHOUSE NATIONS LYING ALONGSIDE EGYPT IN SHEOL

A. (:22-23) Presence of Assyria

“Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are round about her. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, 23 whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the pit, and her company is round about her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.”

Daniel Block: The bulk of the oracle (**vv. 22–30**) represents a formal roll call of nations already in Sheol that welcome the arrival of Egypt.

Constable: Assyria and her allies were already in the grave having perished in war. Even though the Assyrians had struck terror into the hearts of other peoples in their day, they now lay in the grave while others viewed them and marveled.

Peter Pett: Assyria had caused terror in the land of the living, but now she is silent in the grave. It is twice stressed that she and her people are gathered there, slain by the sword. Israel had good cause to be pleased about that. Assyria had been a bitter enemy and a cruel overlord. They were the mighty empire destroyed and taken over by Babylon.

Of course Assyria still flourished above ground, although subject to Babylon. The idea would seem to be that the Assyria of the past, the powerful overlord, had died, along with those slain by Babylon, those who had once distressed Israel.

Leslie Allen: The short Assyria strophe envisages the Assyrian figurehead and his once invincible army now lying in dishonor in a vast cemetery-like place where the troops are ranged around their leader. For the living the Assyrian empire was now only a bad memory. A contrast is posed between their present state and their former position of awesome power on earth. Now they are classed with the victims of violent death, to which the language of the second line refers.

B. (:24-25) Presence of Elam

“Elam is there and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth, who instilled their terror in the land of the living, and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the pit. 25 They have made a bed for her among the slain with all her multitude. Her graves are around it, they are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword (although their terror was instilled in the land of the living), and they

bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit; they were put in the midst of the slain.”

Constable: The Elamites, another formerly mighty people who lived east of Babylonia, were also in the grave having died in warfare (cf. **Jer. 49:34-38**). The people from this region later became a significant part of the Persian Empire, but the Elamite kingdom of former years is in view here. Ashurbanipal the Assyrian had destroyed Elam about 645 B.C.

Neither the Assyrians nor the Elamites practiced circumcision, and now the Egyptians, a circumcised people, would join them in the same grave. The end of Egypt would be no different or better even though they considered themselves superior to the uncircumcised nations of the world (cf. **Gal. 5:6**).

Peter Pett: Elam were an ancient people east of Babylon, known for their warlikeness and had been part of the Assyrian empire. They were probably prominent as bowmen in assisting the Assyrians against Israel for Jeremiah calls down judgment on them (**Jeremiah 49:34-38**). They survived better than Assyria the effects of the Babylonian invasion and were later strong enough to assist Cyrus in defeating Babylon. But they too had spread terror along with the Assyrians, and had suffered at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar’s armies. Effectively that generation of Elam had joined Assyria in the world of the dead.

C. (:26-28) Presence of Meshech, Tubal et al

“Meshech, Tubal and all their multitude are there; their graves surround them. All of them were slain by the sword uncircumcised, though they instilled their terror in the land of the living. 27 Nor do they lie beside the fallen heroes of the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and whose swords were laid under their heads; but the punishment for their iniquity rested on their bones, though the terror of these heroes was once in the land of the living. 28 But in the midst of the uncircumcised you will be broken and lie with those slain by the sword.”

Constable: The nations of Meshech and Tubal in eastern Anatolia (modern western Turkey, cf. **27:13**) along with their neighbors, other uncircumcised peoples, had also perished in war and were now dead powers. They had produced terrifying warriors, like the Nephilim, the ancient legendary warriors of **Genesis 6:4**, but they were not able to escape their fate, and Egypt would join them. It was customary in some countries to bury honored warriors with their swords and other weapons of war (**v. 27**; cf. 1 Macc. 13:29).

Peter Pett: Meshech and Tubal were Anatolian nations who had harried the Assyrians on their northern frontier. They were fierce fighters who deliberately engaged in slave-trading (**Ezekiel 27:13**) and had also spread terror, sufficiently to be worthy of mention here.

It would seem that they were not to lie with the mighty because they had themselves been the terror of the mighty. Their iniquities were on their bones, that is, they were separated because they had been at enmity with all, including the mighty Assyrian empire, and were seen as particularly evil. They were fiercely independent nations. This assumes that *'the mighty'* were Assyria and their allies, which is quite probable. The Assyrians were mentioned first here, and were overlords of the other nations. The mighty are described in terms of burial practices. They have their weapons with them and their swords were laid under their heads.

Douglas Stuart: Meshech and Tubal (vv. 26–28) are more distant powers. Meshech occupied a region in the Fertile Crescent southeast of the Black Sea. In conjunction with Tubal (about whom little is known), it was a former great Indo-European nation that had conquered what is now eastern Turkey, demolishing much of what was originally the Hittite Empire in the process. As people of an entirely different culture and language family, Meshech and Tubal were especially awesome to the Semitic Israelites. Nevertheless, they, too, were in hell when Pharaoh and the Egyptians got there. The Assyrians had wiped out their power in a long series of wars before themselves falling prey to the Babylonians.

D. (:29) Presence of Edom

“There also is Edom, its kings, and all its princes, who for all their might are laid with those slain by the sword; they will lie with the uncircumcised, and with those who go down to the pit.”

Peter Pett: Inscriptions tell us that Edom became a vassal-state of Assyria in around 736 BC. They may well have assisted them against Israel and Judah which would have helped to nurture the undying hatred shown to them by Israel (**Psalms 137:7; Isaiah 34:5-15; Isaiah 63:1-6; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11-12; Obadiah 1:7-9**). It seems that they had a policy of turning back Israelites when they fled for refuge from invading enemies, a callous and cynical attitude (**Ezekiel 35:5**). They too finally suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. They are probably mentioned here because of Israel’s undying hatred. They have joined their erstwhile masters. They probably practised circumcision, but like Egypt they joined the uncircumcised.

E. (:30) Presence of Phoenician City-States

“There also are the chiefs of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who in spite of the terror resulting from their might, in shame went down with the slain. So they lay down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword, and bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit.”

Daniel Woodhead: The final group in **verse thirty** are the Sidonians and the princes of the north. They were essentially the Phoenician city-states. All of them will suffer disgrace.

(:31-32) POSTLUDE – RECAPITULATION – EGYPT HAS JOINED THE OTHER SLAIN NATIONS IN SHEOL

A. (:31) Strange Comfort as Misery Loves Company

“These Pharaoh will see, and he will be comforted for all his multitude slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his army,’ declares the Lord God.”

MacArthur: A strange comfort coming from the recognition that he and his people were not alone in misery and doom.

Morgan: The prophet’s declaration that ‘*Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted,*’ is appalling, as it reveals that the only comfort that can come to him is the profound sense of the operation of infinite justice in the punishment of all, himself included, who have been guilty of the abominations which have issued in the judgment of Jehovah.

Daniel Block: In typical Ezekielian fashion, the motif of consolation in the netherworld is given a new twist. Instead of the lesser finding consolation in their solidarity with the suffering of the greater, the roles are reversed. The fate of the king of Egypt may be humiliating, but he is not alone. Other nations have lost their hordes as well; they will commiserate with him.

Ralph Alexander: Ezekiel was to wail for the Egyptians because they too would descend into the pit of death, as had all other mighty nations that had preceded them. Egypt would not be favored over the uncircumcised nations she had proudly disdained. . . . God had wrought his terror on [the nations listed here], and he would continue to bring his terror on any nation that dealt violently with others in this world. That is why God quickly brought his terror through the Babylonians against Egypt (vv. 31-32).

B. (:32) Divine Emasculation of Once Powerful Egypt

“Though I instilled a terror of him in the land of the living, yet he will be made to lie down among the uncircumcised along with those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude,’ declares the Lord God.”

Daniel Block: this verse affirms the divine hand in Pharaoh’s fate. Yahweh will have the last word. Borrowing vocabulary from the dishonor role, he announces his intentions.

- First, as the nations have inflicted their terror on their victims, so Yahweh will terrorize Egypt. Although the manner of action is not specified, Ezekiel is undoubtedly thinking of Nebuchadnezzar as the divine agent (cf. 30:20–26).
- Second, Pharaoh and all his hosts are sentenced to lie in disgrace among the uncircumcised and victims of dishonorable slaughter. The immutable word of Yahweh, reaffirmed by a new signatory formula, has sealed Egypt’s fate.

Douglas Stuart: Verses 31–32 conclude the lament with a reminder that Egypt, too, will be there in hell along with all the other once-great, uncircumcised nations who were beaten by other nations in war. It will be a consolation of sorts for the Egyptians to

know that they will have plenty of friends in hell—and that is not to be lost on the hearer/reader. It is a major point of the entire prophecy: all the once-great dominating powers, many of whom oppressed relatively tiny Israel, will be destroyed. They will not forever dominate the world scene. Their influence lasted only as long as God allowed it, and they did only what God permitted them to do, including killing one another off. When God decrees it, they take their turn in the pit.

If this control of God over the events of nations through history could be understood, then it could be believed that God had the power to restore little Israel, who in Ezekiel's day stood shamed before the other nations of the world as a destroyed, deported, "dead" nation. That is what the exiled Israelites needed desperately to realize: God was running history, controlling the states of earth. The Babylonians were not in charge. God was. He would eventually shame the other nations, at whose hands Israel now felt ashamed, and make an end of the powers that had seemed to human eyes to have brought about Israel's end. The prophecies that follow in the remainder of the book build upon the certainty that God will restore His people and protect them from the greatest dangers the powers of the world can throw at them, bringing them to a glorious eternal end. Not only can He do it, but Ezekiel's prophecies against the nations show to the faithful a reassuring glimpse of the fact that it will indeed happen.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) While this section is not a technical description of the afterlife, what insights can you gain here about existence after death?
- 2) What will be the outcome for nations that lord it over other nations by virtue of military force and subjugation?
- 3) How does death serve to level the playing field?
- 4) In what sense is this last prophecy against Egypt a lament?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lamar Cooper: The oracles against the nations in **Ezek 25—32** were originally delivered to the people of Judah. Although the words written seem to be solely for those particular nations, they are foremost for the people of Judah in Jerusalem and Babylon and serve at least three purposes.

- First, the oracles in **Ezek 25— 32** reveal God's judgment against the nations that either mocked or aided in Jerusalem's fall [cf. **Gen. 12:3**].

- Second, as with both the king of Tyre and the Pharaoh of Egypt, God would throw them down from their self-elevated positions of power—there is no room for such arrogance and pride in God's creation.
- Third, the oracles are essentially a dismantling of the gods of the nations, which is in turn a dismantling of the gods Judah had begun to rely wrongly upon, and the proclamation that Yahweh is the one and only true God for all nations. ... the phrase '*know I am the LORD*' occurs nineteen times. The primary purpose of these oracles is that everyone should come to '*know the LORD*'.

Peter Pett: So the list of nations is composed in the main of those who were seen as '*causing terror*', probably mainly in association with Assyria, although Meshech and Tubal are partly excepted and therefore lie alone. However, their fearsome activities had ensured their mention. All were or would be destroyed by Babylon, and so Egypt will also shortly join them in their fate. Babylon are not mentioned. At this stage they are the champions of Yahweh. This excludes us from making this description signify the time of the end. Notice the continual stress on those '*slain by the sword*', **the sword of Yahweh in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar**.

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel refused to be mesmerized by the spectacle of Egypt's military power or captivated by Judean dreams of the political renewal that might be served thereby. History's theatrical wardrobe was cluttered with the national costumes of those who had strutted across its stage for a while, until the curtain fell on their particular scene. They lived on only in popular infamy—or, in terms of contemporary beliefs about the underworld, in the deeper regions of Sheol. Such would be Egypt's fate, instead of a Valhalla of chivalrous warriors who rested in peace and honor.

The supplementary conclusion changes the tone by adding to the list of dishonored dead others at whose hands the Judeans had seemingly suffered (cf. **28:24**). They too would pass away to an inglorious fate. But the climax reverts to Egypt, which once more is cast in the sinister role of a tragic has-been.

Daniel Woodhead: Ezekiel is commanded to wail for the multitude of Egypt. This is because the end location of Pharaoh and all those nations he was connected with will have a horrible final destination. Ezekiel is not actually going to do the casting of them into the Pit. He would only carry God's Word out to the world and because of its authority it would be as though Ezekiel consigned Pharaoh's destiny to the bad side of Sheol himself. The rhetorical question directed at Pharaoh is *Whom dost thou pass in beauty?* God is essentially asking Pharaoh if he thinks that he is any better than any of these other nations? This is because he is not and he is going down to be along side them. They are referred to as the uncircumcised and Egypt's being equal to them in death would humiliate and shatter her pride. This phrase, used 10 times in **chapter 32 (vv. 19, 21, 24–30, 32)**, described a death of shame and defeat. God is always referencing a death by the sword of one's enemies when this phrase of death is used by Him. The king of Egypt is seen as descending to Sheol where the other nations see him,

Speak to him, taunt him, and show him that he is just like them. Regardless of the pride he embraced he was now equal to the worst of the worst with no hope of reversing this fate. This is one of many passages that clearly shows us that there is conscious existence beyond the life here and not annihilation. The helpers are those auxiliary nations who were aligned to Egypt but suffer the same fate and are unable to assist Pharaoh now that they are all in Sheol.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/122171358247.pdf>

TEXT: Ezekiel 33:1-20

TITLE: EZEKIEL AS THE FAITHFUL WATCHMAN

BIG IDEA:

ISRAEL MUST RESPOND IN REPENTANCE TO EZEKIEL'S WARNINGS AS A FAITHFUL WATCHMAN APPOINTED BY GOD

INTRODUCTION:

In this transitional chapter moving from God's judgments against the nations to His plan of restoration and hope for His covenant people, we find a final plea for repentance. The nation of Israel needs to hear the prophetic words of warning from faithful Ezekiel, their divinely appointed watchman, and respond. They should not complain against God's justice, because their present conduct merits condemnation. Nor should they give in to despair as if their past apostasy has locked them in to some type of fatalistic demise. They can still choose to repent and renew their loyalty and obedience to the God of the covenant. God's preference and disposition is to act towards them in grace and mercy; but His holiness and righteousness also demand that He enforce justice.

Lamar Cooper: Chapters 33-39 comprise words of restoration and hope, and **chaps. 40-48** present details of the restored community.

Thomas Constable: Alexander considered the message in **33:1-20** as the conclusion to the section of oracles against the nations (**chs. 25-32**). Most commentators viewed this message as an introduction to the messages promising future blessings for Israel (**chs. 33-48**). Obviously it serves a transitional (*janus*) function in the book and looks both ways, backward and forward.

Iain Duguid: Ezekiel 33 is a carefully constructed whole, with a chiasmic movement that hinges around the confirmation of the fall of Jerusalem (**33:21-22**). **Verses 1-11** find a counterpart in **verses 30-33**, with their emphasis on hearing or not hearing the prophetic word, while **verses 12-20** share similar emphases on moral behavior with **verses 23-29**. The whole chapter should thus be seen as a response to the news of that central event of Jerusalem's fall.

Leslie Allen: The use of the **prophetic address** in vv 2, 7, 10 and 12 reveals four sections, vv 2-6, 7-9, 10-11 and 12-20.

Daniel Block: one hears the prophet delivering a final appeal for his fellow exiles to respond to his message. In so doing he vindicates both his own prophetic status (hence the importance of their paying heed to his warning, vv. 1-9) and the justice of Yahweh in his judgment. But he leaves the door open for a positive response, and invites his people to find life in the grace of God.

(:1) PRELUDE – AUTHORITATIVE WORD OF GOD

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying,”

I. (:2-6) EXPLANATION OF THE WATCHMAN FUNCTION REGARDING CULPABILITY

“Son of man, speak to the sons of your people, and say to them,”

A. (:2b) Function of a Watchman – General Principle

1. Approaching Danger Creates a Need for a Watchman

“If I bring a sword upon a land,”

2. Appointment of a Watchman

“and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman;”

Constable: Watchmen stood on the towers of walls in ancient cities and scanned the horizon for approaching enemies. If they saw one coming, they would blow their trumpet, usually a shophar (ram's horn), to warn the people who were farming the lands to take refuge in the city. The figure of blood being on one's head comes from sacrificial practice. The offerer placed his hands on the head of the victim symbolizing the transfer of guilt from the offerer to his substitute.

B. (:3-5) Scenario of a Faithful Watchman

1. (:3-4a) Conduct: Warns the People

“and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away,”

2. (:4b-5) Culpability: Blood is on the People

“his blood will be on his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life.”

C. (:6) Scenario of an Unfaithful Watchman

1. Conduct: Fails to Warn the People

“But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them,”

2. Culpability: Blood is on the Watchman

“he is taken away in his iniquity;”

but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand."

II. (:7-9) APPLICATION OF THE WATCHMAN FUNCTION TO EZEKIEL'S CURRENT SITUATION

"Now as for you, son of man,"

A. (:7b) Ezekiel Appointed Watchman and Charged with Faithfulness

1. Appointed Watchman for Israel by the Lord

"I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel;"

2. Charged with Faithful Performance of His Duties = Hear and Warn

*"so you will hear a message from My mouth,
and give them warning from Me."*

David Guzik: The watchman did not gain his knowledge by studying the armies of the Babylonian empire, or by looking at the false prophets among God's people at that time. Ezekiel heard from God that judgment was coming soon, and had to announce it.

Galen Doughty: God restates the moral principle that God's messengers are accountable to speak God's message. They are not accountable for how people respond to that message. They are to be faithful to their task. What people do with God's message is their responsibility.

B. (:8) Scenario of an Unfaithful Watchman

1. Conduct: Fails to Warn the People

"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,"

2. Culpability: Blood is on the Watchman

*"that wicked man shall die in his iniquity,
but his blood I will require from your hand."*

C. (:9) Scenario of a Faithful Watchman

1. Conduct: Warns the People

*"But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way,
and he does not turn from his way,"*

2. Culpability: No Blood on the Watchman

*"he will die in his iniquity;
but you have delivered your life."*

Iain Duguid: The proclamation starts from the general statement of a commonly accepted fact, that when the Lord sent a judgment against a land, the watchman was responsible for the consequences only if he did not warn the people (**33:2-6**). From this general principle, Ezekiel moves to the specific case facing the people in **verses 7-9**:

Clearly the Lord has sent judgment against his people, and Ezekiel was appointed as his watchman (33:7). No one who has read chapters 4–32 can doubt the prophet's faithfulness to proclaiming the judgment to come; he is free from any culpability in the death of the wicked.

III. (:10-11) DISPOSITION OF THE LORD FAVORS GRACE AND MERCY OVER JUDGMENT

“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel,”

Leslie Allen: Vv 10–11 are a disputation, consisting of three basic elements, thesis, dispute and counterthesis. . . The first element is also a lament, while the second and third elements (v 11) comprise a summons to repentance, with motivation mingled with appeal, in an overall combination of standard elements: the messenger formula, divine promise or assurance, accusation, admonition, threat and a vocative (cf. Raitt, ZAW 83 [1971] 35). An inclusion is formed by the phrase *בית ישראל* “house of Israel.”

A. (:10b) Complaint of Hopelessness and Despair

“Thus you have spoken, saying, ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?’”

Peter Pett: God puts a question in the mouths of Israel, a question which suggests a certain level of conviction of sin. It suggests that they have recognised that they deserve to be declared guilty, and that that causes them great grief. For they have recognised that it means that they do not deserve to live. Rather they deserve to die. Their thought is of a cessation of life because of their sins, a loss of all that is good. Their cry has in it a sense of hopelessness. They see no way of escape.

‘How then should we live?’ Their conviction of sin is such that they recognise that they do not deserve to live. They do not see how a righteous God can forgive them, especially as they now have no sacrificial system to turn to. The loss of their sacrificial system was probably no small one to many of them. It raised the question as to whether they could be properly forgiven without it. God will assure them that they can.

God's reply [vs. 11] reveals that the sacrificial system was not seen by Him as a final necessity. They were not in a position to offer sacrifices, but forgiveness was available. What was required was a heart that turned to Him in repentance. For He looked ahead to the one great sacrifice for sin that would replace all others, the sacrifice of Himself for man's sin. It was that that enabled *‘the passing over of sin done aforesaid’* (Romans 3:25).

David Thompson: There are three different words God uses for sin in this context:

- 1) **Iniquity** – evil, perverted things
- 2) **Transgressions** – rebellious acts of stepping off the right path
- 3) **Sins** – missing the mark of God's standard of righteousness

These words clearly reveal that the judgment of God against His own people is completely justified. But this verse also presents the possibility of survival, in spite of the fact that there has been evil sin.

Ian Duguid: But does this mean that there is now no hope for God's rebellious people? Having failed to heed the prophetic word of warning, does that mean that since judgment has come, they are as good as dead? This seems to have been the thought among at least some of the exiles. They are saying to one another: "*Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?*" (33:10). Now that Jerusalem is on the brink of destruction and they are finally taking the possibility of judgment seriously, **despair** is a real danger.

B. (:11) Challenge to Choose Righteousness and Live

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"

Leslie Allen: In a vehement protest Yahweh objects to being cast solely in the role of punitive destroyer. It does not express his ultimate will, which is to bestow life on those who turn from the bad lifestyle that occasioned the punishment. The judgment was a means to this very end. The divine principle here enunciated gathers up the message of the prophetic canon, that **judgment was the precursor of salvation**: Yahweh plucks up with a view to planting again (**Jer 1:10**). Also, life's present death is regarded as an omen of real, future death. The deuteronomistic alternatives of life or death on the basis of a radical choice are offered anew (**Deut 30:15–20**; cf. **Jer 21:8**). For Ezekiel there was an eschatological connotation, which his later chapters expand, the opportunity of a new life associated with return from exile (cf. **36:24–32**; **37:11–14**). Yahweh would honor a change of lifestyle, the fruit of repentance, and to this end the people are summoned (cf. **14:6**, in an earlier message to the exiles). The divine question is a hope-laden challenge to the despairing question of the people. Such was Yahweh's gracious offer, to which the prophetic warning was the necessary precursor in order to expose the danger that loomed over the impenitent (cf. **2 Chron 24:19**; **36:15–16**). Does the offer of life link theologically with the divine life of the oath formula? If so, **Ps 102:12–13, 24–25 (11–12, 23–24)** and **John 14:19b** provide significant parallels.

Iain Duguid: God's judgment is not a fixed, deterministic fate that operates regardless of human action, but rather is a response to actual human behavior. Even now, it is not too late to turn and be saved. The fundamental covenant choice of life or death is still open to the people (**33:11**).

Daniel Block: Ezekiel's divinely dictated answer consists of two parts. First, he disputes their logic. Appropriately Yahweh strengthens the force of the response to the question of life with an oath that affirms his own: *As I live*. The oath is followed up with an unequivocal affirmation that he is not a sadistic ogre, who finds pleasure (*hāpēs*) in watching the wicked die. Yahweh's pleasure is found in life even for the wicked. His impassioned twofold appeal emphasizes that all they need to do is turn or repent (*šûb*)

from their evil course of life. He ends the dispute with a question of his own. Since a way of survival has been announced, why then should the people die? Quoting **18:31** verbatim, he highlights how needless their death is. Yahweh's plea for repentance is a call to life! Death is not inevitable. . .

Finally, this oracle presents an important dimension of the divine character. God does not desire death, not even for the wicked. He appeals for all to repent and find life in his grace. For this reason he had sent the watchman, and for this reason the prophet had appealed for repentance, even at this late date. This message offers hope to the modern reader as well. **2 Pet. 3:9** will express this truth in another way: The Lord is patient, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should repent and find life in his grace.

IV. (:12-20) VINDICATION OF THE JUSTICE OF GOD

“And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens,”

A. (:12b-16) Past Conduct Does Not Lock in Your Future Destiny

1. (:12b) Foundational Principles Regarding the Connection between the Past and the Future

a. Don't Look to Past Righteousness for Future Security

“The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression,”

b. Don't Give Up on the Future Because of Past Sins

“and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness;”

c. Past Righteousness Can't Cancel Out Future Sins

“whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.”

2. (:13-16) The Present is More Determinative than the Past

a. (:13) Present Life of Sin Negates Trusting in Past Righteousness

“When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die.”

Peter Pett: The warning here is against one who has lived rightly and therefore is confident that he deserves the goodwill of God. So he feels that God now owes him something and that he can turn to sin without losing God's goodwill. That is the belief that a man's destiny depends on the quantity of his good works. But that is denied here. It is here clearly stated that God's judgment on a man is not determined by the quantity of his righteousness but by his revealed attitude of heart.

b. (:14-16) Present Transformed Lifestyle Assures One of Life

“But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, 15 if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he will surely live; he shall not die. 16 None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he will surely live.”

Wiersbe: We must correctly distinguish **regret, remorse, and true repentance**. Regret is an activity of the mind; whenever we remember what we've done, we ask ourselves, 'Why did I do that?' Remorse includes both the heart and the mind, and we feel disgust and pain, but we don't change our ways. But true repentance includes the mind, the heart, and the will. We change our mind about our sins and agree with what God says about them; we abhor ourselves because of what we have done; and we deliberately turn from our sin and turn to the Lord for His mercy.

When Peter remembered his sin of denying Christ, he repented and sought pardon; when Judas remembered his sin of betraying Christ, he experienced only remorse, and he went out and hanged himself.

David Guzik: Again, the point is clear. God does not want us to regard human destiny as fatalistically determined by a person's past, either for good or evil.

Derek Thomas: Grace is not contradicted by the need for repentance to be evident. A man who gives genuine evidence of his repentance—fulfils his vows, repays his debts, and offers restitution for that which he has stolen—is not in some way earning his way into God's favour. For, as Scripture makes clear elsewhere, the repentance is the evidence of faith—a faith that is given by God (**Eph. 2:8**).

Wisely did **Martin Luther** nail to the Wittenburg church door as his first of Ninety-Five Theses: 'Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying "*Repent ye*" etc., intended that the whole of the life of believers should be repentance.' This is the emphasis of Ezekiel in this chapter. As **chapter 18** made abundantly clear, the salvation that God offers is a salvation evidenced by repentance. And how were folk to prove the genuineness of their repentance? By their rejection of ungodliness and return to the ways of the covenant (**33:12, 14, 19; cf. 18:21, 23, 27**).

When we tolerate a bare outward routine and external performance as the evidence of our faith, we are in a state of decline.

B. (:17-20) Present Conduct Will Be the Basis for God's Righteous Justice

1. (:17) Misunderstanding of Justice

a. Wrong Criticism of God's Justice

“Yet your fellow citizens say, 'The way of the Lord is not right,'”

- b. Wrong Evaluation of Their Own Conduct
“when it is their own way that is not right.”

Peter Pett: This sums up man’s attitude. They cannot bear that a sinner can suddenly become acceptable to God. They cannot bear that one who has struggled to be righteous, building up merit, can ‘lose’ the benefit of it. They think that it is not fair. For they believe that God should give a man what he deserves. And they are confident that somehow they can earn merit with God to put in the scales to balance out any wrong they do. Thus to suggest that a sinful man can suddenly be put on a par with ‘the righteous’ is something that they cannot stomach.

Iain Duguid: The problem that the people face is not that of God’s justice, of which they complain in **33:17**. His ways are indeed just, even more than just, since the path to life is continuously held open to rebels. The problem is with the people’s lack of righteousness; they have followed an unjust way (**33:17**). They have consistently chosen the path to death over the path to life. That is what makes it bad news that God will judge each according to his own way (**33:20**)! Nonetheless, the point of the case studies is that there is a remedy for the bad news. The possibility of repentance is Ezekiel’s answer to despair, though the need for perseverance is also there to counteract any tendency toward presumption.

John Taylor: As with the similar words in **18:25–30**, the complaint of the people that *the way of the Lord is not equal* (av, rv) or just (rsv) uses an unusual metaphor taken from weighing in scales. The verb means literally ‘is not adjusted to the right standard’, which is the action of a dishonest salesman.

2. (:18-19) Two Examples of God’s Righteous Judgment

- a. (:18) Apostasy Merits Death
“When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it.”
- b. (:19) Repentance and a Transformed Life Merits Life
“But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them.”

3. (:20) Misunderstanding of Justice

- a. Wrong Criticism of God’s Justice
“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’”
- b. Future Accountability before the Throne of God’s Righteous Judgment
“O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

Constable: The people persisted in claiming that the Lord’s ways of dealing with them were not just. Yet Yahweh assured them that He would deal with each of them fairly,

according to their own individual behavior. God does not blame one person for another person's sins.

Peter Pett: God points out that it is their way that is not just, not His. He treats all the same. If their heart are responsive towards Him and they seek His mercy, He gives them life. If their hearts are turned away from Him and they do not seek His mercy, He gives them death. And if they turn again He again gives life. He is the same towards all. All will be judged according to their present ways and not according to some supposed merit which does not exist. They want to insist that there are some who deserve more than others, and therefore deserve different treatment on those grounds. But God treats all men equally.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense do believers function as watchmen today?
- 2) How is your testimony emboldened by the knowledge that God does not hold you accountable for how people respond to the delivery of a faithful message?
- 3) How do you respond to people who seem resigned to a fatalistic approach to life?
- 4) Why do unbelievers protest so vehemently against the justice of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Some students prefer to interpret **Ezekiel 33-48** idealistically or symbolically, applying these descriptions 'spiritually' to the church today rather than literally to Israel in the future. But if we've been interpreting Ezekiel's prophetic word literally up to this point, what right do we have to change our approach and start interpreting his words symbolically? ... We must face the fact that both approaches—the symbolical and the literal—present problems to the interpreter, but taking Ezekiel's prophecies at face value seems to present fewer problems. Furthermore, seeing literal fulfillment of these prophecies accomplishes the purpose for which God gave them, the encouragement of the people of Israel.

Lamar Cooper: Warning others of the consequences of judgment inherent in sin is never a popular assignment. Believers have a duty to be 'watchmen' who warn those who are in the world and are without God of the destructive nature of sin and its final irrevocable result—death and hell (**33:1-33**). Our responsibility is to warn and proclaim as persuasively as possible, but how the message is received is beyond our control.

Galen Doughty: The life and death Ezekiel speaks of is life and death here and now. In the context of his prophecy he is not talking about eternal life and eternal death and punishment. Heaven and Hell are not in his vision at this point. Yet, with New Testament understanding we can see how this applies eternally as well as temporally. Ezekiel is looking at the problem of God's justice concerning Judah and the Jews and Jerusalem's destruction. He is not talking about eternity. However, we can apply his principles to eternity as we filter his premise through the New Testament and the fulfillment it brings in the Messiah Jesus.

David Thompson: There is a mindset today in many churches and among many ministers that says we need to make our message as attractive as we can to present some upbeat message that will make people feel good. That will bring in the crowds. Don't threaten. Don't warn. Don't preach judgment.

Apparently, God doesn't agree with that thinking. He wanted the people strongly warned. He wanted people to understand if they do not deal with their sin, God will deal with them. Actually this chapter starts a new section in the book that will present many positive messages for Israel. Israel will be restored as a nation and will be given her land. But to kick off this very positive section, God addresses the subject of dealing with sin. Make sure as you are about to go into the land of the Kingdom you are not pursuing a life of sin.

Now in **Ephesians 5:5** God says to His own people that you need to know this with certainty: *no immoral person, no impure person, no covetous person, no idolater will have an inheritance in the kingdom of God.* I did not say that to the church; God did. The point is God's people had better turn away from those things if they want to receive an inheritance from Jesus Christ.

God offers His people plenty of time to turn from sin. If they do, they receive His grace forgiveness. If they don't they receive His judgment. That is exactly what God wanted Ezekiel to tell His people.

WHEN GOD IS ANGRY WITH HIS PEOPLE, BECAUSE OF THEIR PERSISTENCE IN SIN, HE OFFERS THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO TURN FROM THEIR SIN AND EXPERIENCE HIS FORGIVENESS; BUT IF THEY DO NOT TURN FROM THEIR SIN, THEY WILL RECEIVE HIS JUDGMENT.

Daniel Block: **vv. 10-20** -- The oracle consists of two disputations, each of which is structured according to standard disputational patterns:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| a. <u>The first disputation</u> | (vv. 10–16) |
| (1) The popular quotation | (v. 10) |
| (2) The prophet's response | (vv. 11–16) |
| (a) The dispute | (v. 11) |
| (b) The counterthesis | (vv. 12–16) |

(vv. 17–20)

b. The second disputation

- (1) The popular quotation (v. 17a-b)
- (2) The prophet's response (vv. 17c–20)
 - (a) The counterthesis (vv. 17c–19)
 - (b) The dispute (v. 20)

Leslie Allen: The prophet is fighting on two pastoral fronts. On the one hand he has to counter despair and demoralization among the exiles; on the other, he has to do it in such a way as not to encourage moral indifference and a false sense of security. The complexity of his message is occasioned not only by his pastoral situation but also by a traditional tension in Yahweh's self-revelation, which the New Testament and Christianity also know, that he is both gracious savior and moral judge. The first is affirmed in the parable of the lookout and its application to the prophet, and also in the accompanying disputation that anchors the prophet's role to a specific exilic situation. Emphasis rests on the will of Yahweh and the communication of that will to the people. His will for the exiled community was life and restoration (cf. **37:1–14**). Yet it was not an automatic, unconditioned hope: "*whoever has this hope in [God] purifies himself as he is pure*" (**1 John 3:3**). Ahead lay not merely a new Exodus that issued in a return to Yahweh's favor and land, but also a judgment scenario such as the generation of the old Exodus encountered in the wilderness: rebels would have no part in the return (**20:35–38; 34:17–22**; cf. **C. J. Mullo Weir**, VT 2 [1952] 109–11). It is in the light of this coming judgment which would split God's people that they are counseled to prepare themselves. Yahweh warns of judgment and the prospect of an eschatological death precisely because life and not death is his priority (cf. **2 Pet 3:9**). The warning given through the prophet is itself evidence of Yahweh's grace, as the first step toward a desired goal achieved via reformed, godly lives, the goal of a life that was life indeed (cf. **2 Pet 3:11–12**). The prophet thus had a vital role. A necessary task was laid on him, as in a later era on Paul, both as gospel preacher (**1 Cor 9:16**) and as church teacher (**Col 1:28**).

Yet divine grace is easily misunderstood as implying moral irresponsibility, and indeed it has always been difficult to find rational coherence between the righteousness and grace of God (cf. **Rom 3:5–8; 6:1, 15**). Accordingly, the second half of the total message has a human focus, an emphasis on a moral imperative. It is grounded in Yahweh's earlier revelation, in the provision of the Torah that with precise directions (v 15) pointed to the path of life. So Torah and prophecy alike spelled out Yahweh's will, and the role of the latter was to reinforce the former in the creation of a people who with integrity and steady commitment sought to walk in the path of life that was also a path of righteousness. There are New Testament parallels to this dynamic emphasis on conditionality, such as **Col 1:23**. Supremely, perhaps, Ezekiel's total message may be summed up in the words of **Rom 11:22**: "*Take note of the goodness and severity of God: severity to those who fell and goodness to you, provided that you continue in his goodness; otherwise you too will be cut off.*"

TEXT: Ezekiel 33:21-33

TITLE: *RESTORATION IMPOSSIBLE APART FROM OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD*

BIG IDEA:

REJECTION OF GOD'S PROPHETIC WORD CONFIRMS BOTH THE REMNANT IN JUDAH AND THE EXILES IN BABYLON ON THEIR PATH TO CONTINUED DIVINE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Ezekiel prepares to deliver six messages related to Israel's ultimate restoration to the Promised Land. But his first message must focus on the fundamental problem facing both the remnant remaining in Judah and the exiles dispersed in Babylon. They have a heart that rejects God's prophetic word. The remnant likes to pick and choose their theology based on their grid of nationalistic privilege and false security as descendants of Abraham. Thus they excuse their sinful actions. The exiles pretend to pay attention to Ezekiel's renewal of stirring messages, but their heart stubbornly resists applying God's Word to their own lives and obeying His commands. They are motivated by greed and sensuality and only value the entertainment appeal of the preaching.

Constable: RESTORATION TO THE PROMISED LAND (33:21—39:29) --
Ezekiel next recorded six messages about Israel's restoration to the Promised Land. . .

This first message dealt with a serious defect in the Israelites. The Jews still in Judea were not listening to the whole counsel of God, but were picking and choosing what they would obey (vv. 23-29). The Jews in exile were listening to Ezekiel, but they were not responding (vv. 30-33). If they were to profit from the messages of hope that Ezekiel proceeded to give them, all the Jews needed to respond to those he had already delivered by repenting. Thus this first message in this series prepared them for those that followed. The first step on the road to hope was a **change in their attitude toward God's word.**

Daniel Block: Following the narrative note of vv. 21-22, these oracles orient the reader to the mentality prevailing among two remnant Judean populations after the national tragedy: those who remained in the homeland after the destruction of the city and the deportation, and the exilic population in Babylon. In demonstrating the hardened condition of the people, both segments function more naturally as conclusions to the first phase of Ezekiel's preaching than as preludes to the second. Like the loosing of the prophet's tongue and the announcement of Jerusalem's fall, the people's persistent recalcitrance confirms the veracity of the divine word (see 2:1-3:15). On the other hand, by placing these prophecies immediately before the salvation oracles, the editor(s) affirms that Ezekiel's messages of hope are not preconditioned by a repentant people; it required only the external fulfillment of his word of judgment.

Douglas Stuart: A special emphasis of this section is that nothing has changed in terms of the people's relationship to God. Jerusalem has fallen, but the contrition and repentance that should have ensued are missing. The very things people were doing to bring on the great punishment that God had unleashed are still going on. The people's selfish irresponsibility continues.

Iain Duguid: The following two sections make it clear that the hearts of God's people have not been fundamentally changed even by this radical act of judgment [fall of Jerusalem]. Both back home in Judah (33:23–29) and among the exiles (33:30–33), it is business as usual.

(:21-22) DATE AND SETTING OF MESSAGES REGARDING ISRAEL'S RESTORATION TO THE LAND

A. (:21) Date – Report of the Fall of Jerusalem

1. Calendar Timeframe

“Now it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month,”

2. Historic Reference Point

“that the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, ‘The city has been taken.’”

Constable: Ezekiel's last prophecy about the judgment coming on Judah and Jerusalem ended with an announcement that a fugitive would escape Jerusalem's destruction and come and report the city's fall to the exiles (24:25-26). At that time, God would open Ezekiel's mouth, and he would be mute no longer (24:27). Now the messenger arrived, and God opened the prophet's mouth.

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel and his fellow exiles now had official confirmation from an eyewitness of what the prophet had faithfully, and unpopularly, predicted for years. Jerusalem had indeed succumbed. The nation of Judah, the remainder state of Israel, was no more.

B. (:22) Setting – Renewal of Prophesying for Ezekiel

“Now the hand of the LORD had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came.

And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer speechless.”

Iain Duguid: A survivor brings an eyewitness testimony of the city's fall. This is the radical turning point in the fortunes of God's people and in Ezekiel's own life. His dumbness, which has been with him since his commissioning as a prophet in 3:26–27, is now removed, just as the Lord promised in **chapter 24**. The prophet has finally been

released from his divinely imposed bondage. The possibility of a new beginning for God's people similarly exists. But which will they choose: life or death?

I. (:23-29) PROPHECY REBUKING THE FALSE SECURITY OF THE REMNANT IN JUDAH – HOW DID THEY REJECT GOD'S PROPHETIC WORD AND WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?

"Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

A. (:24) Thesis – The Promised Land Belongs to Us

1. Addressing the Prophet

"Son of man,"

2. Targeting the Remnant in Judah

"they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying,"

3. Quoting their Boastful Slogan – Reflecting False Security

*"Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land;
so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession."*

Constable: The Lord informed the prophet about the attitude of the Jews still in the land. The few Jews who still lived in the waste places of the Promised Land were claiming that, since God had promised that land to Abraham, they were right in staying in it (cf. **11:15; Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33, 39**). If He had given the land to one man (Abraham), surely He would not remove it from them (the many sons of Abraham). Jeremiah had told the Jews in the land to submit to the Babylonians (**Jer. 40-44**), but they wanted to regain control over the land.

Peter Pett: Those who now remained in the land, *'the poorest of the land'* who were left to become vinedressers and ploughmen (**Jeremiah 52:16**), began to boast of their new inheritance. They were able to take over large tracts of empty land, land which had been wasted by war, and boasted that in comparison with Abraham they were many and were thus in a better position than he. They thus saw themselves as having been left there by God as inheritors of God's promises, and indeed had some grounds for optimism had they been faithful to the covenant (**Jeremiah 42:10-12**).

Leslie Allen: Ezekiel somehow hears of a false hope that, theologically grounded as it was, had to be exposed as not of God. At an earlier period the prophet had to disabuse the non-exiled Judeans of the notion that, while the deportation of 597 b.c. spelled divine rejection, staying in the land was an earnest of God's providential favor (**11:15**). Such theological naivety was being used again, in a post-587 b.c. situation, to bolster a self-centered resilience that merely indicated that Yahweh's purpose had not yet been understood (cf. v 29; cf. **Isa 9:8-10**). Those still in the land saw themselves as religious pioneers, typologically reliving not the occupation achieved by Israel under Joshua, but

Abraham's earlier occupation (cf. **Gen 15:7, 8; Exod 6:8**). This parallel, rather than the other, made their hopes seem more likely to be fulfilled.

Douglas Stuart: God describes to Ezekiel a **new slogan** that had become popular in Judah in the months since the fall of Jerusalem: "*Abraham was only one ... But we are many ...*" (**vv. 23–24**). . . They were left to control what Abraham had been promised. Shouldn't they, who after all numbered in the thousands, have a greater right to the land than Abraham, who was only one person? The argument was silly, of course, but it made a nice-sounding slogan.

Iain Duguid: The people are, in fact, corporately in a situation analogous to the first case study described by Ezekiel. They are relying on earlier righteousness—in this case, that of Abraham—to see them through in the face of present disobedience.

B. (:25-26) Dispute – Do They Really Deserve to Possess the Land?

"Therefore, say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God,'"

Leslie Allen: The prophet counters this optimistic bandying of theological language with a rhetorical disputation. He argues that its proponents have disqualified themselves from such a promise. . . His argument is a pragmatic one. "*You shall know them by their fruits*"! Here the fruit was not promising, for it violated traditional standards of religious and moral propriety. In **22:3–4, 6–12** this test had been applied to the yet unfallen Jerusalem, and its truth had not ceased to be valid, although the lesson of the capital's destruction had not been learned. Here both specific covenant rulings (cf. **Lev 18:20; 19:26**) and more general deviations are combined in a vehement double protest at the incompatibility of claims and way of life. The reference to the sword seems to relate to social unrest in which might was right.

1. (:25b) First Argument – Specific Sins Disqualify them from the Promise

*"You eat meat with the blood in it,
lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood.
Should you then possess the land?"*

David Guzik: *Should you then possess the land?* God repeated this question twice to emphasize that they *would not possess the land*. God's promise to restore Israel and Jerusalem would be accomplished, but not through ungodly men like these.

2. (:26) Second Argument – Additional Sins Disqualify them from the Promise

*"You rely on your sword,
you commit abominations,
and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife.
Should you then possess the land?"*

Peter Pett: But they were not faithful to the covenant. They ignored the ban on eating the blood of slain beasts, they worshipped idols, they brought violence and death to the land. To '*stand on the sword*' probably meant that they relied on it and resorted to it. To

work abomination was to engage in the sins described in **Ezekiel 18:10-13**. And they especially engaged in illicit sex, probably connected with Canaanite religious rites. All these things meant that God would not allow them to possess the land, which in the end explains why they found refuge in Egypt against God's express command after a short civil war (**Jeremiah 41-43**).

Daniel Block: The lack of spiritual sensitivity and the smug self-interest evident in the quotation contrast with Abraham's total dependence on God. Ironically, those whom others describe as "*the poorest of the land*" (**2 K. 25:12**) have succumbed to the temptation of hubris. The faith of Abraham has been replaced by Darwinian materialism—the fittest have survived. This reorientation is evident also in the survivors' disposition toward the exiles. Whereas **11:14–21** had portrayed the Jerusalemites looking down their noses on their deported kin, now the latter are out of the picture entirely. There is no thought for the welfare of their compatriots nor any anticipation of their return. The survivors' world has shrunk to the physical property on which they are trying to scrounge a living.

C. (:27-28) Counterthesis – Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the People and the Land

"Thus you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God,'"

1. (:27b) Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the People

"As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence."

David Guzik: *Those who are in the ruins shall fall by the sword:* The survivors did not truly escape God's judgment; it was only delayed it for a short time. The same judgments of **the sword, the beasts, and pestilence** would strike them in time. **Jeremiah 40-44** proved this to be true.

2. (:28) Guarantee of Severe Judgment on the Land

"And I shall make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate, so that no one will pass through."

Constable: God promised to desolate the land completely and to humble the pride of His people (cf. **Lev. 26:19, 33**). Even the mountains would be desolate, and travelers would not even pass through the land. Then they would know that He is God, when He desolated their land.

Peter Pett: This is a vivid picture of the situation in the land. Those in waste places were those trying to reclaim the land that had been wasted by war, they would fall by the sword in civil war; those in the open fields probably scavenged for food and were

themselves regularly attacked by hungry and scavenging beasts who had moved in to an area made empty of man; those in the strongholds had found refuge in holes and ruins in the devastated strongholds, those in the caves had returned to primitive ways of living. Both the latter would suffer pestilence because of the conditions. Thus the land would be desolated, an astonishment to all round about. ‘*The pride of her power*’ (**Ezekiel 7:24; Ezekiel 30:6**), the authorities in the land, will be no more. The mountains will be empty and desolate, peopled no more.

D. (:29) Purpose of Severe Judgment for their Abominations

1. Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD,”

2. Deserved Judgment

“when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.”

John Taylor: The passage illustrates with remarkable aptness the overweening arrogance of the minority who wake up one morning and find themselves in the majority. Moreover, like so many minorities, they live in the past and endeavour to draw on ancient precedents to buttress insubstantial claims for the present. Our Lord had to answer similar claims from the Jews of his time (**John 8:33–40**), as did John the Baptist before him (**Luke 3:8**). Ezekiel’s answer was the bitter accusation that morally and religiously they had not a leg to stand on (**25, 26**). Their sins were the very same sins as had brought destruction upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem (**22:6–12; cf. 18:10–13**). Therefore their chances of escaping scot-free were nil.

II. (:30-33) PROPHECY REBUKING THE SUPERFICIALITY OF THE EXILES – HOW DID THEY REJECT GOD’S PROPHETIC WORD AND WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?

A. (:30) Professed Renewal of Interest in God’s Word

1. Addressing the Prophet

“But as for you, son of man,”

2. Targeting the Exiles in Babylon

“your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses,”

3. Quoting their Professed Interest in Prophecy – Reflecting Superficiality

“speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come now, and hear what the message is which comes forth from the LORD.’”

Leslie Allen: The primary message of vv **24–29** must have been to reassure the exiles that the spiritual future, in terms of return to the land and to God’s favor, lay with them rather than with those still in Judah.

Douglas Stuart: in verses 30–33 he hears a word about his own ministry—advising him not to be taken in by the fact that the people listen to him very attentively now that his prior messages have been confirmed by events.

