

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

An Exegetical Study



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Introducing the Book of Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel stands in the English Bible fourth among the Major Prophets. It ranks second in actual word count among the prophetic books (39,407 words as compared to Jeremiah's 42,659), and stands third in size in the entire Bible (behind Psalms and Jeremiah). In spite of its size, this book may well be the most neglected of the prophets. Previous surveys have convinced the average Bible student that he cannot possibly understand this material. Ezekiel is regarded as one portion of Scripture with little spiritual value and even less contemporary relevance. Those who do attempt a more serious study of the book often fail to make it past the intricate visionary details of the first chapter. This is most unfortunate. Ezekiel has a vital message for God's people, a message not duplicated elsewhere in the sacred canon.

While Ezekiel virtually has been neglected by the church at large, it has come to be the happy hunting ground of cultists, critics and curiosity mongers. The modern negative critics regard Ezekiel as pivotal in their topsy-turvy reconstruction of Old Testament history that views the tripartite priesthood as a scribal concoction

from Babylon rather than a divine revelation from Sinai. Ezekiel is cited by self-styled “students of prophecy” as proof that God’s plan for the future includes the modern Zionist movement (Jews returning to Palestine in unbelief), an imminent Russian invasion of Israel, and the reinstatement of the Old Testament animal sacrificial system in a temple shortly to be constructed in Jerusalem. Science fiction buffs have scoured the Book of Ezekiel in search of spaceships and extra-terrestrial beings who pretended to be God. *Mormons* regard Ezekiel 37:15-23 as the prophetic allusion to the Book of Mormon (stick of Ephraim) being added to the Bible (stick of Judah). If for no other reason, the Book of Ezekiel merits careful study so that the man of God may be able to silence these modern day “empty talkers and deceivers” who are upsetting so many families today (Titus 1:10-11). The best defense against a thousand and one errors is the truth.

There is something more positive to be said in favor of diligent study of Ezekiel. The book is full of profound theology, not the least of which is the doctrine of individual responsibility. God’s sovereign grace, his absolute holiness and justice, and his universality are presented here as clearly as in any other portion of Scripture. In spite of difficult details, the theme of ultimate victory for God’s people is forcefully developed in this prophecy. These mother lode truths, plus priceless nuggets of revelation too numerous to mention, will make the serious student of this book spiritually wealthy. Let those who will prospect for this treasure not be discouraged by the exegetical bogs that here and there challenge the resolve as well as the intellect.

Ezekiel invites investigation not only because of what he said, but also because of how he said it. The book is fascinating, replete with visions, allegories, and action parables. Not without reason has Ezekiel been dubbed the “audio-visual aids prophet.” If a picture is worth a thousand words, then Ezekiel must be regarded as artfully verbose. His prophecy is a gallery of word pictures interspersed with mini-stages upon which the prophet performed divinely inspired monodrama. His delightful antics should draw students to his book in these days even as they attracted observers to his door in his day.

The study of a prophetic book is rewarding, but not easy. The serious student must be willing to take time to immerse himself in the historical context that gave birth to the book. He must attempt to

walk awhile in the sandals of the prophet who wrote the book—to understand his motives and manners, his actions and attitudes. He must come to grips, not only with what the book says to and about men, but also with what men have said about the book. All of this takes years of study. But, as the wise one has said, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This first chapter contains an historical, biographical, and literary introduction to the Book of Ezekiel.

Stepping into Ezekiel’s World

Do men make the times, or do the times make the men? That is the age-old question. History is replete with examples of ordinary men catapulted into prominence by circumstances over which they had no control. So it was with Ezekiel. For him the crucial moment came on March 16, 597 B.C. On that day King Jehoiachin opened the gates of Jerusalem to the mighty Nebuchadnezzar. The king and some ten thousand of his subjects - including Ezekiel - were carried away to Babylon. But for that event and the subsequent prophetic call that came to this priest-in-exile, history probably will not have accorded to Ezekiel so much as a footnote. Therefore, to evaluate the historical context of this man of God, one must look backward and then forward from the crucial date March 16, 597 B.C.

A. Judah Prior to the Deportation of Ezekiel: Ezekiel was born in the eighteenth year of Josiah, 621 B.C. Those were bright and promising days for tiny Judah. The shock of seeing their sister kingdom to the north carried away into the far corners of the Assyrian empire a century earlier had now largely disappeared. Young King Josiah had successfully thrown off the oppressive yoke of those same Assyrians. A vigorous religious reformation led by the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah, the priest Hilkiyah, and the king himself seemed to be correcting the basic moral and religious flaws of the nation. Visible signs of idolatry had been purged from the land, but, as it turned out, not from the hearts of the people.

The heroic efforts of that mighty coalition of crown, priest and prophets proved to be in vain. The reformation came to an abrupt halt in 609 B.C. That was the year when Josiah met his untimely death as a result of the wounds received in the unfortunate and ill-advised battle of Megiddo. The good king’s second son Shallum was elevated

to the throne by the people of the land. Shallum assumed the throne name of Jehoahaz.

At the end of three months Jehoahaz was deposed by Pharaoh Neco. The Egyptian was still encamped at Riblah about two hundred miles from Jerusalem. Neco placed Eliakim, an older son of Josiah, on the throne of Judah as his vassal. Eliakim ruled under the throne name Jehoiakim. When Neco was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish on the Euphrates (Jer 46:1), Jehoiakim shifted his allegiance to the Babylonian sovereign. Daniel and several other prominent hostages were sent to Babylon at this time (Dan 1:1).

Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years (2 Kgs 24:1), probably the years 604-601 B.C. When the Babylonian king received a setback on the borders of Egypt, Jehoiakim withheld tribute and declared himself to be independent. To punish the infidelity of his Judean vassal, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim died a natural death or was assassinated before the arrival of the Chaldean troops. His son, the eighteen-year-old Jehoiachin, had to face the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar's army. After three months or so of siege, Jehoiachin surrendered himself and his capital. The king and ten thousand of his chief people - Ezekiel among them - were carried away to far-off Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar installed Mattaniah, another son of Josiah and uncle of the most recently deposed king, on the throne of Judah. His name was changed to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:10-17).

B. Judah After the Deportation of Ezekiel: One will think that the stroke that fell against Jerusalem in 597 B.C. will have cured the country of its vice and immorality. Such was not the case. The inhabitants of Judah continued to be a rebellious and impudent people (Ezek 2:4; 3:7). They refused to walk in the statutes of God (Ezek 5:6-7). They had defiled the sanctuary of the Lord with idolatrous paraphernalia (5:11) and practices (ch 8). Pagan high places, altars and images were conspicuous "upon every high hill, and under every green tree" (Ezek 6:13). In ch 22 of Ezekiel the Lord recites against Judah a catalogue of abominations that will make a pagan people blush - idolatry, lewdness, oppression, sacrilege and murder. Such sin permeated all classes of society. Perhaps Ezek 9:9 best summarizes

the complete corruption of Jerusalem in its last decade: The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness." For they say, The Lord has forsaken the earth, and the Lord does not see.

That Ezekiel in no way exaggerated the corruption in his native land painfully is attested by Jeremiah who lived through those dark days. In a vision the subjects of King Zedekiah were represented to the mind of this prophet as a basket of rotten figs (Jer 24:8). By intellectual and spiritual sophistry, the inhabitants of Judah had convinced themselves that they were the special favorites of heaven to whom the land of Palestine had been given for a possession (Jer 11:15); that their city was impregnable (Jer 11:3). These delusions were stoked by false prophets. In Zedekiah's fourth year, exactly one year before Ezekiel began his ministry, one of these false prophets dramatically announced in the temple that God will shatter the yoke of the Babylon within two years (Jer 28:1-4). In vain Jeremiah warned of the imminent overthrow of Jerusalem and the final deportation of its population (Jer 21:7; 24:8-10; 32:3-5; 34:2-3).

Encouraged by the optimistic predictions of his favorite prophets, Zedekiah got involved in a treasonous coalition against Nebuchadnezzar. An embassy from the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon assembled in Jerusalem (Jer 27:3). Unfortunately for Zedekiah, the plot was reported to the great king in Babylon. Zedekiah was required to make a trip to Babylon to set things straight with his overlord (Jer 51:59) and renew his vassal pledge.

Five years later Zedekiah reneged on his vassal pledge and openly broke with Babylon (2 Kgs 24:20). Tyre and Ammon joined Zedekiah in this revolt. He probably was supported by promises of aid from Pharaoh Hophra (Jer 27:15). Nebuchadnezzar was swift to move his army into Palestine to punish Zedekiah and the other rebellious vassals. The siege of Jerusalem was a gruesome ordeal that, with one brief interruption, lasted for eighteen months.

On July 3, 586 B.C. the supposed impregnable fortress fell. Zedekiah was captured as he attempted to flee the city. Zedekiah was taken in chains to Riblah where he watched his sons executed. He was then cruelly blinded, bound in chains, and carried off to Babylon (cf. Jer 32:4; Ezek 12:13).

A pitiless massacre of Jerusalem's inhabitants followed the successful capture of the city. A month later the great king had the city walls and palaces razed and burned. Those who escaped the slaughter were herded off to join the captives on the river Kebar in Babylon. Only a handful of the poorest sort were left on their native soil (2 Kgs 25; 2 C 36; Jer 39, 40, 52).

C. The Situation on the Kebar: Reactions among the Jews taken captive in 597 B.C. were mixed. Some of the more pious may have realized that their removal from their homeland was a divine stroke against an apostate nation. They sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept as they remembered the sacred precincts of Jerusalem (Ps 137:1). Others continued in the old idolatrous ways of their fathers (Ezek 20:30). While they pretended to be interested in the revelation of God's prophet, they were setting up idols in their hearts (Ezek 14:4). They enjoyed Ezekiel's preaching (33:32), and pondered his parables (20:49), but they never intended to do as he directed them.

On one point virtually all members of the exilic community agreed. The stay in Babylon will be short. God will not abandon His chosen city and people to the Babylonians. This delusion was promoted by a bevy of false prophets who predicted peace for Jerusalem (Ezek 13:16), and thus caused the people to trust their lies (Ezek 13:19).

From distant Jerusalem Jeremiah did what he could to combat these pretenders. A letter from his pen was carried by royal ambassadors to Babylon. The prophet wisely counseled the exiles to settle down quietly in their new home. They should try to make the most of their situation. Jeremiah categorically denied that there will be any speedy deliverance. Only after seventy years had expired will God intervene on behalf of his people (Jer 29:5-14).

The delusions of speedy deliverance and the inviolability of Jerusalem were not easily dislodged. One prophet by the name of Shemaiah fired back a letter to the high priest in Jerusalem suggesting that Jeremiah was mad; he should be taken into custody (Jer 29:24-29). Jeremiah's letter may have been one external stimulus that caused a young priest named Ezekiel to step forth as a prophet of the Lord. In any case, Ezekiel waged valiant battle against the delusion of speedy deliverance during that decade before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

Getting Acquainted With Ezekiel

The only source of information concerning the life of Ezekiel is the book that bears his name. Outside of his own book, he is mentioned only by Josephus I and Ben Sira, neither of whom add any significant detail to the prophet's biography.

A. The Name Ezekiel: The fourth book of the Major Prophets, like two of its predecessors, takes its name from its principal prophetic figure and author. The Hebrew form of his name (yxezq Efil) means God strengthens, or perhaps God is strong. In the Greek Old Testament the name appears as Iezikiei, and in the Latin Vulgate Ezechiel from which the English spelling is derived.

Ezekiel is not mentioned by name by any other writer of Scripture. His name is used only twice in the book that he wrote. Another Ezekiel - a priestly dignitary of David's day - is mentioned in 1 Chron 24:16. It is possible, though not likely, that the prophet Ezekiel was named for the earlier namesake.

It cannot be determined whether the name Ezekiel was the prophet's birth-name conferred on him by his parents, or an official title assumed by himself when he commenced his prophetic vocation. In either case the name is appropriate to the character and calling of this man of God. Ezekiel was to preach to a people who were stiff-hearted (xizq ñEB) and of a hard forehead (xizq ñmEcax). But the Lord gave assurance that He had made the prophet's face hard (xÚzAqÓm) against their faces, and his forehead hard against their forehead (2:5; 3:7-8).

B. Ezekiel's Family and Station: Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest before he was a prophet. Nothing is known of his father Buzi. Circumstantial evidence in the book will suggest that Ezekiel was of the Zadokite line of the priesthood. This line of priests was descended from Zadok, the great priest of Solomon's day (1Kgs 2:35), and ultimately from Eleazer the son of Aaron. The Zadokites came to prominence during the reformation of Josiah (621 B.C.). They were considered part of the Jerusalem aristocracy. This accounts for the fact that Ezekiel was carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C.

Did Ezekiel have a ministry in Jerusalem prior to being carried away to Babylon? No certain answer to this question can be given. It has been suggested that Ezekiel became a temple priest, or at least a

priestly trainee, during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). However, positive evidence that Ezekiel performed priestly functions before his deportation is lacking. The rabbinic tradition that Ezekiel already had commenced his prophetic activity in Palestine likewise finds no support in the biblical materials. Unlike Jeremiah who was under divine directive not to marry, Ezekiel had a wife whom he tenderly cherished as “the desire of his eyes.” It is not clear whether he was married at the time of his deportation. The likelihood is that he married in Babylon. He may have chosen a wife in response to Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles instructing them to settle down and marry. In the ninth year of his captivity, four years after he had begun his prophetic ministry, Ezekiel’s wife died (ch 24). There is no indication that any children were born to this union.

C. The Shaping of Ezekiel: It is impossible to ascertain all the factors that made Ezekiel the man he was. However, it is clear from his writings that this prophet was deeply influenced by four circumstances in his early life.

1. Ezekiel must have been deeply stirred by the heroic reform efforts of good King Josiah. This reformation began in the eighth year of the young king’s reign, intensified in his twelfth year, and climaxed in his eighteenth year (621 B.C.). This was the year Hilkiah the high priest found a lost law book in the temple. That law book became the basis for the most thoroughgoing reform movement ever launched in Judah. Ezekiel’s childhood (up to about age thirteen) coincided with this vigorous governmental effort to bring tiny Judah back to the paths of spiritual fidelity.

2. Ezekiel was also deeply impressed by the elaborate temple services in Jerusalem. Like the young Samuel, he may have spent many of his boyhood hours assisting the priests in their temple duties. In any case, large blocks of his book betray his interest in priestly ritual.

3. During his youth, Ezekiel will have been exposed to the energetic ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. The priestly prophet from Anathoth may have been the teacher of Ezekiel. The two men lived in close proximity to one another for a quarter of a century. The stamp of Jeremiah can be seen in the form of words, phrases, sentences and even complete paragraphs in the Book of Ezekiel.

4. Ezekiel’s deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C. must have had a major influence on his life. Like the other captives, he was treated humanely. Ezekiel was among those captives who settled in the city of Tel Aviv (3:15) in the midst of a fertile district near the river Kebar (1:3).

Unlike his fellow exiles, Ezekiel did not view the exile as a temporary and inconsequential setback for Judah. He had been indoctrinated by Jeremiah too thoroughly to accept that superficial view of the situation. Ezekiel knew the servitude to Babylon will last seventy years (Jer 25:11). He knew that the deportation of 597 B.C. was the first stage of a process that will climax in the overthrow of the Judean state.