Daniel Block: The opening *As for you, human* (*wě'attâ ben-'ādām*) refocuses the audience's attention on the exilic situation, specifically the prophet and his relationship to his people. The genre of this fragment is unique, being cast as a report, presented by a superior to his officially designated spokesman. On the surface, that Yahweh should describe for Ezekiel the disposition of the exiles toward his ministry seems superfluous. Surely he cannot have been oblivious to their rejection of his ministry. But the aim of this report is clear: to offer the prophet encouragement at the conclusion of the first phase of his ministry. Ezekiel had been forewarned of public opposition at the time of his call and commissioning, but he had also been promised that faithfulness in fulfilling the prophetic charge would be rewarded with a recognition of his prophetic status. Now, at the end of the most difficult phase of his service, Yahweh returns with a personal word for his spokesman, reassuring him of his awareness of all he has endured and reminding him that his status as prophet has been vindicated.

B. (:31) Exposure of their Hypocrisy

1. Outwardly Desirous of Hearing God's Word

*“And they come to you as people come,
and sit before you as My people,
and hear your words,”*

2. Exposed as Hypocrites by their Failure to Obey God's Commands

“but they do not do them,”

David Guzik: In a superficial sense Ezekiel was popular as a prophet. People talked about his prophetic words and gave lip-service and the words being from God. Yet it was a very superficial sense; they heard, but they did not really listen or **do them**.

Feinberg: They enjoyed and delighted in his new message of restoration and blessing for Israel and predictions against hostile nations, but they would not obey the moral implications of the prophecies which were prerequisites for personal participation in the blessings. They had no concern for the subject of it. The melody meant everything to them, the words or meaning, nothing. But their reaction to the message would not hinder its fulfillment which was eminently certain.

3. Inwardly Driven by Greed

*“for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth,
and their heart goes after their gain.”*

Daniel Block: Two symptoms of their attitude are cited.

- First, the people's presence before the prophet is motivated by a craving for the sensuous and sensational. Erotic speech is on their lips, and he has become for

them a singer of erotic songs. Ezekiel's oracles titillate his hearers, offering temporary satisfaction, but like any other addiction, they drive the audience back for more.

- Second, they are motivated by greed. Their heart commitment (*'aḥārê biṣ'ām libbām hōlēk*) is to gain, and any means, violent or unjust, is to be used to satisfy their avarice (cf. **22:13, 27**). These then are the twin sins of insincerity: sensuality and greed. The former explains the people's interest in Ezekiel's message; the latter their refusal to heed it.

C. (:32) Exposure of their Shallowness

1. Attracted by the Sensuality of the Prophetic Word

*“And behold, you are to them like a sensual song
by one who has a beautiful voice
and plays well on an instrument;”*

Not enough for a message to make us feel good or to entertain us.

Iain Duguid: Nor are matters any better among the exiles. The news of Jerusalem's fall appears to have given Ezekiel's message a certain popularity and topicality. He is now the subject of conversation in the cities and doorways (**Ezek. 33:30**). To use a contemporary analogy, he is the toast of the talk shows. But the interest is superficial: The people listen to his words but do not put them into practice, regarding them as an intriguing phenomenon rather than a life-changing reality. His fame is like that of a pop star, whose declarations on spiritual matters may arouse curiosity but are scarcely accorded authoritative status. People may have been humming along to his tune, but they are paying no attention to the true meaning of his lyrics.

John Taylor: Ours is not the only age that treats God's spokesmen as if they are public entertainment.

2. Exposed as Shallow by their Failure to Obey God's Commands

*“for they hear your words,
but they do not practice them.”*

Constable: They listened to Ezekiel as they listened to entertainers, singers or instrumentalists. Entertainers expect no response to their performances beyond applause, but preachers expect people to change. The exiles admired Ezekiel for his content and delivery, but they did not put into practice what he told them to do (cf. James 1:22-25). They did not apply it to their own lives and change. Consequently, when what Ezekiel promised came, namely, judgment for personal responsibility (vv. 12-20), they would know that a prophet, a spokesman for God, had been in their midst, not just an entertainer.

D. (:33) Alternate Recognition Refrain

*“So when it comes to pass-- as surely it will—
then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”*

David Thompson: Now in **verse 33**, God says to Ezekiel there will come a day when the people will know you were not an entertainer; you were a prophet. The problem is the day they finally figure out you are a prophet of God, it will be their judgment day.

Iain Duguid: Time, however, will prove the power of the word of the Lord through Ezekiel: “*When all this comes true—and it surely will—then they will know that a prophet has been among them*” (**33:33**). In that day, just as all will know experientially the power of the Lord, so they will also be forced to recognize the authenticity of the Lord’s prophet.

Lamar Cooper: God was not through, however, making himself known to his people. There was much yet to be revealed in word and in deed. Since Jerusalem had already fallen, “*when all this comes true*” may refer to the further prophecies Ezekiel was about to proclaim (**v. 33**). God’s closing words to Ezekiel in **chap. 33** are similar to those given him in his call in **2:5**. Whether or not the people would hear and respond, Ezekiel was to continue proclaiming God’s word. By his faithful ministry they would know that a “*prophet had been among them.*” Faithfulness to God by believers often means that the unbelieving world will not take them seriously (**v. 32**). But faithfulness will one day be vindicated by God (**v. 33**; cf. **Gal 6:9**).

Daniel Block: those who are called by God as his spokespersons may find security in him. The challenge for the communicator of divine truth is to be as gripped by the message as is the divine commissioner himself, to cast that message in as effective a form as possible, and then to commit the results to God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can believers misconstrue the circumstances of prosperity to assume a divine stamp of approval on a lifestyle that is actually superficial and godless?
- 2) What are the signs that a church audience is not evaluating the preached message by biblical criteria?
- 3) Why haven’t the previous severe judgments of God (including the fall of Jerusalem) prompted a change of heart with respect to both hearing and doing the Word of God?
- 4) Where are we guilty of superficiality and a lack of commitment to apply the Word of God to our lives?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: The autobiographical narrative report in vv 21–22, prefaced with a chronological reference, serves as an introduction to an extended oracle that is introduced by a message reception formula, in vv 23–33. The separate addressing of the prophet in vv 24 and 30 splits the oracle into two parts, vv 24–29 and 30–33. The two prophetic messages—for such they are in their diverse content and targets—are both proof sayings ending in third-person recognition formulas (vv 29, 33). The first is a standard three-part proof saying, developed from an oracle of judgment that consists of both a second-person accusation and a third-person pronouncement of punishment (vv 25–26, 27–28). Each part is introduced with commissioning and messenger formulas (vv 25aα, 27aα) and in the second case a divine oath has a reinforcing intent (v 27aβ), while a typical לכן “*therefore, then*” interlocks charge and verdict. The piece is also a disputation that consists of thesis in v 24, dispute in vv 25–26, and counterthesis in vv 27–29 (Murray, JSOT 38 [1987] 103–4). The second divine communication also has elements of an oracle of judgment. An accusatory tone sounds loud and clear in the bittersweet narrative of vv 30–32, while there is a short, sinister reference to punishment in v 33a, as a qualification of the recognition formula. . .

This pericope has its own coherence as a triple statement of the effect of Jerusalem’s fall: on the prophet and on those of the people who did not feature in the wave of deportations from Judah and on those who had been deported earlier. However, it fits well with the previous pericope as a continuation of material intended to be introductory to the new, positive messages of chaps. 34–48. Indeed, within chap. 33 as a whole the report of the downfall of Jerusalem and its prophetic implications has a central role, around which the surrounding oracles are set with the purpose of sounding notes of caution. From this perspective the final reference to the coming of doom in v 33 neatly echoes in an inclusion the warning the prophetic watchman was to give to the exiles. Divine grace is never cheap: Yahweh’s new word of hope carried with it the responsibility for the exilic generation to appropriate it by turning from their wicked ways. In turn, the moral dimension of vv 12–20 is echoed in vv 24–29, so that the latter oracle is not only an insistence that basic immorality undercuts the happy theology of the non-deported Judeans, but in the light of its literary setting carries with it a corollary that the exiles too may not exempt themselves from Yahweh’s moral will, if they are to obtain repossession of the promised land.

David Thompson: There are some people who go to church every week and never change. They come, they sit, they listen, they sing, they give and then they go back home and nothing changes. They do not ever make any adjustments but just continue to live in some delusional fantasy world in which they have convinced themselves that they are just okay with God just the way they are. They are never convicted about anything. They never deal with anything they could identify as sin. They just pat themselves on the back and on they go.

What people don’t realize is that there will come a day when they will be judged according to the Word of God. That is a sober thought. God will analyze our individual

lives in accordance with His Word. What we would be very wise to do in light of this is to ask God to make us sensitive to His conviction. . .

They were not responding to the Word of God. They were not responding to conviction and they were not dealing with sin. So what God does here is He communicates through Ezekiel a powerful point which is this:

GOD'S PEOPLE, WHO DO NOT RESPOND TO THE WORD OF GOD, WILL ONE DAY KNOW THEY WERE IN THE PRESENCE OF ONE WHO TOLD THEM THE TRUTH BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT KNOW GOD THROUGH FORGIVENESS BUT THROUGH JUDGMENT.

Phillip Kayser: Measuring Success by God's Standards -- Ezekiel 33:30-33

Introduction:

What would our church look like if it was to be successful in God's eyes?

I. Inadequate signs of success:

- A. Great Interest in the Pastor and his message (v. 30a)
- B. Witnessing (v. 30b)
- C. Faithful Attendance (v. 31a)
- D. Understanding (v. 32b)
- E. Expression of devotion and love (v. 31b)
- F. Enjoying the Services

II. What God is looking for:

- A. Heart Transformation (v. 31b)
 - 1. A mind totally submitted to God's Word.
(Their mind had not yet been subject to the Spirit.)
 - 2. A will subject to God's desires.
(Their will still lacked submission to God.)
 - 3. Affections oriented away from self-serving to God.
(Their affections were still attached to the creature rather than to the Creator.)
- B. Holiness (vv. 31, 32)

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/12418129192.pdf>

TEXT: Ezekiel 34:1-31

TITLE: THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD-KING AND WE ARE HIS PEOPLE

BIG IDEA:

RESTORATION REQUIRES REPLACING SELFISH FORMER SHEPHERDS WITH THE MESSIANIC SHEPHERD-KING = THE NEW DAVID

INTRODUCTION:

Lamar Cooper: Chapter 34 comprises figurative messages to the leaders of Israel as shepherds (vv. 1–16) and to the people as sheep (vv. 17–24), followed by a literal message to the people (vv. 25–31). The figurative message to the shepherds consists of condemnation and the announcement of their removal (vv. 1–10), then the Lord’s announcement that as owner of the flock he would take over as shepherd (vv. 11–16). In the figurative message to the flock, God announced his determination to judge and to deliver (vv. 17–24). The final message to the people is a promise to provide them with a “covenant of peace” (vv. 25–31).

Thomas Constable: The Lord gave Ezekiel a message for the shepherds (leaders, rulers, cf. Ps. 23) of Israel. Ancient Near Easterners often referred to kings and leaders as “shepherds” (e.g. Num. 27:17; 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Isa. 44:28; Jer. 3:15; 10:21; 23:1-6; 25:34-38; Mic. 5:4-5; Zech. 11:4-17). Prophets and priests were also called “shepherds,” but here kings are also in view. God pronounced judgment on them for three reasons.

- First, they fed themselves rather than the people; they were selfish.
- They were more interested in providing for themselves than for the people whom God had placed in their care (cf. John 10:11-13; 21:15-17).
- They exploited their followers.

Daniel Block: The theological implications of Ezek. 34 are both profound and exhilarating. First, when Yahweh extends his grace to Israel again, the disintegrated deity-nation-land triangle is restored. Ezekiel’s vision of the messianic age recognizes a measure of truth in his contemporaries’ theological formulations. Yahweh had indeed entered into an eternal marriage covenant with them. Yahweh has an enduring interest in his land. His promise to David of eternal title to the throne of Jerusalem still stands. These covenant hopes will all be fulfilled in the messianic age. At that time, when Yahweh’s people live securely in their land, are ruled by a divinely appointed David, and enjoy the shalom of God’s presence and grace, they will finally acknowledge him as their Savior and covenant Lord.

I. (:1-16) REPLACING SELFISH SHEPHERDS WITH THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(:1-2a) Prologue – Prophecy against the Selfish Shepherds of Israel

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, Thus says the Lord God,””

Daniel Block: Following the customary opening word-event formula and the direct address of the prophet as Human (*ben-`ādām*), Ezekiel receives the double command to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel (*rō`ē yiśrā`ēl*). The designation shepherds for leaders is traditional in ancient Near Eastern usage, dating back to Sumerian times.

Douglas Stuart: In **verses 1–2** it is evident that the problem with kings in the past is that they were **selfish**. In the allegory of the passage, they “*fed themselves*” as opposed to the flocks (the people of God). Living off the people’s productivity and wealth (**v. 3**), they did not seek to help the nation, but rather ruled as despots for their own advantage (**v. 4**). The result (**v. 5**) was disaster for the “*flock*,” Israel, which became scattered among the nations and prey to enemies (allegorically, scattered and unprotected as sheep, and prey for wild animals to whom sheep are vulnerable when the shepherd is irresponsible). Israel was then “*lost*” in exile with no “*shepherds*” (rulers) any more to seek them (**v. 6**). The shepherds were called to task by God, the owner of the flock who promised (“*as I live*,” **v. 8**) as a result of the misbehavior of the shepherds (**vv. 7–9**) that He would remove them from their jobs, and who held them accountable for their corrupt leadership (**v. 10**). Thus the historical monarchy in Israel was rejected.

Now (**vv. 11–16**) the Good Shepherd, God, will take over. He is the owner of the flock, and He will find His own sheep, having fired the shepherds who botched the job and allowed the flock to be scattered and subject to danger (**vv. 11–12**). God will bring Israel back to its homeland from exile (**v. 13**) and will take care of them and see to it that they prosper, as sheep prosper with good places to eat and rest (**vv. 13–15**). It is useful to note that in Palestine most grazing land is on the hillsides, while most crop land is closer to the valleys. Thus the sheep are here depicted as living on the hills (although grazing sometimes in valleys, **v. 13**) since that is appropriate to the allegory. God will revive His people, now allegorically “*lost*” and “*sick*,” while at the same time destroying their oppressors (who are surely the wicked kings who ruled Israel, as well as perhaps the foreign nations repeatedly excoriated in **chs. 25–32**).

A. (:2b-10) Condemnation of Selfish Shepherds

1. (:2b-6) Charged with a Wide Range of Offenses

a. (:2b) Feeding Themselves instead of the Flock

*“Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves!
Should not the shepherds feed the flock?”*

b. (:3-4) Fleecing the Flock While Ignoring Their Needs

1) (:3) Fleecing the Flock

*“You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool,
you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.”*

Constable: Specifically, these unfaithful shepherds ate the best parts of the sacrifices rather than offering them to God (cf. **1 Sam. 2:12-17**). They used the wool of sheep to make clothing for themselves rather than offering these animals as sacrifices to God.

Second, rather than feeding God's sheep they slaughtered them; they were oppressive. They had not restored those that needed restoring nor sought those that had wandered away and needed finding. They had dominated God's flock rather than providing loving, self-sacrificial leadership. The primary responsibility of a leader is to care for the needs of those he leads, even if this requires sacrificing his own desires.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel charges the rulers with three crimes of commission.

- First, they consume the milk of their flock. The verb *'ākal* (lit. “to eat”) suggests a solid milk product, perhaps curds or cheese. Again in real life, consuming the milk of the sheep is not an exploitative act, but here it is made to look like robbery.
- Second, the shepherds fleece the flock: the wool you wear. This too is natural in a pastoral economy, but Ezekiel’s figure assumes the forceful removal of wool, making it look like the sheep are left naked before the elements.
- Third, they butcher the fatlings (*habbēri’ā*). The verb *zābaḥ* often denotes the slaughter of a sacrificial animal, especially for the *zebaḥ*, “sacrificial” meal. But here the verb functions simply as a synonym for *ṭābaḥ*, without any religious overtones. Shepherds do raise sheep for their mutton, but in this metaphorical context, such slaughter represents the most blatant violation of the shepherd’s role, presumably judicial murder (cf. **7:23; 9:9**; etc.).

The triad of accusations concludes with a reiteration of the general charge in **v. 2**. The rulers have taken excellent care of themselves, but they have not cared for the flock.

2) (:4) Ignoring Their Needs

*“Those who are sickly you have not strengthened,
the diseased you have not healed,
the broken you have not bound up,
the scattered you have not brought back,
nor have you sought for the lost;
but with force and with severity you have dominated
them.”*

Daniel Block: The crimes of omission reflect a stratum of Israelite “pastors” representing the antithesis of responsible shepherds.

- First, they have shown no concern for the physical health of the flock. They have not strengthened (*hizzēq*) the weak (*naḥēlôt*), healed (*rippē*) the sick (*hōlâ*), or bound up (*hābaš*) the injured (*nišberet*).
- Second, they have shown no concern for the sheep that have left the flock. They have neither gone after the strays nor sought the lost. Instead of caring (*rā’ā*) for the flock, the shepherds have ruled over them with harshness (*hāzēqā*) and brutality (*perek*).

Derek Thomas: Three features of the false shepherds are roundly condemned, thus signaling what was expected of the true shepherds of Israel.

1. Their self-interest

They ‘only take care of themselves’ (34:2).

2. Their love of ease

‘You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock’ (34:3).

3. Their heartlessness

‘You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally’ (34:4).

c. (:5-6) Failing to Protect the Flock from Predators

1) (:5) Flock was Scattered and Attacked

“And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.”

2) (:6) Flock was Scattered and Abandoned

“My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek for them.”

Constable: the rulers allowed the people to scatter over the earth instead of keeping them safely together; they were negligent. The Israelites scattered because they lacked leadership and became prey for the enemies of God's flock. They wandered everywhere, but there was no one to seek them out (cf. **Matt. 9:36; John 10:12-13**).

2. (:7-10) Censured with Judgments Matching Their Offenses

a. (:7-8) Summary of Offenses

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:”

“‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock;”

Peter Pett: The verdict is now given beginning with the accusatory facts. The sheep had not had proper guidance, they had not had protection, and no one had sought them out when they went wrong, and thus they had given way to false teaching and had been physically misused. And all because the shepherds were looking after their own interests and not those of the sheep. They were too busy making themselves well-to-do and advancing their own status.

b. (:9-10) Settling the Score

“therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:”

1) Divine Opposition to the Shepherds

*“Thus says the Lord God,
‘Behold, I am against the shepherds,’”*

2) Divine Accountability

“and I shall demand My sheep from them”

3) Divine Canceling of Privileged Responsibilities

“and make them cease from feeding sheep.”

4) Divine Halt to Their Abusive Practices

“So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore,”

5) Divine Deliverance for the Flock

*“but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth,
that they may not be food for them.”*

Constable: The Lord swore to oppose these shepherds, to hold them accountable for His sheep, to stop them from leading them further, and to rescue His sheep from their influence (cf. **Matt. 20:25-28**).

Peter Pett: He will call the shepherds to account (*‘require my sheep at their hand’*) and remove them from being shepherds to His sheep, so that they cannot any more profit from the sheep. They will no longer be able to *‘eat’* them. Then He Himself will search for them and seek them out.

David Guzik: God solemnly promised to hold the unfaithful, ungodly shepherds to account. In the eyes of the flock, they may seem to go unpunished; God promised to deal with them.

- God would do it by removing them from their position (**cause them to cease feeding the sheep**).
- God would do it stopping their abuse of the flock (**the shepherds shall feed themselves no more**).
- God would do it by removing His flock from them (**I will deliver My flock from their mouths**).

Leslie Allen: Yahweh declares that he will take on the monarchy and—with a deft re-use of the keyword שָׂרָף—*“hold it liable”* for its negligence. Nothing less than their removal from their royal post would transpire in view of their general self-seeking (**vv 2, 3, 8**) and in particular the suffering and fatality of their subjects at their hands (cf. **v 4**). They are ironically portrayed as wild animals (cf. **v 5**)—a travesty of true shepherding (cf. **1 Sam 17:35; Amos 3:12**). Only by removal of the monarchy could God’s people be preserved. Although Yahweh’s positive concern has resounded

through the oracle thus far, especially in the outraged phrase “*my sheep*,” it comes to the fore in the first and last verbs of divine action at v 10, as the focus gradually changes from punishment of one group to salvation of the other.

John Taylor: Because of all this, God declares that he is against the shepherds, even though they ruled by his dispensation. Having failed in their responsibilities, they would not be allowed to rule anymore; the flock would be taken out of their care and they would be deposed from office.

B. (:11-16) Commitment of the Lord to Personally Shepherd His Sheep

“For thus says the Lord God,”

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel 34:11–16 abounds in **first person promises**. God repeatedly promised, “*I will*” go after them, and “*I will*” meet the needs of my people. While there is some overlap and repetition, there are twenty-five such promises in this and the following paragraphs of the chapter. These promises include elements of judgment as well as deliverance. Yahweh promised to hold the shepherds accountable for the sheep, remove them from tending the flock, rescue his flock from their mouths, search for and look after his sheep, look after and gather them, rescue them from clouds and darkness, and gather them from among the nations. He would bring them to their own land, place them on the mountains of Israel, tend the flock in good pasture so that they could lie down in safety, search out the lost and the strayed of the flock, bind up the injured, and destroy the strong who oppose the flock. In addition he would shepherd the flock with justice, judge between one sheep and another, judge between the fat and the lean sheep, save the flock, place over them one shepherd, be their God, make a covenant of peace with them, bless them, send showers in season, and provide for them (vv. 10–29).

No longer would any human figure mediate between God and his people. Only God and his Messiah (v. 23) would be the “*Shepherd*” of his people. This message of hope is a glaring contrast with the picture in 34:1–15 with its message of the neglect and exploitation of human kings. The proliferation of “*I wills*” in 34:10–29 suggests **Yahweh’s determination** personally to be involved in the lives and destinies of his people.

1. (:11-13a) Personal Care in Seeking, Regathering and Restoring the Flock to the Promised Land

“Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land;”

John Taylor: The picture of the shepherd searching out the wanderer, in **verse 12**, is a remarkable foreshadowing of the parable of the lost sheep (**Luke 15:4ff.**), which our Lord doubtless based on this passage in Ezekiel.

Feinberg: In beautiful and unforgettable words Ezekiel predicted a literal return and restoration of the people of Israel to their own land. Notice it will be a regathering from worldwide exile and dispersion. . .

It is both unnecessary and impossible to spiritualize these promises. If the scattering were literal, and no one is foolhardy as to deny this, then the regathering must be equally so.

Wiersbe: In Ezekiel's time, the Lord brought His people back from Babylon; but the picture here is certainly much broader than that, for the Lord spoke about 'countries.'

2. (:13b-15) Pasturing Them in Restful Grazing Grounds

“and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest, declares the Lord God.”

3. (:16) Proactively Restoring the Weak to Full Health While Destroying the Proud and the Oppressors

a. Restoring the Weak to Full Health

*“I will seek the lost,
bring back the scattered,
bind up the broken,
and strengthen the sick;”*

b. Destroying the Proud and the Oppressors

*“but the fat and the strong I will destroy.
I will feed them with judgment.”*

David Guzik: *I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment:* God promised to judge the proud among the sheep, those who were *fat and strong*, but not fed of the LORD.

Derek Thomas: Included within the description of a true shepherd are the qualities of **love**, in taking care of sheep who appeared ungrateful for the self-sacrifice of the shepherd, **patience** in diligently seeking after the lost sheep, **strength** in delivering the sheep from their enemies, and in particular, **courage**, since the long dry summers would demand that a shepherd frequently look for new pastures. It was a dangerous and unsettled life, open at any moment to attack. Even in the tranquil meditations of **Psalm 23**, we are reminded that the shepherd carries a 'rod' to fend off attacks from would-be assassins (**Ps. 23:4**). In a parallel passage in Zechariah the good shepherd is first of all *rejected (11:7–11)*, *pierced (12:10)* and then *struck (13:7)*. The shepherd had to be prepared to pay the ultimate price in caring for his sheep.

Daniel Block: This verse is transitional, reviewing Yahweh’s salvific activity on the one hand, and preparing the way for vv. 17–22 on the other. The summary consists of six short sentences exhibiting a modified mirror image of v. 4:

- V. 4 A The weak (*naḥēlôt*) you have not strengthened (*ḥizzeq*).
- B The sick (*ḥôlâ*) you have not healed (*rippē’*).
- C The injured (*nišberet*) you have not bound up (*ḥābaš*).
- D The stray (*niddaḥat*) you have not fetched (*hēšîb*).
- E The lost (*’ôbedet*) you have not sought (*biqqēš*).
- V. 16 E’ The lost (*’ôbedet*) I will seek (*biqqēš*).
- D’ The stray (*niddaḥat*) I will fetch (*hēšîb*).
- C’ The injured (*nišberet*) I will bind up (*ḥābaš*).
- B’ The sick (*ḥôlâ*)
- A’ I will strengthen (*ḥizzēq*).

II. (:17-22) RENDERING JUDGMENT FOR SELFISH SHEEP WHO ONLY LOOK OUT FOR THEMSELVES

A. (:17-19) Transition from Judging Shepherds to Judging Sheep

“And as for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God,”

Constable: The Lord announced too that He would distinguish among the members of His flock, judging them individually (cf. **Matt. 25:31-46**). Here the Lord viewed the exilic leaders as sheep among His sheep rather than as shepherds. They were, after all, also His sheep. Some of these leaders had not only eaten good pasture and drunk clear water but had made it impossible for the other sheep to eat good food and drink good water. The ordinary sheep had to get by with trampled grass and muddy water.

1. (:17) Judgment Will be Individually Based

“Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats.”

Galen Doughty: God tells his people that he will judge between them, one sheep from another and between the rams and goats. The image goes back to his promise to hold the failed shepherds accountable. The people had suffered greatly not only at the hand of the Babylonians but at the hands of corrupt leaders who took advantage of the people's suffering to get rich and fat. God as the good shepherd will not let that stand. He will judge those who grew rich off the people.

John Taylor: The flock in biblical times, as today in the Middle East, regularly consisted of a mixture of sheep and goats . . . Ezekiel is saying that the powerful and prosperous citizens, who had been greedily taking for themselves all the good things of the land and denying the benefit of them to their fellows, were going to be judged by

the Shepherd. The flock will in fact be purified, not only of its bad leadership but also of its bad members.

2. (:18) Judgment Exposes Those Who Not Only Act Selfishly, but Wreck Things for Others

a. First Example

*“Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture,
that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures?”*

b. Second Example

*“Or that you should drink of the clear waters,
that you must foul the rest with your feet?”*

3. (:19) Judgment Takes Into Account the Impact of Your Actions on Others

*“And as for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet,
and they must drink what you foul with your feet!”*

B. (:20-22) Judgment Belongs to the Lord

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them,”

1. (:20) God Will Make Things Right

“Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.”

Constable: God would judge between the fat and the lean sheep, between those who fed themselves and kept others from eating and those who had to exist on poor food and drink.

2. (:21-22a) God Will Punish Oppressors and Deliver the Oppressed

a. (:21) Punishing Oppressors

*“Because you push with side and with shoulder,
and thrust at all the weak with your horns,
until you have scattered them abroad,”*

b. (:22a) Delivering the Oppressed

*“therefore, I will deliver My flock,
and they will no longer be a prey;”*

3. (:22b) God Will Judge Individually and Without Partiality

“and I will judge between one sheep and another.”

III. (:23-24) RAISING UP THE MESSIANIC SHEPHERD KING AS THE LORD’S SERVANT = THE NEW DAVID FOR ISRAEL

A. (:23) The Good Shepherd Who Faithfully Feeds and Cares for the Flock

*“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David,
and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.”*

Daniel Block: Ezekiel’s announcement of the appointment of a new David for Israel was intended to instill new hope in the hearts of the exiles. Contrary to appearance, the demise of the Davidic house in 586 did not reflect divine impotence or indifference to previous commitments. These events had not only fulfilled previous prophetic utterances (**12:1–16; 17; 19**) but had also set the stage for a dramatic and new act of Yahweh. The decadence of the old order had been removed; now the people are challenged to look forward to a new day when Yahweh’s Davidic servant would be reinstated in accordance with his eternal and irrevocable covenant.

B. (:24a) The Lord’s Servant as the New David Reigning Among Them

*“And I, the LORD, will be their God,
and My servant David will be prince among them;”*

John Taylor: The scattered flock have been gathered to their own land in an eschatological act of deliverance, not without its element of judgment. United and purified, they now enter upon the supernatural golden age of peace and prosperity. Over them is set the Messianic figure who is variously described as my servant, prince and David. Who is this person? He is not, as some would believe, the historical David resurrected, nor is he a human king of the Davidic line, for we are dealing with a superhuman figure who will reign forever (cf. **37:25**). He is the servant of the Lord, represented as an idealized David: for David was the man whom God chose and in whom he delighted; the king who triumphed against all his foes and who extended his kingdom in all directions; the man of Judah under whose genius the whole nation was for a time united. These features of the Messianic leader’s person and kingdom are more significant to Ezekiel than the physical succession of the line of David’s kings. He saw no future for kings of that sort over Israel. They were condemned, and Zedekiah’s fate only served to seal that condemnation. So this new Messianic figure is described not as king, but as prince (*nāśî*), and in that capacity he will be the righteous ruler of the saved community of Israel. Christians can see the fulfilment of this expectation in the character of Christ’s future Messianic rule of which the present Christian era is a mere foreshadowing. . .

(:24b) You Can Count On It

“I, the LORD, have spoken.”

IV. (:25-31) RATIFYING THE COVENANT OF PEACE IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

A. (:25-27a) Blessings of the Covenant of Peace

1. (:25) Security

*“And I will make a covenant of peace with them
and eliminate harmful beasts from the land,
so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.”*

David Guzik: all this points towards the new covenant, especially in its perfection and culmination in the Millennial Kingdom. The promises of peace in the millennium are also found in passages such as **Isaiah 2:4** and **Jeremiah 23:5-6**.

Daniel Block: “*covenant of peace*” -- The description offers one of the fullest explications of the Hebrew notion of *shalom*. The term obviously signifies much more than the absence of hostility or tension. It speaks of wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, humans at peace with their environment and with God.

2. (:26) Prosperity – Showers of Blessing

*“And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing.
And I will cause showers to come down in their season;
they will be showers of blessing.”*

3. (:27a) Prosperity -- Fruitfulness

*“Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit,
and the earth will yield its increase,”*

4. (:27b) Security

“and they will be secure on their land.”

B. (:27bc) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD,”

C. (:27d-29) Deliverance from the Enemies of Peace and Security

1. (:27d) Deliverance from Enslavement and Oppression

*“when I have broken the bars of their yoke
and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.”*

2. (:28a) Deliverance from the Sword

“And they will no longer be a prey to the nations,”

3. (:28b) Deliverance from Fear

*“and the beasts of the earth will not devour them;
but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.”*

4. (:28c) Deliverance from Famine

*“And I will establish for them a renowned planting place,
and they will not again be victims of famine in the land,”*

5. (:28d) Deliverance from Disgrace and Ridicule

“and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.”

Spurgeon: I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough of it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it

is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel.

D. (:30-31) Loyal Relationship with the Lord

1. (:30) Alternate Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,’ declares the Lord God.”

Douglas Stuart: Verse 30 contrasts with the many previous “*they shall know ...*” endings to passages in the book, which tend to emphasize how Israel or foreign nations will feel the wrath of God and thus be forced to recognize His sovereignty. This, instead, is the language of promise: the true Israel will know that God is with them, their being His people and His being their God.

2. (:31) Privileged Relationship with the Covenant-Keeping God

“As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,’ declares the Lord God.”

David Guzik: This wonderful reminder assured Israel that even though they were like sheep, they were much more than sheep. They were *men*, made in the image of God and capable of so much more than sheep. They needed to recognize their place as creatures (*men*) and God’s place as Creator (*I am your God*). This was both their glory and their responsibility before God.

Ezekiel’s phrasing here (*you are men, and I am your God*) acknowledged the great divide between humanity and deity. In Ezekiel’s day that divide had not yet been completely bridged by the Messiah, Jesus Christ, both God and man.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of qualities would define a servant leader who does a faithful job pastoring the flock of God?
- 2) What should encourage the Jewish exiles in Babylon that God still has a plan for the future of the nation of Israel?
- 3) What will kingship look like in the Millennial Kingdom?
- 4) Do we make our boast in the secure relationship we have as the people of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: This chapter is full of **pastoral reassurance**. The backward look at the last years of the Judean monarchy, through the eyeglasses of Jeremiah (**Jer 23:1–2**), answers the question as to why the bitter experience of exile was the people’s lot. The blame is laid firmly on the policies of the last kings of Judah, and the catastrophe is interpreted in prophetic vein as the outworking of a moral providence. The monarchy had to go, divinely ordered as it was, after it degenerated into a self-serving institution that ignored the interests of its subjects, neglecting the weak and exploiting the strong. Yahweh’s traditional covenant role as royal “shepherd” of his people, to whom the kings were responsible as under-shepherds, drove him to intervene against them. Yet this very role carried welcome promises that the ravages of destruction and deportation would be repaired. What Ezekiel typically has to say at length was expressed a generation later in distilled form: “*He will tend his flock like a shepherd ...*” (**Isa 40:11**). Above all, combined with a land-based theology, Yahweh’s covenant guaranteed return to the land.

Douglas Stuart: [God’s revealed] plan is reflected in **Ezekiel 34**. First described in the Pentateuch (in such passages as **Leviticus 26**, **Deuteronomy 4** and **28–32**) and reflected by both the historical books and the prophets, it envisions:

- (1) Israel’s increasing degeneracy and failure to keep God’s covenant;
- (2) God’s rejection, that is, punishment of His people by conquest and exile and the many miseries involved in those events; and
- (3) eventual restoration, not just to Israel’s former state, but restoration of a newly created people to a far better relationship of true faithfulness to God.

Chapter 34 follows this “plan” as its contents demonstrate:

- Israel’s past failure under irresponsible shepherds (leaders) (**vv. 1–10**)
- God, the Good Shepherd, takes over (**vv. 11–16**)
- God judges His flock and puts His Messiah in charge (**vv. 17–24**)
- The resulting blessed new age of the covenant of peace (**vv. 25–31**)

David Thompson: Now shepherds had the primary responsibility to take care of the sheep. Sheep are helpless if left to themselves and a shepherd was responsible to take care of the sheep. He needed to be on the lookout for predators who could harm the flock and He needed to make sure that the sheep were well fed, which meant he had to lead them to appropriate safe and good places. . .

GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LED ASTRAY BY PATHETIC FALSE SHEPHERDS
SO GOD HIMSELF WILL INTERVENE AND PUT HIS OWN SHEPHERD/KING
IN CHARGE AND WILL BLESS HIS PEOPLE. . .

These leaders ruled with force, brutality and cruelty. They were dominant bullies. Instead of helping the flock, they hurt it. They were only in leadership for themselves. They were not kind. They were not compassionate. They loved the power but they didn’t really care about the people.

John Taylor: The word '*shepherd*' suggests **leadership** and **caring**, and it was therefore an appropriate metaphor to use for hereditary monarchs who might otherwise think only in terms of lording it over their people. Israelite history shows how rarely this ideal of responsible leadership was achieved, and Ezekiel was particularly conscious of the failures of the most recent kings before the exile (cf. **19:1–14; 21:25**). He therefore precedes his promise of good leadership to come with a searing attack on the greed and selfishness of the leaders of the past. They had exploited the people as if the flock belonged to them, the shepherds. But the people were the Lord's flock (*my sheep*, **6**) and the kings ruled them by the Lord's appointment (*my shepherds*, **8**). Therefore the shepherds would be punished and the sheep, scattered by exile, would be rescued and returned to their own pastures and cared for by God as their good Shepherd. He would judge them righteously and would appoint his servant, David, as his vicegerent and prince (**24**), and all would be peace and harmony, blessing and prosperity. The passage is illustrative of a high ideal of kingship in the Old Testament and of the place of Yahweh as the true melek-king of Israel from whom the kingship of the house of David was derived. It is also worth noting that the close connection between the king and the shepherd motif justifies us in seeing a certain kingly quality in such well-known passages as **Psalm 23** (where the rod in **verse 4** is the same word as a royal sceptre) and **John 10**.

Derek Thomas: Several points seem to emerge as a reflection of the Shepherd's character.

1. The Shepherd knows his sheep

He calls them '*my sheep*'. He seems to be acquainted with their identity. This is something Jesus noted expressly: '*I know my sheep*' (**John 10:3, 14–15**). Unlike modern Western sheep that are kept only for a short duration for their meat, Palestinian sheep were kept for their wool over the period of their life-span. Relationships developed between pastor and sheep of an intimate and loving nature. Nathanael was astonished at the fact that Jesus knew him (**John 1:47–48**).

2. The Good Shepherd serves his sheep

God's chief complaint about Israel's leaders was this: '*Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?*' (**34:2**). Anyone who has been raised on a farm, as I have been, will know that sheep are not the woolly, cuddly creatures that are depicted in children's picture books! They have no concern for their personal cleanliness whatsoever, and are subject to the most awful diseases and pests. Some of my clearest memories of childhood are of days when the sheep were 'dipped' into pools of foul-smelling chemicals to destroy all manner of nasty infections. Ezekiel was right when he referred to shepherding as involving strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding up the injured and retrieving the strays (**34:4**). Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of his sheep by laying down his own life for them (**John 10:15**).

3. The Good Shepherd leads his sheep

Oriental shepherds did not use dogs to retrieve their sheep; they simply called and the sheep followed. Though it is only hinted at in this chapter, Ezekiel does portray the shepherd as '*search[ing]*', and '*bring[ing] them out*' (**34:11, 13**). God had led Israel 'like a flock' (**Ps. 80:1**). The sheep were to recognize God's voice and follow him (**Ps. 23:1–2**).

4. The Good Shepherd feeds his sheep

He '*pastures*' them (**34:13–15**). Jesus was to add: '*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture*' (**John 10:9**).

5. The Good Shepherd rules his sheep

As we saw earlier, the term '*shepherd*' was synonymous with 'ruler' or 'king' (it is used this way in **34:2**). Instead of the false rule of Israel's kings, God's people are to be governed by God himself. In the grand design of things, the chapter ends with a picture of the kingdom as it will be at the end. The sheep are gathered together with God as the ruler: '*You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord*' (**34:31**).

6. The Good Shepherd protects his sheep

He will keep them from every danger: '*They will no longer be plundered*' (**34:22**). Sheep were harassed by wolves. When hunting in packs the wolf was an animal to be feared. Thus hired hands would run away and leave the sheep to be killed, but the true shepherd would risk his life for them (**John 10:12–13**). The shepherds of Israel (**34:2**) had been '*false prophets*', wolves in '*sheep's clothing*' (cf. **Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29–30**).

7. The Good Shepherd seeks his sheep

'*I myself will search for my sheep*' (**34:11**). '*I have other sheep*', Jesus said, '*that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd*' (**John 10:16**). Jesus is determined to find his sheep, wherever they are!

TEXT: Ezekiel 35:1 – 36:15

TITLE: *JUDGMENT FOR MOUNT SEIR VS BLESSING FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL*

BIG IDEA:

THE RESTORATION OF YAHWEH'S LAND REQUIRES FIRST RENDERING EDMON DESOLATE FOR HER TREATMENT OF ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

These two sections (**chap. 35** and **chap. 36:1-15**) are mirror-images of one another. They are paired in such a way as to highlight the contrasts. Mount Seir is condemned for her hostility and reviling of Israel while the mountains of Israel anticipate the blessing of fruitfulness and repopulation as YAHWEH once again takes possession of His land.

Feinberg: It may appear at first as though the present prophecy belongs to the oracles against foreign nations, but it is probably here as a point of contrast to **chapter 36**, that is, **wrath for Mount Seir** contrasted with **blessing for the mountains of Israel**.

David Guzik: Perhaps Ezekiel put this prophecy here to answer the question, "How can we be restored if there are enemies like Edom who hate us so deeply and wish to take advantage of our desolation?"

Constable: But why did the Lord target Edom here? Probably Edom was representative of all the enemies of Israel who wanted to take over her land, and was selected because of her long history of land squabbles with Israel (cf. **Gen. 25:22-34; 27; 36:6-8, 31-43; Num. 20:14-21; 24:15-19; 1 Sam. 14:47; 1 Kings 11:14-22; 2 Kings 8:21; 2 Chron. 20:1-23; 28:17; Ps. 137:7; Isa. 11:14; 34:5-6; Lam. 4:21-22; Dan. 11:41; Amos 2:1; Obad. 10-14; Mal. 1:2-5**). Edom was the nation that had longest and most consistently resisted Israel's occupation of the Promised Land. The Edomites evidently wanted to reclaim the birthright that Esau had sold to Jacob.

Therefore, if God is going to give Israel her land in the future, as He promised in **chapter 34**, He will have to deal with Edom and all other nations that oppose Israel's possession of it. This section assures the readers, both ancient and modern, that He will deal with opponents to Israel occupying her land by prophesying the destruction of Israel's greatest antagonist viewed as a representative of all such powers (cf. **Matt. 25:31-46**). Edomite invasions of Israel following the Babylonian decimation of Judah also made Edom a major topic of interest.

Charles Dyer: **Ezekiel 36** parallels the New Covenant God promised to Israel and Judah in **Jeremiah 31**. This covenant includes at least three specific elements:

- (a) restoration to the land (**Ezek. 36:24; Jer. 31:27-29**),
- (b) forgiveness of sin (**Ezek. 36:25; Jer. 31:34**), and
- (c) the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit (**Ezek. 36:26-27; Jer. 31:33**).

Wiersbe: In his previous messages, Ezekiel looked back and reproved the people because of their sins. Now he looks ahead and encourages the people by telling them what the Lord will do for Israel in the future. . . The future of Israel [in chapters **36** and **37**] can be summarized in four words: **restoration, regeneration, resurrection, and reunion.**

Anton Pearson: The Territorial Integrity of Israel Assured (35:1 – 36:38)

After the promise of a good shepherd to replace the wicked shepherds who had ruled Israel, there follow three oracles on the security of the land itself. Mount Seir, for its hostility to Israel, was to be rendered a desolation (**35:1-15**); while the mountains of Israel, which had been ravaged by the nations, would become luxuriantly fruitful (**36:1-15**). The Lord would do all these things for his people for his name's sake (**36:16-38**).

I. (35:1-15) PREREQUISITE OF RESTORATION = JUDGMENT AND DESOLATION AGAINST MOUNT SEIR

(:1-3a) Prologue – Addressing Mount Seir

“Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 ‘Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, Thus says the Lord God,”

Jamieson: lit. "Mount Shaggy," alluding to its rugged hills and forests

Leslie Allen: “Mount Seir” is the traditional description of the mountainous area to the south-east of Judah, on the other side of the rift valley, where Edom was situated (see **Gen 36:8, 9**).

Charles Dyer: Edom was the prototype of all Israel's later foes. The destruction of Edom would signal the beginning of God's judgment on the whole earth based on that nation's treatment of Israel (cf. **Gen. 12:3**).

Peter Pett: While the blessing of Yahweh will come on His people, it will be accompanied by judgment on others who have despised His people. And Edom as the bitterest enemy of Israel were selected for the contrast, partly because they shared a similar situation to Judah in their connection with the Jordan rift and its surrounding mountains, and largely because their betrayal was most recently in mind. And even more because they thought that they could take possession of Yahweh's land which He had given to His people. It demonstrated that it was always dangerous to meddle with the people of God even when they also were under chastening.

4 REASONS FOR JUDGMENT OF DESOLATION AGAINST MOUNT SEIR

A. (:3b-4) Vindication of the Lord's Sovereignty

1. (:3b-4a) Divine Opposition in Assertion of Sovereignty

*“Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir,
And I will stretch out My hand against you,
And I will make you a desolation and a waste.
I will lay waste your cities, And you will become a desolation.”*

2. (:4b) Recognition Refrain

“Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

B. (:5-9) Hatred and Treachery against Israel

1. (:5) Charge of Hatred and Treachery

“Because you have had everlasting enmity and have delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end,”

MacArthur: God will judge Edom because of

- 1) her perpetual enmity against Israel since Esau’s hatred of Jacob (**Ge 25-28**), and
- 2) Edom’s spiteful bloodshed against the Israelites trying to escape the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Derek Thomas: their treachery -- The Edomites struck Judah ‘*at the time of their calamity*’ (**35:5**). Some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem managed to escape the lengthy Babylonian siege (one which resulted in such awful atrocities as cannibalism caused by starvation), only to be caught and slaughtered by the Edomites (**Obad. 10, 14**). The Edomites had ‘*harboured an ancient hostility*’ which went back over a thousand years (**35:5**).

2. (:6-9a) Judgment of Bloodshed and Desolation

a. (:6) Bloodshed

*“therefore, as I live,’ declares the Lord God,
‘I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you.’”*

Constable: "Bloodshed" (Heb. *dam*, lit. *blood*) may be a play on Edom's name (Heb. *edom*, from '*adam*, "to be red").

b. (:7-9a) Desolation

*“And I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation,
and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and returns.
And I will fill its mountains with its slain;
on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those
slain by the sword will fall.
I will make you an everlasting desolation,
and your cities will not be inhabited.”*

Feinberg: none would traverse her land. The designation was for all groups, especially the caravans, for Edom's tribes were the channel of commerce between India, the East and Egypt. This was the source of Edom's wealth.

3. (:9b) Recognition Refrain

"Then you will know that I am the LORD."

C. (:10-13) Appropriation of Yahweh's Land

1. (:10) Aggressive Expansionist Policies

"Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two lands will be mine, and we will possess them,' although the LORD was there,"

Derek Thomas: their expansionist policies -- The Edomites had eyes for both Judah and Israel (**35:10**). They coveted that which was not theirs. It is the drive for more that is the cause of the world's ills.

Constable: Ancient Near Easterners viewed the lands of nations as the domain of the gods of those nations. To take a nation was to overcome its god. Thus in trying to take over Israel's land Edom tried to discredit Yahweh since *"the Lord was there,"* it was His land (cf. v. **12**; **48:35**). This in turn involved failing to recognize Yahweh as the only true God (v. **13**).

Peter Pett: Edom were guilty of two major crimes. They considered that they could annex the land that belonged to Yahweh, His possession, and they had magnified themselves (and their gods) against Yahweh. The two nations here are Israel and Judah. But the land belonged to Yahweh. *'Yahweh was there'*, as they well knew. Thus in saying what they did they were despising Yahweh.

2. (:11) Attitude of Defiance

*"therefore, as I live,' declares the Lord God,
'I will deal with you according to your anger and according to your envy
which you showed because of your hatred against them;
so I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. '"*

Feinberg: The principle of recompense in kind was again set forth, for Edom would receive from the hand of the Lord in direct proportion to her anger, envy and hatred against Israel.

3. (:12-13) Arrogant Boasting

*"Then you will know that I, the LORD, have heard all your revilings
which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel saying, 'They are
laid desolate; they are given to us for food.'
And you have spoken arrogantly against Me and have multiplied your
words against Me; I have heard."*

Lamar Cooper: they had spoken against God “*without restraint*” (v. 13). This spirit of defiance was the subject of Malachi’s message and insight into the bitterness of the descendants of Esau (Mal 1:1–5). They exhibited an attitude of **defiance** that ignored God’s will for themselves as well as for the Israelites.

Derek Thomas: their blasphemous boasting -- The Edomites gloated in the downfall of Israel. But Israel belonged to God and thus their boasting was an insult against God himself: ‘*You boasted against me and spoke against me without restraint, and I heard it*’ (35:13). Their boasting constituted blasphemy against God.

D. (:14-15) Gloating over Israel’s Desolation

“Thus says the Lord God,

1. (:14-15a) Promise of Desolation in Return

As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation.

As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you.

You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it.”

Leslie Allen: Israel’s right to the land is reaffirmed: Yahweh as owner had given it to “*the community of Israel*” as a “*heritage*.” While the promise was in abeyance, it was not abrogated.

Constable: The Lord would cause all the earth to rejoice when He made Edom a laughingstock in the world, just as it had rejoiced when Israel became desolate (cf. 36:5). Mount Seir and all of Edom would become absolutely desolate (cf. 36:10). It would not exist when the Lord restored His people to their land. Then the Edomites would learn that Yahweh is God.

Feinberg: The prediction has been literally fulfilled. Edom was first subjugated by Babylon, then Medo-Persia, and then in 126 B.C. by John Hyrcanus the Hasmonean, who compelled them to become Jews. There is no trace of the Edomites now, although their desolate cities can still be identified, as predicted by Obadiah (v. 18) and Jeremiah (49:13).

Leslie Allen: God promised judgment for Edom and announced that since the Edomites rejoiced over Israel’s calamity the whole world would rejoice over its destruction (v. 14). Gloating over Israel and trying to confiscate the territory caused the destruction, desolation, and loss of their land and national identity (v. 15).

2. (:15b) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Daniel Block: In her claims to Israel’s territory Seir failed to recognize its owner. She treated the devastation of Yahweh’s land and the deportation of its population either as a sign that like his people Yahweh had abandoned his land, or as simply the natural

consequences of shifting political circumstances. She could not see the judgment of Yahweh upon his own people in the demise of the nation and the ruination of the land, let alone his concern to cleanse his land of its defilement. Consequently, the mountains of Israel were hers for the taking, like a carcass for vultures. But the first panel of this oracle reminds Edom and the audience that perceptions and reality may indeed be worlds apart.

II. (36:1-15) RESTORATION AND BLESSING FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL

(:1-2a) Prologue – Addressing the Mountain of Israel

“And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. 2 Thus says the Lord God,”

MacArthur: This chapter must be understood to speak of a literal Israel, a literal land, and a literal regeneration, leading to a literal kingdom under Messiah. Ezekiel addresses Israel’s mountains, as symbolic of the whole nation. He promises:

- 1) to give these mountains gain to dispersed Israel (v. 12);
- 2) to cause fruit to grow on them (v. 8);
- 3) to rebuild cities and to multiply people there (v. 10); and
- 4) to bless in a greater way than in the past (v. 11).

This promise can only be fulfilled in future millennial blessing to Israel that she has not yet experienced, because it includes the salvation of the New Covenant (vv. 25-27, 29, 31, 33).

John Taylor: The **structure** of the chapter is as follows,

(a) The oracle addressed to the mountains of Israel has two parts to it. **Verses 1–7** promise that the nations round about Israel, and Edom in particular, will suffer reproach for the way they have treated Israel. **Verses 8–15** speak more positively of the prospect of fruitfulness for the mountains of Israel and repopulation of the land by the homecoming exiles,

(b) The second main section consists of an introductory flashback over Israel’s past, showing that it was concern for his holy name which prompted the Lord to punish his people (16–21), and this is followed by three oracles dealing with the new blessings which the people are to receive and enjoy (22–32, 33–36, 37, 38).

Charles Dyer: Ezekiel contrasted Israel’s present humiliation before her enemies with her future glorification.

A. (:2b-7) Returning Reproach on the Surrounding Nations for Their Insults against Israel

1. (:2b) Taunting by the Enemy with Arrogant Boasts

“Because the enemy has spoken against you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The everlasting heights have become our possession,’”

2. (:3) Tormenting by the Enemy for Good Cause

“therefore, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, For good cause they have made you desolate and crushed you from every side, that you should become a possession of the rest of the nations, and you have been taken up in the talk and the whispering of the people.’”

Feinberg: “*crushed you from every side*” -- The enemy intended to swallow the people of God, the verb meaning literally to pant or snuff up, a figure from the panting of wild beasts, as a wild beast ravenously smells after prey to devour it.

3. (:4-5) Taking Back the Land of Israel as God’s Possession

a. (:4) Encouraging Word from the Lord

“Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the forsaken cities, which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about,”

Constable: God continued His word directed to the **land of Israel**. Some feel uncomfortable with these prophetic passages that so clearly focus on **Israel’s future** in her promised land. They feel such promises contradict the principle that God is Lord over all the earth. **Taylor** spoke well to this concern: “To those who feel that this is altogether too materialistic a concept of God and too constricting for the God of the whole earth, the enlightened Israelite would probably answer that it is no more unreasonable than that the God of all time should declare one day in seven as his own and that the God of all nature should claim a tenth of its produce for himself. Authority over the whole is witnessed to by the surrender of the part.”

b. (:5) Emotional Reaction from the Lord

“therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey.’”

Constable: The Promised Land was the Lord's land ("*My land*"), in the same sense that the Sabbath was His day and the tithe was His possession. These parts were not just segments of their wholes over which God claimed ownership, but they represented and illustrated His ownership of all lands, all days, and all possessions. Israel's enemies had dealt with her in their anger and envy (**35:11**), but now Yahweh would deal with them in His fierce jealousy over Israel's welfare.

4. (:6) Terminating the Insults and Abuse

“Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, ‘Thus says

the Lord God, Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.”

Daniel Block: Functioning as an indirect oracle of salvation, the proclamation makes three important affirmations.

- First, Yahweh announces his presence. For the beleaguered land, one simple word, *hinēnî* (lit. “*behold me!*”), represented the best news imaginable. Yahweh has appeared to defend his land.
- Second, Yahweh speaks. The land has borne the insults of the nations long enough, and Yahweh’s own passion has been ignited. He will have the last word, the content of which is recorded in the following verses.
- Third, Yahweh swears that the nations will take their own medicine. With raised hand he pronounces the sentence. The nature of the nations’ punishment is not specified, but for Israel to hear that the tables will be turned and that the nations will bear their own disgrace (*nāšā’ kēlimmā*) is enough.

5. (:7) Turning the Tables on the Enemy Nations

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults.’”

Leslie Allen: The three accusations brought against the enemies of Israel in **vv. 1–7** expand the ideas of **35:1–15**.

- First, the nations and Edom had taken possession of the mountains of Israel (**36:2–3, 5**).
- Second, the nations and Edom plundered Judah and left the land desolate (**36:3–4**).
- Third, the nations and Edom ridiculed and scorned Judah (**36:3–4, 6, 15**).

Ralph Alexander: The Lord vindicates his righteousness and his people. He had declared in the Abrahamic covenant that he would bless those who bless Israel, but he also would curse those who curse his people (**Gen 12:3**). Therefore God declared that Israel had borne enough scorn and shame from the nations. His fiery jealousy would come against those who had joyously and scornfully invaded Israel for spoils (**vv. 5-6**). As the nations had brought shame on Israel, so he would cause them to bear shame and disgrace. The Lord emphatically “*lifted up his hand*” against the nations in a symbol of strength and wrath (v. 7). He would exonerate his people.

B. (:8-12) Restoring Fruitfulness and People to the Land of Israel

1. (:8-9) Restoring Fruitfulness to the Land of Israel

*“But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come.
For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be cultivated and sown.”*

MacArthur: vv. 8-15 – Israel’s land will be **productive** (vv. 8, 9), **populated** (vv. 10, 11), and **peaceful** (vv. 12-15). These features will be fully realized in the Messiah’s kingdom. The return from Babylon was only a partial fulfillment and foreshadowing of the fullness to come in the future kingdom.

2. (:10-11) Repopulating the Land of Israel

a. (:10-11a) Multiplied Greater than Before

“And I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. And I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first.”

Daniel Block: vv. 8-11 -- The description of the new day envisions the complete restoration of the deity-nation-land relationship. The sign of the new day will be the renewed fruitfulness of the land, described according to the ancient covenant blessings (**Lev. 26:1–13**). The mountains of Israel are portrayed as a tree whose boughs are filled once more with branches and fruit. However, the transformation presupposes two momentous events.

- First, the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people Israel will have been reestablished. What a welcome sound it should have been for Ezekiel’s audience to hear Yahweh referring to Israel endearingly as *’ammî*, “*my people*,” once again. The benefactors of the new fertility of the land will be the nation whom Yahweh had chosen for himself, and to whom he had originally given this land.
- Second, the nation of Israel will have come back home from its exile. In terms reminiscent of earlier predictions of the day of Yahweh (**7:7; 30:3**) and of the judgment of Israel (**9:1; 12:23**), Yahweh announces the imminent return of the people to their homeland. The divorce of 586 B.C. will finally be reversed as people and land are brought together once again.

b. (:11b) **Recognition Refrain**

“Thus you will know that I am the LORD.”

3. (:12) Permanent Possession of the Promised Land

“Yes, I will cause men-- My people Israel-- to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children.”

Lamar Cooper: Ownership of the land was by divine commission. Every family was entrusted with a portion of land protected by the law of the Jubilee Year (**Lev 25:8–24**), when all property was restored to the original owner or surviving family. Thus the land was viewed as a divine stewardship. It was this reason, for example, that Naboth refused to sell his portion of land to Ahab (**1 Kgs 21:3; Lev 25:23**). In this way divine

ownership of the land was acknowledged. When an enemy claimed possession of the land, they claimed ownership of what was not theirs to take. It was God's land.

C. (:13-15) Removing Israel's Reproach

"Thus says the Lord God,"

1. (:13b) Stinging Insults Hurlled at Israel

"Because they say to you, 'You are a devourer of men and have bereaved your nation of children,'"

2. (:14) Secure Future Promised

"therefore, you will no longer devour men, and no longer bereave your nation of children,' declares the Lord God."

Lamar Cooper: When the spies described the land after their reconnaissance, they said that it was a land that *"devours those living in it"* (**Num 13:32**). God promised that in the restoration the land would no longer *"devour"* its inhabitants (**Ezek 36:14**). No longer will people taunt Israel in it; no longer will they scorn them nor cause them to fall (**v. 15**). God assured them that these things would *"never"* happen again.

3. (:15) Shame Removed Permanently

"And I will not let you hear insults from the nations anymore, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer, nor will you cause your nation to stumble any longer,' declares the Lord God."

Galen Doughty: If one remembers that the culture of the Middle East is a shame-honor based culture then the taunts of Israel's enemies would have been as unbearable as the consequences of their disobedience to God. God is going to put a stop to their shame one day when he restores Israel as his people.

Constable: **Verses 8-15** contain four promises concerning the land.

- First (**:8-9**), the land would become productive because the Israelites would soon come back into the land. Yahweh assured the land that He was for it, He would bless it, and it would become cultivated again instead of desolate and uninhabited. Formerly the Lord had said that He was against Mount Seir (**35:3**).
- Second (**:10-11**), the Lord promised to fill all the land with Israelites, to enable them to live in their cities and rebuild the places that had become ruins (cf. **6:3, 5-7**). Earlier the Lord promised to desolate all the land of Edom (**35:15**) and to lay waste her cities (35:4). The mountains of Israel would again become populated with people and animals that would become fruitful and multiply. The Lord would bless them more greatly than ever before. Then His people would know that He is God.
- Third (**:12**), the Lord would cause the people of Israel to take possession of these mountains as their inheritance and never leave them again (cf. **Gen. 12:7**). The Edomites had formerly determined to possess these mountains (**35:10**). The

nations had accused the Promised Land of devouring its inhabitants (cf. **Num. 13:32**), but Yahweh would see that it no longer did that.

- Fourth (:**13-15**), He would not allow the Israelites to hear insults from their neighbors any longer, to bear disgrace any longer, or to stumble in their affairs any longer. He would restore them to their prestigious position as His Chosen People (cf. **Deut. 28:13; Zech. 8:13, 20-23**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we boasting in the security that the Lord is “for us” just as God’s enemies should fear His opposition?
- 2) Is there value in the present day for nations to treat Israel kindly and bless her?
- 3) Why is God so concerned about the physical land of Israel?
- 4) How would you describe the inheritance which believers today enjoy from the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leslie Allen: This literary unit has a number of agendas to fulfill. It has its own internal agenda: Edom and Israel are polarized as negative and positive counterparts. Edom’s involvement in Israel’s fate meant that Edom’s experience would echo that fate, while Israel’s fate would give way to coming fortune. Both promises operate on the level of pastoral reassurance, as damaged self-respect is built up with recourse to faith in a powerful covenant God. The role of the destroyed Jerusalem in the oracles of Second Isaiah is that of the desolated land here. It stands as an objective image of the inner feelings of the exiles. Both prophets appealed to the land-centered theology of pre-exilic times and insisted that it still represented the divine intent. Another agenda of this unit is to provide a counterpart to **chap. 6**. The judgment on the land and people presented there was not Yahweh’s last word: its task done, it was to give way to a new proclamation of salvation. In the two contrasting units the double message of Ezekiel finds its focus.

Douglas Stuart: [Typical **covenant theology** approach to these restoration passages] From the perspective of the New Testament, these promises all apply to the church as the new Israel. How could such seemingly materialistic images have relevance for God's people who are not a single earthly nation farming in a single part of the world? The answer is that they apply literally but not literalistically. The church may take great comfort in the fulfillment of the sort of greatness, confidence, certainty of success, and ultimate victory over all its foes that such a compound oracle (i.e., **35:1—36:15**)

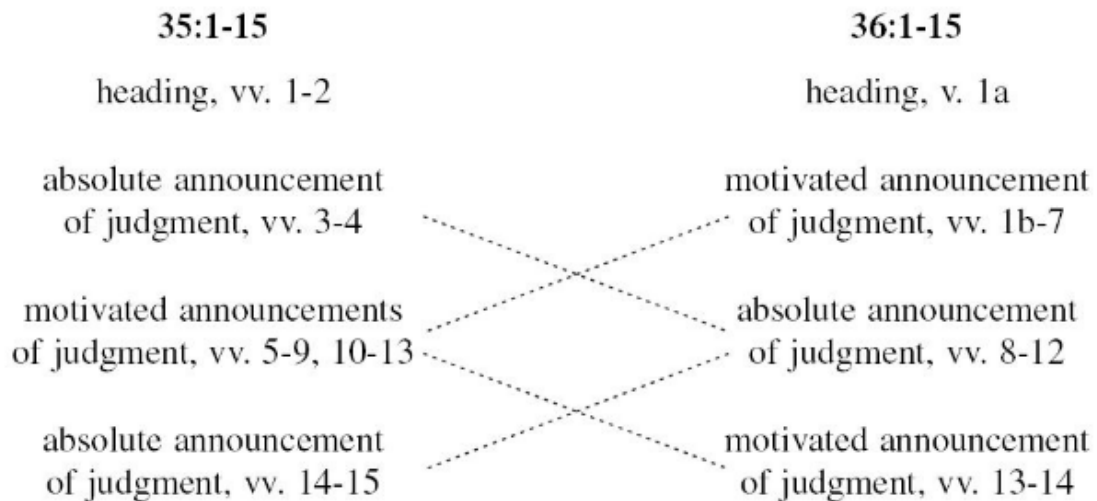
guarantees. ... We may instead rejoice that God has had in mind for us things that the eye had not seen nor the ear heard (**1 Cor. 2:9**)—things that the present description of the abundance of the mountains of Israel is intended only to symbolize.

Galen Doughty: God was just in punishing his people after they had disobeyed and rebelled against him for centuries. Yet he will not excuse the violence and pride of those nations he used to punish his people. Edom is one of those nations. God may discipline his people but he also remembers his covenant with Abraham and punishes those who curse Israel. Even today in our modern era it is a dangerous thing for a nation to oppose and seek to destroy Israel and the Jews. God's promise still holds. The one who blesses the Jews God will bless and the one who curses them God will curse.

Daniel Block: Despite the chapter division, there are many indications that the editors of the book intended **35:1–15** and **36:1–15** to be treated as two panels of a single literary unit.

- First, a single word-event formula in **35:1** governs the entire section.
- Second, Edom, the addressee of **35:1–15**, is still in view in **36:5** as a representative of Israel's enemies.
- Third, the focus throughout is on the land of Israel, referred to as *hārê yiśrā'ēl*, "the mountains of Israel." The preference for this expression over *'admat yiśrā'ēl*, "the land of Israel," is probably determined by the references to *har sē'ir*, "the mountain of Seir," in **35:2, 3, 7, 15**.
- Fourth, the panels are linked by the description of the land as *šēmāmā ûmēšammâ*, "desolation and waste," on the one hand, and *môrāšâ* and *naḥlâlâ*, "a possession," on the other.
- Fifth, they open with stylistically parallel formulae: "Human ... prophesy and say" (**35:1; 36:1**).
- Sixth, the prophet cleverly employs two virtually identical expressions with opposite meanings: *hinēnî 'ēlēkā har-sē'ir*, "Behold, I am against you, O Mount Seir," in **35:3**, and *hinēnî 'ālēkem*, "Behold, I am for you" (i.e., the mountains of Israel), in **36:9**.
- Seventh, the terrain of both Edom and Israel is described with the stereotypical combination of "mountains" (*hārîm*), "hills" (*gib 'ôt*), "valleys" (*gē'ôt*), and "ravines" (*'āpîqîm*) (**35:8; 36:4, 6**).
- Eighth, both panels speak of zeal/passion (*qin'â*) as a motive for divine action (**35:11; 36:5, 6**), and both mention the verbal abuse of the nations against Israel (**35:10; 36:2, 3, 13**).
- Ninth, both associate the cities (*'ārîm*) with waste places (*ḥorbâ*) (**35:4; 36:10**).
- Tenth, both employ *kullāh/kullā'* after "Edom" to emphasize totality.
- Eleventh, both panels rely heavily on the *ya'an ... lākēn*, "Because ... therefore," sequence of clauses.

In spite of these tensions in the text, the arrangement of the segments that make up [36:1-15](#) is not as random or arbitrary as scholars often maintain. Parunak finds in the unit a formal inversion of the chiasm found in ch. [35](#),⁷ illustrated as follows:



TEXT: Ezekiel 36:16-38

TITLE: *GOD'S MOTIVATION FOR THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL*

BIG IDEA:

THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S REPUTATION MOTIVATES THE GRACIOUS RESTORATION OF HIS WAYWARD ELECT NATION

INTRODUCTION:

This passage beautifully unfolds the process and amazing benefits of restoration for the nation of Israel. But the emphasis throughout is on God's motivation to vindicate His holy name before the watching nations. Despite Israel's deserved punishment of dispersion and the present desolation of her cities, God refuses to allow the nations to interpret that scenario as any type of reflection on His inability to execute His sovereignty and to accomplish His ultimate purposes for His chosen people.

Daniel Block: God's actions in human history are driven by revelatory aims: that his people and the world may know that he is Yahweh. The recipients of divine grace are easily deluded into thinking that they are the center of the universe, that their desires determine God's agenda. They may even be offended that sentimental pity toward a person in need takes second place to his concern for his own reputation. But the universal Lord is concerned that all may see his glory and his grace. He acts to preserve the sanctity of his reputation.

John Taylor: In this chapter we are at the heart of Ezekiel's salvation theology. He tells us not only what God will do but why he is acting in this way. As we have seen, the two focal points of God's purposes are his own name and the nations of the world, and these two are related. He wants his name to be great, so that the nations may regard him not as an ineffective tribal god, but as the Lord of the whole earth. And Israel is to be the channel through which this vindication is going to be achieved (through you, **23**). It must have been very difficult for Israel to accept this role, and the only hint that some in Israel were able to accept it is to be found in the so-called Servant Songs of **Isaiah 40–55**, where Israel as the Servant of the Lord fulfils his mission among the Gentiles through suffering.

I. (:16-21) BACKGROUND FOR RESTORATION = THE SCATTERING OF ISRAEL BECAUSE OF UNCLEANNESS

"Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,"

A. (:17) Polluting God's Holy Land

1. Activities of Defilement

"Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds;"

2. Analogy of Defilement

“their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.”

Peter Pett: The blood that was poured out through violence is here likened to a woman’s menstrual flow. The menstrual flow of blood was looked on with something akin to horror by the Israelite male. According to the Law it rendered the woman ‘unclean’ (**Leviticus 15:19-24**), so that anyone who touched her was unclean. So here the defiling of the land by their behaviour could be looked on as similar to the menstrual discharge. It rendered the land unclean before God, as ‘unholy’, and therefore not touchable by Him. Thus God withdrew in horror and kept apart. (The menstrual flow was presumably used as an example because the behaviour of the people included the wrongful spilling of blood).

B. (:18-19) Punished by Dispersion

1. (:18) Reasons for the Outpouring of God’s Wrath

*“Therefore, I poured out My wrath on them
for the blood which they had shed on the land,
because they had defiled it with their idols.”*

Feinberg: When the prophet spoke of blood poured out, he was probably referring to murders, judicial violence and even child sacrifice in the worship of idols (see **16:36; 23:37**). For such enormities in the civil and spiritual realms they were scattered from their country.

2. (:19a) Response of Dispersion among the Nations

*“Also I scattered them among the nations,
and they were dispersed throughout the lands.”*

3. (:19b) Rightness of God’s Judgment

“According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.”

Wiersbe: Israel was guilty of two great sins,

- the first of which was polluting God's land (**vv. 16-19**).
- Their second sin was that of profaning God's name before the Gentiles (**vv. 20-23**).

C. (:20-21) Profaning God’s Holy Name

1. (:20) Israel’s Disregard for God’s Reputation

*“When they came to the nations where they went,
they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them,
‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’”*

2. (:21) God’s Concern for His Holy Name

“But I had concern for My holy name,

which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.”

II. (:22-32) BASIS FOR RESTORATION = THE NEW COVENANT

“Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’”

A. (:22b-23) Vindication of God’s Holy Name

1. (:22b) Basis for God’s Gracious Restoration of Israel

“It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.”

John Taylor: He wants his name to be great, so that the nations may regard him not as an ineffective tribal god, but as the Lord of the whole earth. And Israel is to be the channel through which this vindication is going to be achieved.

Feinberg: In unmistakable language Ezekiel made clear that the basis of all God’s dealings in grace are never predicted on man’s merit, but rather on His holy character and name. This is designed to humble all pride (see **Deut. 9:6; Isa. 48:11**).

2. (:23a) Essential to Defending the Holiness of God’s Great Name

“And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst.”

Galen Doughty: God's holiness in this context is not so much his moral purity as his power, prestige, honor and worthiness to be worshipped. The Jews have profaned all those things by their rebellion and conduct and the Babylonians and other nations around Israel have seen their behavior. Some would have concluded that Yahweh was a weak God because he allowed his people to be conquered and his temple to be destroyed. The prophets however have been clear. Israel deserved her punishment from God for her sin and rebellion. They do not deserve his deliverance and grace to them.

3. (:23b) Recognition Refrain

“‘Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,’ declares the Lord God, ‘when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.’”

B. (:24-30) Sovereign Progressive Actions Accomplishing Israel’s Restoration

1. (:24) Regathered

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land.”

Lamar Cooper: The reference in Ezekiel to a gathering from “*all countries*” seems to imply a wider scope for the return that looked beyond the first return from the Assyro-

Babylonian captivity. This prophecy reflected the hope of a regathering after the a.d. 70 dispersion among all nations of the world (cf. **11:16–17; Isa 11:12; Jer 16:15**).

2. (:25) Cleansed

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean;
I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”*

David Guzik: This reference to cleansing by the **clean water** of the new covenant is the likely connection Jesus had in mind when He spoke of being *born of water* in **John 3:5**. As Paul would later write of the believer, *you were washed* (**1 Corinthians 6:11**).

Lamar Cooper: While the reference was to ceremonial cleansing that was necessary to reestablish worship (**Num 19:13, 20**), it is important to remember that ceremonial cleansing was an external rite, but it was a ritual that also called for internal repentance.

3. (:26) Regenerated

*“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;
and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart
of flesh.”*

Lamar Cooper: No longer would they be characterized by perverse thinking and unresponsiveness to God. . .

The temptation to find the fulfillment of the *'new heart'* and *'new spirit'* of **36:25-27** exclusively in Christian conversion in this age should be resisted. New Testament conversion is only a preview of the massive spiritual revival God has in store for all of true Israel and Gentiles who believe.

Vawter and Hoppe: In the ancient world the heart was the center for volition and the intellectual catalyst for feeling and action. A *'heart of stone'* implied inflexibility and willfulness, while a *'heart of flesh'* meant submission and compliance.

John Taylor: The terms heart and spirit (**26**) also need careful understanding. They are not so much parts of man's make-up as aspects of his total personality. The heart includes the mind and the will, as well as the emotions; it is in fact the seat of the personality, the inmost nature of man. The spirit is the impulse which drives the man and regulates his desires, his thoughts and his conduct. Both of these will be replaced and renewed: the heart that is stubborn, rebellious and insensitive (a heart of stone) by one that is soft, impressionable and responsive (a heart of flesh), and the spirit of disobedience by the Spirit of God. It goes without saying that there is nothing in the Hebrew word *'flesh'* which suggests the corrupting tendency of the Greek *sarx*, as used in the New Testament and particularly by the apostle Paul in **Romans 8**. The result of this psychological transplant will be that Israel will experience a real *'change of heart'* and will become, by God's gracious initiative, the kind of people that they have in the past so signally failed to be. The implanting of God's Spirit within them will transform

their motives and empower them to live according to God's statutes and judgments (27).

4. (:27) Empowered by Indwelling Holy Spirit

"And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

Leslie Allen: Yahweh would creatively endow Israel with new wills that were to be sensitive rather than stony and hard in their reactions to Yahweh's will. Thanks to him, their lives would be governed by a new impulse that was to be an expression of Yahweh's own spirit. He would re-make their human natures, so that they marched to the music of the covenant terms that expressed Yahweh's nature and will. Only thus could the covenant relationship become a living actuality rather than a doctrinal truth. Only thus could the old ideal of Yahweh's people in Yahweh's land (cf. v 20) become a reality.

Daniel Block: God will put his spirit into them, he will alter their hearts (their minds) and make it impossible for them to be anything but obedient to his rules and his commandments. The declaration abandons all hope that Israel, in her present condition, can achieve the ideals of covenant relationship originally intended by Yahweh. The status quo can be altered only by direct divine intervention.

Feinberg: This is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Israel in the future, not that at Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit is frequently connected with the coming of the new economy for Israel (see 39:29; Isa. 44:3; 59:21; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16 f.).

5. (:28) Secured – in the Land and in their Covenant Relationship with God

"And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."

Constable: They would, fifth, live in the Promised Land and enjoy a permanent, intimate relationship with God (cf. Jer. 31:33).

6. (:29a) Sanctified and Protected from Relapse into Idolatry

"Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness;"

7. (:29b-30) Prospered – Fertility and Fruitfulness

"and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, that you may not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations."

Anton Pearson: The results of Israel's regeneration will be:

- her permanent occupation of the land (v. 28a);
- a covenant relationship with God (v. 28b);
- protection against relapse into idolatry (v. 29a);

- the abundant supply of every want (vv. 29b, 30); and
- self-humiliation and repentance on account of past sin (vv. 31, 32)

C. (:31-32) Remembrance of Sin Eliminates Nationalistic Pride

1. (:31) Loathing of Israel's Past Sins

"Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations."

2. (:32a) Squelching of Nationalistic Pride of Israel

"I am not doing this for your sake," declares the Lord God,"

3. (:32b) Repentance and Sorrow over Prior Unfaithfulness

"let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!"

III. (:33-36) BENEFITS OF RESTORATION = TRANSFORMATION FROM DESOLATION TO PARADISE CONDITIONS

"Thus says the Lord God,"

Lamar Cooper: vv. 33-38 -- This is a final review of the benefits of the restoration that God will provide. Those benefits include cleansing from sin, resettlement, rebuilding, replanting, and productivity of the land (vv. 33–34). Mention of the "garden of Eden" in v. 35 suggests that Ezekiel saw a future fulfillment of his prophecy that went beyond the return from Babylon under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. While many aspects of the fulfillment of these prophetic promises were immediate and limited, there was also to be a distant, complete fulfillment in a messianic age. The ideal qualities of life, work, rest, peace, companionship, knowledge by revelation, dominion, productivity, and security characterized human existence before the fall. All were either lost or greatly diminished after sin entered the world. Ezekiel's use of the garden of Eden revealed a hope for the restoration and development of the characteristics of life in Eden.

A. (:33b-34) **Cleansed, Rebuilt and Cultivated**

"On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. 34 And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passed by."

David Guzik: The repeated promises of the restoration of national and geographical Israel as part of the new covenant show us something important and often neglected. There is no doubt that the work of Jesus on the cross and His victory at the resurrection inaugurated the new covenant (**Luke 22:20**). Yet, there is a real sense in which the new covenant *is not yet complete* until these promised blessings upon Israel are fulfilled. We

may say that the glorious return of Jesus, and the millennial kingdom He then establishes, will complete all the promises of the new covenant.

B. (:35) Beautified, Fortified and Inhabited

“And they will say, ‘This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate, and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.’”

C. (:36) Divine Vindication and Guarantee

1. Alternate Recognition Refrain

“Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate;”

Constable: People would marvel at the lushness of the formerly desolate land and at the strength of the formerly ruined cities of Israel (cf. **Isa. 11:6-9; 51:3; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-15; Rom. 8:19- 22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4, 23-27**). The other nations of the world would recognize that Israel's God was responsible for this transformation.

Ralph Alexander: The most important consequence of Israel's restoration would be the spread of the knowledge of the Lord throughout the world. The nations would unequivocally know that Israel's God had accomplished this great restoration. They would now that he was not a weak god but the only God who does exactly what he says (**v. 36**). Israel herself will humbly acknowledge that the one who restored her was the Lord her God (**v. 38**).

2. Guarantee

“I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it.”

IV. (:37-38) THE BREADTH OF RESTORATION = MULTITUDES OF INHABITANTS

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:37b-38a) Population Explosion

“This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. 38 Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men.”

Iain Duguid: God will also restore the land to a “better-than-original” state. It will become “like the garden of Eden,” the ultimate symbol of fertility and fruitfulness (**Ezek. 36:35**; cf. **Isa. 51:3; Joel 2:3**). The garden land will be filled with restored cities; the places that once were torn down and desolate will be inhabited and fortified (**Ezek. 36:35**). In place of the one original 'ādām and his wife, the new garden land will be filled with “flocks of 'ādām,” that is, numerous “people” who will fill the cities to overflowing (**36:38**). The fertility and fruitfulness will thus encompass the people as

well as the land itself, to the point where it will be as crowded as Jerusalem used to be on the great annual festivals, when her streets were crammed with a mass of people and animals (36:38).

Charles Dyer: Ezekiel, a priest, compared the swelling population of Israel to the numerous . . . flocks of sacrificial animals gathered for the feasts in Jerusalem. As tightly packed herds jostle for space because of their vast numbers, so Israel’s ruined cities, then empty and desolate, will be filled with flocks of people.

B. (:38b) Recognition Refrain

“Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the Lord repeatedly emphasize that He is not acting for the sake of Israel in accomplishing her restoration?
- 2) What parallels do you see between the conditions in the Garden of Eden and what is described here for the restoration of Israel?
- 3) How concerned are we for the reputation of God’s name?
- 4) As participants in the blessings of the New Covenant, what parallels do we see in terms of the sovereign actions detailed in this passage to accomplish Israel’s restoration?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: according to the key v. 20, the central issue is not the deliverance of Israel but the **vindication of the reputation of Yahweh**. The text is deliberately crafted so that each segment contributes significantly to the development of the theme, as reflected in the following outline:

The Formulaic Introduction	(v. 16)
a. The Crisis for Yahweh’s Honor	(vv. 17–21)
b. The Recovery of Yahweh’s Honor	(vv. 22–32)
(1) Yahweh’s Name-Sanctifying Goal	(vv. 22–23)
(2) A Catalogue of Yahweh’s Name-Sanctifying Actions	(vv. 24–30)
(3) Yahweh’s Name-Sanctifying Goal	(vv. 31–32)
c. The Vindication of Yahweh’s Honor	(vv. 33–38a)

(1) Among the Nations	(vv. 33–36)
(2) In Israel	(vv. 37–38a)
The Formulaic Conclusion	(v. 38b)

Douglas Stuart: The passage may be outlined as follows:

1. God’s reputation questioned though the fault was Israel’s (vv. 16–23)
2. God’s renewal of His people to obedience (vv. 24–32)
3. Rebuilding and replanting (vv. 33–36)
4. Population increase (vv. 37–38)

David Guzik: Throughout the Bible, God reveals His plan of redemption through a series of covenants. After the extended story of the fall and ruin of humanity in **Genesis 1-11**, the story of the **covenants** begins.

- The **Abrahamic Covenant** promised to Abraham and his covenant descendants a *land*, a *nation*, and a *blessing* to extend to all nations (**Genesis 12:1-3**).
- The **Mosaic or Sinai Covenant** gave Israel the *law*, the *sacrifices*, and the *choice* of blessing or curse (**Exodus 19**).
- The **Davidic Covenant** that promised an *everlasting dynasty*, a *perfect ruler*, and the *Promised Messiah* (**2 Samuel 7**).
- The **New Covenant**, where God’s plan of redemption through the covenants was completed and perfected. Over the span of Old Testament passages that announce the new covenant (such as **Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Jeremiah 23:1-8, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah 32:37-41, Ezekiel 11:16-20, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Ezekiel 37:11-14, and 37:21-28**), we see the promises of a *gathered Israel*, of *cleansing and spiritual transformation*, of a *new and real relationship with God*, and the *reign of the Messiah*.

Iain Duguid: The prophet begins by pointing out the motivation for God’s wrath in the past. The people, while they lived in their own land, polluted it by their actions (**Ezek. 36:17**). As a result they could not remain in God’s presence and he could not remain in their midst. They were unclean, which the prophet describes in terms of the ceremonial uncleanness caused by menstruation. In the law of Moses, this process was considered defiling to a woman, making her unable to take part in religious activities (**Lev. 15:19–24**). This is not because it was in any sense sinful but because any contact with the realm of death, through the loss of bodily life-fluids (e.g., blood or semen) or through contact with a corpse, renders one unfit to be in contact with the realm of life. Communication with the living God through the various Old Testament means of grace was impossible as long as one was in a state of impurity as a result of contact with death.

What Israel had done while they lived in their land was to turn it into a permanent place of death, thoroughly defiling it by means of bloodshed and idolatry, making it a place

unfit for divine habitation by the living God (**Ezek. 36:18**). God had no choice but to bring on them the curses of the covenant they had broken, in wrath scattering them among the nations, just as he had threatened when they first entered the land (**Deut. 29:22–28**).

This action, however, created a new problem for God. He had promised to bring this people, who were called by his name, into the land of Canaan to possess it. He had established a relationship between himself, his people, and the land. Yet now the nations could see that the Lord's people were absent from his land (**Ezek. 36:21**). That three-way relationship had been broken. The conclusion drawn by the surrounding nations would be natural: The Lord's power was insufficient to bring about that which he promised. He had given up on his people as a bad job. The final elimination of those people for their sins—what Moses had feared in **Numbers 14:15–16** and had prayed against—had finally become a reality.

Thus, as long as Israel was scattered among the nations, they continually profaned the divine name (**Ezek. 36:20**). This was now not because of anything particular they were doing, although there is no suggestion that the shock of exile in and of itself brought about a radical change in their behavior. Rather, they profaned God's name simply by being in exile instead of in the land of promise!

TEXT: Ezekiel 37:1-28

TITLE: *REVIVAL AND REUNIFICATION –
THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES AND THE JOINING OF THE TWO STICKS*

BIG IDEA:

GOD WILL POWERFULLY WORK THROUGH REVIVAL AND REUNIFICATION TO ACCOMPLISH HIS ULTIMATE KINGDOM AGENDA FOR HIS ELECT NATION ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

Ezekiel interprets a powerful vision and a symbolic act to portray the important themes of **revival** and **reunification** as foundational for the future kingdom of Israel. This had to be a message of great hope for the exiles whose experience testified to the death and dispersion of the once glorious kingdom. The Spirit of God plays the central role in accomplishing God’s vindicating agenda. The blessings of the New Covenant, the covenant of peace, are reiterated with a focus on permanent and secure dwelling in the promised land in fellowship and covenant relationship with the sovereign God. The rulership of the messianic shepherd king fulfils the promises regarding the everlasting Davidic dynasty. These are important and broad-ranging promises about what God has in store for Israel in the future.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel 37 easily may be divided into two sections by the introductory phrases “*the hand of the Lord was upon me*” in v. 1 and “*the word of the Lord came to me*” in v. 15. The vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1–10) followed by its interpretation (vv. 11–14) is the first message. The second complementary message concerned a symbolic action, binding two sticks together (vv. 15–17) with an interpretation in vv. 18–28. . .

God has not finished with Israel. He plans a permanent reunification and restoration of his people in his land (37:15–24). The realization of this promise was tied to the development of the messianic hope (37:25–28; cf. Rom 11:25–36).

Charles Dyer: Chapter 37 vividly illustrates the promise of chapter 36. God had just announced that Israel will be restored to her land in blessing under the leadership of David her king. However, this seemed remote in light of Israel’s present condition. She was “dead” as a nation – deprived of her land, her king, and her temple. She had been divided and dispersed for so long that unification and restoration seemed impossible. So God gave two signs (37:1-14 and vv. 15-28) to Ezekiel to illustrate the fact of restoration and confirm the promises just made.

Merrill: The New Covenant involves a new heart and a new spirit, to be sure, but it is deeply rooted in history and land. The promise to Abraham was unconditional and included in its benefits a geographical inheritance—indeed, not just any territory but

specifically the land of Canaan (**Gen. 12:1, 7; 13:15-17; 15:18-19; 17:8**). It is that land that is in view throughout Ezekiel's historical and eschatological purview, for unless that land is the focus of God's covenant fulfillment the ancient promises lose their intended significance.

John Taylor: If God's purpose was to restore Israel, he would do it by however great a miracle. Both the vision and the oracle of the two sticks conveyed this message. In the case of the first (**1–14**), the nation was shown that God's Spirit had the power to turn what looked like a host of skeletons into an effective army of men, a picture of Israel restored to life again and filled with the Spirit. In the second (**15–28**), Ezekiel shows that the old divisions between Israel and Judah will pass away: the new nation will unite the remnants of both peoples in one land under one king, and without their traditional animosity.

I. (:1-14) REVIVAL – THE VISION OF THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES *“The hand of the LORD was upon me,”*

A. (:1b-10) Divine Accomplishment of Revival in Transforming Dry Bones into Great Army

1. (:1b-6) Means of Revival Commanded

a. (:1-2) New Vision of Dry Bones in the Valley = Revival Needed
Because of the Reality of Death

*“and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD
and set me down in the middle of the valley;
and it was full of bones.*

*2 And He caused me to pass among them round about,
and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley;
and lo, they were very dry.”*

Taylor: The *valley* is the same word as the ‘*plain*’ in **Ezekiel 3:22** (Heb. *biqa*), and probably the same location is intended.

Constable: In this vision, the prophet walked around among the many very dry bones that littered this valley. They represent the Israelites slain during the conquest of the land and now in exile for a very long time.

Daniel Block: The scene is striking in three respects.

- First, the circumstantial clause at the end of **v. 1** and the phrase *wēhinnēh rabbôt mē’ōd* highlight Ezekiel's amazement at the exceedingly high number of bones. The significance of their number will not become apparent until later (**v. 10**), but the sight suggests the remains of a major catastrophe.
- Second, the bones lay on the surface of the valley, like the remains of corpses denied a proper burial and left for scavenging buzzards. As an Israelite and especially as a priest, Ezekiel knew how important was the proper treatment of human corpses, and the altered image of graves in the interpretive comments of

v. 12 would certainly have been more welcome for the prophet.

- Third, the prophet is surprised at the bones' extreme dryness, which indicates that the people whose remains they represent have been dead for a long time. The image concretizes the hopelessness expressed in v. 11; no life force remains in them at all.

The narrative leaves no hint regarding whose bones these might be, but the picture is one of death in all its **horror, intensity, and finality**.

- b. (:3) Impotence of Dead Bones = Revival Requires a Miracle
*“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’
And I answered, ‘O Lord God, Thou knowest.’”*

Leslie Allen: The visionary scene, a gruesome one, is gradually unfolded. First impressions of a grotesque mass of bones are reinforced as the prophet is taken round the site; he is made aware too that what were once corpses had long since rotted or been eaten away into fleshless bones. The divine question is a standard element in a vision, to wrest significance from the sight (cf. **Jer 1:11, 13; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Zech 4:2, 5**). It was a ridiculous question. A seeming corpse might be revived, but these pathetic piles of bones were hopelessly dead. Out of polite deference to his questioner the prophet leaves him to answer his own question. Yahweh knew the answer as well as he did.

Lamar Cooper: The question “*Can these bones live?*” was designed to show him the impotence of Israel during the exile. God made marvelous promises to the nation in **chaps. 33–36**, but the real issue was, “*Can these bones live?*” Can a dead and impotent nation in exile and under the control of a godless nation be resurrected and become a living, thriving kingdom once again?

Derek Thomas: How do these bones live again? God uses three means to accomplish it.

1. The **preaching** of the Word

Ezekiel is told to ‘*prophesy*’ (**37:4**; literally: ‘**preach God’s Word**’), and does as he is told (**37:7**).

2. The **prayer** of God’s servant

God urges Ezekiel to call upon the ‘*breath*’ to come and breathe into the slain (**37:9**).

3. The **power** of the Holy Spirit

These are the ingredients of any work of revival by God.

- c. (:4-6a) Command to Prophecy of a Revival = Means of Revival Revealed

“Again He said to me, ‘Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive;”

David Guzik: This was a work of **revival**; restoring life to something that at one time had life. This was not the creation of life from nothing; it was the restoration of life to something that had been long dead.

Feinberg: Nothing could be more emphatic than that the agency for effecting the purpose of God in the resurrection of the nation was the powerful word of God.

- d. (:6b) **Recognition Refrain** = Purpose of Revival
“and you will know that I am the LORD.”

Daniel Block: As developed here, the process by which Yahweh will fulfill his promise involves four discrete stages: He will reconnect the bones with sinews, cover the bones with flesh, overlay the flesh with skin, and infuse them with breath. The sequence involving bones, sinews, flesh, and skin reflects an understanding of anatomy available to anyone who had witnessed the slaughter of an animal; it also reverses the decomposition process. The concluding recognition formula gives this segment the quality of a proof saying, highlighting that Yahweh’s goal in reviving these bones is not simply the biological-chemical reconstitution of the body or even the restoration of physical life. He desires spiritual revival: a new recognition of and relationship with himself.

2. (:7-10) Miraculous Stages of Revival

“So I prophesied as I was commanded;”

- a. (:7b) Initial Stirring and Linkage of the Bones
“and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.”
- b. (:8) Incremental Reconstitution into Bodies of Sinews, Flesh and Skin
“And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.”

Leslie Allen: So here separate acts take place because two miracles were necessary, to reconstitute the bones into bodies and to reanimate the bodies. There is also an element of drama in the double process. “One is reminded of the magician who invariably ‘fails’ once or twice in attempting his grand finale in order to intensify suspense and to focus attention on the climactic success to follow” (Fox, HUCA 51 [1980] 11). The process accentuates the power of God even as it concedes the difficulty of the enterprise.

- c. (:9-10) Inbreathing of the Spirit of Life to Animate the Bodies
 - 1) (:9) Divine Activity = Life-giving Breath
“Then He said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.’”

Peter Pett: But then he was to call on the spirit/breath/wind calling it to breathe on the dead that they might live. There is a strong play on the different meanings of *ruach*, which can mean spirit, breath or wind. The winds are seen as providing life-giving breath so that the corpses might live, but we must remember that Yahweh comes on the wings of the wind (**Ezekiel 1:4; 2 Samuel 22:11; Psalms 18:10; Psalms 104:3**). And the wind is elsewhere closely connected with the activity of the Spirit of God (**2 Samuel 5:24; Acts 2:2**), and thus it is clear that what happens here is the result of the work of God's Spirit. It is like a new creation (**Psalms 33:6**).

Daniel Block: The identification of the lifeless corpses as the slain corpses (*hahărûgîm*) offers the first clue to the identity of the deceased. The bones are the remains of victims of some enormous battle. While the oracle expresses no interest in which battle they might have fallen, Ezekiel would naturally have thought of his compatriots, casualties to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah and Jerusalem (cf. v. 11).

2) (:10) Divine Accomplishment = Large Revived Army
"So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army."

David Guzik: The bones were not revived to become a group of spectators or to live for their own comfort. They became an **army**, and an **exceedingly great** one. They lived to act under the orders of the one who gave them life.

Derek Thomas: The word '*spirit*', in both Hebrew and Greek, is a picture word. It pictures breath breathed, or panted out, as when you blow out candles on a birthday cake or puff and blow as you run. Spirit, as **J. I. Packer** delightfully illustrates, 'was what the big bad wolf was threatening the little pigs with when he told them, "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down!" The picture is of air made to move vigorously, even violently, and the thought that the picture expresses is of energy let loose, executive force invading, power in exercise, life demonstrated by activity.'¹ When '*Spirit*' is used of the Holy Spirit, it is meant to convey **the powerful effect of his work**.

B. (:11-14) Divine Interpretation of the Significance of this Vision of Revival

1. (:11-13) National Resurrection of Israel Rescues them from Hopelessness

a. (:11) Three Statements of Despairing Lament

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'"

Peter Pett: God explains the parable. The dry bones were the whole house of Israel, wherever they were. And they were in a state of despondency and hopelessness. They

felt that they were like totally dried up skeletons. They had lost hope. They saw themselves as cut off from their land and cut off from God. They had lost any vision of life. They were in process of giving up. The destruction of Jerusalem had dashed their hopes completely.

b. (:12) Three Statements of Divine Reversal

“Therefore prophesy, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.’”

Kaiser: "This chapter then does not deal with the doctrine of the personal bodily resurrection but with national resurrection.

c. (:13) **Recognition Refrain**

“Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.”

Iain Duguid: There is a sure and certain future based not on what Israel can do but on God’s determination to save his people. Twice, the Lord addresses them as “*my people*” (37:12–13). Though they are indeed dead, God can and will tear open their graves (shifting the metaphor slightly) and bring them up from the dead, giving them life through his Spirit and resettling them in their land (37:14). The promises of a new spirit and a return to the land made in **Ezekiel 36:27–36** will indeed be fulfilled. Then they will know that the Lord not only speaks but acts, thus disproving the proverb of the skeptic, quoted in **12:22**: “*The days go by and every vision comes to nothing.*” Ezekiel’s visions will come about, and the people will be restored to their land and revitalized, through the internal work of God’s Spirit.

2. (:14) New Covenant Relationship Ensures Secure Dwelling in the Land

a. Divine Activity

“And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.”

b. **Recognition Refrain**

“Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,’ declares the LORD.”

II. (:15-28) REUNIFICATION -- THE JOINING OF THE TWO STICKS

“The word of the LORD came again to me saying,”

A. (:16-23) Significance of the Joining of the Two Sticks

1. (:16-17) Instructions Regarding the Symbolic Action –

Joining of Two Sticks

a. (:16) Naming the Two Sticks = Kingdom of Judah and of Israel

“And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.’”