For five years Ezekiel kept silent in Babylon. He listened to others who claimed to be prophets - Ahab, Zedekiah, Shemaiah - proclaim speedy deliverance. He surely must have read the letter written by Jeremiah to Babylon rebuking these deceivers and pronouncing God’s judgment upon them for presuming to speak in the name of the Lord when they had received no message from God (Jer 29). His confidence in the truthfulness of Jeremiah’s message must have been strengthened when two of that trio of false prophets were seized by Nebuchadnezzar and roasted in a fire. The point is that Ezekiel had five years in Babylon to pray and meditate, to sift and sort, to ponder and evaluate and to seek to comprehend the full theological significance of what already had happened in 597 B.C., and what was about to happen in 586 B.C.

D. The Ministry of Ezekiel: Ezekiel appears to have been thirty when he received his call to the prophetic ministry (1:1). With few interruptions, he continued to carry out his assigned mission until his fifty-second year. How long after that he lived cannot be determined. Did he live to see King Jehoiachin released from prison in 562? (2 Kgs 25:27ff.; Jer 52:31). There is no way to tell. A Jewish legend - and it is nothing more than that - has Ezekiel executed by a Jewish prince on account of his prophecies. According to this legend, he was then buried in the tomb of Shem and Arphaxad.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and yet he never mentions the name of his co-laborer. He does mention Daniel three times (14:14, 20; 28:3). The sixth century before Christ saw a flowering of the prophetic institution the likes of which had not been seen since the mid-eighth century when Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Micah were all

flourishing. If the mid-eighth century has been called the golden age of Hebrew prophecy, the early sixth century could just as well be dubbed the silver age of the prophetic movement.

1. *The tone of his ministry.* Ezekiel understood his mission as being primarily, if not exclusively, to the Judean exiles in Babylon. His preaching was meant for their ears. He worked among them as their prophet. The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. was the pivotal event in the prophet's career. That disaster served to divide Ezekiel's ministry into two distinct phases.

In phase one of his ministry (593-586 B.C.) Ezekiel was a prophet of doom. In various ways, both by deed and word, he announced that Jerusalem must fall. His threat seems unconditional. The exiles had to be freed from their dependence on the existence of Jerusalem and the temple by destroying their confidence in the inviolability of the Holy City. Again and again he dashed to pieces the desperate hope of the exiles to return swiftly to their homeland. Ezekiel's basic thesis during these years was that sin had severed the union of Yahweh and Jerusalem. For the exiles to have faith meant to free themselves from their dependence on the temple city, to understand the judgment upon it, and to accept that judgment as being the will and purpose of God.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the tone of Ezekiel's ministry changed. His audience was crushed, despondent and spiritually shaken. The primary tenet of their man-made theology had been demonstrated to be false. Their faith was shattered. Ezekiel sought to comfort those who had lost hope by raising their vision to see the glorious future that God had in store for his people. He sought to guide those who wished to return to the Lord. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel followed the path from a demand for repentance to a promise of deliverance.

2. *The preaching of Ezekiel.* As with most prophets, preaching played the primary role in the ministry of Ezekiel. "Prophets were not writers in the study, but rather impassioned speakers in the market-places." Twice Ezekiel was told to write something - the name of the day (24:2), and names on two sticks (37:15-16) - but in so doing he was only underscoring or illustrating the spoken word. Once he was told to draw (21:18-23), but the sketch that he made in the sand only served as a visual aid to his preaching. However, dozens of times in

the book Ezekiel is instructed by God to verbalize the divine message; *Prophecy... say* (6:2-3; 13:2; 34:2; 36:1); *Speak... say* (14:4; 20:3; 33:2); *Propound a riddle, speak an allegory... say* (17:2-3); *Take up a lamentation... say* (19:1-2). Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel probably had a scribe to date and record the various oracles that he delivered.

An oracle is a type of prophetic speech in which the prophet becomes the mouthpiece for God. In an oracle Yahweh speaks in the first person. By way of contrast, in a sermon the prophet speaks about God in the third person. An oracle is normally introduced by the formula *Thus says Yahweh (the LORD)*. In Ezekiel the oracles usually conclude with one of three formulas: (1) oracle of Yahweh, the standard oracular conclusion; (2) the affirmation formula, *I, Yahweh have spoken*; (3) the recognition formula, *And you/they will know that I am Yahweh*. The book of Ezekiel is rich in the variety of the prophetic oracles that it contains.

3. *The symbolic actions of the prophet.* More than any other prophet, Ezekiel communicated his message through symbolic actions. The purpose of such actions was twofold: (1) they were designed to illustrate or render the oral word more concrete; and (2) they were sufficiently bizarre to arouse interest on the part of the audience. As a rule the prophet appended to his symbolic action an interpretative oracle that expanded upon the meaning of what he had done.

The symbolic act was considered to be "the word of the LORD" as much as any oral discourse that the prophet delivered. Each of the mini-dramas is introduced by the expression "*The word of the Lord came to me.*" These actions are not to be attributed to the creative genius of Ezekiel. The prophet himself bears testimony to the fact that God directed him in the execution of these acts. All these dramatic prophetic actions in Ezekiel concern future events.

4. *The visions of the prophet.* Visionary experiences were also a prominent part of the ministry of Ezekiel. Each vision in the book is introduced by the technical phrase *the hand of the Lord was upon me*. There is no hint that Ezekiel experienced any traumatic physiological reaction to these visions as did Isaiah (ch 21), Habakkuk (Hab 3:16), and Daniel (Dan 10:7-8). Each vision account contains relevant interpretative oracles that are intended to convey a divine

message to the prophet and /or his audience. Dialogue between God and the prophet in the visionary experience is common.

While the vision itself was an individual experience, the telling of it was a prophetic revelation (cf. 11:25). Presumably Ezekiel related to the captives all of the visions that he received from God. The prophetic vision was similar to, but not identical with, a dream experience. Categories of time and space become meaningless. Ezekiel could be physically in Babylon, but then suddenly be in Jerusalem (8:33) or on a high mountain (40:2), or in the midst of a valley (37:1). Scenes change rapidly and illogically. Time is compressed. The measuring of the new temple will have taken considerable time, but in vision this is compressed into but a moment.

Unlike a dream, the vision did not occur while sleeping (8:1). The prophet was conscious of entrance into and departure from the visionary state (cf. 8:1 with 11:24b). Ezekiel's visions occur in four sections of the book. The book opens (1:1-3:15) with the vision of the magnificent throne-chariot of God. This was Ezekiel's inaugural vision, the basis for his prophetic ministry. Chapters 8-11 contain the prophet's visions of the terrible abominations being practiced back in the Jerusalem temple. The most famous vision in the book is undoubtedly that of the valley of dry bones (ch 37). This vision sets forth in bold symbolism the resurrection of the nation Israel following the Babylonian exile. The Book of Ezekiel closes with a lengthy vision of a future temple in a new era (chs 40-48). Ezekiel devotes more space to recording his visionary experiences than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

D. The Character of Ezekiel: Ezekiel was endowed with high intellectual capacity, clear perception, lively imagination, and eloquent speech. He certainly was acquainted with the sacred books, institutions and customs of his own people. He also was acquainted with the learning and culture of the world in which he lived. So accurate is his knowledge of Egypt and Tyre that one wonders if perhaps he had traveled to these places in his youth.

Ezekiel possessed boundless energy, firm resolution, and amazing self-control (3:15, 24, 26; 24:18). He evidently was a man of deep personal humility as is indicated by the title applied to him some ninety-three times in the book, son of man. This title as used in Ezekiel sets

forth man's finite dependence and lowliness in the presence of God's infinite power and glory.

Ezekiel was a man of intense moral earnestness (chs 22, 23). He was a powerful orator (33:32) and a poet of the first rank (15:1-5; 19:14-21; 21:14-21). Though perhaps not as intense as Jeremiah, Ezekiel nonetheless was a warm and sympathetic soul (9:8; 19:1, 14). A deep undertone of pity for the fallen nation of Judah is discernible throughout the third main division in the book. While earlier prophets focus on the people taken collectively, Ezekiel was concerned for individual souls.

Wellhausen referred to Ezekiel as a "priest in a prophet's mantle. "So he was. From the moment he was told to eat the scroll containing God's word, this man was endowed with the spirit and message of the Lord. From that point on he became the very embodiment of the word that Yahweh will have the exiles hear. His overt actions were fully as significant as the words he spoke.

Ezekiel immersed himself in his prophetic duties for some twenty-two years. Like his two illustrious contemporaries Jeremiah and Daniel, Ezekiel possessed an invincible fortitude that kept him faithful through long years of rejection and dejection.

Ezekiel had a propensity for visions, dramatized signs and trance-states. His visions are on occasion couched in stories of angelic transmigration and include somewhat bizarre symbolism. Some of his actions - his dumbness (3:22ff.) and symbolic lying on his side (4:4-8) - have been interpreted as symptoms of a more or less profound mental disturbance. Albright, for example, states that Ezekiel became one of the greatest spiritual figures of all time "in spite of his tendency to psychic abnormality." Others see evidence of schizophrenia or catalepsy in his personality.

It is ridiculous in the extreme to attempt amateur psychoanalysis on a person of another culture and age who has been dead for twenty-five hundred years. One is on safer ground to speak of Ezekiel as "a highly developed mystic who was able to utilize channels of communication not normally available to others." The fallacy of suggesting that Ezekiel was in some sense deranged can be easily demonstrated from a study of his words. His thought processes are

normal, his ideas are completely comprehensible, his sentences are coherent and the sequence of ideas yield a meaningful continuity.

Fohrer has observed three paradoxes in Ezekiel: (1) burning passion on the one hand, pedantic casuistry on the other; (2) bold hopes for the future, but also a sober sense of reality; (3) on occasion he speaks coldly and bluntly, while on other occasions he feels full sympathy for the devout and the wicked.

E. The Message of Ezekiel: The fall of Jerusalem and captivity were necessary measures for God to employ if He was to correct his disobedient people. It was Ezekiel's prophetic duty to explain that Judah - the theocracy in its outward form - must come to an end because of sin. Exile, however, will not be the end of the story. God will one day re-gather a penitent remnant of his chastened people and bring them back to their homeland where they will share in a glorious latter-day theocracy. Thus the basic message of Ezekiel is that God is faithful to his eternal purpose. The sinful nation must be destroyed, yet God will not forsake his own. Ezekiel has been called the "father of Judaism" because of the influence he is said to have exerted on the later worship of Israel. At first his messages were not well received (14:1, 3; 18:19, 25). But in time his prophecies brought about a fundamental change in the idolatrous tendencies of the nation.

Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet. In many passages the interest of a man of priestly origin is apparent. His concern with the cult, priesthood and sanctuary doubtlessly influenced the attitude of the post-exilic Jews toward the temple. But Ezekiel was not a priestly ritualism whose only concern was with the minutiae of liturgy and worship. He makes important contributions to biblical theology. Perhaps in no other book of the Old Testament do the theological views of the author shine out with greater clearness.

1. Ezekiel's doctrine of God. In Isaiah the focus is on the salvation of the Lord; in Jeremiah, the judgment of the Lord; in Daniel, the kingdom of the Lord; and in Ezekiel the focus is on the glory of the Lord. To Ezekiel God was the supreme, self-existent, almighty (1:24) and omniscient (1:18) One. The God of Israel was no mere local or national deity. He was infinitely exalted above the earth, clothed with honor and majesty. Yahweh was the ruler of the celestial hierarchies as well as all that dwell on earth. Men and nations yield to his sovereign

decisions. Egypt, Babylon and all heathen peoples were bound to obey Him. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar was but a tool in his hand.

To Ezekiel God was the Holy One (39:7) whose name was holy (36:21-22; 39:25). He was a God who could make no compromise with sin, who could not overlook the guilty, whether individual or national. Because of the sin of his people, Yahweh withdrew his glory from Jerusalem and the temple (10:18; 11:23). This holy God placed in the mouth of his prophet terrible denunciations against the wickedness of Israel and Judah. In fact, Ezekiel's denunciation of the spiritual waywardness of Judah is more severe than that of his contemporary Jeremiah.

On the other hand, the God of Ezekiel was a God of boundless grace who had no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23, 32; 33:11). Amidst the threats of judgment, He woos them to repentance (14:22; 16:63; 20:11), Though his people were undeserving of his mercy (36:32), yet Yahweh promised to them a glorious future.

2. Ezekiel's doctrine of the Messiah. The Messiah is not so prominent in Jeremiah and Ezekiel as in Isaiah. Nonetheless, there is some striking teaching about the promised one in this book. The Messiah is represented as a "tender twig" taken from the highest branch of the cedar of Judah's royalty, planted upon a high mountain (17:22-24). He is the one to whom the diadem of Israel's sovereignty rightfully belonged, and to whom it will be given after it had been removed from the head of the wicked Zedekiah (21:27). The messianic David will be a faithful prince among God's restored people. He will perform all the functions of a true and faithful Shepherd (34:23-24), ruling over them as king (37:24). This Prince will eat and drink before the Lord in his capacity of special representative of God's people (44:3).

3. Ezekiel's doctrine of man. Ezekiel viewed man as God's creature and property (18:4). He shows awareness of the biblical teaching of the original innocence of man (28:15, 17). But man had fallen; man is sinful (18:21-30). His heart needs to be softened and renewed (18:31). For his wickedness he is held individually accountable (18:4, 13, 18). He is a free moral agent and is therefore responsible for his own reformation of life and purification of heart (33:11; 43:9). To those willing to receive it, God will give a new heart (11:19; 36:26; 37:23). Among the Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel has earned the title "the champion of individualism."

4. *Ezekiel's doctrine of the kingdom of God.* Though the book never uses the terminology "kingdom of God," the book certainly points to the concept of God's reign over the hearts of redeemed men. Ezekiel stressed one point that was considered rank heresy by his countrymen, viz., that the kingdom of God was not inseparably connected with the political existence of Judah. He saw an inner spiritual kernel of the nation existing in the lands of the dispersion (12:17). This nucleus was constantly growing as penitent men were added to it (34:11-19). Eventually Ezekiel saw a new Israel with Messiah as its prince (34:23-24; 37:24). That new Israel will walk in the law of the Lord (11:20; 16:61; 20:43; 36:27) and dwell in the land of Canaan (36:33; 37:25). God will enter into a new covenant with that people (37:26-28). He will walk in close fellowship with them (39:29; 46:9). Upon them He will pour out his Holy Spirit (36:27; 39:27).

F. The Mission of the Prophet: Ezekiel's special task was to act as a watchman to the house of Israel (3:17; 33:7). He was to warn the wicked of the danger of persisting in wickedness. He warned the righteous of the peril of turning from the path of fidelity. To be more specific, Ezekiel's task can be seen as having a four-fold thrust.

1. He was to demolish delusions - to refute the shallow theology which argued that Jerusalem could not be destroyed. He was to defuse the potentially dangerous deception that the exile will soon end with the overthrow of Babylon. Ezekiel had a clear and accurate assessment of the moral and religious situation both in Judah and in Babylon.

2. He was to expose apostasy, and thereby present God's rationale for the judgments that already had befallen Judah, and those more terrible judgments that were about to fall. He was "to interpret for Israel in exile the stern logic of her past history."

3. He was to awaken repentance, and thereby raise up from the ruins of the old Israel a new people who might inherit the promises that had been given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

4. He was to stimulate hope for a better tomorrow with the promise of restoration after the seventy years of Babylonian supremacy had ended. Ezekiel's mission was in stark contrast to that of Daniel, his illustrious contemporary and fellow captive. Daniel was God's messenger to the mighty monarchs of Babylon and Persia. He rubbed elbows with royalty and never, so far as is known, preached to his

fellow exiles. Ezekiel, on the other hand, conducted most of his ministry from his home. He apparently never undertook journeys to distant colonies of exiles, but restricted his prophetic utterances to those who sought him out at his dwelling (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 24:19). However, some of his sermons may have been delivered before larger audiences. Most of his utterances were first spoken before being written. His foreign nation oracles (chs 25-32) and his elaborate description of the messianic temple (chs 40-48) were probably never spoken orally.

Like most of the prophets, Ezekiel was commissioned by God to deliver a series of oracles against foreign nations. The messages were intended to sound a note of warning to the nations that were harassing Israel and exulting in her overthrow. Ezekiel argued that the destruction of Israel was nothing over which the nations should gloat because Israel's destruction was a pledge of their own doom. These foreign nation oracles also served the purpose of beginning the consolation that Ezekiel had for his own people. Israel should derive comfort from the thought that God was preparing for their recovery by pouring out his wrath upon their foes.

The Book of Ezekiel

Before undertaking an exegesis of the prophecies of Ezekiel, some introductory and critical matters pertaining to the book must first be treated.

A. Authorship of the Book: The view that Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the sixth century exile, authored the entire book that bears his name is supported by good evidence. First, this book throughout claims to be by this Ezekiel (1:1; 8:1; 33:1; 40:1-4). A unity of theme is observable throughout the forty-eight chapters - God's vengeance in Israel's destruction and God's vindication in Israel's restoration. Thirteen prophecies are dated and localized in such a way as to point to the life and times of Ezekiel. Similarity of thought, style, phrasing and arrangement make it clear that the entire book is the work of one mind. The evidence for the authenticity and unity of Ezekiel is so convincing that some scholars who otherwise take a critical view toward the Old Testament have written in support of the essential Ezekielian authorship (e.g., Cornill, and Driver). The work as a whole bears the decided imprint of a single personality.

The traditional view of Ezekielian authorship is clouded by two curious statements in Jewish literature. The first is in the Talmud (fifth century A.D.) where it is said that “the men of the Great Synagogue wrote Ezekiel and the Twelve.” A second curious statement is found in Josephus (first century A.D.): “But not only did he [Jeremiah] predict to the people [the destruction of Jerusalem], but also the prophet Ezekiel who first wrote two books about these things and left them [for posterity.]

The Talmud statement probably means nothing more than that the men of the Great Synagogue in the days of Ezra edited and copied the original writing of Ezekiel. The two books referred to by Josephus probably is a reference to two major divisions of the present Book of Ezekiel. Young suggests that chs 1-32 may have constituted the first book, and chs 33-48 the second.

Bentzen contends that “the book as it now stands is no authentic work of the prophet Ezekiel.” One basis for such an assertion is the dogmatic contention that a prophet cannot hold forth both doom and promise. They imagine that the historic Ezekiel must have been a preacher of doom who offered the nation no ray of hope. Unfortunately for the critics, nearly all Old Testament prophets who speak of doom also hold out some hope of restoration for God’s people. The mixture of gloom and discouragement on the one hand, and hope and optimism on the other can be observed in the discourses of any great preacher of the word.

B. Canonicity of the Book : The Book of Ezekiel was one of five antilegomena - books spoken against - in the Hebrew canon. Certain rabbis were convinced that the teaching of this book was not in harmony with Mosaic law. The Torah (Law), for example, prescribed that two bullocks and seven lambs and one ram be offered at new moon celebrations (Num 28:11). On the other hand, Ezekiel speaks of only one unblemished bullock, six lambs and one ram (Ezek 46:6). Rabbi Hananiah vigorously defended the book before those who argued that it should be removed from the canon. Legend has it that he burned the midnight oil - 300 jars of it-in harmonizing Ezekiel with the Pentateuch. Hananiah’s effort at harmonization must not have satisfied all Jewish scholars. The Talmud (Menach. 45a) states that when Elijah comes (cf. Mal 4:5) the discrepancies between Ezekiel and the Pentateuch will be explained.

Modern scholars are not concerned about the differences between the worship system described in Ezekiel and that set forth by Moses. Ezekiel was describing the worship of a new age and a new covenant.

The Book of Ezekiel certainly belongs in the Old Testament canon. It apparently was found in Nehemiah’s collection of “the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning holy gifts” (2 Macc 2:13). Ezekiel was included in the Septuagint translation that was initiated about 280 B.C. Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, numbered this book among the books held sacred by the Jews in his day. The majority of the rabbis defended the book against the disparagement of those who were concerned about the discrepancies with the Pentateuch. The Book of Ezekiel was listed in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b) as belonging to the canon. Among early Christian scholars the book was acknowledged by Melito (A.D. 172) and Origen (A.D. 250). In Christian circles the canonicity of Ezekiel never has been questioned seriously.

C. Ezekiel in Modern Criticism: Modern criticism of the Book of Ezekiel goes back to the Dutch Jewish philosopher Spinoza in the seventeenth century. From that time to the present, the attacks on the book have taken four forms.

1. Attacks upon the authenticity of the whole book. In the nineteenth century some critics began to argue that the entire Book of Ezekiel was a literary fraud. One group of critics dated the book to the Persian period (Zunz, Geiger), and another group to as late as the Maccabean age (Seinecke). C.C. Torrey, with his characteristic propensity for out radicalizing the radicals, proposed in his book *Pseudo-Ezekiel* (1930) that the whole book was a pseudepigraphic work composed centuries after the time of Ezekiel. Another critic, James Smith [no relation to the present writer], argued that the book was actually written in the time of King Manasseh early in the seventh century, a century earlier than Ezekiel. In response to these conjectures, the opinion of another respected critic needs to be heard. Fuehrer thinks Ezekiel was active in the period defined by the dates given in his utterances. “There is no evidence in favor of a date different from that suggested in the book of Ezekiel.”

2. Attacks on the unity of the book. In the eighteenth century, questioning the unity of ancient documents came in vogue. The unity of nearly every Old Testament prophetic book became suspect at this

time. G.L. Oeder suggested that chs 40-48 were added to the Book of Ezekiel long after the prophet was dead.

3. *Attacks upon the integrity of the text.* Modern critics will not allow that Ezekiel was responsible for the arrangement and assembling of the utterances and reports that make up his book. Others must have done this work. These critics disagree among themselves as to whether this rather extensive editorializing was a long process (Freedman), a single editor (May) or a particular circle of disciples (Zimmerli). In any case, the critics believe that the evolution of the book continued even after the editors put it together. They postulate later “literary accretions” by scribes who copied the work.

Most critics will allow that the sixth century Ezekiel wrote some part of the present book; but they attribute to him only a bare minimum of the total verses in the book. This trend began with Jahn (1905) who proposed that scribal notes from the margin of ancient manuscripts were later inserted into the text of the Book of Ezekiel. Hoelscher (1942) wielded the knife of literary criticism mercilessly, arguing that only 170 verses of the 1273 in the book actually belonged to Ezekiel. William A. Irwin (1943) did a little better for the prophet, giving him 251 verses of the book. H.G. May in the *Interpreter’s Bible* generously assigns about half the book to Ezekiel.

On what basis do these critics deny these large chunks of material to Ezekiel? Hoelscher and Irwin take the distinction between poetry and prose as the criterion of genuineness. They deny Ezekiel’s authorship of everything that cannot be fitted into a pre-determined poetic style. Fohrer takes to task other critics for denying large sections of the book to Ezekiel. He then asserts: “Nevertheless, the material preserved under the name of Ezekiel contains a series of later passages deriving from various authors and various periods.” Fohrer himself denies about 111 verses to Ezekiel.

Each critic seems to have his own criteria for deciding what is genuine and what is not. The subjectivity of this approach is manifest. Harrison raises an appropriate question: “How is it possible to establish canons of genuineness, and what in fact constitutes an oracle thus defined?”

4. *Attacks upon the setting of the book.* In 1932 Hertrich introduced the suggestion that Ezekiel actually lived and ministered in

Palestine rather than in Babylon as the book plainly states. Later editors were responsible for the literary framework of the book that makes it appear that Ezekiel lived in Babylon. Other critics have suggested that the locale shifted during Ezekiel’s ministry. Ezekiel is said to have returned to Palestine from Babylon (May) in 591 B.C., or to have commenced his ministry in Palestine and subsequently to have gone to Babylon (Bertholet). Some complicate the matter further by postulating a double shift in Ezekiel’s ministry. Pfeiffer will have Ezekiel first in Babylon, then back in Jerusalem, and finally back among the exiles in Babylon. Five arguments have been advanced in support of the view that Ezekiel spent part of his time ministering in Palestine.

1. Many of the oracles in chs 1-24 are relevant to Jerusalem and Judah rather than to the exiles. Answer: Very little is known about the religious attitudes of the exiles apart from the Book of Ezekiel. How then can one be so sure that what Ezekiel says was not appropriate to the situation in Babylonia? The exiles apparently considered themselves still a part of Jerusalem society. They optimistically expected to return to the homeland shortly. Therefore, invectives against Jerusalem society are far from meaningless to the exilic audience. Furthermore, some of Ezekiel’s utterances may actually have been carried back to Jerusalem by travelers.

2. In ch 16 Ezekiel is told to “make known to Jerusalem her abominations.” Answer: A message to a society does not demand the physical presence of the prophet. Numerous examples can be cited of prophets who resided in Jerusalem, and yet addressed oracles to foreign nations they had never seen or visited. Therefore, the fact that one or two prophecies are directed to Jerusalem and Judah is no evidence that Ezekiel must have been in Palestine at that particular moment.

3. Prophecies are directed to “the house of Israel,” the “rebellious house” that might refer to the inhabitants of Palestine. Answer: The exiles considered themselves a part of the house of Israel. The concept of national solidarity made the exiles corporately part of the rebellious house.

4. Ezekiel betrays an intimate acquaintance with what is going on in the temple in chs 8-11.

Answer: Ezekiel's priestly background will have provided him with vivid recollection of the temple structure and worship. Furthermore, Jer 29 proves that contacts between Jerusalem and Babylon were greater than one might think. News of recent developments in Jerusalem could have reached the prophet's ears by means of those who traveled between the two places. Finally, Ezekiel may have received his knowledge of the temple idolatries through divine revelation.

5. Chapter 11 will demand clairvoyant powers on the part of Ezekiel if he were living in Babylonia. How could he have known that Pelatiah had died immediately in response to the oracle that he had just given? Answer: It may be that the statement in 11:13 that Pelatiah died immediately in response to the oracle is itself a part of the vision. If so, no problem exists. In the other hand, through divine revelation Ezekiel may have known immediately that Pelatiah died in accordance with the prophetic word.

The theory of a Palestinian ministry for Ezekiel creates more problems than it solves. Far-reaching textual alterations are necessary in order to support the theory. Whole sections of the book must be pronounced spurious. Fohrer, himself a radical critic, has stated: "Nothing suggests Jerusalem as one or the only location of Ezekiel's ministry; on the contrary, everything points to Babylonia." Of the utterances of Jeremiah, he is familiar essentially with those from the period before 597 B.C. Not one shred of evidence can be produced to suggest that Ezekiel spent the crucial years under Zedekiah in Jerusalem, or experienced the bitter siege of that city. Besides, no one has ever successfully explained what an editor possibly could have gained by transferring the ministry of a Palestinian prophet to Babylon.

The critical studies of the Book of Ezekiel over the past fifty years or so have largely cancelled out each other. The situation now is much the same as it was prior to 1924 (the work of Hoelscher) when the unity and integrity of the book were generally accepted by the critics. H.H. Rowley (1953) defended the essential unity of the book and took issue with those who will transfer the prophet from Babylon to Palestine or from the sixth century to some other timeframe.

D. Literary Characteristics: Most modern critics give Ezekiel low marks on literary style. Driver referred to him as the most uniformly prosaic of the earlier prophets. However, it is wrong to analyze the book on the naive assumption that the author was essentially a poet as some critics have done (e.g., Hoelscher and Irwin). It is true that the book is characterized by what moderns might consider excess verbiage. The sentences are often long and involved. But Ezekiel's style is enriched by uncommon comparisons. The straight forward and unembellished narration is at times punctuated by passages sublime in both thought and expression. If at times Ezekiel smothers his readers with comparatively dry and uninteresting details (e.g., 40:6-49), at other times he overwhelms them with a barrage of scintillating images (e.g., ch 27). At times he halts and staggers (ch 17); at other times he emotionally plunges forward. To be specific, the Book of Ezekiel is marked by at least seven stylistic characteristics.

1. The book is permeated with the supernatural. It is impossible to reduce Ezekiel to an ordinary or even an extraordinary man of genius. The book is not the result of the subjective meditations of Ezekiel about the condition of his people. Ezekiel insists that every vision, every symbol, every oracle be understood as divine communication of which he was merely the intermediary.

2. The book is marked by highly idealistic coloring. Challenging visions, allegories, parables and the like are found throughout. God no doubt chose to communicate his word in forms suitable to the poetic temperament of this prophet. This type of imaginative discourse is eminently suited for capturing the attention of reluctant listeners. It impresses vividly upon their minds the truths of God. Scholars differ among themselves as to the source of Ezekiel's imaginary. Was he influenced by the art of Babylonia? Many sculptured shapes found in that area present points of analogy to Ezekiel's cherubim. However, Keil has argued that all the symbolism in the book is derived from the Israelite sanctuary and is the logical outcome of Old Testament ideas and views.

3. Ezekiel makes extensive use of earlier Scriptures. He displays an intimate knowledge of the works of the eighth century prophets - Hosea, Amos and Isaiah - as well as those of his own century - Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Most certainly Ezekiel was acquainted with the Pentateuch.

4. The book reflects a cosmopolitan outlook. Ezekiel exhibits a remarkable acquaintance, with several foreign lands. Some critics have even suggested that he may have visited these lands in his youth.

5. Ezekiel employed cultured diction. He was an aristocrat, and there is something aristocratic about his style.

6. The book is marked by originality. Ezekiel freely reproduced the sentiments of the earlier writers “with the stamp of his own individuality upon it.” Among the expressions and thoughts original in the book are the following: son of man; rebellious house; hand of Yahweh was on me; the word of Yahweh came unto me; set your face against; they will know that I am Yahweh; they will know that a prophet is in their midst; thus says Yahweh Elohim (God). A long list of Hebrew verbs and nouns peculiar to Ezekiel could also be produced.

7. The book is full of repetition and deliberate redundancy. If his visions are obscure and mystical, Ezekiel’s sermons are simple. He believed in the technique of emphasis by repetition. He wanted to make it impossible for his hearers to misunderstand his prose discourses.