David Guzik: The tribe of Ephraim was the largest and most influential tribe of the northern kingdom. Several times in the Old Testament the northern kingdom was called **Ephraim**.

Daniel Block: Joseph was the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two dominant tribes in the northern kingdom. Of these two, Ephraim, the younger son, dominated northern politics from the beginning.

Leslie Allen: It begins with a command to perform a symbolic action (**vv 16–17**) and continues with a question and answer format that in Ezekiel is used to create a hinge between a symbolic action and its meaning.

b. (:17) Uniting the Two Sticks

“Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.”

Constable: Mormonism teaches that the two sticks represent the Bible (the stick of Judah) and the Book of Mormon (the stick of Joseph), but the rest of the passage refutes this interpretation.

Douglas Stuart: The north and the south of Israel had not been unified politically since the revolt of Jeroboam, after the death of Solomon in 931 b.c., nearly 350 years prior to this prophecy. Since 722 b.c., when the north lost its political identity and was annexed by the Assyrians, and especially since 586 b.c., when Judah had also fallen, the idea of a reunified Israel of the sort that David and Solomon had ruled over in the ninth century would have seemed ludicrous to any observer of international events in Ezekiel’s day.

2. (:18-19) Interpretation of the Meaning of the Action

“And when the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?' 19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.’”

3. (:20-23) Integrity of Revived National Identity

(:20) Irrefutable Public Display of Revived National Identity

“And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.”

- a. (:21a) Restoration of Israel's **Land Integrity**
"And say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone,'"
- b. (:21b) Restoration of Israel's **Ethnic Integrity**
"and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;"

MacArthur: God made 3 promises that summarized His future plans for Israel:

- 1) restoration, v. **21**;
- 2) unification, v. **22**; and
- 3) purification, v. **23**.

These promises bring to fulfillment;

- 1) the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. **Ge 12**);
- 2) the Davidic Covenant (**2Sa 7**); and
- 3) the New Covenant (cf. **Jer 31**), respectively.

- c. (:22) Restoration of Israel's **Kingdom Integrity**
"and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms."

Peter Pett: The world had been divided at Babel (Babylon - **Genesis 11:1-9**). Then later God's covenant people had been divided. Now the process of healing and restoration was to begin by their being restored to their land and cemented together as one nation in the land. Then they would come under one king, a son of David ruling over formerly divided Israel. Note the rare use of the word 'king' by Ezekiel in relation to the rulers of Israel. Elsewhere it is only used where captivity was in mind or where they are demeaned (**Ezekiel 1:2**; **Ezekiel 7:27**; **Ezekiel 17:12-16**; **Ezekiel 43:7**). For it was Yahweh and His chosen future representative who were truly king over Israel.

- d. (:23a) Restoration of Israel's **Spiritual Integrity**
"And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them."

Daniel Block: The process of purification envisioned involves two actions, in both of which Yahweh functions as the agent.

- First, Yahweh will rescue the Israelites from their apostasies. The verb *hōšîa'*,

- “to save,” usually envisions deliverance from external enemies (cf. **34:22**), but like **36:29**, the present usage envisions the people’s sin as the enslaving power.
- Second, Yahweh will cleanse or “purify” them. The verb *tihar* recalls **36:25–28**, which, in offering a fuller description of the cleansing process, had associated the experience with a heart transplant and an infusion of Yahweh’s Spirit.

The link is confirmed by the reference to covenant renewal, expressed in both instances by citing the covenant formula. The declaration, “*They will be my people, and I will be their God,*” signals the full restoration of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. The present association of covenant renewal with the termination of idolatry, disgusting conduct, and rebellion is reminiscent of **14:11**, and it intentionally announces the reversal of **5:11**. Provoked by their defiling and abominable acts, Yahweh had abandoned his people. Now that he has purified them, he may return and normalize the covenant relationship with them.

- e. (:23b) Restoration of Israel’s **Covenant Integrity**
“And they will be My people, and I will be their God.”

Lamar Cooper: There were thirteen promises made to Israel in **37:21–28** that illustrated God’s determination to revive, revitalize, restore, and reestablish the nation of Israel.

- First, God will personally find Israel and gather the people from among the nations (**v. 21a**).
- Second, God will bring them again into their land that will be restored to them (**v. 21b**).
- Third, God will make one nation of the two that had been in the land (**v. 22a**).
- Fourth, God will set one king over the nation (**v. 22b, 24a**).
- Fifth, God will insure the unity of the restored kingdom that will never again be divided (**v. 22c**).
- Sixth, God will insure that the people will never again serve idols (**v. 23a**).
- Seventh, God will save them, cleanse them, and establish an intimate personal relationship with them (**v. 23b**).
- Eighth, God will enable them to walk in obedience to his law (**v. 24b**).
- Ninth, God will establish them in their land forever (**v. 25**).
- Tenth, God will establish his new covenant of peace with them (**v. 26a**; cf. **34:25; Jer 31:31–34**).
- Eleventh, God will multiply them in the land, and they will enjoy prosperity with peace (**v. 26b**).
- Twelfth, God will establish his sanctuary among them and personally dwell there forever (**vv. 26c, 27**).
- Thirteenth, God will make Israel a testimony to the nations of his saving grace (**v. 28**).

B. (:24-28) Seven Descriptions of Revival Kingdom Blessings for the Nation of Israel

Daniel Block: The present description of Israel's glorious hope breaks down on the basis of subjects of the verbs into three parts as follows:

- (a) The Evidence of Israel's Renaissance (vv. 24b–25)
- (b) The Source/Cause of Israel's Renaissance (vv. 26–27)
- (c) The Impact of Israel's Renaissance (v. 28)

1. (:24a) Messianic Shepherd King

*“And My servant David will be king over them,
and they will all have one shepherd;”*

Feinberg: Some have understood the words “*David my servant*” to mean David literally, but the consensus of prophetic testimony decides in favor of applying it to Christ alone. Apart from the fact that God would not design a culminating age with two supreme rulers on earth in a sort of coregency, a concept foreign to Old Testament prophecy and the repeated mention of the numeral “*one*” in connection with their final king, there is no inherent reason why David must rule again. There was no such implication in the original Davidic covenant of **II Samuel 7**. That unconditional promise stated only that David's final Heir would rule forever, not that he himself would do so. Apart from the undisputed fact of the standing jealousy between Ephraim and Judah, the division of the kingdom came about because of the apostasy of Solomon, a son of David. This disruption can only be reversed by the righteous ruler of the Son of David, the Messiah.

2. (:24b) Covenant Obedience

*“and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes,
and observe them.”*

Leslie Allen: The people's obedience would make possible continued occupation of the promised land envisaged in **28:25–26** and 36:28. The disobedience that had been the cause of the exile would haunt them no longer.

3. (:25a) Permanent Occupation of the Promised Land

*“And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant,
in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it,
they, and their sons, and their sons' sons, forever;”*

4. (:25b) Davidic Dynasty Guaranteed Forever

“and David My servant shall be their prince forever.”

5. (:26a) Everlasting Covenant of Peace

*“And I will make a covenant of peace with them;
it will be an everlasting covenant with them.”*

6. (:26b) Established, Multiplied and Consecrated

*“And I will place them and multiply them,
and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.”*

7. (:27) Covenant Relationship and Fellowship

*“My dwelling place also will be with them;
and I will be their God, and they will be My people.”*

Douglas Stuart: Disunity, disobedience, corrupt national leadership, and multiple sanctuary polytheism—these things that would be overturned by divine action in the future were what Israel and Judah had known throughout most of their history. They had their roots in the past, in the rivalry of Jacob’s children reported in Genesis, in the tendency to idolatry described in Exodus, in the warnings against the dangers of kingship in Deuteronomy, in the intertribal rivalries described in Judges, and so on. The point is that the Israelites had established a pattern. They were habituated to sin, just as all human institutions and people are. What they needed was a change of the nature and magnitude that they themselves could not possibly bring about by human effort. They needed the special grace of the Lord to help them, so that He would offer rescue, and they would need only to respond in faith. We know in retrospect that it was only the work of Christ that could provide for all that Ezekiel’s audience was hearing in **chapter 37**.

(:28) Recognition Refrain

*“And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel,
when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”*

David Guzik: The promise of this **sanctuary** will be described in great detail in Ezekiel **chapters 40 through 48**. To Ezekiel and the Babylonian exiles, no restoration could be complete without some kind of temple.

John Taylor: The restoration of the temple is thus far more than simply a matter of repairing war-damage. It is God’s way of demonstrating that he is not dead and that Israel are still his people.

Leslie Allen: Emphasis is laid on the restored temple towering over the people as the capstone of the new divine-human constitution that time would not decay. It would be a material symbol to the world of the special relationship between God and the people consecrated to him (cf. **Lev 20:26**).

Ralph Alexander: The Lord would enact his peace covenant (cf. **34:25-29**) with Israel at the time of her restoration to the land, when all her other covenants with God would be fulfilled (v. 26). Under this peace covenant Israel would be established in her land, her numbers would increase (cf. **Gen 22:17-18**), and the Lord would place his sanctuary -- his dwelling place -- among his people forever (vv. 26-27; cf. **40:5 – 43:9**). Then all nations would see that it was the Lord who made Israel holy. She would be set apart from all nations as God’s special possession. No other nation would have the Lord dwelling in its sanctuary uniquely in its midst as would Israel (v. 28; cf. **chs. 40-48**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some **applications to preaching** from this vision of the dry bones?
- 2) Why the characterization of the raised bones to **a very great army**?
- 3) Why the reference to the **covenant of peace**?
- 4) What is the significance of the **sanctuary** in the midst of the revived and reunited kingdom of Israel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chisholm: On the surface, New Testament references to the realization of the new covenant in the present era are problematic, for Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of this covenant being made with Israel, not the Gentiles. Some argue that the church is the new 'Israel' through which the Old Testament promise is fulfilled. Others, insisting on a sharp distinction between Israel and the church, propose that the new covenant mentioned in the New Testament is distinct from the one promised in the Old Testament. A better solution is to propose an '**already/not yet**' model, which sees a present realization of the promises in the church and a future fulfillment for ethnic Israel. Only this mediating view does justice to the language of both the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament. Just because the Hebrew prophets mention only Israel as the recipient of the covenant does not mean that others could not be recipients as well; just because the New Testament focuses on a present realization through the church does not preclude a future fulfillment for Israel.

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel clearly envisioned the transformed land of Israel in **chap. 36** and the national resurrection of Israel in **chap. 37**. We must take care not to banish the Israel of the old covenant from the picture in favor of the church. Thus the promises of Israel are not promises to be collected exclusively by the church. When Jesus established the church and turned to the Gentiles (**Matt 21:33–46; 1 Pet 2:4–8; Luke 2:32; 13:6–10**), it was with the same missionary purpose he had for Israel. His plan was to include all people in the presentation of salvation. That missionary purpose was set forth in **Exod 19:1–8**. The arrival of the church age did not circumvent Israel but was God's plan to share his salvific love with all people (**Rev 22:17**). It also assured that Israel would someday be included in the fulfillment of this promise (**Rom 10:1–21; 11:25–33**).

Ralph Alexander: This could genuinely be termed a 'rebirth' of the nation [cf. **Rom. 11:26–27**]. Just as the necessary elements of a nation were essential to the initial formation of Israel in Genesis through Joshua—a people, a government, and a land—so God would provide all three essentials once again in this rebirth of Israel in the future.

The people of that day are brought together through restoration in **36:16—37:28**. The land is provided in the prophecy of **35:1—36:15**. The government of renewed Israel would be given in Ezekiel's apocalyptic vision revealed in **chapters 40—48**.

David Guzik: Undeniably, **Ezekiel 37:1-14** is about God's promised restoration of Israel. It is a restoration so wide and so deep that any fair examination of Israel's history must confess that it has not yet happened. This means that it is yet to be fulfilled, and will be fulfilled as part of God's plan for Israel in the very last days.

At the same time, this chapter teaches many principles of how God works in revival, and how God's servants should think and act relevant to such a mighty reviving work. If we put the modern servant of God in Ezekiel's place, we can make the following observations.

- God's servant must know that the bones are dead and dry.
- God's servant must walk among the dead.
- God's servant must proclaim God's word.
- God's servant must have almost a foolish confidence in God's Word.
- God's servant must understand that the Spirit works in a process.
- God's servant must recognize that the work of the Holy Spirit is essential.
- God's servant must boldly pray for the Spirit to move.
- God's servant must speak in the power of faith.
- God's servant must notice every evidence of the Spirit's work.
- God's servant must look for God's people to be revived into an army of service.
- God's servant must not say that hope is lost.

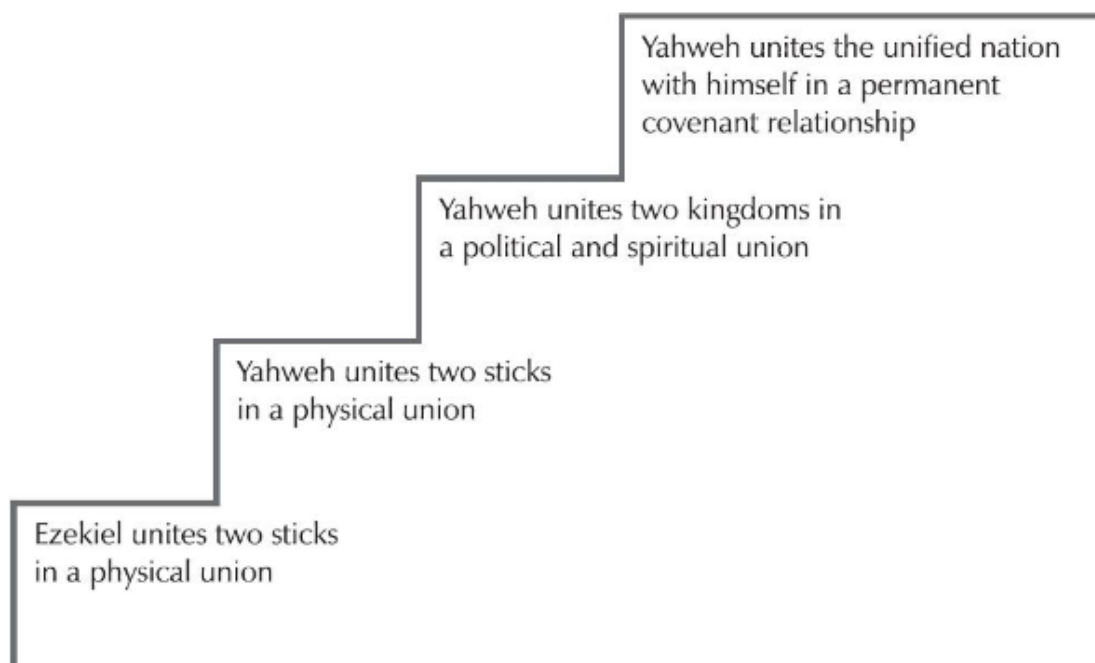
Douglas Stuart: In order to understand fully the events in this passage and their symbolism it is important to know how burials were done in ancient Israel, as well as how the Israelites expected the resurrection of the dead to take place. With regard to burials, the dead were, in effect, buried twice. Here's how the process worked. When an individual died, his or her body was placed in a large family tomb, typically in a tomb cut out of rock, in one of the many chambers lining the walls of the tomb. This was not the final burial, but a kind of preliminary burial. Then the family of the deceased sealed up the tomb and left it alone, perhaps until such time as someone else in the family was buried. When the family reentered the tomb, they would find the body desiccated—dried up, with skin, flesh, and sinews gone—in other words, a skeleton. The skeleton was then taken from the wall chamber where it had resided and placed in a common bone coffin located typically in the middle of the tomb. This common coffin, called an ossuary, held the bones of many persons, sometimes dozens of people. The bones were often separated from their usual skeletal positions in order to make storage in the ossuary efficient. A rib cage might be placed next to a foot, and so on, allowing for the storage of the maximum number of bones in a single ossuary.

Only when bones were dry would they be moved to the ossuary. The purpose of the ossuary was to group everyone as a family awaiting the resurrection, which would take place in reverse order of the desiccation. That is, instead of beginning with a full body

of flesh and ending with bones, the resurrection would begin with bones and end with a full body of flesh.

What Ezekiel saw when God’s Spirit took him in his vision to the valley was the equivalent of a giant outdoor ossuary. Here were bones of people long dead, “buried” together like a huge family. They were, in fact, like the remains of a whole nation’s army slain in battle with no one to gather their bones and give them a proper, final burial. When the bones came together and flesh was added to them, he saw the equivalent of what the Israelites expected the resurrection would entail. We should also note that this demonstrates that the Israelites believed in resurrection of the body as opposed to the mere immortality of the soul. The reason for their elaborate double burial practice was precisely their concern for resurrection. They wanted their remains (i.e., bones, the only part of any person’s body that long “remains”) carefully preserved so that when the resurrection came, they could participate in it. Resurrection then, was a revival of life starting with bones, and that’s what this passage symbolizes for God’s people.

Daniel Block: the progression in thought is deliberate and logical, inviting the audience to look beyond the sign-action to Yahweh’s original and ultimate designs for his people. In the process, the text leads one up at least four levels of significance, which may be illustrated as follows:



In bringing Ezekiel’s restoration oracles to a climax, this prophecy collects numerous themes found in earlier pronouncements. The following represents a summary of the prophet’s views on specific aspects of **theology, ecclesiology, and messianism**.

1. This oracle reinforces **Ezekiel’s exalted view of God**. First, the designation of his renewed commitment to his people as *bērît ‘ōlām*, “the

eternal covenant,” and the fivefold repetition of ‘*ôlām* symbolize Yahweh’s fidelity to his word. Israel’s hope for the future rests in his immutable covenants with the ancestors, the nation of Israel at Sinai, and his servant David in Jerusalem. The devastation of 586 had cast doubts in everyone’s mind about his ability or willingness to act on his people’s behalf. But his ancient pronouncement and his new promise guarantee the permanence and finality of Yahweh’s eschatological work of grace.

Second, the designation of his renewed commitment as *bērît šālôm*, “*covenant of peace,*” symbolizes the goal of Yahweh’s salvific activity. This shalom represents much more than merely the absence of war. It denotes a state of harmony and equilibrium among all participants in the divine-human-territorial relationships. The renewal of covenant vows, the cleansing of the population, the restoration of the people to their hereditary homeland, and the establishment of his residence among his people are prerequisites and evidences of this peace.

Third, the concluding recognition formula reiterates that Yahweh’s restoration of Israel is motivated above all by a concern for his reputation. So long as the Israelites remained in exile the nations would stumble over questions concerning his fidelity and competence to function as the divine patron of the nation. But his salvific actions demonstrate his grace and mercy toward his people. Although they have rebelled against him, he remains their patron. As in the days of old (**Exod. 40**), the climactic revelatory moment will occur when he takes up residence among them once again. This event will not transpire in the back corners of the desert, but in the sight of all the nations, that they may acknowledge his presence, action, and character.

2. This oracle reinforces **Ezekiel’s realistic view of God’s people.**

God’s people were formed by a divine act of grace. The Israelites had nothing to commend them for divine election when he rescued them from the bondage of Egypt, and they certainly have no merit now (cf. **36:31**). On the contrary, throughout their history the nation has demonstrated its bent toward rebellion against the divine Lord, seduction to idolatry, and the disgusting practices of the pagans. But in his grace God removes their defilement, delivers them from their apostasy, and cleanses them from their sin. What is more, by his own initiative he offers to be their God and calls them to be his people.

Especially significant for the Israelites was Yahweh’s unequivocal declaration that all the descendants of Jacob were heirs of the covenant. Against the grain of centuries of history and deep-seated prejudices, Yahweh extends his grace to the whole house of Israel—not only Judah but Joseph and his confederates as well. He rescues them from sin as well as from their divisive past. By establishing his residence in the midst of the nation, all tribes enjoy equal access to the divine patron and participate in the benefactions that emanate from him.

3. This oracle reinforces **Ezekiel’s complex view of the Messiah.**

In spite of the prophet’s avoidance of specifically messianic designations, the messianic significance of this oracle is obvious. The principal features of Ezekiel’s Messiah are

reflected in the titles and role designations he bears. As David he is heir to the eternal dynastic promises made by Yahweh through the prophet Samuel to Israel's greatest king. As *'abdî*, "my servant," he enjoys a special relationship with Yahweh. In this fundamentally religious role, he derives his authority by divine appointment rather than by personal acumen or democratic election. As *našî*', "prince, chieftain," he stands at the head of his people, not as a tyrannical ruler but as one who has been called from their ranks to represent them. As *melek* he is a royal figure, symbolizing the nation's new unity. All other pretenders to the throne have been dismissed that Israel may be "one nation" (*gôy 'ehād*) under "one king" (*melek 'ehād*) occupying the land of Israel. As *rô'eh 'ehād*, "one shepherd," a title added by the prophet in v. 24 to remind his audience of the new dynastic disposition, he will seek the welfare of the flock, protecting and nurturing them after the pattern of Yahweh himself (ch. 34) and in fulfillment of the ancient Mosaic charter for kingship (Deut. 17:14–20).

In all these roles, Ezekiel's Messiah symbolizes the realities of the new age. Remarkably, he plays no part in the restoration of the nation. He neither gathers the people nor leads them back to their homeland. Furthermore, unlike other prophets, Ezekiel makes no mention of the Messiah as an agent of peace or righteousness. These effects he attributes to the direct activity of God. But the Messiah's personal presence symbolizes the reign of Yahweh in the glorious new age.

John Taylor: The explanation given in 21–28 is **futuristic**. It describes the ideal, Messianic kingdom of the last days. The children of Israel will be gathered from among the nations where they have been dispersed (21); they will be resettled in their own land; they will be one kingdom, under one Davidic king (22, 24); they will no longer practise idolatry, but they will be purified from all their defilement (23). They will live a life of obedience to the Lord and will enjoy an everlasting covenant with him (24, 26). The Lord will establish his sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore, and the heathen will know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel (26–28). Now all this is the language of the golden age to which Israel looked forward as the culmination of her national religious existence. Any question of 'fulfilment' has to be related to the whole picture that is given and not to isolated features of it. The answer of the New Testament to this future hope of Israel is that it has come about, but has not been fulfilled. The golden age has dawned in the coming of Jesus the Messiah; fulfilment has begun. But it has not yet been completed. The experience of the church finds that many of the expectations of the past have become realities, but even the realities are only a foretaste of the full and final Messianic joy of the world which is to come. An over-literal interpretation of one aspect of this future hope prevents one from seeing that the prophet is mainly concerned with the ideal of unity in the Messianic kingdom, i.e. a spiritualized pattern of the future Israel based on the historical precedent of David's united monarchy, which was the golden age of the past.

Wiersbe: But central to the nation's unity will be the new temple (Ezek. 37:26-28) where the glory of God will dwell. In their wilderness days, Israel had the tabernacle to unite the camp of Israel, with each tribe assigned a specific place to pitch their tents. The temple in Jerusalem was also a source of unity, for three times a year the men had

to go to Jerusalem to celebrate feasts, and the people were allowed to offer sacrifices only at the temple.

In **chapters 40-48**, Ezekiel will go into detail describing this future temple and its ministries. God called it “*my tabernacle*” (**37:27**) because the Hebrew word means “*a dwelling place*.” God’s presence with His people will sanctify the land, the temple, and the nation, just as He promised in His covenant (**Lev. 26:11, 12**). The nations of the earth will come to worship the Lord with His people Israel (**Isa. 2:1-5**) and “*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*” (**Hab. 2:14**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 38:1 – 39:29

TITLE: DEFEATING THE GOG SQUAD

BIG IDEA:

YAHWEH GLORIFIES HIS NAME BY HIS SOVEREIGN CONTROL AND COVENANT PROTECTION OF ISRAEL AGAINST THE INVADING CONFEDERACY OF NATIONS LED BY GOG IN THE END TIMES

INTRODUCTION:

These two chapters form a cohesive unit detailing the end-times invasion of Israel led by Gog and a confederacy of nations. This attack was orchestrated by God for His revelatory purposes. The resounding defeat was totally God’s work with only the clean-up of the dead carcasses assigned to His people as part of the cleansing of the land. The sovereign deliverance of Israel set the stage for the reiteration of the blessings of their restoration after the necessary discipline of captivity and exile.

Daniel Block: The boundaries of the Gog oracle are clearly defined. The word-event formula in **38:1**, followed by Yahweh’s direct address of the prophet and the command to set his face toward Gog and prophesy against him in **v. 2**, sets this text off from the preceding. The signatory formula in **39:29** forms an appropriate closing, a conclusion confirmed by 40:1, which commences a new visionary account with a date notice. The intervening text is presented as a single oracle describing first the invasion of the land of Israel by Gog and his hordes, and then Yahweh’s utter annihilation of these forces.

Douglas Stuart: **Chapter 39** retells the story of Gog's attack and defeat but with a slightly different emphasis from that of the prior chapter. Not much attention is given to the attack itself (merely **vv. 1-2**), whereas a great deal of space is devoted to describing the massive slaughter of Gog's forces. In a sense, then, **Chapter 38** concentrates on the threat from the powers opposed to God and His people, while **Chapter 39** concentrates more on the deliverance of God's people from that threat.

David Guzik: In Hebrew literature, it was common to give an account and then to repeat it to give emphasis and a few additional details. **Ezekiel 39:1-8** is a summary of what was described in **Ezekiel 38**.

Leslie Allen: The resultant eschatological hope is presented as a warranty of faith in Yahweh’s supremacy and Israel’s permanent security. It is offered as an assurance to counteract the trauma of exile, with the pastoral message that “*if God is for us, who is against us?*” and “*in all these (sufferings) we are more than conquerors*” (**Rom 8:31, 37**).

Iain Duguid: **Ezekiel 38** and **39** form a single unit made up of two panels that describe the defeat of Gog (**38:1–23**) and the disposal of Gog (**39:1–29**). Together, the two

panels depict the ultimate onslaught of evil against God's apparently helpless people and God's decisive intervention to deliver them from the threat to end all threats.

I. (38:1-13) GOG'S MILITARY MOBILIZATION AND GREEDY OBJECTIVE

(:1-2) The Identification of the Invading Adversary as Gog

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 ‘Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, ”

Constable: It is probably safe to say, at least, that "Gog" refers to the name or title of a ruler who will be active in history while Israel is dwelling safely in her land (cf. v. 8). Perhaps Ezekiel referred to this unnamed future enemy of Israel as a dark figure (unknown and evil) calling him "Dark" much as we might refer to such a person as a new Hitler. This may be the future "king of the North" (cf. **Dan. 11:40-45**). I think "Gog" probably does refer to the king of the North here, but "Gog" also probably represents another important figure who will appear in the end times.

MacArthur: Gog came to be used as a general title for an enemy of God's people. "Gog" most likely carries the idea "high" or "supreme one," based on the comparison in Nu 24:7. It refers to a person, described as a "prince" from the land of Magog, who is the final Antichrist.

Ralph Alexander: The biblical and extrabiblical data, though sparse, would imply that Meshech and Tubal refer to geographical areas or countries in eastern modern Turkey, southwest of Russia and northwest of Iran.

A. (:3-9) God's Summons to Mobilize the Invading Forces

“and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ”

1. (:3b-6) Divine Opposition and Control of Gog

a. (:3b) Opposition

*“Behold, I am against you,
O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.”*

Daniel Block: The conflict will inevitably touch Israel, but what Ezekiel envisages is essentially a duel between Yahweh and Gog. Unlike most of the previous occurrences of the challenge formula, which had generally been followed up with threats of severe divine punishment, the opening frame sounds more like a summons to battle. Indeed, the emphasis is on Yahweh's direct and deliberate manipulation of Gog, calling him into the fray (vv. 4–6), and announcing the military strategy he is to pursue (vv. 7–9).

b. (:4) Control

*“And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws,
and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and*

horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;”

c. (:5-6) Confederacy

*“Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them,
all of them with shield and helmet;
6 Gomer with all its troops;
Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its
troops-- many peoples with you.”*

Constable: Along with Gog, the Lord would take Persia, Ethiopia, Put, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah captive. This would involve vast numbers of soldiers. Persia lay to Israel's northeast, Ethiopia to her southwest, Put to her southeast (on the African coast of the southern Red Sea), Gomer to her northwest (in the Taurus mountains of Anatolia and possibly farther northwest in modern western Europe), and Beth-togarmah to her northwest (southeast of the Black Sea). Thus peoples all around Israel would unite against her under Gog's leadership. As Babylonia sought to destroy Israel in the past, so this latter-day Babylon will seek to destroy her in the future (cf. **Rev. 16:13-14; 17:5**). Ezekiel pictured a large alliance of nations against Israel.

2. (:7-9) Divine Mobilization of Invading Forces

a. (:7) Preparation for Battle as a Confederacy of Nations

*“Be prepared, and prepare yourself,
you and all your companies that are assembled about you,
and be a guard for them.”*

b. (:8) Summons to Invade a Secure and Unsuspecting People

*“After many days you will be summoned;
in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored
from the sword,
whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the
mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste;
but its people were brought out from the nations,
and they are living securely, all of them.”*

Leslie Allen: **Living in security** becomes a key phrase in the overall unit (cf. **vv 11, 14; 39:6, 26**). Here it is threatened by the prospect of post-exilic invasion, but the context both before and after makes it clear that Yahweh would prove an adequate protection.

c. (:9) Imagery of Overwhelming Forces

*“And you will go up, you will come like a storm;
you will be like a cloud covering the land,
you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.”*

Leslie Allen: The piece ends with a refrain (cf. v 4b) harking back to the gigantic forces at Gog's disposal. But the ironic truth is that Gog is carrying out Yahweh's orders and operates within limits that Yahweh has set.

Daniel Block: The opening frame portrays Yahweh as a general mobilizing the forces of Gog and his allies for his own military agenda. In so doing it raises several questions. How can Gog, whom vv. 3–6 had portrayed as the enemy of Yahweh, simultaneously play the role of Yahweh's agent? How can Yahweh employ foreign nations against his people after the reestablishment of the eternal covenant relationship and the restoration of the people to the land? In raising these questions this frame sets the rhetorical agenda for the following frames of the prophecy against Gog. Meanwhile, the audience has been informed that Gog's invasion of the land represents part of the calculated plan of God for his people.

B. (:10-13) Gog's Evil Scheme

"Thus says the Lord God,"

1. (:10b-12) Motivation of Instigating Commander

a. (:10b) Origin of the Evil Plan

*"It will come about on that day,
that thoughts will come into your mind,
and you will devise an evil plan,"*

b. (:11) Opportunistic Exploitation of Vulnerabilities

*"and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled
villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live
securely, all of them living without walls, and having no bars or
gates,'"*

David Guzik: The first evil thought Gog had against Israel was to attack them because they seemed defenseless as they were gathered back into the land. The second was **to take plunder and to take booty**; to attack Israel out of economic interest. Gathered back to the land in prosperity, there was **plunder** to seize.

c. (:12) Objective of Plundering Israel

*"to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against
the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people
who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and
goods, who live at the center of the world."*

Feinberg: Rabbinic literature states: "As the navel is set in the centre of the human body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world...situated in the centre of the world, and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel, and the sanctuary in the centre of Jerusalem, and the holy place in the centre of the sanctuary, and the ark in the centre of the holy place, and the foundation stone before the holy place, because from it the world was founded."

2. (:13) Motivation of Participating Vultures

“Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?’”

Daniel Block: The attention turns to outside witnesses to Gog’s preparation for his campaign. The interested parties represent merchant peoples who conduct their trade via the overland routes across the Arabian Desert to the east of Israel (Sheba and Dedan), and the maritime Mediterranean route to the west (Tarshish). Like the list of Gog’s allies, who come from the northern and southern extremes of the world known to Israel, these names constitute a merism, from east to west, connoting all nations involved in international commerce. . .

Are these decent nations challenging Gog’s greed, or are they wishing to capitalize on the opportunity themselves? Since their questions echo many of the expressions found in the previous verse, it seems Gog’s disposition is mirrored in their own covetousness. They too have their eyes on spoil (*šālāl*), booty (*baz*), silver (*kesep*), gold (*zāhāb*), livestock (*miqneh*), and the movable property (*qinyān*). These merchants are vultures, hoping to take advantage of the spoils of this war.

II. (38:14-23) GOG’S EXPECTATION OF EASY VICTORY MET WITH ANGRY DIVINE JUDGMENT

“Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog,”

A. (:14b-16) Gog’s Expectation of Easy Victory

“Thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:14c) Strategic Timing and Circumstances

“On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it?”

2. (:15-16a) Superiority of Forces

“And you will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; 16 and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land.”

Douglas Stuart: God’s control of all that Gog does (even though Gog may not realize it) is outlined in **verses 14–16**. Gog will be aware of the restored, prosperous, but undefended Israel (**v. 14**), will mount an impressive coalition of troops from his location in the north, that is, the Black Sea region (**v. 15**), will attack Israel in the latter days in such great numbers that the army will appear like a cloud covering the earth—but nevertheless all is under God’s control (**v. 16**).

Daniel Block: Verses 14b–16a highlight the opportunism of the invader. Precisely when Yahweh’s people are enjoying their security in his land, Gog will pounce on the unsuspecting victim. The description of the military action summarizes vv. 4–9: he will emerge from his homeland in the far reaches of the north country; he and his vast host will sweep down on Yahweh’s people riding their horses; and they will cover the land like a cloud.

3. (:16b) **Recognition Refrain**

*“It will come about in the last days that I shall bring you against My land, in order **that the nations may know Me** when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”*

B. (:17-23) God’s Angry Divine Judgment against Gog

“Thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:17b) **End Times Invasion of Israel Should be no Surprise**

“Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?”

Constable: This was not the first revelation of a powerful enemy whom God would bring against the Israelites (cf. **Deut. 31:17; Ps. 2:1-3; Isa. 14:24-25; 26:20-21; 29:1-8; Jer. 4:5; 6:26; 30:18-24; Joel 2:20; 3:9-21; Zeph. 1:14-18; 3:8, 15-20; Zech. 12:2-3; 14:2**).

2. (:18-22) **Covenant Curses Unleashed by God’s Wrath**

a. (:18-20) Judgment by Earthquake

“And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,’ declares the Lord God, ‘that My fury will mount up in My anger. 19 And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 And the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground.’”

Feinberg: The reaction to the audacity and effrontery of the invasion of Gog and his forces was stated in bold terms and a vivid anthropomorphism (see **Psalm 18:8**). The picture is of the breath which an angered man inhales and exhales through his nose. God’s patience would be exhausted with the repeated attempts of Israel’s enemies to annihilate her.

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s emotional reaction to Gog’s invasion is obvious as he explodes, heaping up expressions for anger unparalleled in the book, if not in the entire OT. Fortunately for Israel, the wrath previously poured out on them will now fall on their enemy. The firmness of Yahweh’s resolve is reflected not only in the signatory formula, which interrupts the outburst, but also in the expressed motive for his utterance: *“I have spoken in my passion,”* in **v. 19a** leaves no doubt that the following threats arise out of his anger.

b. (:21) Judgment by Sword

“And I shall call for a sword against him on all My mountains, declares the Lord God. Every man's sword will be against his brother.”

c. (:22a) Judgment by Pestilence and Blood

“And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him;”

d. (:22b) Judgment by Torrential Rain, Hailstones, Fire, and Brimstone

“and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone.”

3. (:23) Divine Objective

a. Magnifying His Name = His Greatness, Holiness and Person

“And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations;”

Daniel Block: The first panel of the Gog oracle climaxes with a powerful interpretive statement, highlighting Yahweh’s **threefold revelatory purpose**: to display his greatness (*hitgaddēl*), his holiness (*hitqaddēš*), and his person (*nōda*).

b. **Recognition Refrain**

“and they will know that I am the LORD.”

Douglas Stuart: The covenant curses of pestilence (e.g., **Deut. 32:24**), bloodshed (e.g., **Deut. 32:42**), flood (**Gen. 6**), hail, fire, and brimstone (**Deut. 29:23**) will all be unleashed against Gog’s forces (**v. 22**). Thereby God will have shown Himself supreme, Superior to all the powers of darkness and evil, the only true God in all the world, and the nations will recognize it, however grudgingly (**v. 23**).

III. (39:1-16) GOG’S SLAUGHTERED CARCASSES GLORIFY GOD’S HOLY NAME AND REQUIRE SPECIAL BURIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO ENSURE THE CLEANSING OF THE LAND

*“And you, **son of man**, prophesy against Gog, and say,
‘Thus says the Lord God,’”*

Daniel Block: The present frame recapitulates some of the action of **38:19–23**, but the tone and emphasis have changed. Like **38:1–9**, the description is more objective and focused. There is no reference to divine emotion; instead the attention shifts to the actions of Yahweh against Gog. Except for two references to Gog’s forces falling (**vv. 4, 5**) and two recognition formulae (**vv. 6, 7**), Yahweh is the subject of every verb in the frame. In spite of the recapitulation the plot advances, moving from the defeat of Gog to the disposal of the vanquished enemy.

John Taylor: The overthrow of Gog and his forces is here retold in different language and in fuller detail. This is typical of Hebrew poetry and of the kind of semi-poetical writing which is used in these oracles. It is fond of repetition and delights to revert to previous statements and enlarge on them, even though the result is to destroy all sense of consecutive arrangement.

A. (:1b-5) Military Rout of Gog’s Invading Forces

1. (:1b) Divine Opposition

*“Behold, I am against you,
O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal;”*

2. (:2) Divine Instrument of Aggression against Israel

“and I shall turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel.”

3. (:3) Divine Disarming by God

*“And I shall strike your bow from your left hand,
and dash down your arrows from your right hand.”*

4. (:4-5) Destiny = Defeated, Dead and Dishonored

“You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops, and the peoples who are with you; I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. 5 You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken, ’ declares the Lord God.”

David Guzik: Gog and his armies would not only be dead but disgraced as their unburied corpses littered the field of battle.

Leslie Allen: The divine encounter with Gog (**v 1**) would result in his weapons being dashed from his hands and in his military destination (**38:8**) becoming the scene of defeat and of dishonor for his corpse, like a second Pharaoh (**29:5**).

B. (:6-8a) Motivation = to Highlight God’s Holy Name

1. (:6) Revelatory Retribution

- a. Torching the Secure Coastlands
*“And I shall send fire upon Magog
and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety;”*
- b. **Recognition Refrain**
“and they will know that I am the LORD.”

2. (:7) Reinforcement of God’s Holy Name

- a. Revelatory Objective
*“And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My
people Israel;
and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore.”*

Daniel Block: The Gog debacle will demonstrate once and for all the holiness of Yahweh, not as a theological abstraction but in action, as he stands to defend his people against the universal conspiracy of evil.

- b. **Recognition Refrain**
*“And the nations will know that I am the LORD,
the Holy One in Israel.”*

3. (:8a) Reassurance of Coming Divine Judgment

*“Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,
declares the Lord God.”*

C. (:8b-10) Magnitude of Gog’s Defeat

(:8b) Transition

“That is the day of which I have spoken.”

1. (:9-10a) Discarded Weapons Burned for Fuel for Seven Years

“Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out, and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears and for seven years they will make fires of them. And they will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons;”

Daniel Block: he cites the practical benefit that the pile of weapons offered the Israelites. Rather than being burned in one gigantic bonfire, the armaments provided the land with seven years’ worth of firewood, relieving the inhabitants of the task of scrounging for fuel in the fields, or cutting down the forests. This had the added benefit of providing the environment with a sabbatical week of years to recover from the devastation the invading army had wreaked.

2. (:10b) Tables Turned on the Greedy Invaders

“and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them,

and seize the plunder of those who plundered them, ' declares the Lord God."

Constable: After the Lord destroyed the forces of Gog, the Israelites would use the enemy's numerous implements of warfare for fuel for seven years. The Israelites would not need to burn traditional fuel, because there would be so many old weapons and implements left to burn. They would also take, as spoil, what the invaders had brought into the land, when they came to despoil the Israelites. God would turn the tables on the invaders.

Lamar Cooper: These verses [:9-16] describe the disposal of Gog's army and offer two illustrations of the magnitude of Gog's defeat. First, Gog's weapons will supply Israel with fuel for seven years (vv. 9-10). Gog came to plunder Israel (38:12) but instead will become Israel's (v. 10).

Second, the debacle will be such that a valley in Israel will be required as a graveyard for the slain soldiers of the army of Gog. The valley is not identified other than that it was a route for those traveling "*east toward the sea*" (v. 11). Most interpreters identify the "*sea*" as the Dead Sea since it is the one sea that lies to the east of Israel.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel recognizes the irony in the event: the plunderers (cf. 38:12-13) have become the plundered, and vice versa. How the tables have turned! Those who had not raised a finger in their own defense may now divide the booty that has been delivered to their doorstep (cf. Judg. 5:30; 8:24-26; 2 K. 7:16; Isa. 9:2 [Eng. 3]).

D. (:11-13) Multitude Buried in the Valley of Hamon-gog

1. (:11) Burial Plot Designated for Gog

"And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off the passers-by. So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog."

2. (:12) Burial Process Requires Seven Months to Cleanse the Land

"For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land."

3. (:13) Burial Participants Honored as God Glorifies Himself

"Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,' declares the Lord God."

E. (:14-16) Maintenance Procedures to Ensure Total Cleansing of the Land

1. (:14)

"And they will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface

of the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search.”

2. (:15)

“And as those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man's bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog.”

3. (:16)

“And even the name of the city will be Hamonah. So they will cleanse the land.”

Daniel Block: The seventh frame concludes by reiterating that the primary concern in all this human activity is the **cleansing of the land**. Yahweh is not satisfied with having defeated Gog and his allies; so long as their corpses are visible, the land remains unclean. A totally restored covenant relationship demands a God with a holy name, a holy people, and a holy land.

IV. (39:17-29) GOG'S SACRIFICIAL FEAST REVEALS GOD'S GLORY AND HIGHLIGHTS ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

*“And as for you, **son of man**, thus says the Lord God,”*

A. (:17b-20) The Sacrificial Feast of Gog

1. (:17b) Summons to the Feast

“Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, ‘Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.’”

Daniel Block: Ezekiel's designation of this banquet as a *zebah* classifies it as a ritual event. But by altering all the roles he grossly caricatures the normal image of a *zebah*. In place of a human worshiper slaughtering animals in the presence of Yahweh, Yahweh slaughters humans for the sake of animals, who gather from all over the world (*missābīb*) for this gigantic celebration (*zebah gādōl*) on the mountains of Israel. The battlefield has been transformed into a huge sacrificial table. . .

The literary image sketched here must have been shocking for a person as sensitive to cultic matters as Ezekiel. Even worse than the lack of restraint is the skewing of roles. Yahweh, the sovereign Lord, hosts foul scavenging creatures. Instead of serving clean, edible food, the divine host offers his guests human flesh, thereby violating the most serious taboo of all: the desecration of human life. **Gen. 9:1–7** sanctions animal flesh as food for humans, but no one, neither human nor animal, was to shed human blood, let alone consume it! How the priestly prophet reacted to this horrifying image one may only speculate.

2. (:18-20) Substance of the Feast

“You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. 19 So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. 20 And you will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war, ’ declares the Lord God.”

B. (:21-24) The Glory of the Lord Revealed

1. (:21) Recognition by the Nations of God’s Sovereign Judgment

*“And I shall set My glory among the nations;
and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed,
and My hand which I have laid on them.”*

2. (:22) Recognition Refrain

*“And the house of Israel **will know that I am the LORD their God**
from that day onward.”*

3. (:23) Vindication of the Discipline of Captivity

*“And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile
for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me,
and I hid My face from them;
so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries,
and all of them fell by the sword.”*

Lamar Cooper: The amount of plunder will be awesome and the stench of bodies overpowering as the birds of prey devour the flesh of what was perhaps the greatest army ever assembled (39:9–20). All the nations of the world will see and learn as all the pretense of human glory is extinguished before the pure and ineffable glory of the Holy God of Israel. No longer will the accusation be heard that Israel’s God had abandoned them in unfaithfulness or proved unable to defend them against the nations and their gods. It will be clear to all that it was Israel’s sin and unfaithfulness that led to their exile, that their troubles had been recompense for their uncleanness and their offenses.

4. (:24) Consequences of Israel’s Transgressions

*“According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions
I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.”*

Leslie Allen: The epilogue falls into two sections, vv 23–24, with negative emphasis on Israel’s sin and its divine consequences, and vv 25–29, which positively stress Israel’s restoration in both human and divine terms.

C. (:25-29) The Restoration of Israel

“Therefore thus says the Lord God,”

1. (:25b) Accomplished by God's Mercy to Protect His Reputation

*“Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob,
and have mercy on the whole house of Israel;
and I shall be jealous for My holy name.”*

2. (:26) Transformed from Fear and Treachery to Security and Loyalty

*“And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery
which they perpetrated against Me,
when they live securely on their own land
with no one to make them afraid.”*

3. (:27) Regathered and Sanctified

*“When I bring them back from the peoples
and gather them from the lands of their enemies,
then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations.”*

4. (:28) Submitted to God's Revelatory Agenda

a. **Recognition Refrain**

“Then they will know that I am the LORD their God”

b. Historical Summary of Exile, Regathering and Security

*“because I made them go into exile among the nations,
and then gathered them again to their own land;
and I will leave none of them there any longer.”*

5. (:29) United with God via the Abiding Presence of the Spirit

*“And I will not hide My face from them any longer,
for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,’
declares the Lord God.”*

Lamar Cooper: In this summary Ezekiel listed seven purposes that God would achieve by ending the exile.

- First, God would initiate a new era in relationship with Israel, hence the use of “*now*.”
- Second, God had demonstrated the discipline of love by chastening his people (**Prov 3:11–12; Heb 12:5–8**). He would show the compassion of love by restoring them to their former place.
- Third, God would be zealous for his holy name's sake. He would reverse the profaning of his name that was reported in **36:20–23** and promote the sanctification of his name among the heathen (**36:23**).
- Fourth, Israel would forget their shame and unfaithfulness (**v. 26**) in that their time of disgrace would be past (**36:30–31**).
- Fifth, God would demonstrate his holiness through regathering Israel from the countries of their enemies and reestablishing them in their land (**v. 27**).
- Sixth, Israel would know that Yahweh is their God, for he would leave none in exile but return everyone to the land (**v. 28**).

- Seventh, God would pour out his spirit on the house of Israel as he promised (36:27; Joel 2:29), a promise that was associated with the messianic age (v. 29).

These verses are very similar to the concluding verses of the preceding section (39:21–24). They both declare what the Lord was going to do and how Israel and the nations would respond, and they both refer to the exile and the Lord hiding his face. Both passages mention the nations seeing what the Lord does, but the Lord’s actions in vv. 21–24 involve only judgment on the army of Gog, while in vv. 25–29 they include all aspects of the restoration of Israel. Both passages stress the resultant revelation of the knowledge of God for both Israel and the nations. For Israel, receiving the Spirit (v. 29) will be “*a sign and seal of the covenant,*” representing “*the divine mark of ownership*” (cf. Isa 32:15; 44:1–5; Joel 3:1; Zech 12:10), the “*guarantee of new life, peace, and prosperity.*” It will be “the definitive act whereby he [Yahweh] claimed and sealed the newly gathered nation of Israel as his own.