E. The Interpretation of Ezekiel: The interpreter faces his greatest challenge in the first ten and in the last nine chapters of the book. Ezekiel was the great mystic among the prophets. It is probably because of the difficulty of interpreting his visionary and symbolic prophecies, that Ezekiel is the most neglected of all the prophets. Hall has put his finger on the reason for the difficulties in Ezekiel. He regards the book as “a transition from regular prophetic literature with its annunciations and denunciations to the highly figurative apocalyptic literature of works such as Daniel and Revelation.”

Ezekiel is a mixture of prosaic and poetic, historical and prophetic, literal and symbolic, realistic and idealistic discourse. Each type of literature must be interpreted according to its own hermeneutical principles. Ordinarily it is not too difficult to identify clearly these various types of literature. Obviously, the visions and symbols are the most difficult. Ezekiel’s visions seem to have been based on actual scenic representations that were present to his mind’s eye during

moments of ecstasy. But what of his symbolic acts? Were they actual occurrences, or were they merely carried out mentally by the prophet and reported to the captives? Were they external (Plumptre) or merely internal occurrences (Keil; Hengstenberg)?

There is no reason to doubt that Ezekiel did physically perform some of his symbolic acts, e.g., carrying stuff from his house (11:7); sighing bitterly before the eyes of the people (21:6). In other instances the question is not so easily answered. This much is clear: If Ezekiel did not actually perform the actions before his auditors in his own house, it at least seemed to him while in the ecstatic state that he did.

F. The Text of Ezekiel: Harrison describes the Hebrew text of Ezekiel as “poorly preserved.” He attributes the difficulties in the Hebrew text to the obscurities, technical expressions and hapax legomena that led subsequent copyists into frequent error. It is interesting, however, that the fragments that could be detached from the Ezekiel scroll found in Cave 11 at Qumran show that the Hebrew text was fixed in a form similar to the standard Masoretic Text by the middle of the first century B.C. at the latest.

The Septuagint (Greek) text of Ezekiel was translated by a fairly literal translator, although he occasionally paraphrases when the text is difficult. At times he gave such a literal rendering of the Hebrew that his translation makes for impossible Greek. He often omitted repetitious words and phrases so as to make for a simpler form of the text. Sometimes he appears intentionally to change the text in accordance with a different point of view.

G. Structure and Arrangement: The Book of Ezekiel has been carefully constructed. It is to Ezekiel himself that the credit for this arrangement belongs. The fall of Jerusalem was the mid-point in the ministry of the prophet and also in the book. Chapters 1-24 come from the period prior to the fall of Jerusalem; the last twenty-four chapters in the main are post-fall. In terms of subject matter, the book breaks down into three divisions - oracles against Israel (1-24), oracles against foreign nations (25-32); and a second section pertaining to Israel (33-48).

THE STRUCTURE OF EZEKIEL		
Oracles Concerning Israel Chs 1-22 Prior to the Fall of Jerusalem Condemnation and Catastrophe	Oracles Concerning Nations Chs 25-32 During the Siege of Jerusalem	Oracles Concerning Israel Chs 33-48 After the Fall of Jerusalem Consolation and Comfort

Whatever interruption of strict chronological sequence that the book displays is best accounted for as the work of Ezekiel himself, not some perplexed editor. The prophet at times desired to group his prophecies by the subjects to which they related rather than by the dates on which they were spoken.

The Book of Ezekiel displays a chronological system unparalleled in any prophetic book, save Haggai. Sixteen dates are given in fourteen passages. In two cases (1:1-2; 40:1) a double dating is employed, utilizing two different counting systems. In the following chart, the chronological references are tabulated and converted into the modern cylindrical system.

REFERENCE	YR/MO/DAY	CONVERSION
1:2	5/4/5	Aug 1, 593
8:1	6/6/5	Sep 19, 592
20:1	7/5/10	Aug 14, 591
24:1	9/10/10**	Dec 29, 588
29:1	10/10/12	Dec 31, 588
30:20	11/1/7	Apr 30, 587
31:1	11/3/1	Jun 21, 587
26:1	11/?/1	Sep 18, 587*
33:21	12/10/5	Jan 4, 585
32:1	12/12/1	Mar 4, 585
32:17	12/?/15	Mar 18, 585*
40:1	25/1/10	Apr 29, 573
29:17	27/1/1	Apr 26, 571

* Since the month is not given in the Hebrew text, the date is conjecture. See discussion at the relevant passage. The conversion column is based on the assumption that Ezekiel used the Spring calendar that was common in Babylon rather than the Autumn calendar that at various times was employed in Palestine.

** Ezekiel here is using the dates of Zedekiah for this, event as in 2 25:1.

The dating in the Book of Ezekiel is based on the years of the deportation of King Jehoiachin. This young king went captive in 597 B.C. Apparently he was still considered by many of that time the legal ruler of Judah vis-à-vis Zedekiah who was looked upon as a mere regent of Nebuchadnezzar.

Harrison follows Brownlee in suggesting that the Book of Ezekiel is “a literary bifid,” i.e., the book reveals a two part arrangement. Harrison puts a great deal of emphasis on the statement of Josephus (Ant. 10:5.1) that Ezekiel left behind two books. These books, originally separate productions of the prophet, have been combined in the present book. Harrison thinks that chs 1-23 constitute Book One and chs 24-48 Book Two. The following chart indicates parallels between the two “books” of Ezekiel.

BOOK ONE Chs 1-23	BOOK TWO Chs 24-48
The Vengeance of the Lord against his People	The Vindication of the Lord through his People
The name Ezekiel appears once (1:3)	The name Ezekiel appears once (24:24)
A commissioning of the prophet (3:25-27)	A commissioning of the prophet (33:1-9)
Commission followed by dumbness (3:25-27)	Commission followed by release from dumbness (33:21f.)
Divine glory forsakes the temple (chs 8-11)	Divine glory returns to sanctify the land (43:1-5)

Chapter 2

The Inaugural Vision (1:1-28)

Before a prophet could speak to others, God had to speak to him. A special call vision catapulted the apprentice priest Ezekiel into the prophetic ministry. The vision of the divine chariot - the Merkabah as it is known in Jewish literature - is a fitting introduction to his career. Jewish mystics have always been fascinated with this material. More recently science fiction writers have subjected the Merkabah to the most detailed scrutiny in search of evidence that spaceships from other worlds have landed on this planet.

Much has been written on this chapter of Scripture. Often the discussion has centered on the mechanics of the Merkabah rather than the message that God is trying to communicate through this vision. In ch 1 of his book, Ezekiel discusses (1) the setting (1-3) and (2) the substance (4-28) of his inaugural vision.

Setting of the Vision

1:1-3: The first three verses are a preface to the Book of Ezekiel. Two distinct statements can be identified here. Verse 1 is in the first person and 2-3 are

in the third person. Some critics think two distinct superscriptions are used here, superscriptions that at one time headed separate collections of Ezekiel's writings. It is better, however, to regard 2-3 as a parenthetical insertion by Ezekiel himself designed to explain the puzzling, indefinite expressions in v 1.

That 2-3 are an integral part of this book can be seen in the fact that they provide, in addition to the date for the book, the customary information about the author. The following chart sets forth the differences between the autobiographical superscription and the parenthetical explanation that follows.

THE SUPERSCRIPTION TO THE BOOK		
	Verse 1	Verses 2-3
Form	First Person	Third Person
Date	Thirtieth Year Fourth Month Fifth Day	Fifth Year of Jehoiachin's Captivity Fifth Day
Place	In the midst of the captives by the river Kebar	In the land of the Chaldeans by the river Kebar
Experience	Heavens were opened, I saw visions of God	Word of the Lord came Assuredly unto Ezekiel. Hand of the Lord was there upon him
Recipient		Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest

The preface to the Book of Ezekiel (1-3) presents the setting for the inaugural vision of the prophet. These verses set forth information regarding (1) the recipient; (2) the time; (3) the place; and (4) the nature of the vision.

A. First Preface (1:1)

1. Personal dating (1:1a): Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, the fourth month, the fifth day of the month... Ezekiel's inaugural vision receives double dating. In v 1 the vision is dated in terms of Ezekiel's own life; in v 2, according to the captivity of King Jehoiachin.

Ezekiel was thirty years old when he received the divine call to be a prophet. From v 2 it can be computed that the call vision fell in the year 593 B.C. This means that Ezekiel was born about 622 B.C. during the reign of good King Josiah. He was born four years after Jeremiah began his ministry, and one year before the discovery of the lost book of the law in the temple. The dated prophecies in this book cover a span of twenty-two years. Thus Ezekiel engaged in his prophetic ministry between the ages of thirty and fifty-two.

It is strange that nothing is said in the Old Testament or in Jewish tradition about the age at which a priest began to serve. However, under the law of Moses, Levites entered into their service at the age of thirty (Num 4:23, 30). The probability is rather strong that this was the normal age for entering priestly service as well. If this is so, then Ezekiel never functioned as a priest prior to his deportation in 597 B.C., for as v 2 clearly shows, his thirtieth year fell in 593 B.C.

While he never officiated in the temple, Ezekiel must have studied for years the intricate details of priestly ritual. His thirtieth birthday will have been particularly sad for the son of Buzi because he knew he will never succeed his father in the sacred vocation for which he had prepared throughout his youth. This was a crucial time in the life of Ezekiel. Since it will not be possible for this godly man to serve the Lord as a priest, God called him to another and even more vital sphere of service.

Some scholars regard the thirty years as reckoned from some fixed point in Babylonian or Jewish history. Thus in one scheme the thirty years are counted from the accession of Nabopolassar in 626 B.C. This will yield a date of 596 B.C., one year after the deportation of Ezekiel and ten thousand of his countrymen. This computation will not square with the fifth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin mentioned in v 2. Even less justification exists for counting the thirty years from 621 B.C. when the lost law book was discovered in the Jerusalem temple. As important as this event was in the history of the monarchy, no example of reckoning time from this year can be adduced in the Old Testament.

So important was the inaugural vision in the life of Ezekiel that he dates it as to month and day as well as year. The call came in the

fourth month. Ezekiel here follows the normal preexilic custom of numbering rather than naming the month. In post-exilic times the fourth month was known as Tammuz. Converted into modern day equivalents, Ezekiel's call vision occurred on August 1, 593.

2. *Place of the vision (1:1b)*: that I was in the midst of the captives beside the river Kebar. Ezekiel was in the midst of the captives when he received his majestic vision. What a mixed group they were! Some had given up on God because of the misfortunes that had befallen them. They had compromised with the materialistic culture of Babylon. Others clung desperately at the outset to the illusion that God will never let Jerusalem be destroyed - that God will shortly bring them back to their homeland.

Ezekiel was by the river Kebar at the time God called him to the prophetic ministry. The Jewish captives were not in confinement, but were restricted to a certain area of the land. It is now known that the river Kebar was not actually a river, but an enormous irrigation canal known as Naru Kabari, the grand canal. The remains of this canal are known as Shalt en Nil. The canal started at the Euphrates above Babylon. It flowed southeasterly sixty miles through Nippur, and reentered the Euphrates near Uruk. Evidence of one large Jewish settlement near Nippur has come to light.

3. *Manner of the vision (1:1c)*: The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. In the preface of his book, Ezekiel states in a general way what he will amplify in the rest of chs 1-3. The vision began when the heavens were opened revealing the unseen spiritual world. Whether to the prophet's mental "eye" or to his physical eye, the heavens unfolded like curtains of a stage to reveal to him the divine glory. The phrase visions of God could legitimately be understood in more than one way. Often the Hebrews will add the name of God to a noun to express greatness or majesty. Thus, Psalms 36:6 in the Hebrew refers to the mountains of God by which is meant great mountains. Thus, visions of God could be translated great or majestic visions. But Currey is correct when he observes that "the visions were not only supremely majestic, but visions of the majesty of God." The Hebrew, then, may also be translated "divine visions," i.e., visions concerning God, or devised by God.

B. Amplified Preface (1:2-3)

1. *The national dating (1:2): In the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin)* The vision is further dated to the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar when he surrendered to the Chaldean conqueror on March 16, 597 B.C. The fifth year of the captivity will thus fall in 593 B.C. Most of the dates in Ezekiel are given in terms of the captivity of Jehoiachin. It has been suggested that Ezekiel regarded Jehoiachin as the legitimate ruler of the Jews even though he had reigned only for three months after the death of his father Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:8). However, this may be reading too much into Ezekiel's dating system. The captivity of Jehoiachin involved Ezekiel as well, and may simply have been the most convenient way of measuring time for the captives.

2. *Manner of the vision (1:3a): the word of the Lord came most assuredly...* The visions of God are further identified as being the word of the Lord (v 3). The expression appears some fifty times in Ezekiel. This is the most frequently used expression in the Old Testament to affirm that a prophet had received direct communication from God. The phrase is not to be restricted to the oral directions that came to Ezekiel in ch 2. Rather the word of the Lord embraces all the revelatory experiences of the prophet. The messages Ezekiel preached were not of his own choosing - not necessarily of his own liking. What he spoke came from above.

The problem of authority was crucial for Ezekiel. The somewhat shocking nature of his message required that his credentials be impeccable. For this reason, Ezekiel makes the strongest possible claim that he was commissioned of God. The word of the Lord came most assuredly to him. No doubt existed in his own mind that he had in fact received a heaven-sent vision. The claim to have heard the divine word is found often in Old Testament prophecy (cf. Amos 7; Hos 1).

3. *Recipient of the vision (1:3c): to Ezekiel son of Buzi, the priest...* The author of the book identifies himself for the first time in v 3. He is Ezekiel the son of Buzi. The name Ezekiel means God strengthens. Nothing further is known of his father beyond what is said here. The title the priest properly belongs to the name Buzi as is

indicated by the Hebrew accent marks. Ezekiel will also be a priest, however, as the Old Testament priesthood was hereditary. The first three chapters of Ezekiel describe that moment when the young priest was called to be a prophet. A prophet is one who speaks for another (Exod 7:1; 4:16). This involved speaking for God to man through sermon and oracle. It also involved speaking for man to God in intercessory prayer. While the priesthood was hereditary, one could only become a prophet when he was divinely chosen to be so. Priests interpreted the law of God. They led in the divinely ordained temple rituals.

Prophets (1) interpreted history in the light of the law; (2) urged compliance to the spirit of the law; and (3) announced God's plans for the near and distant future. While both priest and prophet fulfilled vital functions, the ministry of prophet was somewhat broader and less affected by time. Priests were concerned with old covenant law and ritual- the types and shadows that according to God's grand plan were to pass away. Prophets were concerned with basic timeless principles and with the ultimate developments of God's program for this earth. While the names of even the greatest priests are scarcely known today, the prophets through their writings continue to instruct, challenge, guide and rebuke the sons of men.

4. *Location of the vision (1:3d): in the land of the Chaldeans beside the river Kebar;* The inaugural vision took place in the land of the Chaldeans. Although originally the Chaldeans and Babylonians were ethnically distinct groups, at this stage of history the two terms were used interchangeably. The land of the Chaldeans is the southern Mesopotamian basin. It is not altogether certain when the Chaldeans began to filter into this region from the Syro-Arabian desert, but the Assyrian kings found the Chaldeans a formidable force under the leadership of Merodach-Baladan in the late eighth century. Under Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) the Chaldeans were able to extricate southern Mesopotamia from the grip of the Assyrians. They founded what was destined to become the most powerful and wealthy empire that had heretofore existed on the face of the earth.

5. *Empowerment of the messenger (1:3e): and the hand of the Lord came upon him there.* God not only gave this captive priest a message, He also endowed him with the power to deliver that message. Such is the import of the sentence, the hand of the Lord was there on

him. The hand of the Lord designates something felt rather than seen. Proclaiming the unpopular word of God is never easy. Furthermore, relatively young men like Ezekiel were to be seen, not heard. All wisdom resided in the elders of the nation! Thus Ezekiel needed the reassurance of the hand of the Lord. He needed that unseen hand to guide, strengthen and protect him.

Reference to the hand of the Lord (or God) is frequent in the Old Testament. This anthropomorphism refers to the authority, power or protection of the Lord. In reference to individuals, the expression is used somewhat sparingly. The hand of the Lord is said to have come upon Elijah (1 Kgs 18:46) and Elisha (2 Kgs 3:15). In the former case, the hand of the Lord bestowed upon the prophet unusual physical power and endurance; in the latter case, oracular power was imparted.

Elsewhere in Ezekiel the expression the hand of the Lord is used four times to introduce a visionary experience (3:22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1). In two passages the hand of the Lord refers to the divine constraining or sustaining power as it manifested itself in the physical stamina of the prophet (3:14; 33:22).

The evidence points to the following definition for this expression: The hand of the Lord refers to the supernatural manifestation of divine power in the life of a prophet such as will enhance his physical abilities and enable him to see that which the unaided human mind could never ascertain. The expression appears in the Book of Ezekiel seven times.

Substance of the Vision

1:4-28, Ezekiel's call vision is replete with strange and even grotesque figures. Ancient rabbis warned teachers not to expound the mystery of creation in the presence of more than one person, and the mystery of Ezekiel's chariot-throne not even to the one, unless he was unusually wise and discreet.

The point of the vision is that God is arriving to be with his people. This visionary account creates a sense of awe, mystery, and irresistible power. If only this much can be learned from the account, the prophet will have accomplished his purpose. If the reader misses this in the reading of ch 1, detailed analysis of the vision will be of little value.

The interpretation of the details of the throne-chariot description is notoriously difficult. The Jewish rabbis declared that if anyone could

master the secrets of the *merkabah* (chariot) he will know all the secrets of creation. The difficulties involved here are not in the English translation. The problem lies in (1) the poverty of human language when it comes to describing the celestial and supernatural; and (2) the lack of spiritual imagination on the part of the interpreters of this book. In any case, it is the message of the throne chariot, not the mechanics of it, that is important.

Ezekiel's inaugural vision is discussed under its five chief aspects: (1) the storm cloud (v 4); (2) the cherubim (vv 5-14); (3) the wheels (vv 15-21); (4) the platform (vv 22-25); and (5) the throne (vv 26-28).

A. The Storm Cloud (1:4)

1. Direction of the cloud (1:4a): I looked, and behold a stormy wind was coming from

The north... The words I looked and behold is the common introductory formula to visions that occurs nine times in the book. Two kinds of visions are found in the Old Testament. In the objective vision, the prophet is led to discover some meaning in an object upon which he is meditating, Any other person present could have seen the same object; only the significance of the object is given through special revelation. In the second type of vision - the subjective type - the vision is purely internal. It is something that only the prophet experiences. Ezekiel's vision of the throne-chariot is the subjective type.

The first sight to meet the eyes of Ezekiel was a stormy wind. Association of deity with storm phenomena and fire is quite common in Hebrew thought. The mighty thunderstorm is but the attendant of the throne of God. This storm must be a symbol of God's omnipotent power. Within six more years, Jerusalem will be destroyed by this stormy wind. Chapters 4-24 recount in detail Ezekiel's description and prediction of that forthcoming judgment. The stormy wind comes from the north. The direction of the storm is unusual for either Palestine or Mesopotamia. Jeremiah spoke of an enemy coming from the north against Judah (1:14; 4:6). God will employ a ruthless foe from the north- the Chaldeans - to bring about the final destruction of Jerusalem.

2. *Description of the cloud (1:4b)*

- a. Coming from it (1:4b): a great cloud with fire flashing forth... Accompanying the stormy wind was a great cloud. The cloud may be a portent of impending calamity, or perhaps better, a symbol of approaching deity. God will be present in the judgment that was coming on Jerusalem.

Ezekiel does not dwell on the blackness of the cloud. He emphasizes rather its radiance. From that cloud fire was flashing forth. The Hebrew phrase is literally a fire taking hold of itself, i.e., a succession of outbursts of flame. The fire here is probably lightning streaking across the blackness of the heavens. Those who see in this fire an indication that the Jerusalem temple was to be burned are probably reading too much into this descriptive detail.

- b. Surrounding it (1:4c): and a radiant splendor round about. A radiant splendor (nOGah) surrounded the black storm cloud. This dazzling sight is not to be explained with Taylor as the brightness of the desert sun lighting up the edges of the cloud. Still less was the radiant splendor produced by the fire that was flashing forth from the cloud. It is rather the splendor of the glory of God that is being observed by Ezekiel in connection with the great cloud and stormy wind. It is almost impossible to talk about God for any length of time without mentioning light.
- c. In its midst (1:4d): From its midst there was something that appeared like polished bronze from the midst of the fire. In the midst of the great cloud was something that appeared like (lit., as the eye of) polished bronze (Heb. xaHmal). The Hebrew word occurs only three times in Ezekiel (cf. 1:27; 8:2). Some uncertainty exists as to its precise meaning. The Septuagint and Vulgate have electrum, a substance composed of silver and gold. Cooke, however, traces xaHmal back to an Akkadian word meaning polished bronze.

B. The Cherubim (1:5-14)

1. *General description (1:5-6)*: From its midst [I saw] the likeness of four living creatures. This was their appearance: they possessed the likeness of a man. (6) Each of them had four faces and four

wings. Ezekiel observed four living creatures emerging from the midst of the flashing cloud. These grotesque creatures supported the platform (1:22f.) on which stood the throne of Yahweh. The living creatures were basically human in appearance (v 5). The Greek version uses the word zoon (animal, living creature), the same word employed of the four living creatures of Rev 4:6.

The number four has special significance in Ezekiel and throughout the Bible. It suggests primarily the idea of completeness and totality. As a secondary import, this number stands for the created world. Thus the Old Testament speaks of “the four corners of the earth” (Isa 11:12), “the four winds” (Ezek 37:9) and so forth. Ezekiel’s predilection for the number four can be seen in the four wings, four faces, four hands, four sides and four wheels of the inaugural vision. In ch 8 he presents four scenes of false worship and in ch 14 he refers to four plagues.

Each of the creatures had four faces and four wings (v 6). These will be described in more detail in the following verses.

2. *Specific aspects (1:6-9)*

- a. *Their feet (1:7)*: Their feet were straight feet, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot, and they glistened like the appearance of polished bronze. Probably in v 7 the first use of the term feet (regel) is used in the wider sense of legs. These legs are said to be straight, i.e., unjointed. Such at least is the old Jewish understanding of the word. The creatures then, did not bow, crouch or lie down. Throughout the vision they remained perfectly erect.

The *feet* of the creatures resembled the hoof of a calf. This probably means nothing more than that their feet were rounded. This will enable creatures to move freely in every direction. The feet are said to glisten (nOc - cÓm) like polished brass.

- b. *Their hands (1:8)*: Under their wings upon their four sides were hands of a man. In addition to the four wings, each creature had hands (v 8). Some doubt exists as to whether each creature had four hands or two hands. Probably the latter is correct. These hands will be put to good use a bit later (cf. 10:7).

c. *Their wings (1:8b-9)*: Now as for the faces and wings of the four of them, (9) Their wings were joined together, they did not turn when they moved, each went straight ahead. Since each creature had a face on four sides, they did not turn around when their course was altered. The face toward the intended course moved forward in that direction. Wherever they went they always moved forward, since each creature had a face in the appropriate direction (v 9). This detail may point to the resoluteness of purpose that these creatures manifested.

The living creatures had their groundwork in the Old Testament cherubim. Little is known about the angelic order of cherubim, although they are frequently mentioned in the Bible. The description of the cherubim in Rev 4 differs from that found here. Later in Ezek 41 the cherubim are depicted as having only two faces instead of the four that are mentioned in the present passage. The cherubim of the Mosaic ark and the Solomonic temple probably did not resemble those that are here in view. This will account for the circumstance that when Ezekiel first saw these creatures on the bank of the Kebar he did not recognize them as cherubim. This identification he was able to make in 10:20 when he saw the creatures in connection with the temple.

The cherubim as they appear throughout the Bible are symbols, not likenesses. This is why the appearance of these creatures differs from passage to passage. In place of the fourfaced, four-sided figures seen by Ezekiel, John saw each living creature having only one face. But if these living creatures are symbols, of what are they symbolical? The oldest and probably the correct explanation is that the living creatures are symbolic representations of heavenly beings. This is not to say that the living creatures represented any four particular angels. Certainly no one should expect that they will meet creatures in heaven resembling those that Ezekiel saw. These cherubim are symbols, not likenesses. The main point is this: heavenly beings serve the king; how much more should the sons of men.

The general import of the living creatures is not difficult to ascertain. Their facial features (see following discussion) suggest that they have the specific function of representing the earthly creation before the Lord. Yahweh, the God of creation and redemption, holds sway over

all the earth. It is most appropriate that the throne-chariot of the heavenly Sovereign should be borne by those who represent the whole earth over which the Lord holds sway.

3. Focus on their faces (1:10): The likeness of their faces was as the face of a man, and the four of them had the face of a lion on the right, and a face of a bull on the left, and the four of them had the face of an eagle. Each of the living creatures had four faces (cf. v 6). Something of great importance is thus signified. Those creatures associated most intimately with God could see in all directions. The shape of the face differed on the four sides: the face of a man in front, of a lion on the right side, of an ox on the left side, and of an eagle behind (v 10). At the very least, these faces symbolized the highest forms of life that are found in the various realms of creation.

The Jewish rabbis commented:

Man is exalted among creatures; the eagle is exalted among the 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. There may be more to the quadruple faces. Representations of the lion, ox, and eagle were common in Babylonian art, and so will be particularly suggestive to the mind of the exiles there.

Four-faced statuettes of gods have also been found in Babylon. I.G. Matthews suggested that these were common symbols for the chief deities of Babylonia in Ezekiel's day. The vision may then be proclaiming that Yahweh, not the gods of Babylon, control history.

The living creatures formed a square. The human face of each creature faced outward. The effect was that whatever way one looked at the four creatures, a different face was seen from each. All four faces were visible at the same time from any angle.

4. *Their movements (1:11-14)*

a. Disposition of their wings (1:11): Their faces and their wings were separated above. Each had two that joined another, and two covering their bodies. The creatures had four wings (cf. v 6). For the sake of modesty, two of these wings were used to cover the naked bodies of these creatures. The other two wings were in the act of

flying. They were so stretched out that the tip of each touched the wing tip of a fellow living creature on the right and on the left (cf. v 9). This symbolized their unity of purpose. When the throne-chariot came to a stop, the second pair of wings was let down (cf. 1:24). Although the creatures appeared at times to be connected to one another at the wing tips, yet their faces and their wings were separated above (v 11), i.e., they were not physically connected.

- b. Set of their faces (1:12): Each went straight ahead wherever the spirit was to go, they went; they did not turn as they went. The creatures did not need to turn their heads as they moved in various directions (cf. v 9). Apparently the living creatures were not capable of independent movement. The entire throne-chariot of which they were a part moved as a single unit under the impulse of the spirit, i.e., the Holy Spirit.
- c. Swiftness of their movements (1:13-14): As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. Fire was going to and fro between the living creatures. The fire had a radiant splendor, and from the fire lightning was going forth. (14) The living creatures were running back and forth like lightning bolts. Ezekiel compares the appearance of the living creatures to (1) coals of fire and (2) torches (laPPiDÓm). They must have had a pulsating or glowing quality about them. In the midst of the hollow square formed by the four cherubim, Ezekiel observed a bright fire that seemed to move back and forth among the living creatures. Periodically lightning flashed forth from the interior of the “chariot” (v 13). This fire no doubt symbolized the judgment that at that moment of history was in the center of God’s concern. Initially the movements of the living creatures seemed to Ezekiel to be erratic. The creatures were seen running back and forth like lightning bolts, i.e., the throne-chariot moved to and fro with the speed of lightning (v 14).

C. The Wheels (1:15-21)

1. *Location of the wheels (1:15)*: Now as I saw the living creatures, behold [I saw] a wheel on the earth beside each of the living creatures on its four sides. Beside (i.e., under) each of the living creatures was a wheel (v 15). The wheels of the throne-chariot

were not functional. In fact, the only reason the wheels are mentioned is so that the chariot imagery could be maintained. That the wheels were not essential to the movements of the throne-chariot is seen in the fact that the vehicle traveled in the air and not on the ground. Ellison suggests that the wheels symbolize inanimate nature, just as the four cherubim represent the living creation. In ancient Jewish teaching, the wheels were thought to symbolize some order of heavenly beings.

2. *Appearance of the wheels (1:16)*

a. Color (1:16a): The appearance of the wheels and their works was like the color of topaz. The four of them had one likeness. In appearance the wheels resembled topaz (Heb., TarHÓH). They were so constructed as to facilitate movement in any direction.

They were omni directional wheels. Each wheel actually consisted of two wheels, i.e., wheel in the middle of a wheel. The two wheels were probably solid discs that bisected each other at right angles (v 16).

b. Construction (1:16b): Their appearance and their works were as a wheel in the middle of a wheel. This is Ezekiel’s way of describing what today would be called caster wheels.

3. *Movement of the wheels (1:17)*: When they went, they went toward their four sides. They did not turn about in their going. The caster-like wheels allowed movement of the chariot in any direction without the wheels being turned. Apparently there was no steering mechanism connected to the wheels.

4. *Rims of the wheels (1:18)*: As for their rims, they were high and awesome. Their rims were filled with eyes round about the four of them. The rims of the wheels were high, i.e., the wheels were huge in comparison to the entire chariot. Because they were full of eyes, the rims were awesome, i.e., terrifying (v 18). The eyes may have been no more than dazzling spots that added to the brilliancy of the wheels. But it seems more likely that they had a symbolical meaning. The eye in the ancient world was a symbol of intelligence. God sees and knows what is happening throughout his world, including the camps of Jewish captives in Mesopotamia.