Daniel Block: Gog is an agent of the revelatory purposes of Yahweh. That purpose has two dimensions: to declare the greatness, holiness, and glory of Yahweh’s person, and to declare the firmness of his commitment to his people. The defense of this people, who did not need so much as to lift a sword, vindicates his great name while at the same time confirming his word. The presence of the Spirit of Yahweh poured out on the returned exiles guarantees that he would never leave any of the house of Israel at the mercy of their enemies, and that he would never again hide his face from them, as the contemporaries of Ezekiel had just witnessed. In short, Gog becomes the agent through whom Yahweh declares concretely that the events of 586 B.C. will never be repeated.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God choose to use evil and unprincipled instruments (like Gog and his confederate nations) to demonstrate His glory and achieve His kingdom purposes?
- 2) Why should the wicked not be surprised to finally face the reality of God’s opposition and wrath?
- 3) What is required in our situation to accomplish God’s objective of cleansing His holy people?
- 4) What assurance has God given us that He will never leave us or abandon us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: In all, these chapters divide into seven subsections, each introduced by the clause: “*Thus says the Lord God.*” They are:

1. Gog's army prepares to invade (38:3–9)
2. Gog's plan: to plunder peaceful Israel (38:10–13)
3. God is in control of Gog (38:14–16)
4. God overthrows Gog's army and is glorified (38:17–23)
5. Gog attacks, is destroyed, and his army buried (39:1–16)
6. Animals feast on Gog's slain; God is vindicated (39:17–24)
7. God's restoration of Israel, vindicating His name (39:25–29)

Daniel Block: Following the opening formulae, the sequence of events reflected in the frames may be outlined as follows:

Panel A: The Defeat of Gog	(38:2c–23)
Frame 1: The Conscription of Gog	(38:2c–9)
Frame 2: The Motives of Gog	(38:10–13)
Frame 3: The Advance of Gog	(38:14–16)
Frame 4: The Judgment of Gog	(38:17–22)
Interpretive Conclusion	(38:23)
Panel B: The Disposal of Gog	(39:1–29)
Frame 1: The Slaughter of Gog	(39:1–8)
Frame 2: The Spoiling of Gog	(39:9–10)
Frame 3: The Burial of Gog	(39:11–16)
Frame 4: The Devouring of Gog	(39:17–20)
Interpretive Conclusion (The Final Word)	(39:21–29)

Iain Duguid: This description of the state of God's people underlines the **motives** of the evil alliance. They find no justification for their assault in Israel's behavior. Israel is at rest, trusting in the Lord, not in alliances with foreign nations. In that trust she is prospering, experiencing the blessings of covenant faithfulness. Yet trust in the Lord does not eliminate the possibility of conflict. The ungodly, who dwell in "*the far north*" (38:6, 15; 39:2), will cast greedy eyes in Israel's direction, encouraged by the traders from east and west (38:13), and will advance against them like an overshadowing cloud (38:9, 16).

But in spite of all his planning and preparation, Gog has fundamentally misread the match-up. It is not a matter, as he supposes, of his vast and well-equipped army ranged against a defenseless nation (38:14–16). Rather, by tangling with Israel Gog is taking on Israel's God; this is "*my people*" and "*my land*" that he is assaulting. The relationship between God, his people, and his land has been restored, and such an assault on the Lord's name will not pass unchallenged. Indeed, the only reason for Gog's being permitted to come—or, to put it positively as the text does, the reason for which Gog and his allies are brought against Israel—is so that the Lord may demonstrate his greatness and his holiness in defeating this monstrous alliance (38:16).

As in the days of Pharaoh, Gog will serve as an object lesson for the nations of the Lord's power and of his love for his people. . .

The lesson Israel is to draw from these chapters is explicitly laid out for them in **39:21–29**. The Lord is sovereign in history, a sovereignty that is displayed before the nations in two separate movements.

(1) In the first, God demonstrated his sovereignty by sending his own people into exile because of their sin and unfaithfulness (**39:23**). He hid his face from them, and as a result they became easy prey for all their enemies.

(2) But in the days to come a new period in Israel's history is beginning. God's people will return from exile; he will have compassion on them. This change in their fortunes will cause them to "*bear their shame*" (*wenāsû 'et-kelimmātām*, **39:26**). That is, they will take responsibility for their past actions when they are restored to their land and dwell in safety. Then they will know that it is the Lord their God who sent them into exile, and the Lord their God who returns them from exile (**39:28**). The tragic events of 586 b.c. will never repeat themselves, for the covenant-keeping God will pour out his Spirit on his people, as he once poured out his wrath on them, and he will never again hide his face from them (**39:29**).

Lamar Cooper: several principles of interpretation are followed.

- (1) The message is interpreted as literally as the context and language allow.
- (2) Since the biblical canon is considered ultimately the product of divine revelation, these chapters are assumed to harmonize rather than conflict with apparently parallel passages encountered elsewhere in Scripture.
- (3) The present shape of the Book of Ezekiel is believed to have come from a single divinely guided individual.
- (4) Context is understood to constrain meaning and so is taken as a reliable guide.
- (5) Divine revelation is believed to have unfolded gradually or progressively so that later prophecies illuminate, elaborate, or expand earlier ones.

The present writer believes that these principles lead to an interpretation of the following chapters in accordance with a **dispensation premillennial framework**.

Other millennial views are believed inadequate when applied to apocalyptic passages such as **Ezek 38–39** and **40–48**. The premillennial approach is more consistent with the biblical facts, answers more questions, and solves more problems than any of the other approaches. It views history as headed for a literal grand climax that will conclude with a literal battle between Christ and Satan. Jesus will be victorious and establish an earthly kingdom of peace for a thousand years in preparation for the eternal state. This is the general approach that has been adopted in the discussion and interpretation of eschatological passages in Ezekiel and elsewhere. . .

There are at least seven views of the time when the invasion of Gog will take place.

- One view regards this passage as entirely symbolic.

- Another considers that the battle will occur before the tribulation either just prior to or at the time of the rapture of the church.
- A third view is that the battle will occur in the middle of the tribulation and is associated with **Rev 14:14–20** and **Dan 11:40–41**.
- Fourth, the battle will occur at the end of the tribulation and is equated with the battle of **Rev 19:11–21**.
- Fifth, the battle will occur during a transitional period that is between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium to destroy the weapons of Babylon and cleanse the land prior to the advent of the millennium.
- Sixth, the battle will occur at the end of the millennium and should be equated with **Rev 20:7–8**.
- A final view combines the fourth and sixth views and considers that the battle will occur at the end of the tribulation (**Rev 19:17–21**). It will be held in pause for one thousand years, after which it will resume and be concluded as the battle of **Rev 20:7–8**.

Constable: Apparently the fulfillment will take place in two phases, first at the end of the Tribulation and then at the end of the Millennium, when Israel is dwelling securely (cf. **Rev. 19:17-21; 20:7-8**). Ezekiel evidently described the invasion of Israel's enemies into the Promised Land as a single event, but later revelation clarifies that it will happen on two separate occasions. Part of Ezekiel's prophecy describes one of these invasions, part the other, and some of it describes both incidents. Gog, then, does not describe a single individual, but two people, both of whom share similar plans. In the first fulfillment, Gog is the king of the North. In the second, he is the human leader who will lead the rebellion at the end of the Millennium. It seems unnatural for God to describe as one battle one that will have two parts separated by 1,000 years, and there is certainly no indication in Ezekiel that Gog's invasion will have two phases. However, in view of later clarification in the Book of Revelation, we apparently have another instance of two events widely separated in time viewed by a prophet as one. The prophets' descriptions of the near and far destructions of Babylon (**Isa. 21; Jer. 51**), the two advents of Messiah (**Isa. 61:1-2**), and the coming of two persecutors of the Jews (Antiochus Epiphanes and Antichrist; **Dan. 11:21-35, 36-44**) are other examples of this "foreshortened" view of the future.

Derek Thomas: Israel was to learn three fundamental lessons from this episode. First and foremost, they were to appreciate that the Babylonian captivity was not to be the final source of difficulty in their future history. Having encouraged them with promises of a return to blessing (**chapters 32–37**) Ezekiel now wishes them to know that there will be trouble in the earth right up to the very end. Secondly, their afflictions, both present and future, would be due to their sin (**39:23–24**). It had been so in Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. It will be the same with Gog's forces. Thirdly, they are equally to appreciate that God has not abandoned them entirely. Just at the point of their final overthrow, God will intervene to save them. It will teach them that though he must punish, he will not forsake. In all of this his purpose is to glorify his own name: *'I will display my glory among the nations ...'* (**39:21**).

TEXT: Ezekiel 40:1 – 42:20

TITLE: *VISION OF A RESTORED TEMPLE – TAKING THE TOUR*

BIG IDEA:

WORSHIP MATTERS TO THE LORD AS SEEN IN HIS PRECISE DESIGN OF THE RESTORED TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM IN THE LAST DAYS

INTRODUCTION:

Lamar Cooper: **H. Parunak** has noted a **chiastic structure** to **chaps. 40–42**, centering around the description of the inner court. After the introduction to the vision in **40:1–4**, Ezekiel’s angelic tour guide begins his tour outside the temple (**40:5–16**). Then they move into the outer court (**40:17–27**) and finally into the inner court and the focus of the tour (**40:28–41:26**). Ezekiel and his guide then move back through the outer court (**42:1–14**) and out of the temple (**42:15–20**).

40:1-4 – Introd.

A. 40:5-16

B. 40:17-27

C. 40:28 – 41:26

B1 42:1-14

A1 42:15-20

The restoration of the temple would be a significant step in the reestablishment of Israel’s national and spiritual identity (cf. **37:26–27**). The departure of the glory of God that he had reported in **chaps. 10–11** along with the final destruction of Jerusalem were difficult theological problems that superseded the physical, political, social, and economic circumstances. The vision of the restored temple was a statement of affirmation about the future of the nation. The magnitude and magnificence of the temple and its complex indicated that Ezekiel clearly foresaw the restored community as supplanting that of David and Solomon. The temple of the last days would be a source of blessing and a lamp of truth to the whole world. The restored temple represents God’s desire to be in the midst of his people and suggests his accessibility to them and desire to bless them (see, e.g., **48:35; Rev 21:3–4; 22:1–4**).

Douglas Stuart: **Hope** is the focus of these last nine chapters—hope in spite of the depressing realities of captivity in Ezekiel’s day, hope based upon the revealed plan of God to move His people into a new age of blessing and close relationship to Himself.

David Thompson: **Size of the Millennial Temple**

- 1) The tabernacle was 30 by 15 feet.
- 2) Solomon’s temple was 60 by 30 feet.
- 3) This Millennial Temple is 70 by 35 feet.

It stands to reason that when Jesus Christ reigns in Jerusalem, His temple will be a step up from all previous temples, which these dimensions suggest.

Thomas Constable: Many take this passage as a prophecy, set in the apocalyptic literary genre, that anticipates a literal fulfillment in the future. Some of the descriptions have symbolic significance as well as literal reality, and some teach spiritual lessons. Nevertheless, the revelation concerns a future temple, worship, and physical changes in the Promised Land when Israel, not the church, dwells there securely (i.e., during the Millennium). This is the reading of the text that seems most consistent with the rest of the book and the rest of Scripture.

(40:1-4) INTRODUCTION TO THE VISION

A. (:1) The Timing of the Vision

“In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there.”

Thomas Constable: Ezekiel dated the vision that comprises the final portion of the book as coming to him on April 19, 573 B.C., more than 12 years after his immediately preceding messages (cf. **33:21- 22**). This is the final dated prophecy in the book, but not the last one that Ezekiel received chronologically (cf. **29:17— 30:19**). Ezekiel located this prophecy in time using two points of reference, in relation to the beginning of the Exile and in relation to the fall of Jerusalem. Perhaps he dated it so precisely because what this vision describes has been hard for many readers to accept at face value. Nevertheless the prophet affirmed that the Lord did indeed give it to him at this specific time.

If this vision came to Ezekiel on the tenth day of the first month of Israel's religious calendar, their month Nisan (Abib), as seems likely, it arrived just before the Jews began preparing for Passover.

Lamar Cooper: Zimmerli notes the dominance of the number **twenty-five** and its multiples in this passage (v. 1). He believes that by using this number Ezekiel was calling to the attention of the captives in Babylon that they were halfway to the next Jubilee Year still another twenty-five years away.

Isaiah 61:1–4 used the Jubilee Year as a symbol of the dawn of the messianic age. He portrayed the Jubilee Year as a time of release from captivity. Isaiah's prophecy has long been viewed by premillennialists as an announcement of the millennium. Ezekiel's use of terms similar to the Jubilee Year lends support to the conclusion that he prophesied the advent of the millennial kingdom and the millennial temple.

B. (:2) The Setting of the Vision

“In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel,

*and set me on a very high mountain;
and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.”*

C. (:3) The Bronze Man with the Measuring Rod

*“So He brought me there;
and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of
bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand;
and he was standing in the gateway.”*

Feinberg: The brass was actually copper with the symbolic significance of strength (**I Kings 4:13; Job 40:18**), unwavering steadfastness (whether in good or evil, **Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Isa. 48:4**), and judgment (**Deut. 28:23; Lev. 26:19; Micah 4:13**). The line of flax was for the longer measurements; the reed was for the shorter. The task of measuring was important (cf. **Zech. 2:1; Rev. 11:1; 21:15**). Some interpret the work as the pronouncement of God of His title to all that is involved, but the emphasis in each instance appears to be a delineating of that which belongs to God.

D. (:4) The Command to Take In the Vision and Declare it to Israel

*“And the man said to me, ‘Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears,
and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought
here in order to show it to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see.’”*

I. (40:5-16) THE SURROUNDING WALL AND EAST GATE

A. (:5) The Surrounding Wall Outside the Temple

*“And behold, there was a wall on the outside of the temple all around,
and in the man's hand was a measuring rod of six cubits,
each of which was a cubit and a handbreadth.
So he measured the thickness of the wall, one rod; and the height, one rod.”*

Thomas Constable: A normal cubit was the distance between the tip of a person's middle finger and the end of his elbow, about 18 inches (**Deut. 3:11**). A handbreadth was about three inches. A long cubit was about 21 inches long, the length of a normal cubit plus a handbreadth. Since each of the cubits of the man's measuring rod was a cubit and a handbreadth, it seems that the cubits in view in these dimensions were long cubits (cf. **43:13**). Six long cubits (one rod) equals about 10 feet.

Leslie Allen: The ostensibly human figure is a supernatural being, as his radiance indicates (cf. **1:7; Rev 21:17**): his role will be to guide, measure and interpret. His equipment is a rod (lit. “reed”) for short measurements and a tape for longer ones (cf. **47:3**). The vision is explicitly related to the exiles: its purpose was to crystallize Yahweh’s promises of restoration given through Ezekiel.

Iain Duguid: It is highly significant that the first thing the prophet sees on his tour is a wall surrounding the whole temple area (**40:5**). Walls have as their purpose regulating and defining space; they are there to mark territory as “inside” or “outside” and to

regulate access to the “inside” space. Nor is this wall a minor obstacle; it is some ten and a half feet tall and ten and a half feet thick, providing a solid dividing line between the “holy,” the area of the temple itself, and the “profane,” the area outside. The function of this wall as a wall of separation between these two realms is apparent from the fact that the wall’s height is mentioned, a dimension not provided for the other spaces. A wall depends on its height and thickness for its effectiveness in keeping people out, so these dimensions take on a particular importance.

If the wall is too thick to be broken and too high to be scaled, its effectiveness in restricting access will depend on its gates. But what gates this wall possesses! The three sides that permit access (there is no entry on the west side) are dominated by massive fortress-style gatehouses, almost forty-five feet wide and ninety feet deep (40:13, 15). The defensive nature of these gates is underlined by the fact that they have a portico or vestibule not on the outside, where one would expect it (and where it is on the inner gatehouses) but on the inside.

B. (:6-7) The Threshold of the East Gate

“Then he went to the gate which faced east, went up its steps, and measured the threshold of the gate, one rod in width; and the other threshold was one rod in width. 7 And the guardroom was one rod long and one rod wide; and there were five cubits between the guardrooms. And the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate facing inward was one rod.”

C. (:8-9) The Porch of the Gate and its Side Pillars

“Then he measured the porch of the gate facing inward, one rod. 9 And he measured the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its side pillars, two cubits. And the porch of the gate was faced inward.”

D. (:10-16) The Guardrooms and the Side Pillars

“And the guardrooms of the gate toward the east numbered three on each side; the three of them had the same measurement. The side pillars also had the same measurement on each side. 11 And he measured the width of the gateway, ten cubits, and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits. 12 And there was a barrier wall one cubit wide in front of the guardrooms on each side; and the guardrooms were six cubits square on each side. 13 And he measured the gate from the roof of the one guardroom to the roof of the other, a width of twenty-five cubits from one door to the door opposite. 14 And he made the side pillars sixty cubits high; the gate extended round about to the side pillar of the courtyard. 15 And from the front of the entrance gate to the front of the inner porch of the gate was fifty cubits. 16 And there were shuttered windows looking toward the guardrooms, and toward their side pillars within the gate all around, and likewise for the porches. And there were windows all around inside; and on each side pillar were palm tree ornaments.”

Thomas Constable: There was a total of six guardrooms in the gate complex, three on each side of the main hallway, and they were all the same size. . .

The height of the doorframes surrounding the main gate was 60 cubits (100 feet). This may seem extraordinarily tall to modern readers, but imposing gates were common in the great cities of antiquity. . .

Palm trees were symbols of beauty, fruitfulness, salvation, glory, and the millennial age (cf. **Lev. 23:40; 1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; 2 Chron. 3:5; Song of Sol. 7:7; Ps. 92:12-14; Neh. 8:15; Zech. 14:16-21**).

Lamar Cooper: The gates are a foreshadowing of the accessibility God gave to all people through Jesus, who presents himself as the door by which one can enter to God and be saved (see **John 10:9–21**). The choice of three gates for this temple rather than four or more may suggest a deeper significance of the means of access God provides for humans to approach him, since God manifests himself in three ways to the human family as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

II. (40:17-27) THE OUTER COURT

A. (:17-19) The Chambers and Pavement

“Then he brought me into the outer court, and behold, there were chambers and a pavement, made for the court all around; thirty chambers faced the pavement. 18 And the pavement (that is, the lower pavement) was by the side of the gates, corresponding to the length of the gates. 19 Then he measured the width from the front of the lower gate to the front of the exterior of the inner court, a hundred cubits on the east and on the north.”

B. (:20-23) The North Gate

“And as for the gate of the outer court which faced the north, he measured its length and its width. 21 And it had three guardrooms on each side; and its side pillars and its porches had the same measurement as the first gate. Its length was fifty cubits, and the width twenty-five cubits. 22 And its windows, and its porches, and its palm tree ornaments had the same measurements as the gate which faced toward the east; and it was reached by seven steps, and its porch was in front of them. 23 And the inner court had a gate opposite the gate on the north as well as the gate on the east; and he measured a hundred cubits from gate to gate.”

C. (:24-27) The South Gate

“Then he led me toward the south, and behold, there was a gate toward the south; and he measured its side pillars and its porches according to those same measurements. 25 And the gate and its porches had windows all around like those other windows; the length was fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits. 26 And there were seven steps going up to it, and its porches were in front of them; and it had palm tree ornaments on its side pillars, one on each side. 27 And the inner court had a gate toward the south; and he measured from gate to gate toward the south, a hundred cubits.”

Douglas Stuart: Why all this elaborate gate and guard structure? Why locate all the entrances as far away as possible from the Most Holy Place? The reason is the desire for controlled access, symbolizing the fact that God's people must be pure. Unbelievers will not be allowed to pollute God's house in the new age.

III. (40:28 – 41:26) THE INNER COURT AND THE HEART OF THE VISION

A. (40:28-37) The Three Gates

1. (:28-31) South Gate, Guardrooms, Side Pillars and Porches

“Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate; and he measured the south gate according to those same measurements. 29 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars, and its porches were according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. 30 And there were porches all around, twenty-five cubits long and five cubits wide. 31 And its porches were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars, and its stairway had eight steps.”

Lamar Cooper: Each gate leading to the inner courtyard had eight steps instead of seven (vv. 31, 34, 37). The use of the **number eight** was considered in rabbinic literature to have messianic overtones. The eight steps typologically pictured the Messiah as a means of access to the inner court and sanctuary, therefore the presence of Yahweh.

2. (:32-34) East Gate, Guardrooms, Side Pillars and Porches

“And he brought me into the inner court toward the east. And he measured the gate according to those same measurements. 33 Its guardrooms also, its side pillars, and its porches were according to those same measurements. And the gate and its porches had windows all around; it was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. 34 And its porches were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars, on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.”

3. (:35-37) North Gate, Guardrooms, Side Pillars and Porches

“Then he brought me to the north gate; and he measured it according to those same measurements, 36 with its guardrooms, its side pillars, and its porches. And the gate had windows all around; the length was fifty cubits and the width twenty-five cubits. 37 And its side pillars were toward the outer court; and palm tree ornaments were on its side pillars on each side, and its stairway had eight steps.”

B. (:40:38-43) The Sacrifice Preparation Rooms

“And a chamber with its doorway was by the side pillars at the gates; there they rinse the burnt offering. 39 And in the porch of the gate were two tables on each side, on which to slaughter the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering. 40 And on the outer side, as one went up to the gateway toward the

north, were two tables; and on the other side of the porch of the gate were two tables. 41 Four tables were on each side next to the gate; or, eight tables on which they slaughter sacrifices. 42 And for the burnt offering there were four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide, and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice. 43 And the double hooks, one handbreadth in length, were installed in the house all around; and on the tables was the flesh of the offering.”

Daniel Block: The tour of the temple grounds is temporarily suspended as two particular features are singled out for more careful scrutiny. Indeed, these paragraphs lack all the elements that have characterized the account so far. Although the dimensions of the table are given, there is no reference to the guide, let alone his measuring activity. The general symmetry of the narrative to this point is abandoned as the focus shifts from structural features of the complex to a particular piece of furniture, to a series of rooms occupied by cult personnel, and then to the role of a special class of priests. Indeed, if vv. **38–46** were deleted the account of the tour would read like a continuous narrative. Nevertheless, this segment should not be discounted as inauthentic or the work of later hands. From v. **45** it is evident that these observations were made during the course of the tour. Indeed, the insertion lends realism to the account. As anyone who has been led around a new site by a tour guide knows, the leader often pauses along the way to describe a particular feature with greater detail, thereby adding both understanding and interest to what could otherwise become routine.

Thomas Constable: The presence of **animal sacrifices** in the millennial system of worship has troubled many readers. The Book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus Christ was the superior sacrifice who replaced the sacrifices of the Old Covenant (**Heb. 7—10**). The best explanation seems to be that in the Millennium there will be animal sacrifices, but they will look **backward** to Christ's sacrifice even as the sacrifices of the Old Covenant looked forward to His sacrifice. They will be like the Lord's Supper is for Christians, a memorial of Christ's death. The Lord's Supper, of course, will cease to be observed when the Lord comes for His church at the Rapture (1 Cor. 11:24, 26). . .

There could be other reasons for animal sacrifices in the Millennium besides serving as memorials, namely: cleansing from the defilement of sin and demonstrating obedience to Christ. Another reason will probably be to bring people together for fellowship and feasting to the glory of God. There are several other passages that refer to sacrifices in the Millennium (cf. **Isa. 56:7; 66:20-23; Jer. 33:18; Zech. 14:16- 21; Mal. 3:3-4**).

C. (40:44-47) The Priests' Quarters

1. (:44-46) Function

“And from the outside to the inner gate were chambers for the singers in the inner court, one of which was at the side of the north gate, with its front toward the south, and one at the side of the east gate facing toward the north. 45 And he said to me, ‘This is the chamber which faces toward the south, intended for the priests who keep charge of the temple; 46 but

the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him.”

2. (:47a) Measurements = a Perfect Square

“And he measured the court, a perfect square, a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide;”

3. (:47b) Altar

“and the altar was in front of the temple.”

D. (40:48-49) The Temple Portico

“Then he brought me to the porch of the temple and measured each side pillar of the porch, five cubits on each side; and the width of the gate was three cubits on each side. 49 The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the width eleven cubits; and at the stairway by which it was ascended were columns belonging to the side pillars, one on each side.”

E. (41:1-12) The Temple Sanctuary

1. (:1-2) The Nave

“Then he brought me to the nave and measured the side pillars; six cubits wide on each side was the width of the side pillar. 2 And the width of the entrance was ten cubits, and the sides of the entrance were five cubits on each side. And he measured the length of the nave, forty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits.”

2. (:3-4) Doorway

“Then he went inside and measured each side pillar of the doorway, two cubits, and the doorway, six cubits high; and the width of the doorway, seven cubits. 4 And he measured its length, twenty cubits, and the width, twenty cubits, before the nave; and he said to me, ‘This is the most holy place.’”

Iain Duguid: The temple building is a tripartite structure, comprising portico, outer sanctuary, and inner sanctuary, whose architecture focuses attention on the inner sanctuary, that is, “*the Most Holy Place*” (41:4). This is the only square space within the temple building itself, and it is reached by passing through three openings of increasing narrowness. The door from the inner court into the portico is fourteen cubits (almost twenty-five feet) wide; the door from there into the outer sanctuary is ten cubits (seventeen feet) wide, while the door into the inner sanctuary is a mere six cubits (ten feet) wide. This design feature underlines the **sanctity** of the Most Holy Place, a sanctity so great (even before the return of God’s glory!) that Ezekiel himself is not permitted to enter it. Instead, he remains outside, while the guiding angel goes in alone and measures it (41:3–4).

3. (:5-7) Side Chambers

“Then he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits; and the width of the side chambers, four cubits, all around about the house on every side. 6 And the side chambers were in three stories, one above another, and thirty in each story; and the side chambers extended to the wall which stood on their inward side all around, that they might be fastened, and not be fastened into the wall of the temple itself. 7 And the side chambers surrounding the temple were wider at each successive story. Because the structure surrounding the temple went upward by stages on all sides of the temple, therefore the width of the temple increased as it went higher; and thus one went up from the lowest story to the highest by way of the second story.”

4. (:8-11) Raised Platform

“I saw also that the house had a raised platform all around; the foundations of the side chambers were a full rod of six long cubits in height. 9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers was five cubits. But the free space between the side chambers belonging to the temple 10 and the outer chambers was twenty cubits in width all around the temple on every side. 11 And the doorways of the side chambers toward the free space consisted of one doorway toward the north and another doorway toward the south; and the width of the free space was five cubits all around.”

5. (:12) Separate Building

“And the building that was in front of the separate area at the side toward the west was seventy cubits wide; and the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length was ninety cubits.”

David Thompson: Now in these verses, we are given dimensions to a different building which is behind the Temple building. Its dimensions are 70 cubits wide or 122 ½ feet wide by 90 cubits long or 157 ½ feet long with a wall that is 5 cubits or 8 ¾'s feet thick. We are not told exactly what the purpose will be for this building. It is possible it will be used to dispose of things pertaining to the sacrifice, but the purpose is not stated.

F. (41:13-26) Auxiliary Buildings

1. (:13-15) Square Measurements

“Then he measured the temple, a hundred cubits long; the separate area with the building and its walls were also a hundred cubits long. 14 Also the width of the front of the temple and that of the separate areas along the east side totaled a hundred cubits. And he measured the length of the building along the front of the separate area behind it, with a gallery on each side, a hundred cubits; he also measured the inner nave and the porches of the court.”

2. (:16-26) Paneling, Adornments and Carvings

“The thresholds, the latticed windows, and the galleries round about their three stories, opposite the threshold, were paneled with wood all around, and from the ground to the windows (but the windows were covered), 17 over the entrance, and to the inner house, and on the outside, and on all the wall all around inside and outside, by measurement. 18 And it was carved with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and every cherub had two faces, 19 a man's face toward the palm tree on one side, and a young lion's face toward the palm tree on the other side; they were carved on all the house all around. 20 From the ground to above the entrance cherubim and palm trees were carved, as well as on the wall of the nave. The doorposts of the nave were square; as for the front of the sanctuary, the appearance of one doorpost was like that of the other. 22 The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits; its corners, its base, and its sides were of wood. And he said to me, "This is the table that is before the LORD." 23 And the nave and the sanctuary each had a double door. 24 And each of the doors had two leaves, two swinging leaves; two leaves for one door and two leaves for the other. 25 Also there were carved on them, on the doors of the nave, cherubim and palm trees like those carved on the walls; and there was a threshold of wood on the front of the porch outside. 26 And there were latticed windows and palm trees on one side and on the other, on the sides of the porch; thus were the side chambers of the house and the thresholds.”

Douglas Stuart: Also, there is the interesting **symmetry** of the temple itself. Add up all the key measurements in the chapter, particularly **verses 13–26**, and you find that the temple building and its separating courtyards (as in **v. 14**) formed an area one hundred royal cubits (175 feet) square. This was no haphazard structure, built up as the years went by as many Canaanite and other Near Eastern temples undoubtedly were. This was the divinely given temple of the future, all in order, perfectly ready for God to dwell among His people and they to have access to Him.

Finally, note the **beauty** of it all. This building was decorated in a manner befitting its role as the symbolic earthly house of the one who is “altogether lovely.” Wood paneling covered most of the interior (**vv. 15–16**)—and that in an area of the world where wood was incredibly expensive and not normally used in decorative architecture. Intricate carvings also adorned many surfaces (**vv. 17–20**), featuring palm tree designs that suggested the oasis atmosphere so delightful in the Near East, and cherub designs (essentially like double-faced winged sphinxes) that suggested the heavenly guardianship of the temple and its holy places (cf. also **Ezek. 1**). Even the doors were double folding doors (hinged in the middle) so that they were of more elaborate than usual construction (**v. 24**). An elevated foundation support structure on the outside surrounded the whole building (**v. 8**), adding to its mass and stability, and protecting its lower, most accessible level, from unauthorized penetration (cf. **1 Kin. 6:6**).

It was a grand sight. For Ezekiel and his audience, in a day when no temple existed, it was also a guarantee of great things to come. Israel would be restored. They would one day worship again in the Lord's house. They would be guests at His divine sanctuary, a place more glorious than they had yet experienced.

Iain Duguid: The only piece of furniture mentioned within the temple building is an “altar” of wood in the outer sanctuary, which is designated “*the table that is before the Lord*” (Ezek. 41:22). This is presumably the table on which the “*bread of the Presence*” was laid out before the Lord (1 Kings 7:48). It is mentioned here because it will later be referred to as one of the places at which the Zadokite priests have the privilege of ministering (Ezek. 44:16), a situation that is the necessary corollary of its location in the outer sanctuary, where only they had access.

IV. (42:1-14) THE OUTER COURT AND THE CHAMBERS

A. (:1-9) Gallery of Three Stories with Chambers

“Then he brought me out into the outer court, the way toward the north; and he brought me to the chamber which was opposite the separate area and opposite the building toward the north. 2 Along the length, which was a hundred cubits, was the north door; the width was fifty cubits. 3 Opposite the twenty cubits which belonged to the inner court, and opposite the pavement which belonged to the outer court, was gallery corresponding to gallery in three stories. 4 And before the chambers was an inner walk ten cubits wide, a way of one hundred cubits; and their openings were on the north. 5 Now the upper chambers were smaller because the galleries took more space away from them than from the lower and middle ones in the building. 6 For they were in three stories and had no pillars like the pillars of the courts; therefore the upper chambers were set back from the ground upward, more than the lower and middle ones. 7 As for the outer wall by the side of the chambers, toward the outer court facing the chambers, its length was fifty cubits. 8 For the length of the chambers which were in the outer court was fifty cubits; and behold, the length of those facing the temple was a hundred cubits. 9 And below these chambers was the entrance on the east side, as one enters them from the outer court.”

B. (:10-12) Construction of the Chambers

“In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, facing the separate area and facing the building, there were chambers. 11 And the way in front of them was like the appearance of the chambers which were on the north, according to their length so was their width; and all their exits were both according to their arrangements and openings. 12 And corresponding to the openings of the chambers which were toward the south was an opening at the head of the way, the way in front of the wall toward the east, as one enters them.”

C. (:13-14) Purpose of the Holy Chambers (North and South) for the Priests

“Then he said to me, ‘The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering; for the place is holy. 14 When the priests enter, then they shall not go out into the outer court from the sanctuary without laying there their garments in which they minister, for they are holy. They shall put on other garments; then they shall approach that which is for the people.’”

Feinberg: The uses of these chambers were twofold:

- (1) for the priests to eat the most holy things there, and
- (2) to keep there the sacred vestments when they put them off before going into the outer court to the people

V. (42:15-20) MEASURING THE SURROUNDING WALL

A. (:15) Measuring the Perimeter

“Now when he had finished measuring the inner house, he brought me out by the way of the gate which faced toward the east, and measured it all around.”

B. (:16-19) Measuring Each Side

1. (:16) East Side

“He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds, by the measuring reed.”

2. (:17) North Side

“He measured on the north side five hundred reeds by the measuring reed.”

3. (:18) South Side

“On the south side he measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.”

4. (:19) West Side

“He turned to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.”

C. (:20) Total Measurement

“He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, the length five hundred and the width five hundred, to divide between the holy and the profane.”

Leslie Allen: The statement of the purpose of the wall in **v 20b** reveals the sanctity of the temple area as the domain of God. This sphere of the divine was set aside, in the world and yet not of the world, as a colony of heaven.

Feinberg: The entire area was much too large for Mount Moriah where Solomon's and Zerubbabel's temples stood. The scheme requires a great change in the topography of the land which will occur as indicated in **Zechariah 14:9-11**, the very time which Ezekiel had in view.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How much does the Lord care about the details of our worship?
- 2) What does the Holy of Holies teach Christians today about the privilege of our access to the Father?
- 3) Are we careful to maintain a distinction between the sacred and the profane?
- 4) What is the symbolism of the engraved palm trees?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: We come now to one of the most significant portions of Scripture in the entire Bible. What is described in these last nine chapters of Ezekiel is the Millennial Temple and the worship that will take place in it plus the distribution of the land for Israel. Now this section of Scripture has been explained in different ways:

- 1) Some suggest that this is a description of Solomon's temple before it was destroyed in 586 B.C.. But when one compares the description of this temple with Solomon's temple in Kings and Chronicles, that is not possible.
- 2) Some suggest this is a description of the restoration of the Temple that took place in the 6th century, after the Babylonian captivity. This is not possible because the description and the dimensions do not fit. The people who rebuilt the temple did not follow the specs found in these chapters.
- 3) Some suggest this describes an ideal temple which really won't be built. This makes no sense at all in view of the precise details that are given about the Temple. Ezekiel's prophecies are all very precise concerning individuals, nations and the Temple.
- 4) Some suggest that this is a prophetic picture of the Church, not a literal Temple. This makes no sense because this prophecy is about Israel (**40:4**) and not about the church. Furthermore, the words Ezekiel uses are very precise and very literal, not symbolic.
- 5) Some suggest this is a picture of a real Temple that will exist during the Millennium, when Jesus Christ reigns on this earth in Jerusalem. This is the true interpretation. . .

Now this Temple and these rooms have been prepared for the arrival of a Divine Person.

Four parting thoughts:

1) Every bit of this Temple area is carefully measured and has a purpose, which forces us to admit this will be a literal place. I cannot imagine Ezekiel writing down all of these measurements and then going to the people of Israel and saying this isn't real; it is just all symbolism that I am giving to you because God and myself have nothing better to do. This will be a very real sacred place of worship when Jesus Christ reigns on this earth.

2) There are different levels of sanctity. At the center of this is the most sacred spot of all, which is the Holy of Holies. Then outside of that there are areas where the priests who are close to God may be. Then you have another area of other priests around the altar and within the inner gates. Then there is the outer area open to worshippers. Then out beyond that there is the surrounding territory of Israel that is recognized by the rest of the world as being a sacred land.

3) God has a wonderful, future plan for Israel. Israel needs to realize this. God has a tremendous plan of future blessing for Israel. In any plan of God for the people of God, He has a wonderful future plan that literally will be fulfilled.

4) It is a privilege to have a relationship with God in any dispensation. Any relationship with God is of pure grace.

Leslie Allen: Chaps. 40–42 are a celebration. They harness the wagon of contemporary reality to a star of hope. The prophet and his constituency are stuck fast in exile. For Ezekiel and those of the exiles who had been his fellow hostages, twenty-five weary years have elapsed since they were deported in 597 b.c. Yet on this Rosh ha-Shanah or New Year's Day, when the vision is experienced, he is looking forward to the completion of a calendar process, the year of Jubilee at the end of forty-nine years (cf. **Lev 25:9–10; Ezek 46:17**). He views it as a metaphor for God's new work of liberation and restoration for his people. At this spiritual midpoint he celebrates in advance the "*salvation that is nearer than*" ever before (**Rom 13:11**). Present time and the eschatological future are blended in a series of geometrical shapes, squares and half-squares, whose dimensions are made up of twenty-fives and fifties and their multiples. Even the total number of steps from outside the temple area to the temple itself amounts to twenty-five (7 + 8 + 10 [**40:22, 34, 49**]). The account is an architectural symphony, an intricate composition that counterpoints the predicament of exile and the promise of restoration in a grand celebration of God's sure purposes. This theological stylization is presented both as an assurance and as a challenge to the exiles; it ministers pastorally to their needs (**40:4**; cf. **43:10–11**).

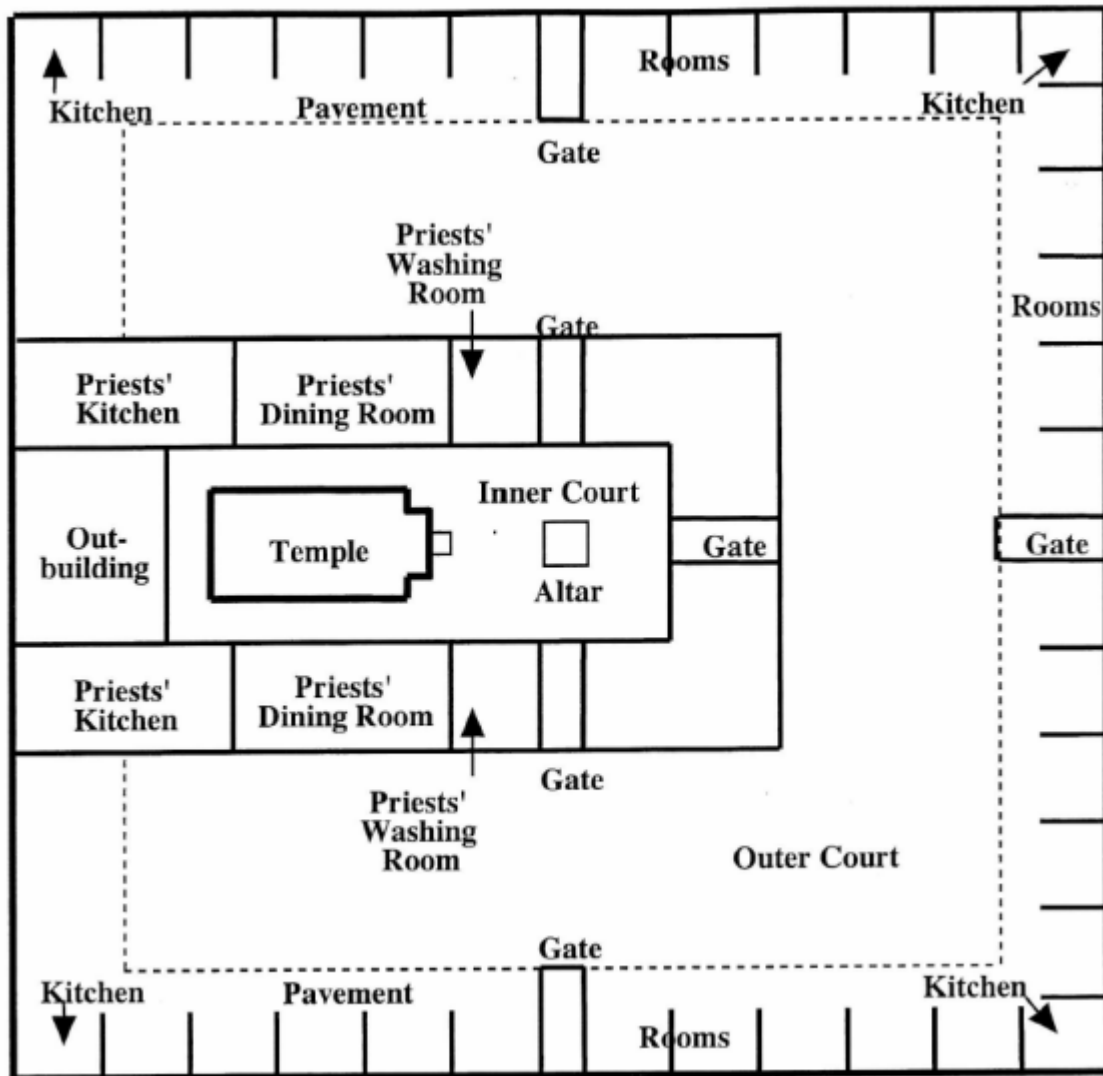
Charles Dyer: Why did Ezekiel take so much space to describe the millennial temple? Here are two reasons:

(1) The sanctuary was the visible symbol of God's presence among His people. The prelude to Israel's judgment began when God's glory departed from Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (**Ezek. 8—11**). The climax to her restoration as a nation will come when

God's glory reenters the new temple in Jerusalem (43:1-5).

(2) The new temple will become the visible reminder of Israel's relationship to God through His New Covenant. Since God gave detailed instructions for building the tabernacle to accompany His inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Ex. 25—40), it is not unusual that He would also supply detailed plans for His new center of worship to accompany the implementation of the New Covenant. This temple will be the focal point for the visible manifestation of Israel's new relationship with her God.

Thomas Constable:



Lamar Cooper: Beginning with Solomon's temple there are seven sanctuaries of Israel in Scripture:

1. Solomon's Temple. Details Solomon's construction are reported in 1 Kgs 6-8. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587/586 b.c. (Jer 32:28-44).

2. Zerubbabel's Temple. When the Hebrews returned from Babylon in 535 b.c., one of the first priorities was to lay the foundation for a new temple. The structure was dedicated in 516 b.c. (**Ezra 3:1–8; 4:1–14**). Zerubbabel, a descendant of David (**1 Chr 3:19**), was in charge of this reconstruction.

3. Herod's Temple. The existing structure desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 169 b.c. was refurbished and enlarged by Herod the Great. The work began in 19 b.c. and continued until the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70.

4. The Present Temple. The present temple of the Lord is the life of a believer (**1 Cor 6:10–20; 2 Cor 6:16–18**). The human heart will be the sacred sanctuary of God's presence until the Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns and builds the millennial temple foreseen by **Ezekiel in 40–48**.

5. The Temple of Revelation 11. The temple of **Rev 11:1–2** appears sometime after the rapture (**Rev 4:1**). The Antichrist will set up world headquarters in this temple at Jerusalem (**Dan 11:45**).

6. Ezekiel's Millennial Temple. **Ezekiel 40–48** refers to the temple to be built in Jerusalem during the millennium for Israel's use in worship commemorating the new covenant with Messiah.

7. The Eternal Temple. John records the end of the first heaven and the first earth (**Rev 21:1–3**) and declares that God himself will dwell with his people and will be the temple of the new Jerusalem (**Rev 21:22**).

Lamar Cooper: The word translated "*example*" is the one from which we get the English word "type." It means an "image" or an "impression" like those struck on the face of metal coins. The image is a representation of a real person or object. In the Old Testament "types" were in the form of images painted with words. Descriptions of the temple, priesthood, and worship regulations such as those envisioned by Ezekiel were all prophetic "types" of the life and work of Christ. The following represents a summary of some of the more obvious typological associations in **chaps 40–42**.

First, the sanctuary was the third division of the temple complex and the most holy place in the temple area. Like the tabernacle and temples before it, this structure will be a reminder of God's desire to dwell among his people. It was for this reason that the Messiah came and the "*Word became flesh and lived [“tabernacled”] for a while among us*" (**John 1:14**).

Second is the use of the number eight. There were eight steps leading up to the inner court of the priests in the temple area (**40:31, 34, 37**). Why not seven or five or fifteen? Eight seems to have symbolized the Messiah. Eight steps showed that Messiah was the way to the inner sanctuary of God (**John 14:6**). There were eight slaughter tables for preparing sacrifices. These tables were a foreshadowing of the perfect Lamb of sacrifice

that God sent for all people in the Messiah, Jesus Christ (**John 1:29**). The sacrifices of Ezekiel's temple were done on the eighth day (**43:27**), the day of new beginning. These were dim but discernible allusions to the Messiah, who would be the "way" and the "sacrifice" (**Heb 10:1–18**; esp. v. 10).

Third were the three levels. The three temple sanctuary levels and the placement of these divisions are dim types of the triune nature of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There were side rooms on each of the three levels, which presumably were areas for individual worship. These side chambers could only be entered through the middle level (**41:7**). Just so the Messiah, the second Person of the Godhead, is the one through which we gain access to all three (John 14:6).

Fourth are the doors. Both the inner and outer courts of the temple area had three doors, and the sanctuary had three inner divisions, each having a doorway (see **40:5–42:20**). Jesus used the figure of a door as a self-characterization (**John 10:9**).

Fifth were the palm trees. The use of palm trees carved in the woodwork of the sanctuary symbolized peace (**40:16, 22, 26, 31; 41:18–20, 25–26**) and long life. Isaiah revealed that the Messiah would be known as the Prince of peace (**Isa 9:6**). The people unknowingly acclaimed him to be the King of peace when he entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before his crucifixion (**John 12:13; Ps 92:12**).

Sixth was the altar of sacrifice (**41–47**), a reminder of the sacrificial work of Messiah (**Isa 53:7–10; Heb 10:1–18; John 1:29**; see **43:13–27**).

Seventh, was the year of release. The language of **Ezek 40:1–4** makes a subtle but clear allusion to the year of release or Jubilee Year (**Lev 25:8–17**). Isaiah made it clear that the Messiah would come and initiate a glorious and eternal year of release (**Isa 61:1–4**). When Jesus began his first earthly ministry, he did so by announcing the advent of the year of release and by reading **Isa 61:1–2**, therefore claiming to be the Messiah (**Luke 4:18–19**). These seven examples are representative and serve to illustrate both subtle and overt messianic ideas in the temple of Ezekiel's vision.

TEXT: Ezekiel 43:1-12

TITLE: GOD'S GLORY RETURNS TO THE NEW MILLENNIAL TEMPLE

BIG IDEA:

THE SHEKINAH GLORY OF THE LORD'S MAGNIFICENT PRESENCE RETURNS TO THE NEW MILLENNIAL TEMPLE TO REIGN IN HOLINESS

INTRODUCTION:

This is one of the most dramatic sections in the prophecy of Ezekiel. The exiles in Babylon would have been tremendously encouraged by this vision of the return of God's Shekinah Glory to the new millennial temple in Jerusalem. God would this time take up permanent residence in His house and reign over His kingdom in a culture of holiness produced by repentance and purification.

Derek Thomas: One of the saddest moments in Israel's history occurred when the ark of the temple was taken into Philistine hands and Israel was left bereft of God's help. When Eli heard of the consequent death of his two sons, he fell backwards and broke his neck. His daughter-in-law, in the shock of all the events, gave premature birth, dying in the process. Before she died she gasped out that the child should be called Ichabod, meaning "*The glory has departed*" (**1 Samuel 4**).