5. Focus on wheel movement (1:19-21)

- a. Linked to the creatures (1:19): When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them. When the living creatures were lifted up from upon the earth, the wheels were lifted up. The wheels themselves had no capacity for independent movement. They always moved in conjunction with the living creatures.
- b. Empowered by the Spirit (1:20): Wherever the Spirit was to go, they went; thither was the spirit to go and the wheels lifted up opposite them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. The creatures in turn were under the control of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God was in the creatures, and the spirit of the living creatures, as it were, was in the wheels (v 20). Apparently God from his throne exercised an influence upon the spirits of the living creatures, thus coordinating their movements. Amid all the uncertainties and tragedies of life, the Spirit of God is at work providentially directing all discordant aspects of life.
- c. Independent of the creatures (1:21): In their going, they went, and in their standing still, they stood still. When they were lifted up from upon the earth, the wheels were lifted up opposite them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. There is no indication that the wheels were attached to the living creatures. To emphasize the co-ordination of the wheels and creatures, v 21 repeats and amplifies the thought that when the creatures moved in any direction, the wheels moved with them. The effortless mobility of God's throne chariot is a way of depicting the grand theological theme of God's omnipresence.

D. The Platform (1:22-25)

1. General appearance (1:22): Over the heads of the living creatures was something like a platform, gleaming terribly like ice, stretched forth over their heads above. Over the heads of the creatures was what appeared to be a platform (רִאֲשֵׁי הַמְּנוּחִים). It is not certain how this platform was supported, whether by the wings of the cherubim or by some other means. The platform was gleaming like terrible ice (qerax). The ice was terrible in the sense of being awesome because of its glittering brightness (v 22). In this dazzling platform the glories of heaven are symbolized. In Rev 4:6 this platform becomes a "sea of glass."

Many commentators feel that this expanse (KJV, firmament) was dome-shaped. There is, however, no proof of this in the word itself, or in the context.

2. The sound under the platform (1:23-24): Under the platform their wings were straight, one to another. Each one had two wings covering his body on either side. (24) Then I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of great waters, as the sound of the Almighty as they went, the sound of noise like the sound of an encampment. When they stood still they let down their wings. The entire persons of the living creatures including their outstretched wings were under the platform. Each creature had one pair of wings stretched straight out, and another pair modestly covering their bodies (v 23).

The audio portion of the vision is referred to in vv 24-25. The four pairs of outstretched wings vibrated powerfully as the throne-chariot moved. Three similes are employed to try to depict the awesome sound produced by the theophonic chariot. The noise was like that produced (1) by great (or many) wafers; (2) by the voice of the Almighty, i.e., rolling thunder, and (3) by an army on the move. When the movement of the chariot ceased, the living creatures lowered their wings (v 24). Consequently the dreadful noise ceased.

3. The voice above the platform (1:25): From above the platform that was over their heads came a voice when they stood and let their wings down. The movement of the throne-chariot was directed by a voice that came from above the platform. This voice must be that of God. No words are attributed to Him at this point, but the author here prepares the way for the later words of that One who was enthroned above the living creatures (v 25).

E. The Throne (1:26-28)

1. Location of the throne (1:26a): Above the platform that was over their heads was what appeared to be a sapphire stone, the likeness of a throne. With obvious hesitation the prophet describes what he saw above the platform. Since God can be visualized only in terms of "likeness," the vision abounds in terms like "as" (K-); "resembling"; "looked like" (D-m°T); "like" (K-mareh); and "appearance" (mareh).

Ezekiel saw what resembled a throne of sapphire. What Ezekiel saw may be compared to the vision of Moses who saw under God's

feet “a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Exod 24:10). The throne is an obvious symbol of universal sovereignty.

2. *Occupant of the throne (1:26b-27)*: He who sat upon the throne had the likeness of the appearance of a man (v 26). Ezekiel is careful to place as much distance as possible between the deity and a mere man. The upper portion of this human-like figure flashed like polished bronze. These bright flashes resembled fire (lightning?). Similarly, the lower half of the figure flashed like fire. A radiant splendor characterized the whole being (v 27).

Anthropomorphism - describing God in human terms - is quite common in the Old Testament. The use of this literary device has occasioned the charge that the concept of God in the Old Testament is primitive. However, anthropomorphism serves a useful function. It aids in describing the indescribable; but it does more than that. Anthropomorphism underscores the basic theological proposition of the Old Testament, viz., God is living. Furthermore, anthropomorphic description causes men to appreciate even more the truth that man bears in his person the divine image. In such Theophanous as has been described in Ezek 1, only the human form was appropriate to represent the Lord.

3. *Over the throne (1:28a)*: As the appearance of a bow that is in a cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the radiant splendor round about. The brightness was multi-colored, much like the beautiful colors of a rainbow. This rainbow is more than simply a token of glory and splendor. It is a token of mercy and promise as well. Ezekiel was to preach about the coming storm of judgment; but he was to look beyond that dark hour to the dawning of a new day and the resurrection and restoration of the people of God (v 28).

4. *Explanation of the throne (1:28b)*: This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. The final verse of ch 1 interprets what Ezekiel has described in the previous verses. He has been describing the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. God revealed his magnificent person to Ezekiel to prepare him for ministry. The Lord would continue to appear to Ezekiel in this same fashion throughout the book to encourage him that he was a servant of almighty God.

The term glory was a technical term used to denote the presence of the Lord among his people. To look on the face of God meant death (Exod 33:20). But God’s presence could be described in terms of blinding light or dazzling fire, within a protective cloud (Exod 19:16-18; 40:34-38). At the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary. It took up permanent residence in the Holy of Holies (1 Kgs 8:10). As time went on, God became linked more and more to Judah and the temple. It was left to the prophets of God to champion the ancient doctrine that Yahweh was Lord of all the earth.

Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of God is truly remarkable in that he sees this manifestation at a spot far removed from the Jerusalem temple. Those who were captive in Babylon felt cut off from the Lord because geographically they were unable to participate in temple worship. This vision gives evidence that God’s presence could be experienced in a foreign land.

Ezekiel’s vision centers on God, not the cherubim or the wheels, as interesting as they may be. However symbolic this vision may have been, it was a genuine vision of God. Ezekiel saw as much of God as is permitted to mortal man. The true spiritual significance of Ezek 1 is ascertained when the various details of the vision are interpreted as revealing theological truths. The search for spaceships and visitors from other planets in this chapter is ludicrous, if not downright blasphemous!

In contemplating God under the form of a man, Ezekiel helps pave the way for that grand revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Paul describes Jesus as the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) and the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person (Heb 1:3). John declares that the word was made flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Ezekiel’s reaction (1:28c): When I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice speaking. The whole vision of the throne-chariot and the divine Presence had a marked effect upon Ezekiel. He fell to his face. He was thus prepared to hear the word of the Lord (v 28). The experience of Ezekiel was akin to that of Isaiah (Isa 6) and Daniel (Dan 7:9 ff.).

Chapter 3

The Call and Mission (2:1-3:27)

Heavenly visions were not granted to biblical saints merely to excite their (and our) curiosity. The visions were intended to incite them to proclaim the divine word. Chapters 2-3 contain the commission that came to Ezekiel in connection with his inaugural vision. As in the case of Jeremiah, the commissioning came in stages, separated presumably by some time intervals. For the most part, these intervals cannot be determined. At each stage of the process, Ezekiel was given time to assimilate the message before the commissioning continued.

The material in chs 2-3 can be discussed under the following four heads: (1) the call to service 2:1-7);(2) the preparation for service (2:8-3:15); (3) the responsibilities of service (3:16-21); and (4) the restrictions on service (3:22-27).

Call to Serve (2:1-7)

Following his mind-boggling visionary experience, Ezekiel heard the call of God to prophetic service. He was told in no uncertain terms where and how he was

to serve. In this paragraph Ezekiel is (1) strengthened (2:1-2); (2) warned (2:3-5); and (3) charged (2:6-7).

A. Ezekiel Strengthened (2:1-2): And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you. (2) And the Spirit came into me as he spoke unto me. He caused me to stand upon my feet. Then I heard one speaking unto me. The Lord took the lead in the commissioning of the prophet. It was his voice (1:28), rather than that of one of the cherubim, that Ezekiel heard giving him the first command (v 1). The title son of man occurs over ninety times in the Book of Ezekiel. In most cases it precedes a command of God. The term “son” often is used in Hebrew to denote membership in a class. Thus a son of man will be a member of the class of man, i.e., a mortal. The designation emphasizes human frailty as over against the awesome might and majesty of God who had just revealed himself to Ezekiel. By this title, Ezekiel was reminded continually that he was dependent on the Spirit’s power. The Spirit enabled him to receive the message of God (v 2) and to deliver it in the power and authority of the Lord.

Though he had been privileged to see the majestic, heavenly vision of God’s throne-chariot, Ezekiel was nevertheless nothing more than a human being. Within a few years Daniel will use the title son of man in a technical sense of that divine-human one who will receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:13). Jesus’ application of the title son of man to Himself seems to be based more on Daniel’s usage than on Ezekiel’s.

The first command given to Ezekiel in the book is the command to stand upon your feet. The standing position is apparently the correct posture from which to hear the divine commission (v 1). It is service, not servility, that God desires most. Davidson comments: “It is man erect, man in his manhood, with whom God will have fellowship and with whom He will speak.”

Even as the Lord issued this command to Ezekiel, spirit came into him. The term *r^oax* (wind/spirit) occurs about fifty-three times in this book. In the light of 3:24, it is best to understand this spirit as the Spirit of God. The Spirit came into the prophet compelling him and enabling him to comply with the command just issued. That Spirit supplemented and revived Ezekiel’s physical powers, like a fresh breath of life.

What a blessed truth is intimated here. Frail and feeble man can be empowered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God supplies the power to perform his special service.

B. Ezekiel Warned (2:3-5): God sets forth the difficulties that Ezekiel will confront in his ministry, and the duty that will be his as God's spokesman. He likewise seeks to encourage Ezekiel in the discharge of his ministry.

1. *Their record of rebellion (2:3): And he said unto me, Son of man, I am sending you unto the children of Israel, unto rebellious nations that have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me until this very day.* Ezekiel was to be God's representative to the children of Israel. In earlier prophets the term Israel is used of the Northern Kingdom that was carried away captive in 722 B.C. The kingdom of Israel, as distinct from the kingdom of Judah, had long since ceased to exist by the time of Ezekiel. Thus Israel here is not the Northern Kingdom.

The term *Israel* is used two ways in the Book of Ezekiel. Sometimes Ezekiel employs the name Israel for all of the people who had joined in the covenant with God at Sinai. In other words, Israel is the entire Hebrew community of faith. On other occasions Ezekiel refers to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem as Israel. After the destruction and deportation of the Northern Kingdom, the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom claimed this honored title for themselves.

Ezekiel's mission was ultimately to the whole contemporary generation of Israelites, both those who were in Judah and those who were in exile. To be sure his ministry had impact back in Judah, at least in the period between 593 and 586 B.C. But v 11 indicates that his immediate audience was near at hand - his fellow exiles. However, Ezekiel does not clearly distinguish between Israelites in Judah and those in Babylon. Often he seems to ignore the miles that separate the two groups.

The present generation had rebelled against the Lord. They had refused to adhere to strict monotheism. In their apostasy the present generation was but following the example of their fathers, for they too had transgressed against the Lord. The rebellion of Israel was intergenerational (v 3).

The audience is described as rebellious nations that have rebelled against me. The plural nations may be a reference to Israel and Judah. However, the term nations (*GÜyim*) usually is restricted to the heathen peoples as over against God's people. Perhaps the word is here used contemptuously. Israel and Judah had become, by virtue of their rebellion against God, no better than heathen nations. The plural also points to the fact that the children of Israel at this time are not one nation, but are scattered and disunited.

2. *Their intransigence (2:4): The sons are hard of face and stout of heart. I am sending you unto them, and you will say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD!* The sons, i.e., the present generation, are further described as being hard of face and stout of heart. The first phrase describes the brazenness of the hardened sinner who displays no shame. The second phrase describes that stubborn, unyielding disposition that continues in the path of error in spite of repeated warnings and harsh chastisements.

Ezekiel's mission field did not look promising! God wanted him to have no illusions about this work. There was little prospect for success. The important thing, however, was that Ezekiel was to preach only the word of God. His message was to be characterized by, and punctuated with, the phrase thus says the Lord GOD. This so-called messenger formula is common in the prophets. It also appears in a secular context (Gen 32:3-4; 2 Kgs 19:9-10).

Lord GOD (v 4) is Adonay Yhwh, "My Lord Yahweh." Ezekiel frequently makes use of the double term. In English versions when the word Lord or God is written in all caps it is an indication that the personal name of God - Yahweh - is being used.

3. *Their opportunity for enlightenment (2:5): But as for them, whether they will hear or refuse (for they are a house of rebels), then they will know that a prophet is in their midst.* In the word rebels there may be an allusion to the insane and suicidal rebellions that foolhardy patriots were continually plotting. Nebuchadnezzar was the God-ordained ruler of the world. To rebel against him was to be in rebellion against the will of God. Over a dozen times Ezekiel refers to his auditors as a *house of rebels*, lit., *house of rebellion*.

Ezekiel was not required to be successful, only faithful. *house of rebels*, The recognition formula, they [or you] will know, appears in

the book about sixty times. It underscores how Israel and the nations will come to recognize Yahweh as Lord of history. Here the people come to realize that a prophet had been in their midst. They will be forced to recognize Ezekiel as a true prophet when the calamities predicted by him came upon them (v 5).

C. Ezekiel Charged (2:6-7)

1. *Be fearless (2:6): But as for you, son of man, do not fear them or be afraid of their words; for thorns and thistles are with you. You are sitting upon scorpions! Do not fear their words. Do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.* Unlike Moses and Jeremiah, Ezekiel had no opportunity to protest his inability and timidity. God moved to forestall such excuses with earnest exhortation: Do not fear them or be afraid of their words. Ezekiel will face terrible opposition. Four times in v 6 God tells his prophet not to be afraid. Such words of reassurance are part of the calls of other prophets (Josh 8:1; Jer 1:8). They usually occur, however, only after the candidate has expressed reluctance. Though Ezekiel has given no indication of hesitation about his mission, the Lord may be addressing his unspoken fears.

Such an exhortation is in order because his hearers are thorns and thistles. This preacher must have a tough hide to endure the digs, scratches, abrasions and stinging sarcasm that a hostile audience heaps on him.

Dwelling among those thorns and thistles are scorpions with deadly stings. There will be threats to his life. He will be pierced through on many occasions by this ungrateful and irresponsive crowd. At such times he must remember that this kind of conduct is entirely in character as far as these exiles are concerned for they are a rebellious house. For this reason, Ezekiel must not fear their words or be dismayed (lit., shattered) at their looks (v 6).

2. *Be faithful (2:7): But speak my words unto them, whether they hear or refuse, for they are rebellious.* This section of explanation and exhortation closes with renewed appeal to be faithful to his preaching ministry regardless of the audience reaction (v 7).

Preparation for Service (2:8-3:15)

Following the call to service, God begins a process of education to prepare this man for the assigned task. Three steps can be

distinguished in this educational process. The prophet needed to (1) assimilate the message of God (2:8-3:3); (2) have assurance of divine power (3:4-9); and (3) have a correct assessment of his future congregation (3:10-15).

A. Appearance of a Scroll (2:8-10)

1. A test (2:8): As for you, son of man, hear what I am about to speak unto you. Do not be rebellious like the rebellious house. Open your mouth, and eat what I am about to give you. God addresses Ezekiel with four imperatives: hear, be not rebellious, open, eat. Ezekiel must not be rebellious like the house of Israel. He must eat what God gives him. Once again God forestalls any reluctance on Ezekiel's part by these words of warning. Disobedience will mark Ezekiel as no better than the rebellious people to whom he was to preach.