Israel's current condition in exile was a similar low point. The collapse of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple underlined the fact that God had departed from his holy city. Ezekiel had been taken to Jerusalem in a vision in **chapter 10** to see God depart! That was in 592 B.C. Almost twenty years have passed since that awful day. Nothing could be worse than that. If the new temple in Ezekiel's vision is to be of any significance other than for architects, the essential nature of its glory has to be underlined. This involves the return of God to dwell in his temple again. This is what these verses now describe.

Daniel Woodhead: The prophet is brought back to the east gate. This time he sees the **Shekinah Glory** of God returning to Israel in the same manner that He left in 586 B.C. The sound of many waters is the wings of the Cherubim moving Him with wheels of fire. The Shekinah Glory is a physical manifestation of the God of the Universe in time and space. The word Shekinah is a term used to describe the glorious divine appearance of God to man on various occasions in human history. The usual title found in the Bible is The Glory of Jehovah or the glory of the Lord. The Hebrew term used in our Bibles is *Kvod Adonai* which means the Glory of Jehovah. There are other Hebrew forms which describe His glory. This is what the Shekinah is, the Glorious God. In Greek the title is *Doxa Kurion* and is translated as the glory of the Lord. *Doxa* means brightness or splendor. This is how God appears. From early Genesis to the book of Revelation the Shekinah has appeared in many forms. He has been a light, a cloud, a loud trumpet blast, fire and other forms. In the Tabernacle and the first Temple He made unique

appearances in order to dwell with His people. When the Tabernacle was complete and operational the Shekinah dwelt among the Israelites.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/813171628293.pdf>

H. A. Ironside: God from the first claimed to be their King politically as well as religiously: and He had resisted their wish to have a human king, as implying a rejection of Him as the proper Head of the state. Even when He yielded to their wish, it was with a protest against their king ruling except as His vicegerent. When Messiah shall reign at Jerusalem, He shall then first realize the original idea of the theocracy, with its at once divine and human king reigning in righteousness over a people all righteous (**Ezekiel 43:12; Isaiah 52:1; Isaiah 54:13; Isaiah 60:21**).

I. (:1-5) THE GLORY OF THE LORD TAKES UP RESIDENCE IN THE TEMPLE TO DWELL WITH HIS PEOPLE

A. (:1) Staging for the Observance of the Return of God's Glory

“Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;”

B. (:2-3) Shekinah Glory Returns with All of Its Effects

1. (:2a) Its Approach

“and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east.”

MacArthur: Here, the Lord returns to be Israel's King. The glory departed to the E from Israel (**11:23**) when God judged them, so the glory returns from the E when He has regathered them, and is restoring their worship.

Daniel Block: the glory is the visible manifestation of the divine presence, a fact reinforced by Yahweh's own interpretive comment in **44:2**.

David Guzik: It is hard to *define* the glory of God; we could call it the radiant outshining of His character and presence. The Bible says that God's glory radiates throughout all His creation (**Psalms 19:1-4**). Yet there is also the concept of the visible, tangible glory of God – the *shekinah* – and this is scattered about the Old Testament. In many cases it is described as a cloud.

- This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (**Exodus 13:21-22**).
- This is the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from (**Exodus 16:10**).
- This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (**Exodus 19:9, 24:15-18, Numbers 11:25, 12:5, 16:42**).
- This is the cloud that stood by the door of the Tabernacle (**Exodus 33:9-10**).
- This is the cloud from which God appeared to the High Priest in the Holy Place inside the veil (**Leviticus 16:2**).
- This is the cloud of Ezekiel's vision, filling the temple of God with the brightness of His glory (**Ezekiel 10:4**).
- This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by

the power of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 1:35**).

- This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (**Luke 9:34-35**).
- This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at His ascension (**Acts 1:9**).
- This is the cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth (**Luke 21:27, Revelation 1:7**).

2. (:2b) Its Audible Presence

“And His voice was like the sound of many waters;”

3. (:2c) Its Awe-Inspiring Aura

“and the earth shone with His glory.”

Constable: God's shekinah glory did not return when Zerubbabel rebuilt it, nor when Herod the Great remodeled it (cf. **Hag. 2:7**). But now the Lord Himself was about to take up residence in His millennial temple. God's voice was as the sound of a mighty waterfall (powerful and majestic; cf. **1:24; Rev. 1:15; 14:2**), and His glory illuminated the land as it passed over it (cf. **Exod. 34:29-30, 35; Mark 9:3; 2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 1:16; 18:1**).

An interesting foreview of the departure and return of God's glory occurred when God's glory departed with the ark of the covenant into the Philistine camp (**1 Sam. 4:19-22**) and then returned when David brought the ark into Jerusalem (**2 Sam. 6:17-19**). Another parallel is Jesus' departure from Jerusalem in His ascension and His return to it at His second advent, both events happening on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem.

4. (:3a) Its Appearance with Respect to Previous Visions

a. Vision When Coming to Destroy Jerusalem

*“And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw,
like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city.”*

MacArthur: just as the vision in **chaps. 8-11**, which pictures His coming, by angels, to judge Jerusalem (cf. **9:3-11; 10:4-7**).

b. Vision When First Capturing the Attention of Ezekiel

*“And the visions were like the vision which I saw
by the river Chebar;”*

MacArthur: God's appearance is also glorious as in the vision of **1:3-28**.

Lamar Cooper: But it was apparent to Ezekiel that the Lord's coming here was not a summons to ministry or a sign of judgment. It was a sign of his covenant love bringing blessings to his people that would never be taken away. The verb translated “*was radiant*” is found often suggesting the Lord's favor, as in the priestly blessing in **Num 6:25**—“*The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you*” (cf. **Ezra 9:8; Job 33:30; Pss 19:8; 31:16; 67:1; Isa 60:1**).

5. (:3b) Its Impact on Ezekiel
“and I fell on my face.”

David Guzik: The sense is that Ezekiel didn't *choose* to do this; it was a natural response. He had done the same before (**Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23; 9:8, and 11:13**).

Daniel Block: The prophet's physical response, falling down on his face, indicates that neither years of reflection nor decades of divine service have dulled his sense of awe and terror at the sight of the glory of God.

C. (:4-5) Shekinah Glory Fills the House of God with the Manifestation of His Presence

1. (:4) Intentional Entrance
“And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.”

Daniel Block: Although Yahweh could have entered the temple area through the northern or southern gate, the choice of the east gate is deliberate, leading in a straight line along the central spine of concentrated sacrality to the holy of holies.

2. (:5a) Inspired Access and Observance
“And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court;”

3. (:5b) Indwelling Magnificence
“and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.”

Feinberg: The cloud of the Shekinah has been described as “simply the atmospheric clothing of the theophany.” But however explained, it was only the presence of the Lord which could make the building the house of God. The mention of glory with regard to the consecration of the Mosaic tabernacle or the Solomon temple is not a part of the imagery of stage setting. Rather it is the vital element which reveals the worthwhileness of all that is set forth. Thus Ezekiel was expressly given the privilege by the Spirit Himself of viewing the glorious return of the Lord to His abode and His people. God's glory may always be depended upon to fill His house; it has been so in the past and will be in the millennial era.

II. (:6-9) REPENTANCE REQUIRED AS THE PURIFICATION FROM DEFILEMENT FOR GOD TO DWELL WITH HIS PEOPLE

(:6) Introduction to the Message
“Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me.”

A. (:7a) Establishment of God's Throne and Dwelling Place on Earth
“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of

the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.”

B. (:7b-8) Elimination of Any Future Defilement Patterned after Past Transgressions

1. (:7b-8a) Specific Sins Called Out

“And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die, 8 by setting their threshold by My threshold, and their door post beside My door post, with only the wall between Me and them.”

Lamar Cooper: God promised that his return would be a permanent return (vv. 7, 9). Further, he promised that restored Israel would “*never again*” defile God’s name or turn to idolatry. The exile indeed was a cure of idolatry and Baal worship. After the Babylonian captivity Israel never again turned to idols.

Daniel Block: Yahweh’s general demand for the cessation⁴¹ of name-defiling behavior is concretized by citing a series of specific offenses that had provoked the furious outpouring of his wrath in an earlier era: spiritual harlotry of nation and king, and the veneration of the deceased.

The first charge is summed up in one word, *zēnūtām*, “*their harlotry*,” which occurs twice in vv. 7b–9. While the word may denote spiritual infidelity in general (Num. 14:33), in Ezekiel this unfaithfulness is expressed in illicit affairs with other gods and political powers. By framing vv. 7–9 with general accusations of “*harlotry*” of “*the house of Israel*” and referring to the funerary offerings of “*their kings*,” Ezekiel maintains a primary focus on **the sins of the people**. The specific offenses of the kings are described parenthetically. . .

The fourth charge accuses the Israelites of abominable practices. As in 36:31, where the term also appears in a context concerned with the sanctity of the divine name, *tô ‘ēbâ* serves as a catchall for all disgusting and scandalous pagan activities. The last clause of v. 8 reaffirms that Yahweh refuses to minimize the severity with which he has treated his own people.

2. (:8b) General Abominations Cited

“And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed.”

3. (:8c) Justification for God’s Wrath

“So I have consumed them in My anger.”

C. (:9) Essential Requirement for Permanent Dwelling of God with His People

1. Repentance of God’s People

“Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me;”

Constable: If the Israelites would put away their harlotry (physical and spiritual) and would refrain from burying their dead too close to holy ground, the Lord promised to dwell among them forever. While the place of burial may seem insignificant to modern Westerners, it was important to ancient Near Easterners since it expressed respect or disrespect.

John Taylor: The defilement which had previously taken place there had been by harlotry, i.e. idolatry and sacred prostitution (2 Kgs 23:7), and (apparently) by the practice of burying kings within the sacred precincts. We know from the books of Kings that fourteen kings of Judah were buried 'in the city of David', i.e. where the temple and royal palace were, and it appears as if the fault lay in the lack of any clear line of demarcation between what was sacred (the temple proper) and what was profane (the palace and any tombs associated with it). This separateness was Ezekiel's great plea, as we have already observed. **Verse 8** refers either to the palace buildings, which had been within the temple complex, or to the construction of royal burial places close by. In Solomon's temple there had been no walled-off outer court separating the temple from the unconsecrated ground outside. Ezekiel's vision rectified this.

2. Resolve of God to Dwell Permanently with His People
"and I will dwell among them forever."

Daniel Block: vv. 7-11 -- The divine speech divides into two major parts: an explanation for Ezekiel (vv. 7-9), and a charge to the prophet (vv. 10-11). In addition to the change in subject matter, the bifurcation of Yahweh's address is also reflected formally. On the one hand, each section opens with the familiar direct address of the prophet: *ben-'ādām*, "Human." On the other, the twofold declaration "*I will dwell among the descendants of Israel/them forever*," in vv. 7 and 9, creates an effective **inclusio** around the first part, highlighting this section as a declaration of Yahweh's intentions in entering the temple.

III. (:10-12) HOLINESS REQUIRED AS THE CULTURE FOR GOD DWELLING WITH HIS PEOPLE

A. (:10-11) Charge to the Prophet to Stir Up Shame for Past Sins

1. (:10) Purpose of Detailed Design of the Temple

"As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan."

Richard Carlson: Beloved, I call us today to behold the glory of the Lord, to blush and be ashamed of our sin, and to repent. The whole purpose for revealing the pattern of the millennial temple to Israel by Ezekiel was to move them to be ashamed, and past their shame to repentance and a desire for restored fellowship that they had lost through their sins. When we see God's pattern for our life, and how many times our waywardness has forfeited our ability to live in the light of His glory, we will fall to our knees. The way of the transgressor is hard. Only the obedient child of God finds His yoke light and His burden easy. Amazingly, the whole center of God's will in the pattern for the millennial

temple relates to His specific plans for how He is to be worshipped—down to the last detail. Never forget, God’s people are ashamed and repent in the face of God’s glory.
<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/37111757358.pdf>

2. (:11) Pursuit of Present Obedience = Outcome from Shame over Past Failure

“And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes, and do them.”

Leslie Allen: If such wrong practices had resulted in exile (v 8bβ; cf. 22:31), a prerequisite for return from exile was a change of heart that took seriously their shamefulness. Proclamation of Yahweh’s new work of salvation was to stimulate a realization of how far the people stood from God and from his will (cf. 16:54, 61; 36:31–32). This end was to be served first by study of the temple plan, to be drawn by the prophet, with its massive gatehouses that warned of the awesomeness of the one who resided there, and with its gradations in holiness from periphery to center. Second, the temple procedures that promoted and protected Yahweh’s holiness, which were also revealed to the prophet (and presented in the course of what follows) would bring a challenging message. The architectural plan was itself to serve as an inducement for inaugurating and maintaining the procedures.

Daniel Block: The intended effect of the vision on the people is striking: so that they may be humiliated. There is no thought of celebrating the return of Yahweh to their midst, any more than there had been in the establishment of the everlasting covenant in 36:32. On the contrary, the purpose clause in v. 10b, involving the Niphal of *klm*, introduces a homiletical dimension to the vision. In challenging the people to consider their role in the desecration of the divine name through their iniquitous behavior (*’āwônôt*), the word *niklam* shatters assumptions of worthiness and forces the audience to accept responsibility for the failure of divine-human relations. This spiritual map of holiness puts them in their place: they are sinners visited by God, and invited to his presence by grace alone. Even in the new order, they do not earn the right to divine favor. Yahweh returns on his own initiative and for his own purposes.

B. (:12) Culture of Holiness Dominated God’s Kingdom

*“This is the law of the house:
its entire area on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy.
Behold, this is the law of the house.”*

MacArthur: Here is the key to the entire vision of **chaps. 40-48**. These glorious future plans show how much Israel forfeited by their sins. Every detail should produce repentance in Ezekiel’s hearers and readers.

Constable: The overriding lesson of the vision was that holiness was to permeate everything connected with the future of the mountain-top temple.

Ralph Alexander: There was only one basic law for the temple area: all the area on the temple mountain would be holy. The stress would be on God's holiness and his place of rule and residency. Holiness would be the emphasis in the Millennium. All worship structures and regulations were to demonstrate God's holiness. A continual contrast would be observed between the holy and the profane. The Messiah would judge unholiness with the rod of iron (cf. Ps 2:8-9; Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15)!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection between Repentance and Holiness?
- 2) What is the connection between Holiness and the Presence of God?
- 3) What is the connection between Holiness and the Kingdom of God?
- 4) What is the connection between Holiness and the Worship of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lamar Cooper: Verses 6–12 not only contain a vision of the fulfillment of the promise of restoration found in **chaps. 33–37** but also present an outline of the **theological significance** of the temple. Ezekiel's future temple, like Solomon's temple, was to be the **center of worship** for Israel. Its religious significance was presented by Ezekiel in five important theological statements in **vv. 7–12**, which form a conclusion to the section (**40:1–43:12**) and present a summary of the theology of the temple.

First, the temple was the **throne house of God (43:7)**. The ark enshrined in the most holy place of the temple of Solomon was considered to be the throne of God. When the ark of the covenant was placed there, God was understood to be taking possession of his house of worship and affirming his desire to dwell among his people. A cloud filled Solomon's temple as a sign of God's presence and approval (**1 Kgs 8:10**). This cloud was accompanied by the glory of God (**1 Kgs 8:11**). The divine name represented the person of God to the Semitic mind. Therefore the name of God was enshrined in the temple (**1 Kgs 8:17**). Though the Hebrews understood that God was too great to be contained in an earthly temple (**1 Kgs 8:27**), they also knew that in some unique and mystical way God was enthroned in the temple that Solomon built and dedicated to God's glory. As a part of the restoration God promised he would again be the Shepherd of Israel and that he would dwell with them in a unique way (**Ezek 34:30**). The temple of Ezekiel's vision made that promise a reality by looking to a future day when God would personally dwell again with his people (**Rev 7:15–17; 21:3–4**).

Second, the temple was a **sign of God's election of Israel (43:7)**. Yahweh had chosen Israel as the people through whom his redemptive purpose would be realized for all humanity (**Deut 7:6–11; Ezek 34:30**). He chose Jerusalem and Zion (**Pss 68:17; 132:13**) as the place where his temple was built and where worship was centralized. Because the temple was spared in the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 b.c. (**2 Kgs 18:1–19:37**) its deliverance was viewed as a sign of God's special unflinching protection. This deliverance created the belief that Jerusalem and the temple were inviolable and would always be afforded such protection. This was one reason that Ezekiel's preaching ministry was so unpopular. He predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, which the people had always thought to be impossible. The vision of God's return to the temple was a reconfirming sign of God's determination to keep his promise of the election of Israel and selection of Jerusalem, where his name would be enshrined forever.

Third, the temple was a **visible sign of the holiness of God (43:7c)**. Yahweh's name repeatedly had been profaned by Israel's "*detestable practices*" (**43:8**; cf. 5:11; 44:6–7, 13). They had profaned the temple by allowing pagan worship to infiltrate its courts as noted by Ezekiel in **chaps. 8–9** and by their negligence (cf. **22:26**). The temple was the center of society. A corrupt temple was the sad witness of a corrupt nation (**36:23**). Ezekiel saw the millennial temple where God's holiness and name would again be established. He also envisioned a new holiness among the people, suggesting a new order based on the holiness and righteousness of Yahweh, who would reign forever as the monarch of this coming kingdom (**43:8–9**). McConville suggests that **43:12** ("*All the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be most holy*") together with **Zech 14:20–21** be understood to describe "the beginning of a reclaiming of the whole creation as holy to God."

Fourth, the temple was a **visible witness of God's redemptive love**. God promised he would gather Israel from among the nations and return them to their land. After they returned to the land, he promised to cleanse them, give them a new heart, a new spirit, and save them from their uncleanness (**36:21–29**). The reconstructed temple was to be a confirmation of this promise and a witness to its fulfillment (**43:10–12**). The permanent presence of God would bring a vivid awareness of sins forgiven and uncleanness removed. The design of the temple with its graduated sections approaching the holy of holies pointed to the holy God in residence. The perfect law that he endorsed will call his future people Israel to serve him again in humility, faith, and repentance (**43:10–11**). This was, is, and will be the law of the temple (**43:12**). God's determination to restore Israel, cleanse them, and permanently dwell with them was an affirmation of his redemptive love for them and for all humanity.

Fifth, the temple was a **physical sign of the new covenant (43:11–12)**. All the significant covenants of the Old Testament had a visible sign of their confirmation and perpetuity. Adam's covenant was sealed by the sign of the seed of the woman (**Gen 3:15**). Noah's covenant was sealed by the rainbow (**Gen 9:11–13**). Circumcision was the seal and sign of the Abrahamic covenant (**Gen 17:1–14**). The Mosaic covenant was sealed by the observance of the Sabbath and by the tabernacle and its laws (**Exod 24:1–**

18; 25:8–10.). David’s covenant promise of a permanent dynasty for his descendants was sealed by the temple that his son built for God’s glory (2 Sam 7:13–14). Ezekiel and others envisioned a covenant of peace, whose spiritual sign would be the outpouring of the Spirit (36:26–28). The temple, the vision of which unfolded in chaps. 40–42, would be the physical confirmation of the covenant of peace and of the future restoration (Ps 48:1–14, esp. v. 8). The millennial temple will stand as a witness to the immutability of God’s covenant of peace with Israel and with all humanity (43:11–12).

Daniel Block: First, this vision proclaims the ineffable **holiness of God**, which may be communicated only through the medium of analogy. Not only is he enthroned above the heavens, removed from all “gods”; he dwells in absolute splendor in his house, separate from his people.

Second, this vision proclaims the glorious **mercy of God**, who invites sinners into a relationship with himself and provides the means whereby that relationship can be expressed, though without contaminating his own holiness or endangering the life of his devotees. Because he longs for fellowship with humans he comes to dwell among them, though without sacrificing any of his glory. Ezekiel and his audience were privileged to learn this lesson through visionary revelation, but Christians recognize the ultimate expression of the divine desire in Jesus, who is not only the restored temple (**John 2:19–22**) but the physical manifestation of divine glory—full of grace and truth (**John 1:14**).

Third, the vision exposes the **sinfulness of human beings**, even those who pride themselves in being the people of God. Against the backdrop of divine holiness, penitent sinners rightly feel shame because of their rebellious ways. The glorious news of the gospel is not that we are worthy of access to him, but that he receives us in spite of our sin. However, that God invites us as we are does not mean that he accepts our condition as satisfactory. He calls on his people to put away their idolatrous ways and to sanctify his name through righteous living.

David Thompson: In the previous chapters, we have seen an intricately designed Temple. We have seen the buildings and the walls and the gates and the courtyard and pillars and rooms. All of this has a purpose. The point of this is not just to build something impressive; it is to build something that will actually feature the presence of God and the worship of God.

In **Ezekiel 43**, the presence of God and the glory of God return to the Temple of God. It has been a long, long time and when this happens, it will be a monumental moment. But this moment will not be just some random act of God. This moment will feature some very unique things, which we want to point out.

WHEN THE GLORY OF GOD RETURNS TO THE TEMPLE THE INITIAL FOCAL POINT WILL BE ON THE THRONE, THE ALTAR AND THE OFFERINGS.

TEXT: Ezekiel 44:1-31

TITLE: PROTECTION OF THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY –
ROLE OF THE ZADOKITE PRIESTS IN THE MILLENNIAL TEMPLE

BIG IDEA:

**THE PRIVILEGE OF ACCESS TO GOD MUST BE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED
BY DIVINE STANDARDS OF HOLINESS**

INTRODUCTION:

Iain Duguid: Following on the description of the return of the glory of the Lord to fill the central space of the temple, **Ezekiel 44** continues the process of the filling of the various spaces described in **chapters 40–42**. No one is allowed access to the Most Holy Place itself, but who may be permitted to enter into the inner court of this holy God? The question of access to God is, of course, not a new one in Ezekiel’s day. The tabernacle had strict regulations governing access to the different areas, as had Mount Sinai itself before that (**Ex. 24**). What is new about Ezekiel’s vision, however, is that the rules of access are tighter than those of the tabernacle, and the basis for those rules is now bound up in the past obedience of the parties concerned. Those who have proved themselves obedient are rewarded with the closest access to the center, while those who have strayed are allowed only a more limited access. It is the outworking in visionary, graded form of the question and answer of **Psalm 24:3–4**.

Feinberg: The main subject of this chapter is the regulations for the priests of the Lord who serve in the temple. Purity of worship is safeguarded and emphasized throughout, therefore attention is directed toward those having to do with introduction of pollutions in former times. Notice that all worship is carried on facing westward, as in the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon, to forestall any reenactment of the abominations of **chapter 8**. There will be no sun worship.

**I. (:1-3) PROTECTION OF THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY BY THE
CLOSED EAST GATE AND THE PRIVILEGED PRINCE**

A. (:1) Staged Vision of the Closed East Gate

*“Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary,
which faces the east; and it was shut.”*

B. (:2) Secure Residence of the Lord in the Temple

*“And the LORD said to me, ‘This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened,
and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it;
therefore it shall be shut.’”*

Constable: Its sealed condition guaranteed God's promise that He would never depart from the temple again (**37:24-28**).

David Guzik: On the temple mount in Jerusalem today, the eastern gate is completely closed, filled in with stone blocks. Yet this is not the fulfillment of **Ezekiel 44:1-2**; the gate mentioned here belongs to a temple compound yet to come.

Daniel Block: The **closing of the gate** is significant for several reasons. First, as the text itself declares, because Yahweh has passed through this gate it is henceforth barred to all human traffic. The issue is access to the sacred precinct. Prior to Yahweh's arrival, there had apparently been no restrictions on passage through this gate. If the prophet had not passed through it himself, he had observed the guide walking about inside it, taking measurements of the gate's features. Once Yahweh has made his grand entrance into his temple, however, no one else may enter here. Priests must enter the inner court to perform their services, but not even they may follow in Yahweh's steps.

Second, by inference one may conclude that if the closed gate symbolizes the sanctity of the precinct, particularly the central spine, it also declares the permanence of Yahweh's residence within the temple. The closing of the door presents the prophet with a visual affirmation of the promises expressed verbally in **43:7, 9**. Yahweh hereby announces concretely that he would reside among the descendants of Israel forever. The tragedy of **11:23** will never be repeated.

Third, the closed gate presents a veiled polemic against pagan notions. Among the many activities involved in the Babylonian New Year festival was the ritual "opening of the gate" (*pît bâbi*). The sacred gate (*bābu ellu*) apparently remained closed to all human traffic except on the great day of the festival when Marduk would exit and later return in procession through it. The closing of this gate declares on the one hand that Yahweh is not dependent on human arms for residence in the temple. No one, neither well-intentioned worshipers nor foreign conquerors like Nebuchadnezzar, may enter here. As the sovereign over Israel, and by extension over the earth, Yahweh opens gates that no one may close, and closes gates that no one may open. No enemy, either human or divine, will ever crash his sacred residence, remove him from his throne, and drag him off, according to the common treatment of the images of patron deities of conquered lands. Yahweh reigns supreme.

C. (:3) Special Privileges for the Administrative Prince

*"As for the prince, he shall sit in it as prince to eat bread before the LORD;
he shall enter by way of the porch of the gate,
and shall go out by the same way."*

Constable: This prince (Heb. *nasi*) is not Messiah, though some commentators have concluded that he is. This becomes clear later when the writer described him as presenting a sin offering for himself, something that it is impossible to imagine Jesus Christ doing (**45:22**; cf. **46:4, 12**; **Heb. 4:15**; **9:22-28**). Furthermore, this leader will produce natural children, another extremely unlikely action for Messiah (**46:16**). Third, he is not a priest and exercises no priestly rights, whereas Jesus Christ is now and ever will be our great high priest.

David Guzik: As for the prince: Ezekiel wrote of a ruler, a **prince**, who would have special privilege regarding the gate. This ruler is likely David, whose future rule over Israel is mentioned several times in Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 34:23-25** and **37:25**) and elsewhere (**Isaiah 55:3-4**, **Jeremiah 30:8-9**, **Hosea 3:5**). In **Ezekiel 37:25** it is specifically written that David would be **prince** over Israel.

Lamar Cooper: If the prince is not the Messiah, then who is he? Some have identified the prince as David resurrected and serving in the temple during the millennium. More likely the prince is a special representative of the Messiah who will serve as an administrator of the temple, temple area, and sacred district. Such a conclusion is suggested by **Levenson**, who sees the prince as an apolitical messianic leader or a David-like administrator. . .

Gates were more than entrances to cities in the ancient Near East. Archaeological excavations have revealed that these ancient gates were actually buildings with rooms on either side of the entrance. In these rooms the elders of the city sat to rule in civil and judicial matters. The city gates functioned as a town council, chamber of commerce, city court, and welcome wagon all in one. Amos decried the lack of justice in the gate and indicted the city fathers because they were corrupt and could be bribed into perverting justice. Thus the rich were able to secure whatever injustice they could buy, and the poor were disadvantaged (**Amos 5:10, 12, 15; Prov 22:22**).

The prince of Ezekiel's temple is a godly representative of the messianic King. He will sit in the gate, commune with God, and serve as a guarantor of mercy, justice, and righteousness. He will be the perfect spiritual-administrative leader of the new kingdom. The eternal security of believers in the millennium and beyond is guaranteed by God's determination to dwell permanently among his people (**44:1-3**; cf. **John 10:28; Heb 7:24; Jude 4**).

Feinberg: The author believes it is a future scion of David's dynasty who will represent the Messiah governmentally in the affairs of earth. He will have a representative position but not that of the high priest nor of the kings formerly in Israel. His will be an intermediate status between the priests and the people. He will be among the people in their worship seasons (**46:10**) but will not be permitted to enter the inner court, although he can approach nearer than the people (**46:2**). He will be obligated to provide the various festival offerings and the solemnities of Israel (**45:13-22**). He will have allotted to him a special portion of the land and will be forbidden to appropriate any inherited land of the people (**45:7-8; 46:18; 48:21-22**). His modified and intermediate status emphasizes the nature and importance of the theocracy in the millennial day, where high priestly and kingly rule will be combined in the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prince, Messiah's representative in a special sense, will then have the privilege of sitting in the very gate where the Lord Himself will have entered. He will perform certain religious acts in the presence of the Lord, and have a particular ingress and egress to the house of God.

II. (:4-14) PROTECTION OF THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY NOW THAT THE GLORY OF THE LORD HAS RETURNED TO DWELL

A. (:4-5) Sacred Space Created by the Return of the Glory of the Lord

1. (:4) Vision of the Glory of the Lord Filling the Sanctuary

a. Staging of the Vision

“Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house;”

b. Magnificence of the Vision

“and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD;”

c. Response to the Vision

“and I fell on my face.”

2. (:5) Charge to Protect the Sanctity of the Sanctuary

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and concerning all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with all exits of the sanctuary.’”

B. (:6-8) Sacred Space Was Violated in the Past

“And you shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, 7 when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void-- this in addition to all your abominations. 8 And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge of My sanctuary.’”

Wright: It is clear from **vs. 5-8** that in the last days of Solomon’s Temple the priests had allowed anyone, even uncovenanted pagans, to act as priests and temple servants. Either they had been lazy or busy with their own affairs, and had hired others to do their work; or they had taken bribes from pagans who wanted to serve in the Temple, perhaps for the offerings that they were able to take home and resell.

Lamar Cooper: The practices being condemned in **vv. 7-8**—bringing foreigners into the sanctuary (cf. **Neh 13:4-9**), giving unauthorized individuals charge over holy things, and desecrating the temple with unholy foreign worship (**44:7-8**) cannot be identified historically with certainty. Rabbinic tradition says the “*detestable practices*” consisted of the employment of priests who were unqualified to minister before the Lord because of their evil deeds. It also may refer to the unauthorized use of prisoners of war to perform menial tasks in the temple. Perhaps these sins were committed during Ezekiel’s exile in Babylon. They are not directly attributed to the Levites, however,

whose sin is said to have been idolatry and encouraging Israel in idolatry (vv. 10, 12). There is nothing to suggest that their guilt involved serving as priests at the high places.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel identifies two consequences of this encroachment on sacred space: the sanctuary and all things sacred had been desecrated (*hillel*), and Yahweh's covenant is rendered null and void. . . Ezekiel views the temple in the midst of the people as the visible sign of Yahweh's covenant. Israel's failure to respond to his gracious presence with ethical and cultic obedience absolved Yahweh of responsibility toward his covenant partner. To the prophet, the admission of foreigners into the temple struck at the heart of Israel's relationship with God.

C. (:9-14) Sacred Space Must Be Protected in the Future -- Role of the Levites

1. (:9) Prohibition of Foreigners in the Temple

“Thus says the Lord God, ‘No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.’”

Constable: In the millennial temple, foreigners (uncircumcised in heart and flesh, i.e., unbelieving Gentiles) would not be allowed to enter the temple proper, and probably not even the temple precincts (v. 9; cf. **Ezra 4:1-3; Neh. 13:1-9; Acts 21:27-31**).

2. (:10) Punishment of Rebellious Levites for Past Idolatry

“But the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity.”

Feinberg: Because those who had come near to the Lord in His service, yet so forgot their high calling and privilege as to minister for the nation before idols – strengthening the nation in their inclination to apostatize from the Lord – God must manifest His righteous displeasure in forbidding such participants of the Levites from the higher areas of priestly ministry. Theirs will be an inferior phase and place of service. Finally, it is reiterated that they will be entrusted with the general oversight of the service of the sanctuary. The grace of God is to be found throughout the pages of the Old Testament, even if not to the degree manifested once the Messiah came to earth, ministered and died for man's sin.

3. (:11-14) Place of Service for the Levites in the Millennial Temple

a. (:11) Assignment of Future Role for the Levites in the Sanctuary

“Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.”

Lamar Cooper: God has a place of service for everyone. Though the Levites were disqualified from leadership roles, they still had a significant part in the service of the temple. Past moral failure does not exclude one from worship or service in the house of

God. It may, however, preempt one from serving in leadership roles where a moral failure would present a compromised testimony (**44:11–14**).

- b. (:12-13) Accountability for Past Transgressions Limits their Role
“Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn against them,” declares the Lord God, ‘that they shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed.’”

Ralph Alexander: Limitations were placed on Levites’ ministry. They would not be permitted to serve the Lord as priests, nor would they be allowed to come near any of the Lord’s holy things, especially his most holy offerings (v. **13a**). They would serve neither in the inner court nor in the temple itself.

- c. (:14) Administrative Duties Associated with Worship in the Temple
“Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service, and of all that shall be done in it.”

III. (:15-31) PROTECTION OF THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY DELEGATED TO THE ZADOKITE PRIESTHOOD

A. (:15-16) Role of the Zadokites

“But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord God. 16 ‘They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge.’”

Constable: The Levites from Zadok's branch of the priestly family, however, would have special privileges since Zadok and his sons had served the Lord faithfully in the past (cf. **40:46; 1 Sam. 2:35; 2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24-29; 1 Kings 2:26-35; 1 Chron. 6:7-8**). They would be able to approach the Lord Himself and minister to Him by presenting the sacrifices of the people to Him. They had permission to enter the temple proper, to place sacrifices on the "table" (the altar, **40:46**, and or the table in the holy place, **41:22**), and to fulfill what God commanded concerning His worship.

Feinberg: Zadok was the son of Ahitub of the line of Eleazar (**2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 6:7-8**). He was faithful to David during the insurrection of Absalom (**2 Samuel 15:24 ff.**), and anointed Solomon as king after the abortive attempt of Adonijah to seize the throne (**1 Kings 1:32 ff.**).

Leslie Allen: The role of the priests is duly spelled out. They are strikingly demarcated as “*levitical*” and “*Zadokite*,” that is, members of the same tribe as the Levites but descended only from Zadok. While the Levites’ role is tinged with a vehement expression of disgrace, that of the priests is antithetically expressed in terms of honor. Theirs were to be the privileges of the central task of altar duty and of access into the inner court, to which, together with the temple, the term “*sanctuary*” now refers, over against the “*temple area*” of v 14 (cf. **Gese**, Verfassungsentwurf 127).

B. (:17-22) Regulations Regarding Dress and Conduct

1. (:17-19) Linen Garments Required

“And it shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house. 18 Linen turbans shall be on their heads, and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat. 19 And when they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers; then they shall put on other garments that they may not transmit holiness to the people with their garments.”

Constable: The Zadokite priests would need to wear linen, not wool, garments when they served the Lord in the temple sanctuary and the inner gates and court (cf. Exod. 28:42; Lev. 16:4; Rev. 19:8). This included linen turbans and undergarments. No fabric that caused them to sweat would be acceptable because perspiration would make them wet, and dry skin stays cleaner than sweaty skin. Wool may have been an unacceptable material too because it is a product of animals, whereas linen comes from plants.

Leslie Allen: vv. 17-31 -- To the clarification of vv 15–16 has been smoothly appended a potpourri of regulations concerning priests. They are essentially a selection designed to illustrate how cultic holiness was to be translated into the priestly lifestyle. Holiness is their explicit or implicit motif. The priests’ right of access to the inner court (vv 17, 21, 27) made them stewards of a scrupulously guarded holiness.

Ralph Alexander: When the priests left the inner court to go out among the common people, they were required to change their clothes (cf. Lev 6:11), leaving their linen garments in the sacred rooms so designated (42:1-14). In this way they would not improperly make the people holy with their ministering clothes (v. 19).

2. (:20) Moderation in Hair Length

“Also they shall not shave their heads, yet they shall not let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads.”

David Guzik: Their hair was not to be shaved, but their hair was not to be **long**. They were to avoid extremes in either way.

Charles Dyer: Completely shaving one's head or letting one's hair go unkempt were signs of mourning (cf. **Lev. 10:6; 21:5, 10**).

3. (:21) Abstinence from Wine while Ministering

“Nor shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter the inner court.”

4. (:22) Marriage Parameters

“And they shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman but shall take virgins from the offspring of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.”

C. (:23-24) Regulations Regarding the Priorities of Teaching, Judging and Obeying

1. (:23) Teaching

“Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.”

Douglas Stuart: Several of the regulations repeated here from the Pentateuch emphasize the importance of not mingling **the common with the secular**. This does not mean that common, everyday things are bad in themselves. Rather, the usual, typical, routine, regular, common things of life do not point people to God and certainly do not emphasize the fact that special steps must be taken to cleanse people from sin. We do not overcome sin automatically. In this fallen world, we can be sure that human beings will never reach God's standards and will never receive His favor if they just continue doing what is typical and common. The route to God is a special route—and the restrictions on mingling the secular with the common helped the ancient Israelites, if they were willing to learn, to see exactly that.

Lamar Cooper: **Verse 23** breaks into the flow of regulations to interject the reason for these regulations: *“They are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean,”* teaching by **example** as well as **precept**. The priests were to provide the kind of unblemished example that would encourage Israel to worship God and attract unbelieving nations to serve him.

2. (:24a) Judging

“And in a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances.”

3. (:24b) Obeying

“They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts, and sanctify My sabbaths.”

D. (:25-27) Regulations Regarding Defilement with Dead People

1. (:25a) Overall Prohibition

“And they shall not go to a dead person to defile themselves;”

Constable: The Zadokite priests would not be able to have any contact with a dead corpse except in the case of their own immediate families (cf. **Lev. 21:1-3**). People will die during the Millennium (cf. **Isa. 65:20**), but no one will die in the Eternal State (**Rev. 21:4**). After his initial cleansing from the defilement caused by contact with a corpse, the priest would have to wait seven days before resuming his priestly duties (cf. **Num. 19:11-19**). On his first day of service after his cleansing, he would have to go into the inner court and offer a sin offering for himself.

2. (:25b-27) Exception for Close Relatives

a.. (:25b-26a) Contact Permitted

“however, for father, for mother, for son, for daughter, for brother, or for a sister who has not had a husband, they may defile themselves.”

b. (:26b) Cleansing Required Followed by Week of Isolation

“And after he is cleansed, seven days shall elapse for him.”

c. (:27) Continuance of Ministry Requires Sin Offering

“On the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, ’ declares the Lord God.”

E. (:28-31) Regulations Regarding Inheritance and Material Provision

1. (:28) Inheritance

“And it shall be with regard to an inheritance for them, that I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel-- I am their possession.”

2. (:29) Material Provision

“They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs.”

Constable: These priests would receive no other inheritance in the land but the privilege of serving the Lord in the special ways that He permitted. The Lord would designate a portion of the land in which they would live (**45:4; 48:10-11**), but this was not their inheritance. The perquisites (the "perks") of this inheritance would include the privilege of eating parts of the best grains and animals that the people brought to the Lord as sacrifices (cf. **Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:9-12; 1 Tim. 5:18**). Everything that the people would bring as offerings to the Lord would go to them. These were "devoted" (Heb. *herem*) things, things given that the offerer could not redeem (buy back; cf. **Lev. 27:21, 28; Num. 18:14**).

3. (:30) First Fruits

“And the first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of

every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough to cause a blessing to rest on your house.”

4. (:31) Prohibition

“The priests shall not eat any bird or beast that has died a natural death or has been torn to pieces.”

David Guzik: Things that died naturally or were killed in some kind of accident must not be food for the priests. This would violate the principle of not touching dead bodies (**Ezekiel 44:25**), but also be an expression of their trust that God would provide. They will not have to scavenge for food as some animals might.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do we corrupt worship today and violate the sanctity of God’s presence?
- 2) What is the significance of our bodies being the temple of God in this context?
- 3) Are we careful to maintain the distinction between the holy and the profane?
- 4) Given the priesthood of all believers today, how do we view our privileges and responsibilities?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: Controlled access to the temple is once again the predominant theme of the passage, with the goal of teaching God’s people the true nature of holiness and holy worship. It must be remembered that the history of access to the Jerusalem temple from the time that Solomon built it to the time of its destruction in 586 b.c. had not been a positive one. Violations of its holiness were common over the centuries, and Ezekiel had with his own visionary eyes seen the depths to which improper worship could go among the Israelites (**chs. 8 and 9**).

At fault especially were three disparate groups: king, foreigners, and Levites (including most of the priests). These are the three that are mentioned in the present passage:

1. Prince’s restriction (**vv. 1–3**)
2. Foreigners’ restriction (**vv. 4–9**)
3. Levites’ restriction (**vv. 10–14**)

Each of these three groups bore significant responsibility in corrupting the worship practices of the pre-exilic temple. The king, as the head of the nation and supervisor of worship, should have kept the temple pure. Foreigners should never have been admitted, since they were there simply as syncretists and not as true worshipers of the Lord. The Levites by all means should have upheld the restrictions against foreigners of the Mosaic Law (e.g., **Ex. 12:43; Lev. 22:25**), which it was their job to teach to the people (**Num. 18; Deut. 27:14ff.**, etc.). Ezekiel's vision looks to a correction of the long history of abuse. In the eschatological temple, everything will be properly done, and access will once again be restricted to the true people of God.

Iain Duguid: The concern for and protection of the holy. In ancient Israel, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, a sanctuary was not a place to be entered lightly and unthinkingly. Rather, the sanctuary was seen as a danger zone, somewhat comparable to a nuclear power plant. In a nuclear power station, strict precautions have to be taken because of the special dangers of radioactivity, which can cause catastrophic effects if it is handled carelessly. Access to some areas of the site is strictly limited, and special clothing has to be worn for some processes to prevent lethal contact between those operating the plant and the radioactive material, and to prevent radioactivity being transmitted by them to the outside world. In an analogous way, the priests had to take special care in their dress and their conduct to avoid danger to themselves and to prevent dangerous levels of holiness being brought into contact with the general public.

Nowhere is this caution more evident than in Ezekiel's vision. This is hardly surprising, given Ezekiel's own experience of seeing the Jerusalem temple defiled and subsequently destroyed by God's holy wrath. Anyone who personally witnessed the carnage caused by the meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear power station would understandably be concerned to tighten up regulations to guard against its repetition. In precisely the same way, Ezekiel's vision represents a tightening of the "holiness code of practice," a raising of the walls and reinforcing the steel of the containment chamber around the temple. Ezekiel is all too aware of something distant from our contemporary thinking: that it is a fearful thing for sinners to fall into the hands of the all-holy God.

David Thompson: When Jesus Christ reigns on this earth, Temple matters become very sacred and very serious. Everything will be precise. No one is permitted to have access to the Most Holy Place, but there are those who will be permitted to enter into the inner court area. But this will be highly regulated.

There are some who basically say this is all symbolic. It really isn't literal or real. Well if that is true, then the last nine chapters of Ezekiel (**Ezek. 40-48**) are a waste of writing, time and space. Frankly, I don't know how anyone can conclude this isn't real. These are very real predictions with precise details that will exist during the Millennium. What we see here is this:

WHEN JESUS CHRIST REIGNS ON EARTH, WORSHIP AT THE TEMPLE WILL BE PRIESTLY REGULATED AND WILL TAKE ON A WHOLE NEW MEANING.

What we learn from this passage in Ezekiel is that the **rules of access** into this Temple are much more regulated than they ever were into the Tabernacle. Those who proved themselves to be faithful will be rewarded with the closest access to God. Those who strayed will have limited accessibility.

There are six millennial worship facts brought out in this chapter:

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #1 – The east gate will be shut down. **44:1-2**
One of the main themes of this chapter is regulated entrances and exits.

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #2 – The prince will eat bread before the LORD.

44:3

Only the prince will sit inside the east gate to eat in the presence of the Lord. The prince has already been identified as King David (**Ezek. 34:24; 37:24-25**). We know from the last verse in the book of Daniel that Daniel will be raised up to inherit a portion of geography during this very era. But Daniel is not David and in the Millennium, David will play a key role in regard to national Israel. What we learn here is that King David will also be on the scene, right in Jerusalem and right in the Temple area. David will be allowed to eat some of the bread offerings that worshippers are bringing to the Temple. This shows the intimate connection King David will have to God and to the whole theme of worship.

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #3 – Ezekiel sees the glory of God fill the Temple.

44:4-8

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #4 – God will appoint the Levites to take care of His Temple. **44:9-14**

The Levites will have a priestly role to play in the Millennium, but it will be a downgraded role. They will have a secondary role to play and not a primary role to play.

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #5 – God will appoint the priest of Zadok to minister to Him. **44:15-19**

The line of Zadok was one branch of the priestly line that formed a very limited group in the Levites. Once this Temple is completed and once this earthly worship is reestablished, the worship will be vested in the priestly “*sons of Zadok*.” Zadok was appointed chief priest during the days of Solomon’s reign and he faithfully supported Solomon (**I Kings 1:32-35; 2:26-27, 35**). Even though the children of Israel went astray from the true worship of God, the “*sons of Zadok*” remained faithful.

MILLENNIAL WORSHIP FACT #6 – God gives a list of things the priest will do and will not do. **44:20-31**

TEXT: Ezekiel 45:1-25

TITLE: FOCUS ON WORSHIP IN THE NEW TEMPLE IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA

BIG IDEA:

WORSHIP IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA REQUIRES:

- SECURING THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY
- STOPPING THE FORMER PRACTICE OF GREED AND EXPLOITATION BY THE CORRUPT LEADERS IN FAVOR OF FAIR BUSINESS DEALINGS
- SUPPORTING THE PRINCE IN HIS ROLE OF ADMINISTERING THE VARIOUS OFFERINGS
- CELEBRATING THE SPECIAL NATIONAL FEASTS WITH APPROPRIATE OFFERINGS

INTRODUCTION:

Peter Wallace: What is the relationship between **worship** and **justice**? If there is no justice, God does not receive our worship! If our assemblies are not characterized by righteousness – in all our relationships, then they are despicable in the sight of God. . .

I would suggest that each time God says “*thus says the Lord GOD*” there is a coherent claim in each passage. And together these claims demand that justice be expressed in our worship.

1. Justice in the Economics of Worship (45:9-17) --
2. Justice in the Prince’s Offerings for the Feasts of the LORD (45:18-25) --
Verses 18-25 then speak of the particulars of the sacrifices.
3. The Gates, the Prince, and the People (46:1-15) --
46:1-8 then deal with the sacrifices and ritual for the Sabbath and the new moon – the only times when the east gate of the inner court would be open.

Lamar Cooper: Seven sets of regulations were given to the prince and the priests. These regulations are presented in the seven divisions of this section.

- First is a demand for just standards (45:9–12).
- Second are offerings for the prince (45:13–17).
- Third are regulations for the feasts (45:18–25).
- Fourth are regulations for the Sabbath (46:1–8).
- Fifth are general regulations for worship (46:9–15).
- Sixth are regulations concerning the prince and his property (46:16–18).
- Seventh are regulations for cooking (46:19–24).

I. (:1-8) WORSHIP IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA REQUIRES SECURING THE SANCTITY OF THE SANCTUARY – SACRED LAND ALLOTMENT – ISRAEL’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LORD

A. (:1-5) Allotment for the Lord, for the Sanctuary, and for the Priests and Levites

1. (:1) Summary Allotment for the Lord

“And when you shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an allotment to the LORD, a holy portion of the land; the length shall be the length of 25,000 cubits, and the width shall be 10,000. It shall be holy within all its boundary round about.”

Daniel Block: The switch from priestly to princely concerns occurs within vv. 1–8a, with vv. 1–5 dealing with the priestly real estate allotments (*’āḥuzzā*), v. 6 with the whole house of Israel, and vv. 7–8a with the prince. . . The use of the **lot** reflects the conviction that Yahweh owns the land and has authority to distribute it to whomever he pleases.

Ralph Alexander: A specific portion of Israel’s land in the Millennium would be set aside for a sacred area for the priests and the sanctuary. The entire area would be a contribution to the Lord by Israel. That land would not really belong to the priests but to the Lord. In this sense, also, the Lord would continue to be the priests’ inheritance.