2. A scroll (2:9-10):

a. It was extended (2:9): I saw, and behold a hand was extended unto me, and behold in it the roll of a book. The stage was set for this initial test of obedience. To his surprise (behold!), Ezekiel saw a hand (cf. Jer 1:9) come forth to him from the throne-chariot. The hand was either that of one of the cherubim, or that of the One on the throne itself. The hand contained a roll of a book, i.e., a scroll (v 9). This scroll was probably made of papyrus, rather than animal skins. Papyrus is edible, and could easily be cut in pieces column by column. By sewing many pieces of these materials together, a scroll of twenty feet or more in length might be constructed.

b. It was unrolled (2:10a): He spread it before me... Unlike the sealed scroll in Rev 4, this scroll was open. It was no mystery what God was about to do to Jerusalem.

c. It was full (2:10b): and it was written on front and back. The scroll contained writing. The ancients regarded the written word as far more definite and unalterable than the spoken word. The writing on the scroll was God's authoritative word for the children of Israel. The writing was on the scroll before Ezekiel received it. The message he will preach originated with God. It was a written word - a fixed and unchangeable divine declaration.

The scroll was somewhat unusual in that it contained writing on both sides. Normally scrolls were inscribed on only one side. Is there symbolic significance in this fact? Perhaps it simply means that God had a lot to say to his people through Ezekiel. On the other hand, maybe the scroll was completely inscribed so as to eliminate the possibility of Ezekiel adding anything to the divinely received message. Then again, perhaps the writing on front and back symbolized the abundance of the calamities that will befall Jerusalem.

- d. It was sad (2:10c): There was written on it lamentations, mourning and woe. Until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Ezekiel preached a message of doom such as might be characterized as lamentation, mourning and woe. The scroll thus set forth prophetically what will shortly befall Jerusalem and Judah.

B. Assimilation of the Word (3:1-3)

1. The Lord's directive (3:1): He said unto me, Son of man, eat what you discover; eat this roll and go speak unto the house of Israel. Again God addresses four imperatives to Ezekiel. He is to eat, eat, go, and speak. He is to eat this roll. The word of God must be internalized, digested and assimilated by one who will serve as God's messenger. Ezekiel himself must become the message.

Coming on the heels of the command to eat the scroll is the command to go speak unto the house of Israel. Immediately following the reception of the word there must be the proclamation of it.

2. Ezekiel's submission (3:2): I opened my mouth, and he fed me this roll. Ezekiel attempted to comply with the Lord's command. He opened his mouth. At this point the gracious God intervened and aided in the consumption of the document.

3. The Lord's explanation (3:3a): He said unto me, Son of man, your belly will eat and your inward parts will be full with this roll that I am giving unto you. Further encouragement came from the Lord to the effect that Ezekiel should swallow and digest the scroll that he had been given. Ezekiel complied. Ezekiel himself becomes the embodiment of the divine word.

4. Ezekiel's experience (3:3b): So I ate it, and it became in my mouth like honey for sweetness. Much to his surprise, Ezekiel found

that the scroll tasted sweet like honey (cf. Jer 15:16; Ps 119:103). This sweetness in no way indicates that Ezekiel took some morbid delight in his message of doom. Rather the sweetness of the scroll lay in the privilege of knowing and proclaiming the word of God.

Ezekiel did not eat a literal scroll. This action was done in a vision. A person does strange things in dreams, and so it was also in this heaven-sent vision. The point is that Ezekiel must familiarize himself with the word of God by reading the scroll as eagerly and attentively as one eats food to satisfy hunger. The fact that God caused him to eat the scroll may point to supernatural aid that the prophet received in comprehending and mentally preserving the minutest detail of this unpleasant message.

C. Assurance of Divine Power (3:4-9)

1. Need for divine power (3:4-7)

- a. His field is needy (3:4): He said unto me, Son of man, go unto the house of Israel and speak with my words unto them. The ingested scroll symbolizes empowerment to preach. The command to go to the captives with the word is repeated in v 4: Go... speak. He is to preach with my words. He is to convey God's message to them in the very tongue in which he had received it. The exiles were beginning to use the Aramaic tongue of the Chaldeans, but they will still be familiar with the Hebrew.
- b. His field is near (3:5): For you have not been sent unto a people of obscure language and heavy tongue, but unto the house of Israel. Unlike Jonah, Ezekiel is not being sent to a people whose language was utterly incomprehensible. The expression obscure language means literally, deep of lip. The same expression is found in Isa 33:19 where it refers to a foreign language that cannot be comprehended. Heavy tongue is a tongue that is sluggish and dull (cf. Exod 4:10), or one that is tiresome to understand. Many foreigners were in Babylon. Communication with them will not be easy.
- c. His field is focused (3:6): Not unto many people of obscure language and heavy tongue whose words you cannot comprehend. Surely if I had sent you unto them, they would hearken unto you. Lack of communication between Ezekiel and his audience will not be due

to any language barrier. It was to the house of Israel - his own compatriots - to whom he is sent (v 5). But this in no way will aid the communication process. Sometimes the home missionary has a more difficult task than he who ventures into foreign lands to preach the gospel in exotic tongues. Strange languages are more easily mastered than the technique of communicating with those with unbelieving hearts. Ezekiel's chances of "getting through" to his audience will have been greater if he were speaking to people with a hard language rather than a hard heart.

d. His field is difficult (3:7): But as for the house of Israel, they are not willing to hearken unto you, because they are not willing to hearken unto me; for all the house of Israel are strong of forehead and hard of heart. Nothing personal will be involved in Israel's rejection of the message of Ezekiel (cf. 1 Sam 8:7-8). The basic problem with the house of Israel was that they had no interest in hearing what God had to say. The people will show an aversion to Ezekiel simply because he was the bearer of the divine word. Therefore, the opposition that Ezekiel was warned to expect was not to be regarded as unusual, or directed against him personally. The exiles were deaf to the voice of God that had spoken through various natural disasters, as well as through his human spokesmen. It was therefore unlikely that they will give any heed to Ezekiel.

2. Provision of divine power (3:8-9)

a. Endowment of courage (3:8-9a): Behold, I have made your face strong against their face, and your forehead strong against their forehead. (9) Like a diamond harder than flint I have made your forehead. The first hurdle for Ezekiel's ministry was the natural fear that will arise over the prospects of preaching an unpopular message to an unsympathetic multitude. For this task God will endow Ezekiel with courage. The Lord will make Ezekiel's face strong against their face, and his forehead strong against their forehead (v 8). The latter figure is taken from horned animals that vie for supremacy by butting heads. Ezekiel will be able to match their obstinacy with sanctified stubbornness of his own. He will be as zealous for truth as they were for falsehood. They were as hard as flint; he will be as hard as a diamond. Ezekiel's firmness will cut like a diamond into the flint-like hearts of the men of Israel.

b. Exhortation to courage (3:9b): Do not fear them. Do not be dismayed before them, for they are a rebellious house. Ezekiel need have no fear or be dismayed before that rebellious people. Given the circumstances that he faced, how appropriate was this prophet's name, Ezekiel - "God strengthens" or "God hardens."

D. Assessment of the Congregation (3:10-15)

1. The words of God (3:10:11)

a. He must hear them (3:10): And he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I will speak unto you, receive into your heart. With your ears hear. The first priority of any preacher is to be in harmony with the word of God. God called upon Ezekiel to hear all the words that He will speak to him. He must not only hear them with the ears, he must also receive them into his heart. He must understand and believe the message he is to preach. All my words that I will speak suggests that there will be future revelations that the prophet will also have to assimilate and subsequently announce. It is interesting to note that God will communicate to Ezekiel in words, not just in abstract thought and ambiguous visions. Here is verbal revelation.

b. He must speak them (3:11): Then go unto the captives, unto the children of your people. Speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they desist. Once Ezekiel understood the divine word and personally yielded to it, he will be prepared to undertake his mission to the Babylonian captives. He must go to them and speak what God had spoken to him. He was not to be influenced by their reactions to his words. His job was to faithfully proclaim the word. He was to speak authoritatively. A thus says the Lord was to characterize all of his preaching. He was to preach on regardless of whether or not they gave heed. There may be a touch of irony in the expression your people, rather than my (God's) people.

2. The sounds from the chariot (3:12-13)

a. Occasion of the sounds (3:12a): **Then the Spirit lifted me up. I heard behind me the sound of great shaking** - At this point the Holy Spirit lifted Ezekiel up to whisk him from this mountain-top visionary experience to the valley of prophetic service (cf. 2:2).

This is the first of several places where the prophet describes his supernatural transports. Ezekiel was still in the midst of his visionary experience. Neither psychic levitation nor physical transposition is being described here. In his vision Ezekiel experienced a subjective feeling of being airborne, much like the feeling one has in a dream of soaring through the air.

The prophet had been in the presence of the theophany - the visionary throne-chariot - during all that has been narrated to this point (1:4-3:12). When he was lifted up and carried away it seemed to Ezekiel that he was leaving the theophany behind. Simultaneous with the Holy Spirit entering Ezekiel, the magnificent throne-chariot departed the scene. As it did so, the sound of a great shaking was heard.

- b. The praise in the sounds (3:12b): Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place - A voice pronouncing a blessing on the glory of the Lord accompanied the shaking noise. This voice is unidentified. It may be the voice that was heard from above the firmament in 1:24-25; or it could be the voice of the cherubim praising the Lord. The phrase from his place (v 12) is problematic. It probably refers to the place where the glory of God revealed itself in the vision. To state the matter differently, the glory of the Lord yet remained in the place from which it was departing because his place is universal.
- c. Significance of the sounds (3:13): even the sound of the wings of the living creatures touching each other, and the sound of the wheels beside them, even the sound of great shaking. The sound of great shaking of v 12 is identified in v 13. As the throne-chariot departed, Ezekiel heard the whirring of the wings of the living creatures and the rumble of the wheels. When the throne-chariot was stationary, the living creatures did not touch each other. But when they were in flight the cherubim raised their wings so as to touch each other. See on 1:11.

3. The transmigration of Ezekiel (3:14): And the Spirit lifted me up, and took me so that I came with bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. After the departure of the throne-chariot Ezekiel describes what happened to him in these words: the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away (v 14). This does not mean that Ezekiel was miraculously transported from one spot to another in Mesopotamia. Rather it means that Ezekiel, guided and

impelled by the Holy Spirit, went forth among his countrymen. This suggests that the site of the vision was some distance from the exile settlement, for it is to the latter place that Ezekiel now returned.

In v 14 Ezekiel describes his feelings as he departed the scene of his visionary experience. He went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit. Anger, then, was the dominant emotion in his heart at this moment. Why did he feel this way? Was he resentful at having been thrust into such a terrifying task? Possibly. It is more likely, however, that the word of the Lord that had been eaten and digested had created within him a righteous anger against the sin of Israel.

Not only was Ezekiel filled with God's indignation, he was conscious of being strengthened and guided by the hand of the Lord (v 14). Even though the vision was over, he still felt that the unseen hand was upon him.

4. *Ezekiel among the captives (3:15): And I came unto the captives at Tel Aviv who were dwelling beside the river Kebar, and to where they dwelled.*¹³³ *And I sat there seven days astonished in their midst.* Following the visionary experience, Ezekiel rejoined his fellow captives in Tel Aviv, the chief center of the exiles in Babylon. The name Tel Aviv means "heap of grain ears." The place probably got its name from the fertility of the area.

For seven days Ezekiel sat astonished among the exiles. Keil understands the term to mean motionless and dumb. This was a time for reflection, meditation and readjustment. Various explanations of the seven days have been given. This was the period of pre-scribed mourning in certain periods of Old Testament history (Job 2:13). The period for the consecration of a priest was also seven days (Lev 8:33). Thus Ezekiel may have regarded this period as his time of personal consecration to the prophetic office. The simplest explanation, however, is that Ezekiel was waiting for further instruction. There will then be no particular significance in the number seven.

Responsibility of Service (3:16-21)

Beginning in v 16 the focus shifts from the national to the individual aspects of Ezekiel's mission. In the midst of the general visitation that will fall upon the nation as a whole, each individual was to stand before the Lord to have his faith and works rewarded or punished.

This passage underscores the basic moral principle that each person is individually responsible for his own conduct. Another principle enunciated here is that God's messengers must face up to the responsibility to warn all men of the consequences of their ways.

A. Ezekiel as Watchman (3:16-17)

1. Revelation (3:16): And it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying... At the end of the seven days of silence, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, i.e., he had another revelation from God. This is the first of some sixty occurrences of the revelation formula in the book. The expression implies the experience of a possessing word or influence. In this word Ezekiel receives both instruction and further commission to carry out his ministry.

2. Installation (3:17a): Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. Ezekiel learned in this revelation that God had appointed him to be a watchman for the house of Israel. Watchman was not a new name for the prophet of God, but it was not common. Yet it is used at the beginning of Ezekiel's commissioning. It is repeated and amplified at his decommissioning in 33:1-9. Evidently the term brings out a prominent feature of Ezekiel's ministry.

Ellison puts his finger on the significance of the title watchman when he notes that Ezekiel was not merely to be God's messenger to the people in general; he was to be God's messenger to the individual in particular. He was to be a personal evangelist as well as a public orator. While it is true that only the facts of his public ministry have been preserved, this in no wise nullifies the conclusion here reached. Ezekiel was to engage in a pastoral ministry such as priests in Old Testament times were supposed to perform. The chief contribution of Ezekiel to Old Testament theology is his emphasis on individual responsibility.

3. Obligation (3:17b): Hear the word from my mouth, and give them warning from me. In his capacity as watchman, Ezekiel was to wait and watch for the word from the mouth of God. He then was to warn the people of impending calamity. The life and safety of a community were in the hand of a city watchman. So also the life and safety of the people of God were in the hands of Ezekiel. Four different

cases are discussed so that Ezekiel might clearly assess his responsibility as Israel's watchman.

B. Various Watchman Scenarios (3:18-21)

1. *Case one: the unwarned wicked (3:18)*: In his role as Watchman, Ezekiel will encounter two types of individuals. First, he will encounter the wicked - those destined to die for the sin they had committed. Ezekiel's job was to warn him of his wicked way, i.e., of the consequences of continuing his wicked course of conduct. The wicked will be those who do not serve God, but on the contrary, live in open defiance of Him.

God told Ezekiel that the penalty for the wicked is death. He will die in his iniquity (v 18). Most commentators see nothing more involved here than the end of physical life. It should be noted that it is not Ezekiel who here speaks; it is the Lord. The question is not, then, what was the level of understanding of the doctrine of retribution or the doctrine of the afterlife in the sixth century B.C. Still less is the full meaning of the utterance to be determined by ascertaining how Ezekiel or his contemporaries may have interpreted the word die. The teaching of the Bible is that those who die unforgiven "die" for all eternity in a conscious existence elsewhere known as the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). That a premature death may also be involved cannot be denied. But to contend that premature death exhausts the meaning of the statement is to disregard the total biblical teaching that eternal retribution follows the physical death of the wicked.