2. (:2-3) Allotment for the Sanctuary

“Out of this there shall be for the holy place a square round about five hundred by five hundred cubits, and fifty cubits for its open space round about. 3 And from this area you shall measure a length of 25,000 cubits, and a width of 10,000 cubits; and in it shall be the sanctuary, the most holy place.”

3. (:4-5) Allotment for the Priests and the Levites

a. (:4) For the Priests

“It shall be the holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the LORD, and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary.”

b. (:5) For the Levites

“And an area 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width shall be for the Levites, the ministers of the house, and for their possession cities to dwell in.”

Leslie Allen: What is called “the sacred reservation” was to be divided into two strips, each 25,000 x 10,000 cubits. One was to possess the highest degree of sanctity: it would contain the temple area and also provide habitation for the priests. In the other strip the

Levites were to reside.

Daniel Block: Reflecting the distinctions drawn in **ch. 44**, the second 25,000-by-10,000 cubit strip of land was allocated for the second-rank cult personnel, **the Levites**, who are described professionally as *měšārētē habbayit*, “*ministers of the temple complex.*” In this context only the priests’ portion is referred to by *nahālā*; the land of the Levites (and the people) is designated their *’āhuzzā*. With this distinction, Ezekiel has drawn another literary wedge between the two classes of priests. The prophet anticipates the Levitical tract to be dotted by cities where they would live.

Feinberg: The temple was the heart and focal point of the national life in times past, and it will be in the millennial era as well. Notice the priests’ area will be on the east and west, the Levites’ portion on the north, and the prince’s domain outside that of the priests; all in a sense protecting the sanctuary from profanation.

B. (:6-8) Allotment for the City and for the Prince

1. (:6) For the City

“And you shall give the city possession of an area 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, alongside the allotment of the holy portion; it shall be for the whole house of Israel.”

Daniel Block: These verses move on to the next level of land holdings, referred to enigmatically as *’āhazzat hā ’ir*. This tract is to be 5,000 cubits (about 1.6 mi.) wide and 25,000 cubits (about 8 mi.) long, and is to be situated adjacent to the sacred reserve. It is accessible to the whole house of Israel, perhaps offering dormitory space for worshipers making their annual pilgrimages to the temple. To learn whether this strip was north or south of the sanctuary the reader must await **ch. 48**.

2. (:7) For the Prince

“And the prince shall have land on either side of the holy allotment and the property of the city, adjacent to the holy allotment and the property of the city, on the west side toward the west and on the east side toward the east, and in length comparable to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border.”

3. (:8) Summary

“This shall be his land for a possession in Israel; so My princes shall no longer oppress My people, but they shall give the rest of the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.”

Iain Duguid: The primary purpose of this sacred district is to provide a zone of graded holiness outside the temple, exactly analogous to that inside the temple. The entire temple complex is, from the perspective of the land, a “*Most Holy Place*” (**45:3**). The area immediately around the sanctuary is therefore reserved for the priests, in which they are to build their homes (45:3–4). The strip parallel to the priestly portion and to its north is reserved for the Levites and their cities (45:5), while the half-size strip to its

south is for the city (45:6).⁴ To the east and west of the 25,000 cubit sacred square, the remainder of the sacred strip is to be allocated to the prince (nāšî') as his personal (or rather familial) inheritance. . .

Holiness is thus the key principle underlying the division of the land, as is evident from the fact that the word *qōdeš* and its cognates occur no fewer than eleven times in **Ezek. 45:1–6**. At the center of this Holy Land is the temple, not the city or the king. The old Zion theology, which found its focus in the twin pillars of the election of Jerusalem and David, is now refocused on the central assertion of Yahweh's kingship and rule in the temple.

II. (:9-12) WORSHIP IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA REQUIRES STOPPING THE FORMER PRACTICE OF GREED AND EXPLOITATION BY THE CORRUPT LEADERS IN FAVOR OF FAIR BUSINESS DEALINGS

“Thus says the Lord God,”

A. (:9b) Prohibitions against Injustice

1. Put off Injustice / Put on Justice

*“Enough, you princes of Israel;
put away violence and destruction,
and practice justice and righteousness.”*

2. Stop Exploitation

“‘Stop your expropriations from My people,’ declares the Lord God.”

B. (:10-12) Positive Measures to Ensure Justice

“You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath. 11 The ephah and the bath shall be the same quantity, so that the bath may contain a tenth of a homer, and the ephah a tenth of a homer; their standard shall be according to the homer. 12 And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels shall be your maneh.”

Constable: They should also be fair in their commercial dealings. Their basic dry and liquid measures, "*an ephah*" (about one-half bushel) and "*a bath*" (about six gallons), were to be standard and equal. An ephah should always be a tenth of an homer (five to six bushels), and a bath should always be a tenth of an homer (five to six bushels).

Likewise weights should be the same (consistent, unchanging). One shekel (about two-fifths of an ounce) should (always) equal 20 gerahs (about one-fiftieth of an ounce). Twenty shekels plus 25 shekels plus 15 shekels (60 shekels) should (always) equal one mina (about one and one-quarter pounds).

Lamar Cooper: 45:9–12 -- This section is a rebuke of the priests for their dishonesty in the use of scales, weights, and measures used to weigh offerings brought to the temple. Abuse of these tools of the marketplace was a source of frequent mention in the Old

Testament (**Lev 19:35; Deut 25:13–16; Prov 11:1; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10–12**). Amos preached against insincere worship and dishonest practices (**Amos 8:1–6**). He painted a sordid picture of people who were impatient because of the arrival of the Sabbath that interrupted their dishonest and deceitful business practices perpetrated on the populace. The people of Amos’s day loved dishonest gain more than they loved God. They were selfish and covetous. Their lack of morality in the market reflected their loose attitude toward all standards of righteousness. These dishonest merchants tampered with the scales, placed false bottoms in the measure used in the sale of grain, mixed chaff with the salable wheat, and shaved metal off the coins used in exchange (**Amos 8:5–6**). Concern for honesty applied to the temple precincts as well as the marketplace. In the temple animals were bought and money was exchanged by those who came to worship.

Ezekiel already had soundly rebuked the community leaders for their injustices (**22:1–31**). That he also here rebuked the priests was another reminder of how seriously God views honesty and probity in dealings between individuals. It was a sad testimony to the lack of honesty among the spiritual leaders of Ezekiel’s day and a warning for spiritual leaders in every age (cf. **22:1–22**). Such dealings reveal the sincerity or lack of it that is necessary for acceptable worship. Jesus mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount as a basis for our acceptance before God (**Matt 5:23–24**).

III. (13-17) WORSHIP IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA REQUIRES SUPPORTING THE PRINCE IN HIS ROLE OF ADMINISTERING THE VARIOUS OFFERINGS

A. (:13-16) Charge to the People

1. (:13-15) Responsibility of the People

“This is the offering that you shall offer: a sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat; a sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley; 14 and the prescribed portion of oil (namely, the bath of oil), a tenth of a bath from each kor (which is ten baths or a homer, for ten baths are a homer); 15 and one sheep from each flock of two hundred from the watering places of Israel-- for a grain offering, for a burnt offering, and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them, ’ declares the Lord God.”

Lamar Cooper: The people were responsible to provide for the operation of the temple, its services, and the priests. Tithes and offerings have always been the acceptable means for funding God’s work. Everyone was to participate in this, the only legitimate method for temple support. The sanctuary was never to be supported by merchandizing.

John Taylor: Specific dues are to be paid over by the people of the land to the prince, and he will have the responsibility of providing the offerings and sacrifices at all the festivals.

2. (:16) Purpose of the Offering = Provide for the Prince

“All the people of the land shall give to this offering

for the prince in Israel.”

B. (:17) Charge to the Prince

1. Responsibility of the Prince in Israel

“And it shall be the prince's part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the libations, at the feasts, on the new moons, and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel;”

Leslie Allen: V. 17 serves to introduce the final section, **45:18–46:15**, concerning the rites of offerings to be enacted in the new temple. In the present unit, which deals with annual ceremonies, the first part, vv **18–20**, announces an annual ritual of decontaminating the inner sanctuary area. It is reminiscent of the dedication of the altar in **43:13–17**.

2. Purpose of the Offering = Make Atonement

“he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.”

Iain Duguid: But although the people provide the materials for the regular offerings (**45:15–16**), it is the prince’s responsibility from his own resources to provide the offerings for the special occasions: Sabbaths, New Moons, and annual festivals (**45:17**). In both the regular and the special offerings, the prince has a central role as the representative of the people in worship, presenting the *“sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel”* (**45:17**). This is a great privilege, especially given the central significance of purification and atonement in **chapters 40–48**.

IV. (:18-25) WORSHIP IN THE MILLENNIAL ERA REQUIRES CELEBRATING THE SPECIAL NATIONAL FEASTS WITH APPROPRIATE OFFERINGS

“Thus says the Lord God,”

Douglas Stuart: Ezekiel’s vision does not include provisions for all of the offerings and feasts. If it did, the vision would be much longer, as a perusal of the offering and feast laws in chapter after chapter of the Book of Leviticus makes clear. Instead, we have here a sampling of regulations for offerings and feasts, suggestive rather than exhaustive, intended to give a flavor of the sacrificial calendar obediently kept in the restoration era.

Iain Duguid: Mention of the sacrifices on these special occasions in the ritual calendar leads into a discussion of the ritual calendar itself. Like the vision of the temple itself, Ezekiel’s calendar appears to be a stripped-down, focused edition of what had previously been in force. There is no mention of the Feast of Weeks, the third annual festival, and the remaining two festivals (**Passover** and **Tabernacles**) have become virtually symmetrical festivals of purification, celebrated in the first and seventh months

of the year respectively (45:18–25). Of the two, the Feast of Passover retains more of its distinctive features: It is explicitly named “*the Passover*,” and the seven-day feast during which only unleavened bread is to be eaten and the application of sacrificial blood to the doorposts clearly recall the original festival (45:19–21). Yet its original character as a festival of the Lord’s deliverance from Egypt is now subordinated to a concern for purifying the sanctuary.

A. (:18b-20) New Year’s Day Sin Offerings

1. (:18b) Young Bull to Cleanse the Sanctuary on New Year’s Day

“In the first month, on the first of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary.”

Charles Dyer: The New Year’s day celebration, on Nissan 1 (mid-April), will be to purify the sanctuary (v. 18). If someone sins unintentionally, a second purification will be offered on the seventh day of the month (v. 20). This offering and ceremonial cleansing possibly will replace the Day of Atonement (in the seventh month, Lev. 23:26-32).

2. (:19) Sprinkling of the Blood

“And the priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put it on the door posts of the house, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court.”

3. (:20) Special Provision on the Seventh Day of the Month

“And thus you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who goes astray or is naive; so you shall make atonement for the house.”

Daniel Block: Although Ezekiel retains the label of the ancient rite of Passover, his ordinance calls for a dramatic **transformation of the festival**. Like the original Passover (Exod. 12–13), Ezekiel’s celebration has inaugural significance. Through this celebration the nation of Israel becomes the people of God. Whereas the function of the original Passover sacrifice was apotropaic (to ward off Yahweh), however, Ezekiel’s is **purgative**. Like the rest of this prophet’s Torah, the cult of the new order is preoccupied with **holiness**: maintaining the **sanctity of the temple** (v. 20) and of the **worshiper** (v. 22). Before the rituals can be performed, viz., before the new spiritual relationship between Yahweh and his people can be celebrated, the defilement of the building and the people must be purged. Through the Passover celebration, the temple complex becomes sacred space and the Israelites become a holy people. In this newly constituted theocracy the role of the *nāšī*’ is pivotal. As the patron and guardian of cult, he bears the responsibility for the sanctification of the temple and the nation, a subject that ch. 46 will address in greater detail.

B. (:21-25) Passover/Unleavened Bread and Feast of Tabernacles

1. (:21-24) Passover / Unleavened Bread

a. (:21) Command to Observe the Passover / Unleavened Bread

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall

have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.”

b. (:22) The Sin Offering

“And on that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering.”

c. (:23) The Burnt Offering

“And during the seven days of the feast he shall provide as a burnt offering to the LORD seven bulls and seven rams without blemish on every day of the seven days, and a male goat daily for a sin offering.”

d. (:24) The Grain Offering and the Oil

“And he shall provide as a grain offering an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram, and a hin of oil with an ephah.”

2. (:25) Feast of Tabernacles with Identical Offerings

“In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the oil.”

Iain Duguid: If the Passover feast is still named and recognizable, the festival in the seventh month, which takes place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, has lost all its original distinctiveness. It lacks any name or description, except for the fact that the prince is to provide the same offerings for it as at the Passover (**45:25**). There is apparently no comparable purification ceremony before it, nor is any ceremony recorded that might correspond to the Day of Atonement ceremony associated with this festival in **Leviticus 16**. The primary annual ritual purification of the central sanctuary now takes place at the beginning of the year. But Ezekiel’s special interest in purification remains clear in the prominent place given to the sin offerings in the list of **Ezek. 45:25**. Both festivals thereby come to share the same interest in atonement for sin, which is the recurrent theme of Ezekiel’s cult.

Lamar Cooper: The feast of the seventh month is the **Feast of Tabernacles**. It is described in **Lev 23:33–36** and **Num 29:12–38**. Since it too was a seventh-day feast, the same regulations applied (v. 25). Ezekiel saw these feast days as observances to be used by Israel in their millennial worship to celebrate the redemptive work of the Messiah.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can we be more careful to prevent the profanation of our temples, our bodies, as we seek to worship the Lord today?

2) How corrupt and greedy were the priests throughout Israel’s history if God needed to chastize them here for their injustice and use of false weights and measures?

3) Since the physical land is so important to God, and so many details are given about the allotment of this land to special groups, how can any type of spiritual or allegorical interpretation be maintained?

4) Why are these feasts and offerings continued during the Millennial era?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Contrast Levitical and Millennial Feasts

<u>Levitical</u>	<u>Millennial</u>
1. N/A	1. New Year – Eze 45:18-20
2. Passover – Lv 23:5	2. Passover – Eze 45:21-24
3. Unleavened Bread – Lv 23:6-8	3. Unleavened Bread – Eze 45:21-24
4. Pentecost – Lv 23:9-22	4. N/A
5. Trumpets – Lv 23:23-25	5. N/A
6. Atonement – Lv 23:26-32	6. N/A
7. Booths – Lv 23:33-44	7. Booths – Eze 45:25

Douglas Stuart: Israel was a nation settled on the premise that every family would have some land of its own to farm. God wanted His people to constitute a universally landed nation. The lengthy descriptions of land distribution in **Joshua 12–21**, unexciting reading in themselves, reflect the importance of democratically distributed access to the land. The Promised Land would be less than a Land of Promise if only a few people had opportunity to work land of their own. In other words, fair distribution of the land was a part of Israel’s social justice. In **chapters 47–48** further attention is given to the distribution of the land among all the tribes. Here the focus is on the future city of Jerusalem.

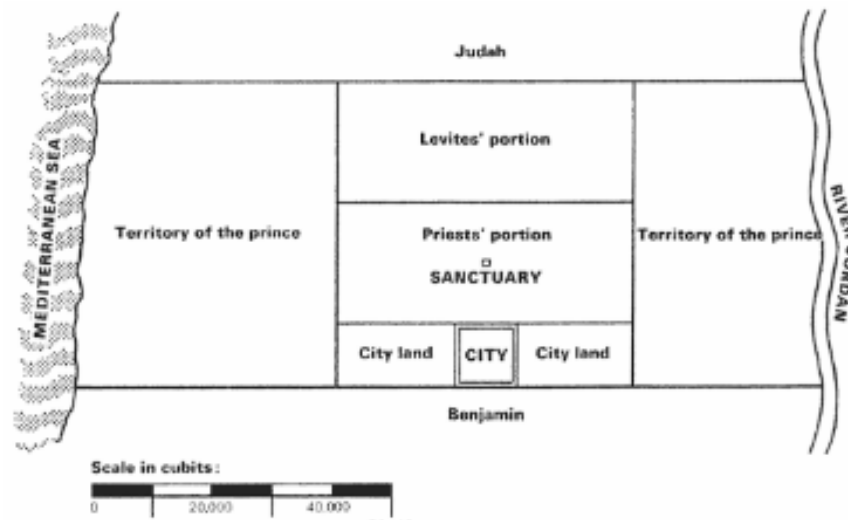
In the passage the subject of land distribution leads naturally to the subject of social justice in general. The passage has two main concerns:

1. The city apportioned—temple, priests, Levites, prince, etc. (vv. 1–8)
2. The need for fair and just laws in general (vv. 9–12)

Imagine a rectangle of land stretching from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the Jordan River on the east, that is, a broad strip of land cutting right through the midsection of the territory of Israel. Imagine that rectangle divided again into thirds. The middle third would then be further divided as follows, according to **verses 1–4**: a special holy section would be at the center of the middle third, set apart for the Lord, inhabited by the priests and containing the square temple plot described in **chapters 40–43**. North of this holy center section, but still within the middle third of the broad rectangle, would be a section of land for the Levites (**v. 5**). Then south of the holy center section, still in the middle third of the broad rectangle, would be land designated for the city of Jerusalem (**v. 6**). . .

Then the prince, the messianic king of the new age foreseen in the vision, would have the remaining territory of the broad rectangle of land—both the eastern third, along the Jordan, and the western third, along the Mediterranean (**vv. 7–8**). With his own land, the prince would not need to gain wealth by imposing high taxes, forced labor, and other oppressive governmental conditions and controls on the rest of the population, as had so frequently been the experience in the past (e.g., **1 Kin. 5:13; 12:4; 21:1–16**; cf. **Deut. 17:14–20**).

John Taylor: Apportionment of the Land



Daniel Block: the sanctity of Yahweh and his temple is the driving force behind this territorial legislation. The central tract, 500 cubits square, is reserved for the sanctuary, the most holy place (**vv. 3–4**). This property is protected from defiling touch by a 50-cubit buffer (*migrāš*, **v. 2**). Outside this open space, the priests who have access to Yahweh have their homes, though they do not possess the land on which their houses are built. The next level is set aside for the Levites, who maintain the temple but are prohibited from officiating in the rituals. Beyond this, one finds the area set apart for citizens coming to worship at the central shrine, and finally the land set aside for the

head of state. Like the sanctuary itself, the properties are deliberately designed and assigned to reflect decreasing spheres of holiness as one moves outward from the core. Accordingly, as one moves inward from the outside, these more or less concentric rectangles reflect increasing restrictions on access, culminating in the sanctuary, where Yahweh alone dwells.

David Thompson: Now one question is why is there a gap between the Passover and the Tabernacles? Three national festivals have been eliminated: Feast of Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement. Two feasts—feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread (**v. 21**) are combined as one feast that points back to Christ's sacrificial death and the feast of Tabernacles points to the New Blessings that Israel has in the Millennium because of His death. Perhaps it is because this is part of the New Covenant and no longer does the new covenant feature six Festivals but three. The Millennium will feature law and order and focus on Jesus Christ.

Robert Lawrence:

3. How can these prophecies be understood literally when the N.T. states that the sacrificial system has been done away with by the death and resurrection of Christ?

6. There are 2 primary interpretations of **Ezekiel 40-48**. One is spiritual and the other is literal.

7. First, some state that these sacrifices are not to be understood literally, but only as symbols or foreshadows of what was fulfilled in Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross. (**Hebrews 1:1-2**)

15. The literal interpretation looks to the actual restoration of the temple and sacrificial system, just as Ezekiel prophesied it would be fulfilled during the millennium. (**Revelation 20**)

16. Ezekiel presents a highly detailed description, with numerous measurements, and historical scenes that do not fit with a spiritual interpretation.

17. If this passage is spiritualized, then on similar grounds most of the O.T. prophecies could be spiritualized away, including the obviously literal ones about the first coming of Christ – which we know from their fulfillment was literal.

18. The same then applies to His second coming.

19. The Scripture distinguishes between Israel and the church. (**1 Corinthians 10:32; Romans 9:3**)

20. Promises unique to Abraham and his literal descendants, such as the Promised Land, are not fulfilled in the church, but remain yet to be fulfilled in the future. (**Genesis 12:1-3; Romans 11; Revelation 20**)

21. The passage of Scripture in **Revelation 21** is not about the millennium - it is about the eternal state that will follow the millennium.

22. Ezekiel's prophecy (**40-48**) will be fulfilled in the millennium. In the eternal state there will be no temple or sacrifices.

23. The sacrifices mentioned by Ezekiel have no atoning significance. They are merely memorial in nature – looking back to the accomplished work of Christ on the cross, the same the Lord's Supper does for believers today.

24. The rest of Ezekiel's prophecy will be fulfilled in a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ. (**Revelation 20:1-7**)

25. If so, then there is no reason not to take the prophecy about the sacrifices as literal too.

26. The O.T. did not foresee how Jew and Gentile would be joined together, but it did envision that the Gentiles would be blessed. (**Ephesians 3:4-6** and **Isaiah 11:10-16**)

27. Ezekiel's prophecies do not exclude this later revelation. (**Colossians 1:26**)

28. The book of Hebrews speaks only of abolishing animal sacrifices as in an atoning sense – not in a memorial sense.

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John Whitcomb: Animal Sacrifices in Israel – Past and Future

Though commanded by God, animal sacrifices in Israel could never remove spiritual guilt from the offerer. The book of Hebrews is very clear about that (**Heb. 10:4, 11**). But it is equally erroneous to say that the sacrifices were mere teaching symbols given by God to prepare the nation for Messiah and His infinite atonement. Such a view is contradicted by precise statements in Exodus and Leviticus. From God's perspective, this was surely a major purpose in the sacrificial system; but it could not have been their exclusive purpose from the perspective of Old Covenant Israelites.

The Scriptures tell us that something really did happen to the Israelite offerer when he came to the right altar with the appropriate sacrifice; and he was expected to know what would happen to him (cf. **Lev. 1:4b**: "*that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf*"). What happened was temporal, finite, external and legal – not eternal, infinite, internal and soteriological. Nevertheless, what happened was personally and immediately significant, not simply symbolic and/or prophetic.

Now what does all of this indicate with regard to animal sacrifices in the millennial temple for Israel under the New Covenant? It indicates that future sacrifices will have nothing to do with eternal salvation, which only comes through the true faith in God. It also indicates that future animal sacrifices will be "efficacious" and "expiatory" only in terms of the strict provision for ceremonial (and thus temporal) forgiveness within the

theocracy of Israel. Such sacrifices, then, will not be primarily memorial (like the bread and the cup in church communion services), any more than sacrifices in the age of the Old Covenant were primarily prospective or prophetic in the understanding of the offerer.

Though the Kingdom Age will begin with only regenerated citizens (cf. **Matt. 25:34**), the vast majority of people born during the Kingdom Age will remain unbelievers (**Rev. 20:7-9**). Thus, millennial nations will increasingly need the protection from the immediate wrath of a holy God that animal sacrifices will provide in accordance with their divine design and function in the Mosaic Law. Ezekiel foresaw, by the Spirit of God, that there will be "*the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel*" (**Ezek. 45:17**). And Jeremiah foresaw that "*the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to prepare sacrifices continually*" (**Jer. 33:18**).

How can vital spiritual instruction be accomplished for citizens of the millennial Kingdom Age through a system of animal sacrifices? If it is theoretically possible (though sadly rare) for the church today to achieve a spiritual, symbolic and pedagogic balance in the use of bread and cup in the Eucharist, then it will be all the more possible for regenerated Israel to attain the divinely intended balance between form and content, lip and heart, hand and soul, within the structures of the New Covenant. It is not only possible, but prophetically certain, that millennial animal sacrifices will be used in a God-honoring way (cf. **Ps. 51:15-19; Heb. 11:4**) by a regenerated, chosen nation before the inauguration of the eternal state when animals will presumably no longer exist.

Before the heavens and the earth flee away from Him who sits upon the great white throne (**Rev. 20:11**), God will provide a final demonstration of the validity of animal sacrifices as an instructional and disciplinary instrument for Israel. The entire world will see the true purpose of this system. Of course, the system never has and never will function on the level of Calvary's cross, where infinite and eternal guilt was dealt with once and for all. But the system did accomplish, under God, some very important pedagogical and disciplinary purposes for Israel under the Old Covenant (**Gal. 4:1-7**). There is good reason to believe that it will yet again, and far more successfully from a pedagogical standpoint, function on the level of purely temporal "cleansing" and forgiveness (cf. **Heb. 9:13**) within the strict limits of the national theocracy of Israel during the 1,000 years of Christ's reign upon the earth in accordance with the terms of the New Covenant.

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TEXT: Ezekiel 46:1-24

TITLE: SPECIFIC REGULATIONS REGARDING ACCESS VIA TEMPLE GATES,
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCE AND THE USE OF TEMPLE KITCHENS

BIG IDEA:

THE HOLINESS OF GOD, THE SANCTITY OF WORSHIP AND THE PROTECTION OF LAND OWNERSHIP GOVERNED BY SPECIFIC REGULATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Feinberg: The emphasis here is unmistakably on the Sabbath and the new moon, which alone should indicate the Jewish setting of the passage. . . the Sabbath of the Old Testament will be reinstated for a restored and consecrated Israel. . . Notice here that legalizers and seventh-day observance advocates always fail to realize that the Sabbath consisted in more than just abstinence from labor on the seventh day of the week, important as that was for the commandment, but included also specific sacrifices to be offered by an authorized priest in a designated place of God's choosing.

Note how the spotlight is centered on the glory and sanctity of the Sabbath, for on that day of the week alone the gate of the inner court will be opened. It is by this gate that the prince will enter into the sanctuary to preside as the priests prepare the designated offerings which the prince himself will offer before the Lord.

Ralph Alexander: It may seem incongruous that the Sabbath, the sign of the Mosaic covenant (cf. **Exod 31:13, 16-17**), would be observed in the millennial kingdom when it is not observed during the church age under the new covenant. Is this a retrogression in God's purposes? Not if it is understood that all God's covenants would be fulfilled and operating in the messianic kingdom (cf. **37:15-28**). The Mosaic covenant would find its fruition in the messianic kingdom in that Israel finally would be God's people and he would be their God in a relationship that was to exist under the Mosaic covenant. That the pictorial sacrifices had their reality in the work of Christ does not nullify the relationship of Mosaic covenant that is a holy one. The Mosaic covenant showed Israel how to live a holy life in a relationship with God, and that type of life is still valid under the new covenant (cf. **Jer 31:33-34; Rom 8:4**). Therefore, for the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant to be fulfilled side by side is not incongruous. Ezekiel, however, was looking at the situation only from his perspective under the Mosaic covenant.

I. (:1-15) THE TEMPLE GATE REGULATIONS AND PRESCRIBED OFFERINGS -- FOR DAILY, WEEKLY, MONTHLY, ANNUAL WORSHIP OBSERVANCES

"Thus says the Lord God,"

Leslie Allen: On the sabbath and new moon day the access of the head of state (vv 1–2) and the people (v 3) is regulated before the offerings of those days are discussed (vv 4–7). Then at the public services the access of people (v 9) and head of state (v 10) is again broached before their offerings are mentioned (v 11).

A. (:1b-8) Worship During Sabbath and New Moon Observances

1. (:1b-2) For the Prince

a. (:1b) Access to Worship

1) Gate Closed

“The gate of the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days;”

2) Gate Opened

“but it shall be opened on the sabbath day, and opened on the day of the new moon.”

Constable: Observance of the **Sabbath day** in the future, as was true in Israel's past, will remind the Israelites of God's creation of the cosmos, His creation of their nation, and His provision of rest (in the Messiah). The **new moon** (new month) celebrations may be periodic reminders of God's providential control of nature and His faithful provision of His people's needs, as they were in the past.

Lamar Cooper: Sabbath observance in the millennial temple allowed the fulfillment of the typology of the Mosaic covenant foreshadowing Jesus the Messiah, our Sabbath rest.

b. (:2a) Performance of Worship

1) Entrance of the Prince

“And the prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate.”

Lamar Cooper: The inner east gate is the place from which the prince will carry out his ministry on Sabbath and feast days (v. 2). He will not enter the inner court or take part in the sacrifices because he was not a priest. He remained inside the east gate of the inner court to perform his duties while the people were just outside the gate in the outer court (v. 3). This placed the prince in a mediatorial role between the priests of the inner court and the people of the outer court.

Daniel Block: Ezekiel prescribes four specific actions for the prince.

- First, the prince shall enter the gate structure from the outer court through the vestibule (*'ûlām*).
- Second, the prince is to stand by the post of the gate, that is, the jamb between the vestibule and the series of guard recesses, since the inner gates were mirror images of the outer. This vantage point enables him, as guardian and patron of the cult, to observe the cultic activity of the priests. But the prince himself is not

- to move any closer, let alone step out onto this most sacred space of the inner court.
- Third, while the priests present his whole burnt offerings and peace offerings to Yahweh on the altar in the inner court, the prince shall prostrate himself on the threshold of the gate, an appropriate response of a mortal in the presence of deity.
- Fourth, the prince is to leave the gate structure. The duration of his stay in the gate is unspecified, but **v. 2b** suggests that his time is limited, since after he has left, the gate must remain open the rest of the day.

2) Offerings by the Priests

“Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings,”

3) Completion of Worship by the Prince and His Exit

“and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out;”

c. (:2b) Shutting of the Gate

“but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.”

Constable: On these special days, the prince would lead the people in worship. He would enter the inner east gate complex and stand in its vestibule. Evidently he will not be able to enter the inner court because he will not be a priest (cf. **Num. 28:3-8**), but he will be able to view the inner court and the altar from the doorway at the western end of the gate complex. The vestibule would be the site of his worship as he presented his burnt and peace offerings (symbolizing his personal dedication and his gratitude for God's fellowship respectively). After he finished worshipping, he would depart from that gate into the outer court, but the gate would remain open until the evening.

2. (:3) For the People

“The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons.”

Daniel Block: On these Sabbaths and new moon festivals the citizens of the restored community of faith shall gather and pay homage to Yahweh by prostrating themselves at the entrance of the inner gate.

3. (:4-7) Sabbath Day and New Moon Offerings

a. (:4-5) Sabbath Day Offering

“And the burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the LORD on the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish; 5 and the grain offering shall be an ephah with the ram, and the grain offering with the lambs as much as he is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah.”

Constable: These grain and oil offerings evidently symbolize the Lord's rich provisions for His people.

David Thompson: This regulation is clearly different than the Mosaic regulation, which in itself proves this is a very unique and different time period. Under the Mosaic law the Sabbath day burnt offering consisted of two male unblemished lambs and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil (**Numbers 28:9-10**). Obviously during the millennium there is a change in the system.

b. (:6-7) New Moon Offering

“And on the day of the new moon he shall offer a young bull without blemish, also six lambs and a ram, which shall be without blemish. 7 And he shall provide a grain offering, an ephah with the bull, and an ephah with the ram, and with the lambs as much as he is able, and a hin of oil with an ephah.”

Leon King: the Hebrews used a lunar calendar in which each month had 28 days. The four main Moon phases in order are the New Moon, First Quarter Moon, Full Moon and Last Quarter Moon.

4. (:8) Access by the Prince

“And when the prince enters, he shall go in by way of the porch of the gate and go out by the same way.”

Leslie Allen: Closure and limited access to the head of state are predicated of both the outer (**44:1-3**) and inner east gates. Since the outer east gate could be approached via the other outer gates, it was kept permanently closed. However, in the case of the inner east gate, it had to be opened, if the head of state was to have access, since there was no other point of entry, the inner court being off limits to all but priests (cf. v 8). The closure of both gates was to commemorate Yahweh's entry through them when he came to take up permanent residence in the new temple. The head of state had the privilege of passing through the porch at the outer end of the gatehouse (cf. **40:31, 34**) and standing at the inner end, at the point to which **45:19b** refers, in order to witness the priests' sacrificing his offerings and to perform there a gesture of obeisance, kneeling with head pressed to the ground. Leaving the gate open allowed the people to look from the other side of the gateway in the outer court, as they chose to come during the holiday to perform their act of worship

B. (:9-12) Worship During the Annual Feasts

1. (:9-10) Traffic Flow

a. (:9) For the People

“But when the people of the land come before the LORD at the appointed feasts, he who enters by way of the north gate to worship shall go out by way of the south gate. And he who enters by way of the south gate shall go out by way of the north gate. No

one shall return by way of the gate by which he entered but shall go straight out.”

Lamar Cooper: in order to insure an orderly flow of people on worship days, the north gate is designated as the gate of entry (vv. 9–10). The prince accompanied the worshipers who entered the outer court by the north gate. The south gate is designated as the gate of exit. No one could leave by the gate of entry.

Derek Thomas: It may seem strange that 46:8–10 includes what are in effect traffic directions! The explanation is not difficult. The estimated numbers in Jerusalem at feast days in the time of Christ grew from 50,000 to 200,000. In this vision, the numbers are even greater. Anyone who has been in a crowd knows the need for good crowd control.

b. (:10) For the Prince

“And when they go in, the prince shall go in among them; and when they go out, he shall go out.”

Constable: The prince should accompany the people on those occasions entering and exiting the court with them. He would worship God as one of the people then, not as someone special.

Douglas Stuart: Verses 8–10 are in effect traffic directions. The crowds anticipated for the temple on holy days would be enormous. Ezekiel’s audience could remember the crowds in the temple at worship from their own days in Jerusalem. So a traffic pattern was needed. One stream of worshipers would enter via the northern gate and exit via the southern gate, and the other stream would go the other way. The lines would pass each other neatly in the outer courtyard. This eliminated the potential confusion of people turning around to go out the way they came in and kept lines moving in and out of worship. The king is one of the crowd (v. 10), a humble worshiper under these conditions even though he has a slightly special entering and exiting route (v. 8).

2. (:11-12) Offerings and Access for the Prince

a. (:11) Grain Offering with Oil

“And at the festivals and the appointed feasts the grain offering shall be an ephah with a bull and an ephah with a ram, and with the lambs as much as one is able to give, and a hin of oil with an ephah.”

b. (:12) Freewill Offering (Burnt or Peace Offering) by the Prince

“And when the prince provides a freewill offering, a burnt offering, or peace offerings as a freewill offering to the LORD, the gate facing east shall be opened for him. And he shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings as he does on the sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and the gate shall be shut after he goes out.”

Ralph Alexander: If the prince desired to make a **freewill offering** of a burnt offering of consecration or a fellowship offering of thanksgiving, the east gate was to be opened specially for this act of worship and then closed when he finished. This was the only exception to that gate remaining closed throughout the normal six days (v. 12). The prince was to present his freewill offerings in the same manner as he made offerings on the Sabbath.

C. (:13-15) Daily Burnt and Grain Offerings

1. (:13) Burnt Offering of a Lamb

“And you shall provide a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to the LORD daily; morning by morning you shall provide it.”

2. (:14) Grain Offering with Oil

“Also you shall provide a grain offering with it morning by morning, a sixth of an ephah, and a third of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour, a grain offering to the LORD continually by a perpetual ordinance.”

3. (:15) Summary

“Thus they shall provide the lamb, the grain offering, and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering.”

II. (:16-18) THE PRINCE’S GIFTS – MANAGEMENT OF ROYAL LANDS

“Thus says the Lord God,”

Daniel Block: This fragment represents a relatively independent unit, with its own opening citation formula in v. 16. It divides into two parts, the first (vv. 16–17) being cast in the form of a bifurcated casuistic regulation, and the second (v. 18) consisting of a prohibition, followed by a positive announcement of proper procedure.

A. (:16b-17) Two Different Land Gift Situations for the Prince

1. (:16b) Prince Gives to His Son

“If the prince gives a gift out of his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance.”

2. (:17) Prince Gives to His Servant

“But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance shall be only his sons'; it shall belong to them.”

Constable: The prince could give a gift to any of his sons out of his own inheritance from the Lord. This gift was theirs forever. However, if he gave such a gift to one of his servants, it would revert back to the prince on the year of liberty. This year would evidently be similar to the year of jubilee (every fiftieth year) under the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Lev. 25:10; 27:24). Its purpose, in the past and in the future, is to remind

God's people that He owns everything and that they only occupy and manage what He has entrusted to them.

B. (:18) Integrity of Land Ownership

1. Don't Dispossess the People

“And the prince shall not take from the people's inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession;”

2. Limit Gifts to Royal Owned Land

“he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people shall not be scattered, anyone from his possession.”

Constable: The prince was not to give gifts from the inheritances of the other people of the land but only from his own inheritance. Israel's leaders and people in the past had appropriated other people's property as their own (cf. **45:8-9; 2 Sam. 24:24; 1 Kings 21:19; Mic. 2:1-2**). This ordinance would also result in the prince's sons remaining in his allotment of land rather than being scattered among the other tribal allotments.

Lamar Cooper: The regulations concerning property and ownership were designed to discourage covetousness and encourage recognition of God's ownership of all things (**46:16-18**).

Douglas Stuart: For social justice to prevail, it is not enough to distribute the land once. The land must continue to be distributed fairly in all succeeding generations. Threatening this fairness was the possibility that wealthy individuals could buy up land not belonging to their own families, or that people might will their land to persons not in their families. This could eventually result in family members being forced off their ancestral lands. Thus the Pentateuchal laws insisted that all lands stay within the families to which they were originally distributed by lot, no matter what. This practice was sometimes followed (as in **Ruth 4**) but was most often ignored in pre-exilic Israel, causing great social injustice (cf. **Is. 5:8**). In the new age, even the king would have to abide by the regulations to keep his land within his family. Gifts of land to others would revert to the royal family at each year of jubilee (*“the year of liberty,”* v. 17), in accordance with **Leviticus 25:8-55**.

The goal of these regulations is order and justice—order in worship so that things are done “decently and in order” and justice in the dispersion of land belonging to the king so that royal land never leaves the king's family.

Feinberg: The prince will be married and have sons – a truth that makes it impossible for him to be the Messiah – and it is natural that he will give them gifts, even of land. Whatever the prince gives them will remain theirs as an inheritance. A gift by the prince to any of his servants will be in another category, for it will be liable to revert to its original owner in the year of jubilee. But there is a prohibition now stated against violent seizure by the prince of the land of any of the people, for he is not to give gifts of land by confiscating the property and patrimony of others. He will have a portion of

his own which he can distribute to his sons, but his family is not to be enriched through the impoverishment of others. This is in keeping with the strict righteousness of the age of justice.

III. (:19-24) THE TEMPLE KITCHENS

Daniel Block: the present unit exhibits the common Ezekielian practice of “halving” (vv. 19–20, 21–24), each segment being introduced by its own **guidance formula**.

These two parts belong together and must be interpreted in the light of each other.

They have essentially the same shape, and both involve an area of the temple complex relating to the cooking of sacrificial meals. Both subdivide into two parts, an **identification of the location** of the structures described, followed by an **explanation of their function**.

A. (:19-20) Kitchen Area Associated with the Priests’ Chambers

1. (:19) Location Identified

“Then he brought me through the entrance, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers for the priests, which faced north; and behold, there was a place at the extreme rear toward the west.”

Daniel Block: Although only the northern kitchen is reported, the symmetry of the overall structure suggests that a counterpart also existed on the **south side**.

2. (:20) Function Described

“And he said to me, ‘This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the grain offering, in order that they may not bring them out into the outer court to transmit holiness to the people.’”

Derek Thomas: Following a description of the sacrifices, Ezekiel now explains how and where they are to be offered, and in some cases, cooked. Bread was to be baked in ovens to be found at the western extremity of the north row of priests’ chambers in the inner court (46:19–20). Worship, in the Old Testament, and in Ezekiel’s visionary new kingdom, includes the fellowship of eating food with one another. After the Levites had cooked the offering, the worshippers gathered in family groups to eat.

Feinberg: The purpose of the regulations will be to inculcate a sense of the sanctity of the Lord’s service, guarding against that familiarity which so often in the past led to gross defilements of the Lord’s sanctuary. Special boiling places for the sacrifices, a practical provision indeed, will be appointed in order to avoid the ceremonial sanctification of the people, which would interrupt their ordinary course of life.

Galen Doughty: The man-angel who has been guiding Ezekiel through the new temple shows him the rooms on the western end of the temple that belong to the priests. These are the rooms where the priests prepare the sacrifices and cook the meat and bake the

grain from the grain offerings. The priests cook the sacrifices here in order to avoid bringing them into the outer court and consecrating the people. Holiness is seen here as a good infection but it is to be limited to the inner courts of the temple and the priests lest the people who worship in the outer courts be made holy and accidentally desecrate the temple or the holiness of the Lord.

B. (:21-24) Kitchen Areas in the Corners of the Outer Court for the People's Sacrifices

1. (:21-23) Location Identified

“Then he brought me out into the outer court and led me across to the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court there was a small court. 22 In the four corners of the court there were enclosed courts, forty cubits long and thirty wide; these four in the corners were the same size. 23 And there was a row of masonry round about in them, around the four of them, and boiling places were made under the rows round about.”

2. (:24) Function Described

“Then he said to me, ‘These are the boiling places where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people.’”

Daniel Block: the Lord's business must be conducted in a manner respectful of his holiness. In Ezekiel's blueprint for the future every detail is determined by Yahweh. Even seemingly inconsequential matters like the temple kitchens and the activities conducted therein are designed to reflect the gradations of holiness that govern the shape of the entire complex. The priests' unique responsibilities in the service of Yahweh were accompanied by special privileges, like eating portions of the reparation, purification, and grain offerings. While lay participation in these meals was prohibited to prevent the contagion of holiness, the special kitchens in the outer court offered them the privilege of eating in the courts of Yahweh.

John Taylor: The prophet is first shown the kitchen at the western extremity of the north row of priests' chambers in the inner court, and we may safely assume that there was a similar place on the south side of the court as well. There the priests were to boil the flesh of the guilt- and sin-offerings and to bake the flour of the cereal-offering, taking great care not to carry any of these into the outer court for fear that they may sanctify (av; better, communicate holiness to, rsv) the people (**20**). The prophet then sees the four kitchen areas in the four corners of the outer court of the temple where the Levites (the ministers of the house, **24**) boil the people's sacrifices for them. So the temple was a place for sacrificing, cooking and eating, as well as for prayer and so-called 'spiritual' activities.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you surprised to see the revival of the practice of the **Sabbath** with its corresponding sacrifices during the millennial era? What is the significance of the Sabbath in this church age?
- 2) Why are some of the **prescribed sacrifices** different during the millennial era than during OT times? Why are some feasts omitted in the millennial era?
- 3) Why is God so concerned with the **inheritance** of the land by specific families and so protective of families getting permanently dispossessed of their inheritance?
- 4) Why has our preaching and teaching given so little attention to the role of this special **prince** in the millennial era (who clearly is not the Messiah)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Block: But this ordinance makes its own contribution to Ezekiel's theological vision. On the one hand, it reaffirms that Yahweh will not become common or familiar even with his people. Enthroned in his glory, he resides inside his temple, where only those whom he authorizes may enter. Neither people nor prince may view him directly; they may not even enter the inner court. The degrees of holiness inherent in sacred space are reflected in concentric walls of accessibility. But the glorious fact remains: in his grace Yahweh not only invites the worship of mortals; he reveals to them activities that guarantee acceptance with him and appoints officials whom he will receive on their behalf. The alienation of the distant past is over. Ezekiel's vision of daily, weekly, and monthly rituals proclaims the continuing grace of a deity at peace with his people.

Vawter and Hoppe: This feature of Israelite worship shows how concretely the people expressed their belief that God has made provision for the most basic of bodily needs: the need for food. It also symbolizes the union between God and Israel. The worship that went on in the temple was not confined to word and gesture. It included the eating and the experience of fellowship that comes from sharing a meal.

Matthew Henry: It is far from being a prince's honor to increase the wealth of his family and crown, by encroaching upon the rights and properties of his subjects; nor will he himself be a gainer by it at last, for he will be but a poor prince, when the people are *scattered every man from his possession*, when they quit their native country, being forced out of it by oppression, choosing rather to live among strangers that are free people, and where what they have they can call their own, be it ever so little. It is the interest of princes to rule in the hearts of their subjects, and then all they have is, in the best manner, at their service. It is better for themselves to gain their affections by protecting their rights, than to gain their estates by invading them.

TEXT: Ezekiel 47:1-12

TITLE: RIVER OF LIFE

BIG IDEA:

THE LIFE-GIVING WATER FLOWING FROM THE TEMPLE BECOMES A POWERFUL RIVER

INTRODUCTION:

Lamar Cooper: The view taken here is that **Ezekiel 47:1–48:35** is neither wholly symbolic nor wholly literal. The best approach, considering the apocalyptic character of the text, is to regard the chapters as both a literal description with accurate details but also as highly symbolic with deeper truths. This approach is adopted by **Davidson** and will be the one followed in the discussion of **47:1–12**.

Wiersbe: Jerusalem is the only great city of the ancient world that wasn't located on a river, and in the east, a dependable water supply is essential for life and for defense. During the Kingdom Age, Jerusalem shall have a river such as no other nation ever had.

Daniel Block: the renewal of God's people is from start to finish a miraculous work of divine grace. The revitalization of the landscape is not achieved through human ingenuity, technology, or effort; it is the result of Yahweh's lifting of the curse and replacing it with his blessing. This river of life does not originate in the palace of the earthly king, but in the house of God. Wherever it flows, it produces life, even in the Dead Sea, the ultimate symbol of the curse (cf. **Gen. 18**). At the same time, the manner in which God produces life out of death is most remarkable. From small and often imperceptible beginnings and with little promise, God's grace transforms a hostile world. Such is the mystery of divine power, miraculously bringing life out of death.

Brian Bell: Three part outline:

- The source
- The course
- The force of these waters

I. (:1-2) THE DIVINE SOURCE OF THE RIVER = THE TEMPLE

A. (:1) Flowing from under the Temple Porch

*“Then he brought me back to the door of the house;
and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house
toward the east, for the house faced east.*

*And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house,
from south of the altar.”*

David Guzik: Significantly, the river does not come from a king's palace or a government building. It doesn't come from a marketplace, a place of business, or an athletic arena. It comes from God's house.

B. (:2) Flowing from under the Eastern Gate

“And he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.”

Constable: Just south of the east gate he saw water trickling to the east, a continuation of the stream that he had observed inside the temple enclosure.

Leslie Allen: This visionary experience portrays and proclaims **the temple** as source of blessing for the land. . . Ezekiel evidently stands at the entrance to the nave of the temple. . . A trickle of water ran down the steps in the direction of the east gate. However, since the altar stood in the way of a direct flow, the water first flowed down the right side of the steps and along the south sidewall of the temple before crossing the inner court in a course to the south of the altar. That course was apparently maintained across the outer court and beyond the outer east gate, as the prophet discovered after a necessary detour through the north gate(s), since the east gates were closed. There is an implicit reminder that this was the route that Yahweh had traveled in his return to the temple (43:1–5). The stream, virtually retracing his path, was **flowing from the very presence of God**.

Iain Duguid: The river flowing from Ezekiel's temple follows the sacred route eastward from the inner court, out through the (closed!) east gate of the outer court (**Ezek. 47:2**). Because Ezekiel cannot follow it through there, he is brought round by the north gate and sees it trickling out of the south side of the gate. In comparison with the abundant streams of the traditional picture, the renewed temple provides at first a minimal flow. Yet the stream that starts out so pitifully small miraculously becomes progressively larger the further he journeys along it.

Lamar Cooper: The water that flowed from the threshold proceeded from the sanctuary on the east side and then flowed southeasterly past the altar on the south side, then to the south side of the eastern gate (v. 2). From that point it became a stream that flowed into the Kidron Valley at first turning south, then continuing past the Hinnom Valley, and then taking a turn southeast. . .

God alone is the Source of life and provides the Word of life that is the life-giving water that quenches the thirst of the human heart for life, forgiveness, and salvation (47:1–2; John 4:14; Eph 5:26; Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17).

II. (:3-5) THE RAPIDLY INCREASING DEPTH OF THE RIVER = UNFORDABLE RIVER – SUFFICIENCY OF THE RIVER

A. (:3) Water Up to the Ankles

“When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water reaching the ankles.”

B. (:4a) Water Up to the Knees

“Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the knees.”

C. (:4b) Water Up to the Loins

“Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water reaching the loins.”

David Guzik: This rapid increase in depth – from a small trickle of a stream to ankle depth, to knee depth, to waist depth, all in the course of about a mile (or 1.5 kilometers) – is *miraculous*. We read nothing of other streams leading into this; it is a miraculous and abundant provision.

D. (:5) Water So Deep = Unfordable

“Again he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be forded.”

Constable: This description suggests that some major topographical changes will have occurred east of present-day Jerusalem by this time. Other revelation supports this conclusion (cf. **34:26- 30; 36:8-12, 30-36; 37:25-28; 45:1-8; 48:8-14; Joel 3:18; Zech. 13:1; 14:4-8**). The water will follow the contours of the altered terrain, not the past or present landscape. Zechariah recorded that the water flowing from Jerusalem will divide with half of it going west to the Mediterranean Sea and half east to the Dead Sea (**Zech. 14:8**). Ezekiel described only the branch that flowed east.

Feinberg: Why was it necessary to bring Ezekiel through the waters in vision? The purpose was to reveal to him both the size and depth of the river. The trickle (the literal of ‘*ran out*’ of v. 2 is ‘*trickled forth*’) had become a veritable river during the measuring activity of the man in the vision.

Leslie Allen: vv. 3-6a -- In just over a mile the stream increases to a deep river. Normally one would envisage tributaries and drainage as the cause of such a phenomenon. Here, however, a miracle is at work, somewhat like the unspent jar of meal and unfailing cruse of oil in **2 Kgs 8:1-6**, or like the growth of the kingdom of God from mustard seed to spreading tree (**Mark 4:31-32**; cf. **Dan 4:8[11]**) or like the stone that became a great mountain (**Dan 2:35**). Still more surprises are in store. As the question implies, Ezekiel has seen nothing yet!

Lamar Cooper: The river is like the blood of the Messiah from the cross of Calvary that began as a trickle (**John 19:34**). Finally, the blood, like the river, became a flood of redemption for all people (**Rev 1:5**). So the flow from Calvary became a fountain of redemption for all people including Israel (see **Zech 13:1-6; Rev 1:5-6**). Just so, the

water of life that the prophet saw coming from the threshold came forth gently, then began to flow, and finally became a mighty river of life healing all in its wake. When God's Word is received, he transforms death into life and produces life in abundance springing up as life-giving water within every person. This abundant sustenance was made available to all people through Jesus Christ (**John 4; 10:10**).

III. (:6-12) THE LIFE-GIVING POWER OF THE RIVER = TRANSFORMING DESOLATION INTO PARADISE – STRENGTH OF THE RIVER

A. (:6-7) Giving Life to Many Trees

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen this?’ Then he brought me back to the bank of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other.”

B. (8-:11) Giving Life to Many Fish

“Then he said to me, ‘These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters of the sea become fresh. 9 And it will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there, and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. 10 And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.’”

Constable: These millennial waters will purify the waters of the Dead Sea and make it a live sea. The Dead Sea presently contains 24-26 percent minerals, compared with normal seawater that contains 4-6 percent. This is the reason no fish or other aquatic life live in it. But the water of this future river will give life to all of the creatures that will gather in swarms along its banks, as well as to the fish that will swim in it.

Lamar Cooper: The sufficiency of the water of life from the throne of God is evidenced by the fact that no additional elements were needed to produce life, fruit, transformation, or healing. With the life-giving water from God the barren becomes fruitful, the dry becomes nourished, the empty becomes filled, the bitter becomes sweet, the unhealthy is healed, and the dead is made alive (**vv. 6-8; Luke 7:21-22**).

Charles Dyer: The Dead Sea today is a symbol of barren desolation. This future change is a visible reminder that God can turn death to life. Our God specializes in changing the unchangeable!

Peter Pett: we must recognise its **intention**. It was **to bring life** wherever it went (**Ezekiel 47:9**). To the ancients the primary power of water was to give life. Those who lived in Canaan knew what it was to watch all nature die in a waterless and very hot summer. And then the rains came, and almost immediately, like magic, the bushes came

to life, greenery sprang from the ground, and the world came alive again. That was the life-giving power of water. In Babylonia Israel had also witnessed the power of the great rivers. Along their banks life always flourished, and water was taken from them by irrigation to bring life to drier areas. The wilderness blossomed like a rose. They knew that the coveted Garden of Eden had been fruitful because of the great river flowing through it that became four rivers and watered the world. So that was their dream for their everlasting homeland, a great and everflowing river that would bring life everywhere, and especially in men's hearts.

Feinberg: En-gedi is located at about the middle of the west shore of the Dead Sea, whereas En-eglaim has not been definitely identified. Some think it is Ein Feshkha near which are the caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thus En-gedi and En-eglaim may loosely represent the two extremities of the Dead Sea. The sea in its entire length will be completely changed. . .

Even the Talmud pointed out that salt from the Dead Sea was preferred above all other kinds because it was reputed to hasten the burning of the sacrifices, as well as to minimize the unpleasant odors of burning flesh.

Constable: The entire Dead Sea region would not become fresh, however; the swamps and marshes would remain saline, perhaps to provide salt and or other minerals for the people.

Daniel Block: The preservation of some pockets of saltiness is intentional, recognizing the economic benefit of the minerals found in and around the Dead Sea. *Salt (melah)* is not only a valuable seasoning and preserving agent; the word functions generically for a wide range of chemicals extracted from the sea.

C. (:12) Giving Life to All Kinds of Trees for Food

“And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.”

Constable: The river that Ezekiel saw was a real river with life-giving and healing properties. But like the rivers in **Genesis 2** and **Revelation 22** it also has symbolic significance. Many interpreters spiritualize the entire passage and see no literal fulfillment in the future. It represents the spiritual life and healing that flow to humanity from the throne of God (cf. **John 4:14; 7:37-38**).

Leslie Allen: Barren land was to be transformed into a scene of sustenance and herbal healing, a perennial antidote to pain and need.

Iain Duguid: The numerous trees of **Ezek. 47:7** are now more closely defined as “*fruit trees*” (lit., “*food trees*,” **47:12**). They will not suffer from any lack of moisture; rather, as with the depiction of the righteous person in **Psalms 1**, “*their leaves will not wither*,

nor will their fruit fail.” Indeed, they will be so full of life that they will bear new fruit every month to feed the population, and their leaves will be for healing (**Ezek. 47:12**). All of this will be brought about because they are fed from the source of life-giving fruitfulness, the stream that flows from the temple.

Charles Dyer: Another way God will provide for Israel is by the trees on the riverbanks that will bear fruit year-round. The fruit will provide food and their leaves will provide healing. How healing will come from the leaves is not clear, but sickness will be virtually eliminated. God will use these trees to meet people’s physical needs.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What source do you look to for life and healing?
- 2) Are you overwhelmed by the sufficiency of God’s life-giving waters?
- 3) Have you experienced the transforming power and healing power of God’s life-giving water?
- 4) Since the millennial era is the gateway into the eternal state, what similarities do you see in the two environments?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ralph Alexander: John mentioned a *similar* river relevant to the eternal state in Revelation, but it isn’t the same as this river. The variance between Ezekiel’s account of this river and that of John in the Revelation centers on the **river’s source**. God is the source of both rivers; but Ezekiel saw the river issuing from the temple, whereas John saw the river coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (a temple not existing according to **Revelation 21:22**).

Peter Pett: ‘*Waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward.*’ Water is regularly a picture of spiritual life and growth, whether in terms of river or rain. ‘*The righteous man*’ is ‘*like a tree planted by the streams of water,*’ (**Psalms 1:3**). The man who trusts in Yahweh is like ‘*a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river,*’ (**Jeremiah 17:8**). The coming transforming and reviving work of the Spirit is likened to men being sprinkled with water and made clean (**Ezekiel 36:25-27**), and to water being poured out on those who are thirsty, and streams on the dry ground (**Isaiah 44:3**). A Man is coming who will be a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, like rivers of water in a dry place (**Isaiah 32:2**). A fountain is to be opened for sin and uncleanness (**Zechariah 13:1**). Those who take refuge in God will

drink of the river of His pleasures, for with Him is the fountain of life (**Psalms 36:8-9**). There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High (**Psalms 46:4**). The earth being filled with the knowledge of Yahweh is likened to the waters covering the sea (**Isaiah 11:9**).

Iain Duguid: Fishers of Men

Just as the water is transformed in Jesus' interpretation from a physical to a spiritual flow, so also is the activity of those who stand beside it. In place of literal fishermen surrounding the Dead Sea, Jesus calls his disciples to be "*fishers of men*" (**Mark 1:17**). The mark of Jesus' resurrection power in John's Gospel is, not coincidentally, a miraculous catch of a huge number of fish, which closes out the careers of the disciples as ordinary fishermen and inaugurates their ministry as those through whom eternal life will be brought to the nations.

We too are called to be "*fishers of men*" in God's service, yet what kind of fishermen are we? What kind of fishermen wait for the fish to come to them and give up at the first refusal? On the contrary, effective fishermen take on themselves the task of pursuing the fish where they are and refusing to take no for an answer, studying diligently how best to increase their catch. One way or another, insofar as it lies in their power, they will land that fish.

Yet, lest in our enthusiasm for the gospel we become too triumphalist, **Ezekiel 47** reminds us that God's work often starts out from small beginnings and progresses slowly. The mighty river of life, which at the end is too deep to cross, begins with the barest trickle. The temptation is for us to be impressed by large numbers and impressive presentation and to look down on the slow, steady work of the Spirit in building his church individual by individual. We seek reenactments of the Day of Pentecost, when three thousand believers were added to the church, and scorn the slow, steady accretion of Christians to the fold.

Lamar Cooper: Everything in Ezekiel's description presents a picture of the life-giving, healing, and life-sustaining properties of the water from the sanctuary. Whatever the water touches from the parched earth in the Judean wilderness to the toxic mineral water of the Dead Sea is given life (**v. 9**). On its journey from Jerusalem the river nourishes the grove of trees that produces fruit every month (**v. 12**). The leaves of these trees will not wither but will be a valuable commodity providing healing herbal medicines. The water of life flows into what is today a dry desolate area, which the prophet in this vision saw restored to a fruitful habitat. He saw the final restoration of all things that in his earlier vision he had called the restoration of the Garden of Eden (**36:25**). Thus in both a literal and symbolic way he presented the salvific efficacy of the life that flows from the throne of God to transform everything and everyone who will receive it.

TEXT: Ezekiel 47:13 – 48:35

TITLE: GOD DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE PROMISED LAND

BIG IDEA:

**ISRAEL'S POSSESSION OF HER INHERITANCE IN THE PROMISED LAND
ALLOWS HER TO ENJOY THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Lamar Cooper: Ezekiel saw five elements of the new kingdom that revealed the restoration would be permanent.

- First, the new temple will be dedicated to and indwelt by the one true God, Yahweh (**40:1–43:12**). He will finally and eternally be accessible to his people.
- Second, the new order of worship (**43:12–46:24**) will be designed to confirm the new covenant of Israel and commemorate the work of Christ.
- Third, the new quality of life (**47:1–48:29**) will be filled with material fruitfulness and spiritual fulfillment.
- Fourth, the new city (**48:30–34**) will be a symbol of the new unity and oneness of Israel and God.
- Fifth, the new name of the city will be *Yahweh Shammah*, “*The Lord is There!*” (**48:35**), as a testimony of God’s eternal presence among his people.

Iain Duguid: The final section of Ezekiel’s book records the delineation and distribution of the renewed land, continuing the trend of the vision to move outward from the temple. The land itself is oriented around the temple, however, and so the final section of the book will return to themes that have been central throughout the vision of chapters **40–48**. In the same way as chapters **40–42** presented theology in architectural form, this final section renders theological concepts in geographical form. In both formats, the concepts of space, access, and position relative to the temple are crucial. . .

The high walls of the temple underline God’s **transcendent** presence in the midst of God’s people but separate from them, while the river of life speaks of God’s **immanent** presence for blessing in the midst of his people. Similarly, God’s transcendence is emphasized in the separation of the temple from the city, while at the same time his immanence is asserted by the sacred shape given to the city and its new name, “*the Lord is there.*”

Charles Dyer: God will return to dwell with His people. No longer worshipping lifeless idols and engaged in detestable practices, Israel will enjoy the Lord’s holy presence in the Millennium.

I. (47:13-23) THE BORDERS OF THE PROMISED LAND

“Thus says the Lord God,”

Douglas Stuart: There are two special areas of attention in this passage:

- (1) the concern that God's people occupy their full boundaries, and
- (2) the concern that Gentiles will have an inheritance.

A. (:13-14) Defining the Promised Land

1. (:13b) Scope = Twelve Tribes of Israel

a. Normal Distribution for the Twelve Tribes

“This shall be the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel;”

Daniel Block: Although the nation had been divided politically for nearly four hundred years, as in the case of all his prophetic colleagues Ezekiel's vision of Israel's future is based on the tradition of a united nation consisting of twelve tribes of Israel descended from Jacob's twelve sons.

b. (:13c) Special Case = Tribe of Joseph

“Joseph shall have two portions.”

2. (:14a) Equality

“And you shall divide it for an inheritance, each one equally with the other;”

3. (:14b) Fulfilment of Abrahamic Covenant

“for I swore to give it to your forefathers, and this land shall fall to you as an inheritance.”

B. (:15-17) North Side Borders

“And this shall be the boundary of the land: on the north side, from the Great Sea by the way of Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad; 16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer-hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran. 17 And the boundary shall extend from the sea to Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, and on the north toward the north is the border of Hamath. This is the north side.”

C. (:18) East Side Borders

“And the east side, from between Hauran, Damascus, Gilead, and the land of Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the eastern sea you shall measure. This is the east side.”

D. (:19) South Side Borders

“And the south side toward the south shall extend from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, and to the Great Sea. This is the south side toward the south.”

E. (:20) West Side Borders

“And the west side shall be the Great Sea, from the south border to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This is the west side.”

F. (:21-23) Equitable Distribution of the Promised Land

1. (:21) Summary Statement

“So you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel.”

MacArthur: The picture is that of an enlarged Canaan for all to inhabit. The boundaries are substantially larger than those given to Moses in **Nu 34:1-15**. Palestine, promised in God’s covenant with Abraham (**v. 14; Ge 12:7**), has specific geographical limits within which Israel will finally occupy tribal areas which differ from the occupation in Joshua’s day (cf. **Jos 13-22**). This is the complete fulfillment of the promise of the land in the Abrahamic Covenant.

2. (:22-23) Dealing with Foreign Proselytes

a. (:22) Equal Treatment as Native-born Sons of Israel

“And it will come about that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst, who bring forth sons in your midst. And they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.”

David Guzik: The general allotments of land were assigned to each tribe. Within each tribal allotment, particular portions of land would be assigned to families **by lot**.

b. (:23) Location Determined by Tribal Association

“And it will come about that in the tribe with which the alien stays, there you shall give him his inheritance,’ declares the Lord God.”

Constable: The reference to these aliens bearing children marks them as having mortal bodies, in contrast to believers with immortal (resurrected) bodies, who will also have access to the millennial earth (cf. **Matt. 22:30; Rev. 20:4**). These aliens were to inherit portions of land in the tribal allotments just like the Israelites who lived there (cf. **14:7; 22:7; Lev. 19:34; 24:22; Num. 15:29; Isa. 56:3-8**).

John Taylor: It is based on the principle that if these men choose to accept the standards, the religion and the way of life within Israel as a permanency, i.e. as proselytes who settle and have children there (**verse 22**), then they are entitled to the same treatment as native Israelites.

II. (48:1-7) ALLOTMENTS FOR THE SEVEN NORTHERN TRIBES

“Now these are the names of the tribes: from the northern extremity, beside the

way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, as far as Hazar-enan at the border of Damascus, toward the north beside Hamath, running from east to west, Dan, one portion. 2 And beside the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one portion. 3 And beside the border of Asher, from the east side to the west side, Naphtali, one portion. 4 And beside the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side, Manasseh, one portion. 5 And beside the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one portion. 6 And beside the border of Ephraim, from the east side to the west side, Reuben, one portion. 7 And beside the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one portion.”

Constable: The tribe of Dan was to receive the northernmost section of the Promised Land. The order of tribes from north to south, north of the sacred district, was Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah—seven tribal allotments of equal size (47:14). Since they will be of equal size, and since the east-west width of the Promised Land would vary depending on the latitude of each allotment, it seems that the north-south distance would also vary somewhat.

John Taylor: The pattern which the allocation of the land follows is that, because the central sacred portion is well to the south, seven tribes have land to the north of it and the remaining five have land to the south. The northern tribes (beginning from the north) are Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah. Of these it is worth noting that the three which are farthest from the sanctuary are tribes descended from sons of Jacob’s concubines, Dan and Naphtali having been born to Rachel’s maid Bilhah, and Asher to Leah’s maid Zilpah (Gen. 30:5–13). The fourth son by concubinage, Gad, is the farthest away from the sanctuary among the southern group of tribes (27). Judah has pride of place immediately to the north of the central portion, as being the inheritor of the Messianic promise through the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:8–12), and he supersedes Reuben, the first-born, who is in the next position away on the north side. The other two places are held by the two grandsons of Rachel, the children of Joseph.

III. (48:8-20) ALLOTMENTS FOR THE SANCTUARY, PRIESTS AND CITY

A. (:8-9) The Sanctuary

“And beside the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the allotment which you shall set apart, 25,000 cubits in width, and in length like one of the portions, from the east side to the west side; and the sanctuary shall be in the middle of it. 9 The allotment that you shall set apart to the LORD shall be 25,000 cubits in length, and 10,000 in width.”

Daniel Block: v. 8 sets the agenda for vv. 8–22. Parallel to the twelve tribal territorial grants (*nahālôt*) is a thirteenth strip of land, identified as the *těrûmâ*, a technical sacrificial expression for a “gift” dedicated (*hěrîm*) to Yahweh. There is irony in Ezekiel’s unique usage of the term inasmuch as the command to dedicate the *těrûmâ* occurs in a context where Yahweh is giving his land to his people. But cast

in the second person plural of direct address (like v. 9), v. 8 calls for action by the Israelites: they are to raise (*hērîm*) the territorial reserve as if it were an offering presented to deity. This tract of land shall measure 25,000 cubits wide (about 8 mi.) and run from the eastern border (the Jordan) to the western border (the Mediterranean), parallel to the tribal allotments. For the first time these allotments (*nahālôt*) are referred to as *hālāqîm*, “portions” (cf. 45:7), which link this text with Joshua’s division of the territorial spoils of holy war against the Canaanites. Situated between Judah and Benjamin, the *tērûmâ* splits the *hālāqîm* into two unequal groups, seven in the north and five in the south. This tract not only represents the theological center of gravity (not the geographic middle!) of the nation; it has its own nucleus, the sanctuary (*miqdāš*) “in its midst” (*bētôkô*).

B. (:10-14) The Zadokite Priests and Levites

“And the holy allotment shall be for these, namely for the priests, toward the north 25,000 cubits in length, toward the west 10,000 in width, toward the east 10,000 in width, and toward the south 25,000 in length; and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in its midst. 11 It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. 12 And it shall be an allotment to them from the allotment of the land, a most holy place, by the border of the Levites. 13 And alongside the border of the priests the Levites shall have 25,000 cubits in length and 10,000 in width. The whole length shall be 25,000 cubits and the width 10,000. 14 Moreover, they shall not sell or exchange any of it, or alienate this choice portion of land; for it is holy to the LORD.”

C. (:15-20) The City = The Public Allotment

“And the remainder, 5,000 cubits in width and 25,000 in length, shall be for common use for the city, for dwellings and for open spaces; and the city shall be in its midst. 16 And these shall be its measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500 cubits, the east side 4,500 cubits, and the west side 4,500 cubits. 17 And the city shall have open spaces: on the north 250 cubits, on the south 250 cubits, on the east 250 cubits, and on the west 250 cubits. 18 And the remainder of the length alongside the holy allotment shall be 10,000 cubits toward the east, and 10,000 toward the west; and it shall be alongside the holy allotment. And its produce shall be food for the workers of the city. 19 And the workers of the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it. 20 The whole allotment shall be 25,000 by 25,000 cubits; you shall set apart the holy allotment, a square, with the property of the city.”

John Taylor: The city is allotted the remaining strip of land to the south of the priests’ portion. This contained the city proper, a square of 4,500 cubits, with a 250 cubit surround of open land (17) flanked by two stretches of arable land, 10,000 × 5,000 cubits each. This was for those who worked in the city to cultivate, both industrial and agricultural workers, who would have belonged to a variety of tribes (19). The total area of the whole of this central square, 25,000 × 25,000 cubits, would be about 50 square miles by the conventional cubit or 69 square miles by Ezekiel’s longer cubit (cf. 40:5).

Feinberg: Notice once again the great minuteness of detail. This is more than strange, it is inexplicable, if all the statements are to be taken symbolically. As far as we are aware, no such abundance of details occurs anywhere else in Scripture outside the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and its priestly service, which no orthodox expositor feels called upon to interpret other than with strict literalness. Then it is only consistent to do the same here. No commanding considerations indicate otherwise.

Constable:

48:8a -- South of Judah's portion would be a special territory, which would be the same size as the other tribal allotments.

48:8b-12 -- It would include a section 25,000 cubits (about 8.3 miles) wide, and the temple sanctuary would stand in its center. This portion would be 25,000 cubits long, from east to west, and 10,000 cubits (about 3.3 miles) wide, from north to south. It would be for the descendants of the Zadokite priests who remained faithful to the Lord. This would be a most holy place next to the territory for the other Levitical priests.

48:13-14 -- The other Levitical priests would have an allotment the same size next to the allotment of the Zadokite priests. They were not to sell or exchange any of this land for other land because it was holy to the Lord.

48:15-19 -- The remaining portion of this allotment, a section 25,000 cubits (about 8.3 miles) wide by 5,000 cubits (about 1.7 miles) north to south, would be for the holy city and the open spaces beside it. The city itself would occupy the central portion of this section. It would be for the common use of the Israelites, as would be its open spaces and home sites. The city itself would be 4,500 cubits (about 1.5 miles) square with a 250 cubit (416 feet 8 inches) open space border on each of its four sides, another green belt like the one around the temple complex (cf. 45:2). The 10,000 cubit-wide (3.3 miles) agricultural areas on the east and west sides of the city would also be for the production of food for those who lived in the city. Those who lived in the city, from all the tribes of Israel, would cultivate those fields.

48:20 -- The total holy allotment would be 25,000 cubits (8.3 miles) square including the city and its adjacent lands as well as the territories for the Levites and Zadokites. This is an area of almost 70 square miles.

Daniel Block: The design of this area reflects three levels of increasing sanctity: profane city, moderately sacred Levitical tract, most sacred priestly land.

IV. (48:21-22) ALLOTMENT FOR THE PRINCE

“And the remainder shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy allotment and of the property of the city; in front of the 25,000 cubits of the allotment toward the east border and westward in front of the 25,000 toward

the west border, alongside the portions, it shall be for the prince. And the holy allotment and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the middle of it. 22 And exclusive of the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the middle of that which belongs to the prince, everything between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall be for the prince.”

Constable: The tribe of Benjamin received land next to the holy allotment, possibly because Benjamin was one of Rachel's sons or because the Benjamites supported David (cf. **2 Sam. 19:16-17**) and allied with Judah to form the Southern Kingdom.

Lamar Cooper: At least three factors stand out regarding this allotment.

- (1) The territory for the prince is larger than that of either the Zadokite priests or the Levites. This fact is more impressive when you realize that this allotment was for one family in contrast to the others that were for tribal groups.
- (2) The proximity of the land allotted to the prince to that of the Zadokite priests, Levites, the sanctuary and the city corresponds to his probable role as the administrative representative of the Messiah (see **44:1-3**).
- (3) The location of these two territories will make them the eastern and western boundaries of the sacred area twenty-five thousand cubits square and suggests a possible role for the prince and his family as guardian or protector.

V. (48:23-29) ALLOTMENTS FOR THE FIVE SOUTHERN TRIBES

“As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one portion. 24 And beside the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side, Simeon, one portion. 25” And beside the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one portion. 26 And beside the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion. 27 And beside the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one portion. 28 And beside the border of Gad, at the south side toward the south, the border shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the Great Sea. 29 ‘This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for an inheritance, and these are their several portions,’ declares the Lord God.”

John Taylor: Benjamin has the privileged position nearest to the sanctuary, as his father's youngest son by Rachel; Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun come next, all born of Leah; and finally, as we have already noticed, Gad, the child of the concubine, Zilpah. It needs little imagination to realize that, apart from Judah and Benjamin, which adjoin the holy portion and which always had the closest geographical interest in Jerusalem, the other ten tribes are allotted without any regard to their original position in the land of Israel at the time of the conquest.

VI. (48:30-35) MILLENNIAL CITY OF THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH ITS GATES

A. (:30-31) North Side Gates

“And these are the exits of the city: on the north side, 4,500 cubits by measurement, 31 shall be the gates of the city, named for the tribes of Israel, three gates toward the north: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one.”

B. (:32) East Side Gates

“And on the east side, 4,500 cubits, shall be three gates: the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one.”

C. (:33) South Side Gates

“And on the south side, 4,500 cubits by measurement, shall be three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one.”

D. (:34) West Side Gates

“On the west side, 4,500 cubits, shall be three gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one.”

Derek Thomas: The city has twelve gates, three on each side, named according to the twelve tribes of Israel, with ‘Joseph’ replacing his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (48:32), and ‘Levi’ taking the additional place (48:31). Levi was given no land in which to dwell and is therefore not mentioned in the land distribution of the preceding sections (cf. **Josh. 13:14**). The point being made is that everyone in Israel has access to the city of God.

Feinberg: The fact that the names of all the tribes will appear on the gates of the glorious city is harmonious with the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning the rule in the kingdom (**Matt. 19:28**), and beautifully symbolizes at the same time in visible form the unity and harmony in the nation so long divided. All the ancient rivalries, contentions and jealousies will be gone, and blessed unity will prevail.

E. (:35) Particulars

1. Size of the City

“The city shall be 18,000 cubits round about;”

2. Name of the City

“and the name of the city from that day shall be, ‘The LORD is there.’”

Constable: The new name would indicate a new character, as always in Scripture, namely, that the Lord would forever reside among His people (cf. **11:20; 37:23, 27; Gen. 17:8; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 24:7; 32:38; Zech. 8:8**).

The Lord will never again depart from them, or send them out of His land. He will forever dwell among them, and they will forever enjoy the unbroken fellowship with

God that He intended since the creation of the world. The Book of Ezekiel ends with a description of a **New Jerusalem** like **Isaiah 65—66** and the **Book of Revelation**,

though the New Jerusalem of Ezekiel is millennial and the New Jerusalem at the end of Revelation is eternal.

Derek Thomas: And the name of this city? Not Jerusalem, or Zion, but *Yahweh-Shammah*—‘*THE LORD IS THERE*’ (48:35). This has been the meaning of the entire vision: to point out to a despondent people in exile that God is with them. The point of this vision has not been to focus on the city of Jerusalem, or the temple in its gigantic proportions; still less to get sidetracked by discussions of its relevance to modern Israel. Ezekiel wants his readers to be taken up with God and his presence with his people. At the heart of the covenant was the Lord dwelling among his people. ‘*I will be your God and you will be my people,*’ had been the theme of ages. God commanded Israel to construct a tabernacle that he might dwell among them (Exod. 25:8). It was to be the place where he would dwell among his people (Exod. 29:42–44). Throughout Deuteronomy, God had spoken of a place ‘*to put his Name ... for his dwelling*’ (Deut. 12:5; cf. 12:11, 14; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 7, 11). Ezekiel has already spoken in similar terms in **chapter 37**: ‘*I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.*’

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Given the privilege of closest access to the heart of the sanctuary, are we actively pursuing drawing close to the Lord?
- 2) Given the literal fulfillment of God’s OT promises to His elect nation, what can we expect regarding the complete fulfillment of all of God’s promises to us?
- 3) Do we appreciate the graciousness of God in including Gentiles on an equal basis?
- 4) As Christians, are our lives characterized by the glory of the presence of the Lord abiding with us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Baxter: Comparing and contrasting the three main visions in the book:
- in chapters 1—3,

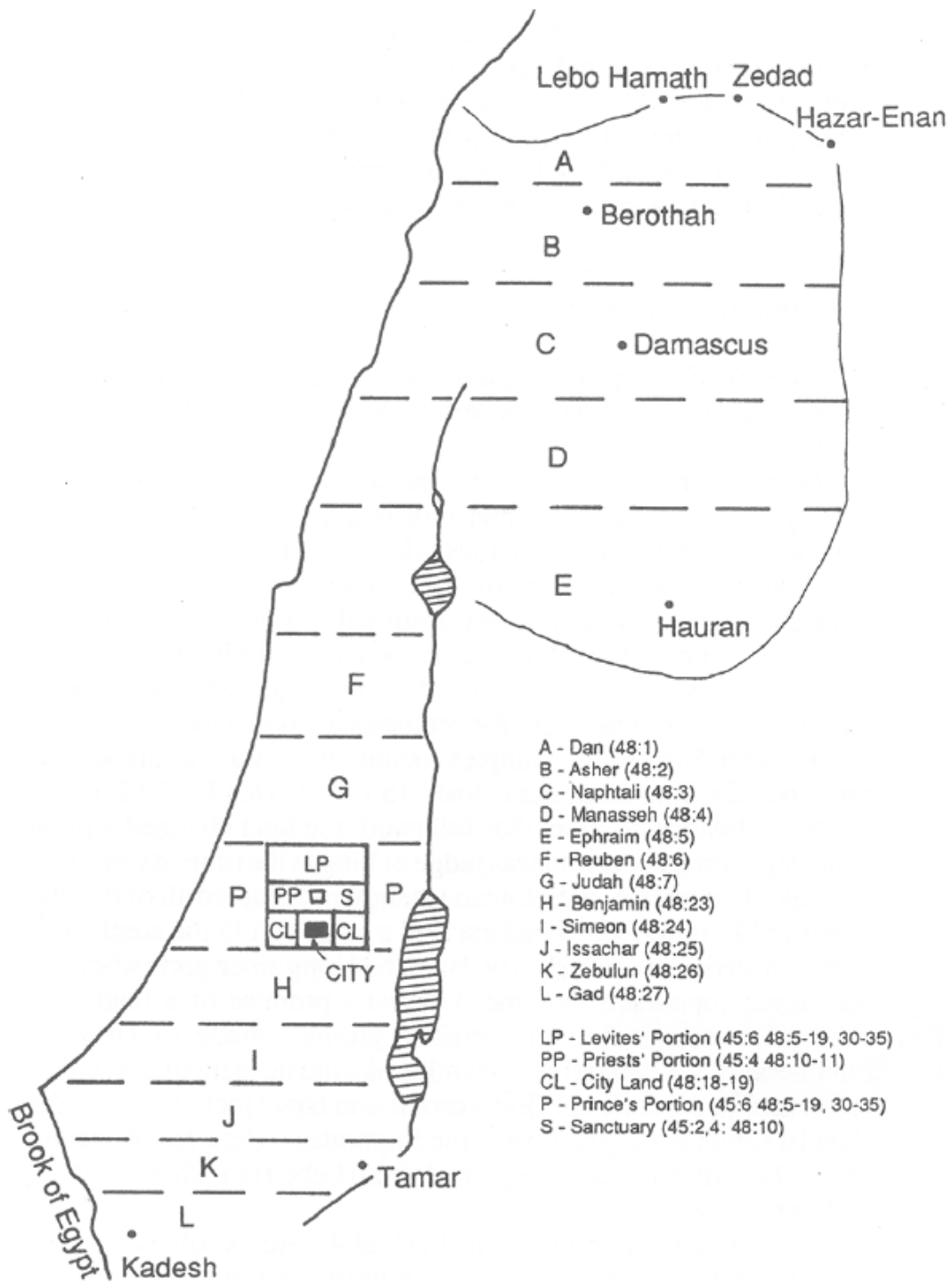
- 8—11, and
- 40—48:
- The central idea of the first vision is that of God **overruling**.
- The central idea of the second vision is that of God **intervening**.
- The central idea of the third vision is that of God **consummating**.

In the first God overrules in sovereign government. In the second God intervenes in righteous judgment. In the third God consummates in gracious restoration. In the first we see glory transcending. In the second we see glory departing. In the third we see glory returning. In the first vision Ezekiel must see the throne of Jehovah high over the wheels of government. In the second he must see the activity of Jehovah behind the stroke of judgment. In the third he must see the victory of Jehovah in the ultimate realization of the ideal. In other words, Ezekiel was to see, in these three visions, the purpose of Jehovah above all, and behind all, and beyond all.

Daniel Block: The stylization and idealism evident in Ezekiel's description of temple and Torah continues in Ezekiel's territorial vision. This is evident in at least six cartographic features.

- First, undergirded by egalitarian convictions, and designed to correct the injustices of the past, the tribal territories appear as strips of land running across the land from east to west without respect to—nay, in defiance of—the geographic grain.
- Second, the territorial allocations, with the secondary tribes assigned the outer territories and Judah and Benjamin at the center, are governed more by ideal than historical reality.
- Third, the centrifugal Mosaic arrangement for extending the influence of the cult to all parts of the nation through Levitical cities is replaced by a centripetal paradigm in which all cultic and administrative personnel live near the central shrine, and all Israel must come to it for worship.
- Fourth, the land set aside for the prince and the religious functionaries displays the same concern for balance and symmetry evident in the temple complex itself. While the reserve as a whole consists of a strip of land 25,000 cubits wide running all the way across the land, parallel to the tribal allotments, it is divided into three parts. The religious properties in the center are flanked by the *nāśî'* lands on each side.
- Fifth, the sacred heartland consists of identical priestly and Levitical allotments (25,000 × 10,000 cubits), but the addition of the city property yields a perfect square, 25,000 × 25,000 cubits.
- Sixth, the city's design transcends topography, history, and custom. It is laid out as a perfect 4,500-cubit square, with twelve gates, named after the tribes of Israel and distributed equally among the four walls (for an era of peace!). Furthermore, this "capital" belongs to the people; it is not the private property of the king or the preserve of one tribe.

Derek Thomas:



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APPENDIX: RELATIONSHIP TO ESCHATOLOGY

Source: [Lamar Cooper](#)

Ezekiel and the Millennium – Different Eschatological Frameworks

The interpretation of the Book of Ezekiel must involve more than exegesis and text-critical analysis. It must involve relating the message of the book to biblical theology as a whole. Since Ezekiel's message is largely an eschatological one, this means relating Ezekiel to the Bible's teaching on eschatology. The major questions in this regard are:

- Who are to be the recipients of the redemptive promises of Ezekiel?
- What is to be the nature of the fulfillment of those promises?

Various answers to these questions largely distinguish four primary hermeneutical frameworks applied to biblical eschatology.

Dispensational Premillennialism. Premillennialism is the teaching that Christ's second coming will inaugurate a visible kingdom of righteousness that will comprise the whole earth. The term "dispensationalism" refers to a system of scriptural interpretation that stresses literal fulfillment of prophecy as well as distinctions in God's administrative program historically, that is, "dispensations." The various dispensations (some of which may overlap) reflect different aspects of God's purposes in his plan for history.

The thousand years of **Rev 20** are considered to be literal in fact and duration, fulfilling Old Testament promises of a Davidic messianic kingdom (distinct from the universal kingdom of God), including a restored national Israel and a redeemed earth. [J. S. Feinberg](#) has written, "While a prophecy given unconditionally to Israel has a fulfillment for the church if the NT applies it to the church, it must also be fulfilled to Israel. Progress of revelation cannot cancel unconditional promises." During the millennium Satan will be bound, signifying the elimination of his influence from the world. Most important, Jesus will reign as Messiah on earth, and believers will be his administrators. The millennial kingdom will entail blessings for all nations but will have a distinctive Jewish emphasis, including a form of worship involving a rebuilt Jewish temple and the reinstatement of certain sacrifices. There will be two resurrections, the first unto life before the millennium and the second unto judgment at the end of the millennium.

Classic (or "essentialist") dispensationalists maintain a sharp distinction between the church and Israel. The church age is understood as a parenthesis in God's prophetic program, during which focus is on the salvation of Gentiles. God's program with Israel will be renewed after the church has been temporarily removed from the earth during the tribulation. Jesus' second coming to the earth with the church will begin the millennium, during which there will be two distinct peoples of God, the church and Israel.

A contemporary variation known as "**progressive dispensationalism**" places greater stress on ultimate fulfillment of divine purposes in the final eternal kingdom of the new heavens and earth.

Also while maintaining the expectation of the restoration of national Israel in the millennium, they see the current church age as having inaugurated the Davidic kingdom in some sense and as having begun the fulfillment of Old Testament promises of spiritual blessing, including Gentile salvation. Thus this current age is not a parenthesis in God's prophetic program, and there is only one people of God united in Christ. In the millennium as well, although an ethnic distinction between Jew and Gentile will be recognized as "different dimensions of redeemed humanity," there will be only one people of God. Also stress is placed on fulfillment of prophecy not in Israel or in a Davidic kingdom but in Christ.

Historic Premillennialism. This hermeneutical approach is based upon a literal interpretation of New Testament prophecy and thus agrees with dispensational premillennialism that there will be two resurrections and that Jesus' second coming will inaugurate an earthly millennial kingdom (whether or not literally a thousand years). Christ's messianic reign, however, is believed to have begun in an invisible form at his resurrection and ascension, so that the millennial kingdom is only part of Christ's reign. More important to the distinctiveness of the view, Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom of righteousness are thought to be fulfilled in the New Testament church. **G. E. Ladd** explains that the "basic watershed between a dispensational and a nondispensational theology" is that dispensationalism "forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and fits the New Testament into it." Nondispensational eschatology, however, follows the principle of the New Testament and reinterprets the Old Testament "in light of the Christ event." Thus the church is identified as spiritual Israel, the people of God, although a future conversion of literal Israel is affirmed, perhaps in the millennium. Nevertheless, the millennial kingdom is not interpreted as a Jewish kingdom involving temple and sacrifices but as a kingdom of Christ.

Postmillennialism. This view, not widely held, while agreeing with premillennialism that there is a future earthly kingdom, asserts that the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament are in process of being fulfilled in the church. Initiated by the first coming of Christ, the kingdom of God is being extended through the work of the church with the growth and power of the gospel. According to **J. M. Kik**, "The post-mill looks for a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the glorious age of the church upon the earth through the preaching of the gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit." Those who hold this position expect the conversion of all nations prior to the second coming of Christ. The millennium is understood as a gradually beginning period of indeterminate length during which there will be unprecedented peace and righteousness on earth. It will be the final stage of the church age which will end with Christ's return and with one general resurrection of those who have lived in all previous ages of human history.

Amillennialism. The word "amillennial" means "no thousand years." This is the view, then, that there is to be no literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Rather, the millennium of **Rev 20:1–10** is "not exclusively future but is now in process of realization." In the sense of a present "inaugurated" reality it is most commonly considered to be a heavenly kingdom in which believers who have died reign with Christ. As such it extends from the first advent of Christ to just before the second. An older view defines it more as symbolic of the reign of Christ in the

church in the present age. Christian history since the ascension is the story of the conflict between good and evil, God and Satan. Many biblical passages regarding the millennium relate to this ongoing spiritual struggle which will intensify until a climactic conflict symbolized by the battle of Armageddon and the destruction of Gog and Magog (**Ezek 38–39; Rev 16:16; 20:7–10**) is ended by the return of Christ. The binding of Satan (**Rev 20:2–3**) is frequently interpreted as his restriction from deceiving the nations, making possible the evangelistic work of the church. To an even greater degree than in historic premillennialism, the church is equated with spiritual Israel and is considered the direct recipient of Old Testament promises. Christ's return and the final judgment will conclude the millennium, thus ending human history and inaugurating the final eternal state of believers and the new heavens and earth. Many of the Old Testament prophecies commonly applied to the millennium by premillennialists are interpreted by amillennialists as referring to the new heavens and earth, which is understood to follow the church age as the second phase of the kingdom of God. This approach advocates less literalness in the interpretation of prophecy and is less preoccupied with details and chronology of events related to the end of time since many eschatological events are expected to occur almost simultaneously.

One's eschatological view will have a definite effect on the hermeneutical methodology employed in interpreting Scripture. While there are capable scholars who favor each of the above approaches to the interpretation of end-time events, this commentary will follow the **dispensational premillennial framework** as that which best fits the exegesis of the text and which correlates with the theology of the rest of Scripture. A rationale for this orientation is presented in the next section.

Character of the Kingdom of God in Ezekiel

The kingdom of God has at least three manifestations.

- First is the universal kingdom of God, which is his supreme rule over all creation in all time and eternity (**Pss 10:16; 103:19**).
- Second is the mediatorial kingdom of God, which is local, earthly, and future (**Isa 24:23; Pss 2:4–6; 29:10; Zech 14:9**). This kingdom will be initiated by Christ at his return.
- Third, the church is at present part of both the universal kingdom and the coming mediatorial kingdom. The church will reign with Christ during his earthly rule in the millennium (**Col 1:3; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 12:28; Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6, 8**). Likewise Israel will share in this coming earthly rule by receiving Jesus as the Messiah and reestablishing the Davidic kingdom under his administration.

The promises made to Israel in **Ezek 33–48** will have their fulfillment in a literal thousand-year reign of the Messiah. While the entire section comprises messages of hope and comfort concerning the future restoration of Israel, **Ezek 36:16–38** is a key passage in understanding Ezekiel's contribution to biblical eschatology as well as his message. He demonstrates that **36:16–38** and **chaps. 40–48** are best understood when interpreted according to

dispensational premillennialism, as he discusses four aspects of the millennial reign of the Messiah according to Ezekiel:

The Return of Israel to the Land. Ezekiel 36:16–38 promises a regathering of Israel from all the nations, a spiritual and numerical transformation of the people, and increased productivity of the land. This restoration will have the purpose of restoring Yahweh's reputation among the nations.

The Necessity of a Millennium. A millennial fulfillment of the promises of Ezek 36:16–38 is required for three reasons.

- First, the promises were not fulfilled in the postexilic restoration.
- Second, the fulfillment is yet future to the New Testament writers (cf. **Rom 11:26–27**).
- Third, fulfillment in the eternal state does not do justice to God's purpose of vindicating himself among the nations of the earth.

The Description of the Temple. There are three reasons that the temple of Ezek 40–48 must be a future millennial temple. First, the temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod do not meet Ezekiel's specifications. Second, symbolic fulfillment of the temple as the church or heaven fails to explain the intricate detail of Ezekiel's temple, such as the eight steps leading to the inner courtyard (**40:31**). Third, there is no temple in the eternal state (cf. **Rev 21:22**).

The Nature of the Reinstated Sacrifices. The sacrifices instituted in the millennial temple are compatible with the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. They should be understood as

- (1) memorials, just as the Lord's Supper in the New Testament,
- (2) associated with ceremonial forgiveness or sanctification (cf. Heb 9:13), or
- (3) symbolic descriptions of worship in the millennium using terminology familiar to Ezekiel's readers.

Dispensational premillennialism can accommodate all the details in Ezekiel's many prophecies by giving them their most literal and normal interpretation. **Chapters 33–48** are primarily eschatological and reveal a restoration for Israel/Judah that is future, final, purposeful, and preparatory for the advent of the final state of all creation.

Passages in Ezekiel and elsewhere reveal at least seven characteristics of the kingdom of God.

- First, the kingdom is literal and will have Jerusalem as its capital (**Ezek 36:33–38; Ps 48; Isa 2:1–4; Obad 12–21; Zech 14:1–21**). The king will be a divine-human person who reigns as a descendant of David and has divine authority (**37:24–28; Isa 11:1–9; 32:1–2; Jer 23:1–6**).
- Second, the government of the kingdom will be theocratic. The divine-human king will reign as God's personal representative (**Ezek 34:11–24**). He will have the government upon his shoulders (**Isa 9:6**) and receive dominion and glory (**Dan 7:14**). He will reign

from God's holy hill called Zion (**Ps 2:6; Isa 60:1–14**) and will perform all legislative, judicial, and executive functions of government (**Ezek 34:17–24; 37:24; Isa 33:17–24**).

- Third, the administration of the kingdom will be performed by a spiritual nobility made up of Old Testament believers (**Ezek 37:24–25; Dan 7:18, 22, 27**), the church (**1 Cor 6:2; Rev 3:21; 20:6**), and martyrs from the tribulation (**Rev 20:4**).
- Fourth, while the kingdom will have a physical manifestation, its character is spiritual. It will be initiated, operated, and maintained by the Spirit of God (**Ezek 36:24–28; Jer 23:5–6; 31:34; Rom 8:1–39**). The Spirit will be in individuals to empower them and to grant knowledge, wisdom, and direction (**Jer 31:31–34**).
- Fifth, the ethical conduct of the king, the rulers, and the citizens will give evidence of the spiritual character of this kingdom (**Ezek 36:27, 31; 37:24; Jer 33:14–16**). God's law will go forth from Jerusalem, which will be the hub of a great worldwide administrative system (**Isa 2:1–4; Zech 8:20–23**). The spiritual character of the kingdom also will result in physical changes in and around Jerusalem, such as topography (**Zech 14:3–4**), climate (**Isa 32:15–16; 35:7**), agricultural productivity (**Isa 35:1–5; Amos 9:13**), radical improvements in human health (**Isa 35:5–6; 65:20–23; Zech 8:4**), and even in animal behavior (**Isa 11:6–9; 65:25**).
- Sixth, the ruler of the kingdom will unite the offices of prophet, priest, and king. He will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (**Ps 110; Zech 3:8–10; 6:9–15; Heb 7:1–27**). He will set up a central sanctuary, and all nations will come to it (**Ezek 37:26–28; Zech 8:9, 21; 14:9, 16**). The glory of God in the sanctuary will signal his presence (**Ezek 43:1–7**), and sacrificial worship will be his memorial (**Ezek 46:1–24**).
- Seventh, the water of life will flow freely from the rebuilt sanctuary (**Ezek 47:1–12**). This water will provide healing and produce the trees of healing and blessing for all nations (**Rev 22:1–3**) and signal the removal of the curse of sin.

Ezekiel's messages, style, and theological insights combine to rekindle hope today just as they did in the sixth century b.c. Ezekiel lived in a time that was marked by encroaching materialism (**16:15–34**), religious skepticism (**13:1–14:11**), religious syncretism (**8:1–8**) and moral decadence (**22:1–31**), a time not unlike our own. To these and other significant issues, the Book of Ezekiel speaks with clarity.