If the prophet fails faithfully and forthrightly to sound the alarm, he will be held accountable for the death of that sinner - his blood I will seek from your hand (v 18). The focus changes in v 18 from them to him - the individual. The teaching here harks back to the principle expressed in Gen 9:5f. Just as the blood of a murdered man demanded retribution by the nearest kinsman, so a man dying unwarned will be regarded virtually as the victim of murder committed by the unfaithful Watchman. Ezekiel himself would have to die for his negligence. Though this utterance is metaphorical, it nonetheless emphasizes the enormous responsibility that was Ezekiel's. The Christian responsibility to warn the lost is no less (1 John 5:16).

2. *Case two: non-repentant wicked (3:20)*: Nothing but good can result from the discharge of responsibility to warn the wicked. If

he heeds the warning and alters his course of conduct, he will live, i.e., save his soul. If he refuses, he will suffer the consequences of death. But the messenger thereby has done his duty. Thus he has delivered his own life of blood-guiltiness. An important principle of Old Testament jurisprudence is illustrated in this passage: The failure to save life corresponds to murder.

3. *Case three: the straying righteous man (3:20)*: On occasion Ezekiel will encounter a man whose basic orientation was righteous, but who momentarily had strayed from the path of fidelity. Sometimes God permits a stumbling block to be placed before such a one - some trial, some difficulty, some occasion for sin. For an example of such a stumbling block see 7:19 and 44:12. It is true that God tempts no man in order to bring about his destruction. Through his providence and permissive will, however, He allows men to be tried that their faith may be found true. Stumbling was not inevitable. A moral choice was always involved. Furthermore, God provided the Watchman to warn where the stumbling blocks were located.

Should one who was outwardly pious depart from the path of righteousness, the past righteous acts¹⁴⁰ of that man will not be remembered. To neglect to warn such a person will result in his death and the Watchman's guilt.

4. *Case four: the righteous man who heeds (3:21)*: But as for you, if you warn a righteous man that a righteous man does not sin, and he does not sin, he will surely live because he has been warned. As for you, you have delivered your life. If a righteous man who had stumbled into sin repented, he will thereby save his soul. In any case, the Watchman is free from any responsibility so long as he sounded the alarm.

Restriction on Service (3:22-27)

A. A New Meeting with God (3:22-23)

1. *A divine directive (3:22)*: The protracted period of commissioning comes to an end with a second glimpse of God's glory. Following the lesson at Tel Aviv, the hand of the Lord, i.e., the power and guiding influence of God, came upon Ezekiel. He was told to go out into the plain. There God will teach Ezekiel yet another lesson about his ministry. The word plain means literally "valley," the area

between two mountains. This may well have been a site frequented by Ezekiel in his periods of solitude. It may well have been in this same "valley" that Ezekiel later received his vision of dry bones (37:1).

2. *An obedient response (3:23)*: And I arose, and went out unto the plain. Behold there the glory of the Lord was standing like the glory that I saw beside the river Kebar. I fell upon my face. Ezekiel complied with the divine command. When he reached the designated spot, he saw a second vision of the glory of the Lord. The vision was very much like that which he had seen by the Kebar. Modern commentators seem to focus on the various aspects of the heavenly throne chariot - the wheels and living creatures. Ezekiel, however, sums up the whole of that vision by his reference to the One who rode the chariot - the glory of the Lord. As on the earlier occasion, Ezekiel reacted to this majestic manifestation by falling on his face (v 23).

B. New Instructions (3:24-27)

1. Restriction of his movement (3:24-25)

- a. *Strengthened by the Spirit (3:24a)*: And the Spirit came on me. He made me stand upon my feet. He spoke to me, and said... Again the Holy Spirit entered into Ezekiel, giving him the strength and confidence to stand on his feet.
- b. *What Ezekiel was to do (3:24b)*: Go shut yourself up in the midst of your house. Ezekiel now received a new command. He was told to shut himself within his house.
- c. *What would be done to Ezekiel (3:25)*: And as for you, son of man, behold fetters will be placed upon you. You will not go out in their midst. In his house, Ezekiel will be bound with fetters. No evidence exists that Ezekiel was ever literally bound by his auditors. The fetters must be symbolic or metaphorical of self-imposed (or God-imposed) restraint. Perhaps the restraints were placed on the prophet by his fellow captives. It seems that Ezekiel's movements outside his house were severely restricted, if not actually curtailed.

2. Restriction on his speech (3:26-27)

- a. *His mouth closed (3:26)*: And your tongue will cleave unto the roof of your mouth so that you will be dumb. You will not become to them a man of reproof, for they are a rebellious house. Divine

restrictions were placed upon the speech of Ezekiel, as well as on his movements. His tongue will cleave unto the roof of his mouth. Because of the rebelliousness of the house of Israel, the prophet should (or will) be silent.

During that period of self-imposed (or God-imposed) dumbness, he will not serve as a man of reproof to them. This ministry of silence seems to have been intended to demonstrate to the exiles that they were indeed a rebellious house (v 26).

- b. His mouth opened (3:27): But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth. You will say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD. The one who hears, let him hear, and the one who desists let him desist; for they are a rebellious house. Ezekiel will only communicate with his fellow exiles at such times as he had a divine communication to share with them. From time to time God will commit to his Watchman a revelation that was to be passed on to the captives. Ezekiel was to preface every spoken word with *Thus says the Lord*.

The silence of Ezekiel was to last for a limited time. When Jerusalem fell six years later, the restraints were removed from the prophet (33:22). This was, to use the language of Taylor, ritual dumbness. Ezekiel did not suffer from catalepsy or some nervous disorder. Rather the idea is that he was to speak only when under a divine compulsion to do so. The reaction of men to these God-given pronouncements will confirm men in their attitude toward God. Men will either obey it, or they will despise it. In the former case, they will find grace; in the latter, condemnation. By his preaching and non-preaching, Ezekiel continuously confronted his auditors with the life and death alternatives.

3:25-27, The interpretation of this paragraph is extremely difficult. The problem is not so much in what is said - though that is difficult enough - but in the timing of it. How can the previous commands to preach the word be squared with the thought that Ezekiel was to be dumb? How can his being bound with cords be harmonized with subsequent chapters that show him moving about freely? Those who have wrestled with these questions may be divided into two broad categories. First, some think in terms of a literal period of silence. Even among those who hold to a literal period of silence at least four different positions have been taken:

1. Some think the episode is chronologically out of place. They think this command was issued after ch 24. The passage has been placed in its present position because of topical considerations. It does, after all, partake of the nature of a commission.

2. Others suggest that there was a period of dumbness prior to the launching of the ministry of proclamation. This will be the obvious solution to the problem were it not for the difficulty of finding time for such a period of dumbness in the known chronology of Ezekiel's life.

3. David Kimchi offered the intriguing suggestion that the silence was divinely imposed so as to prevent Ezekiel from speaking until he had received the entire revelation that God reveals in chs 1-11. He was not to speak prematurely.

4. Finally, some suggest that the silence was the first of a series of prophecies that Ezekiel acted out. Another approach to this passage regards the fetters on Ezekiel as symbolic or metaphorical. These scholars see the restraint upon the prophet as a symbol of the bitter opposition of his fellow exiles to his prophesying. Ezekiel preaches, but the exiles do not listen. Since no real communication will take place, it will be as though Ezekiel were dumb. Still others interpret the entire passage as saying simply that Ezekiel will refuse to speak to his neighbors about ordinary matters. He will speak only when he had a divine revelation.

Chapter 4

Dramatic Parables (4:1-7:27)

The use of symbolic actions by Old Testament prophets was a proven way of gaining an audience and underscoring a point. The great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah found the symbolic act a useful tool when they could no longer obtain a hearing for their message. Ezekiel performs four dramatic parables in this section depicting (1) the siege of Jerusalem (4:1-3); (2) national sin (4:4-6); (3) the siege famine (4:9-17); and (4) the nation's fate (5:1-4).

These dramatic parables were performed in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. At that time any thought of Jerusalem's overthrow will, according to any human prognostication, be highly improbable. Zedekiah ruled in Jerusalem as Nebuchadrezzar's vassal. With his lands diminished and his military strength exhausted, no one could imagine that he will be so stupid as to provoke his overlord. Yet Ezekiel joined Jeremiah in affirming that destruction was the ultimate fate of Jerusalem.

Parable of Jerusalem's Siege (4:1-3)

A. Preparation (4:1-3a):

1. The tile (4:1): But as for you, son of man, take to yourself a tile and place it before you. Inscribe upon it a

city, Jerusalem. In his first symbolic action, Ezekiel was to sketch a diagram of Jerusalem on a tile or brick (RSV). In Mesopotamia the clay tablet was the common writing material. While the clay was moist and soft, the inscription was engraved upon it with a stylus; then the tablet was exposed to the sun for hardening. Large numbers of such tablets have been recovered, some of which have diagrams of buildings upon them similar to what an architect might devise. It would be natural under the circumstances for a Hebrew exile to make use of the Babylonian writing material.

2. Siege equipment (4:2): Lay siege against it, and construct a mound about it. Set against it encampments, and place battering rams round about. Ezekiel was instructed to lay siege against the city he had drawn. By a common figure, the prophet is here represented as doing what he portrays. Perhaps he drew on the tile the plan of a siege. On the other hand, it may mean that he was to model the various siege weapons around the brick. A third possibility is that the armament of the besieging troops was represented on other tiles. Four common siege techniques are named:

Assault towers denote the towers manned by archers by which a besieged city was attacked. The Hebrew is actually singular. Sometimes these towers were of enormous height, as much as twenty stories. Such towers are frequently depicted in Mesopotamian art. According to 2 Kgs 25:1, assault towers were used in the final siege of Jerusalem.

Mounds were banks of soil heaped up to the level of the walls of the besieged city. Such mounds could serve as observation posts, and, if close enough to the walls, ramps for the battering rams.

Camps were military detachments that surrounded the city. Battering rams were iron-shod beams transported by a wheeled tower. Often the battering ram was found in the lower part of the siege towers mentioned above.

3. The iron pan (4:3a): As for you, take to yourself an iron pan. Place it as a wall of iron between you and the city. The prophet was to place an iron pan between himself and the inscribed tile. This was a kind of flat pan - virtually no more than a sheet of metal - such as was used for baking a thin cake of bread (cf. Lev 2:5). This pan

represented a wall of iron. Normally walls provided protection or containment. The pan probably represents the siege wall around Jerusalem erected by the Babylonians.

B. Action (4:3b): Set your face against it. It will enter a state of siege, and you will besiege it. It is a sign to the house of Israel. With his symbolic objects in place, Ezekiel was to perform a symbolic action. He was (1) to set his face against the city; and (2) to lay siege to it. The prophet was to assume the part of the attacking army. Since Ezekiel was God's representative, his actions underscored the point that God was fighting against Jerusalem. Perhaps the laying siege (RSV, press the siege) indicates the gradual movement of the clay models of siege instruments nearer and nearer the doomed city. The tile diagram and the objects pertaining to it were designed to be a sign to the house of Israel.

Ellison pictures Ezekiel silently acting out these parables much to the chagrin of the growing numbers who assembled each day to watch his antics. When the crowd was ready to listen, Ezekiel gave the verbal explanation of his actions (5:5-7:27). The term house of Israel here embraces both those Jews who were in exile and those who remained in Judah.

Parable of Israel's Sin (4:4-8)

In 4:1-3 Ezekiel impersonated Jerusalem's enemies. His role is now reversed. Here Ezekiel symbolizes the apostate people of God. He is to lie first on his left side, then on his right side, to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The Oriental habit was to face eastward when indicating points of the compass. Facing east one has north on his left side and south on his right. Hence the left side represented the house of Israel, the northern kingdom that had been carried captive in 722 B.C. The right side symbolized the house of Judah, the southern kingdom that was in its dying days at the moment Ezekiel received this revelation. The number of days that the prophet spent on each side symbolized the number of years that each kingdom stood under the condemnation of God.

A. General Observations. A few observations about this action parable need to be made before the difficult question of the numbers found here is taken up:1.

1. The action of the prophet in lying first on the one side, then on the other, was commanded by God. Therefore, there is no reason to suspect that Ezekiel suffered from epileptic seizures or catalepsy.

2. Verse 4 seems to suggest that the time periods do not represent the time of Israel's sinning, but the period during which the people of God had been, or will be, punished for their sins.

3. The longer period of punishment for Israel, the northern kingdom, indicates the greater guilt of that nation.

4. Part of the time Israel and Judah bore the penalty of their sin simultaneously. That is to say, the period of punishment overlapped.

5. The end of the period of punishment was the same for both kingdoms - 539 B.C.

6. In dealing with prophetic numbers, one must allow for approximations or rounding off.

7. Such great diversity of opinion exists as to the terminus a quo of the figures in vv 5-6 that dogmatic assertions are out of place.

8. Inherent in these figures is a hint of hope. The period of punishment, though long and terrible, will not be interminable.

9. It is not necessary to assume that Ezekiel was in the prone position day and night. Other activities are said to have been performed during this period. Hence the symbolic prone position must have lasted only part of each day.

B. Ezekiel on the Left Side (4:4-5): In his prone position, Ezekiel was to bear the iniquity of the two kingdoms. The term iniquity in the Old Testament can refer to the sin itself, or the punishment that comes upon that offense. In the present passage, the term seems to have the latter connotation. Ezekiel is to symbolize through his personal suffering of physical restraint the punishment of God's people in being cut off from the holy land and the temple. This symbolic suffering is by no means to be equated with the vicarious suffering that is set forth in Isa 53.

Ezekiel was to lie on his left side 390 days. If the Hebrew text be retained as is, there seems to be only one possible terminus a quo for this period, viz., the division of the Israelite kingdom in 931B.C.

Allowing for round figures - something very common in prophecy - the 390 years terminate with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. Through that entire period the citizens of the northern kingdom were under the wrath of God because of their apostate activities.

C. Ezekiel on the Right Side (4:6): From what point are the forty years of Judah's punishment to be counted? The figure forty is reminiscent of the period of Israel wandering in the wilderness (Num 14:34). In Ezekiel's day, the nation came into "the wilderness of the peoples" (20:35). From the final deportation of Jews to Babylon in 582 B.C. (Jer 52:30) until the fall of Babylon and the end of the Babylonian exile in 539 B.C. is a period of forty-two years. The prophet is probably referring to this period with the symbolic number forty, the period during which God's people, because of their sin, are denied access to the Promised Land.

Another view worthy of note is that in these figures a purely symbolic significance. The two figures combined yield 430 years. This may be a representation of the future in terms of the past. Just as Israel was 430 years in Egyptian bondage, so will they now be in bondage in Mesopotamia.

Some scholars find difficulty in fitting the 430 days of this action parable into the chronology of the early ministry of Ezekiel. Ellison argues that this action parable must be fitted into the year and two months that elapsed between 1:2 and 8:1. According to the Jewish system of reckoning time, this is equivalent to 413 days. Ellison therefore argues that the forty days on the right side must have been concurrent with the last forty days of the 390 days on the left side. In the fulfillment of this prophecy the forty years of Judah's punishment were in fact concurrent with the last forty years of Israel's punishment. In the symbolic action, however, the days seem to be consecutive - 390 on the left side followed by forty on the right side. Therefore, one must conclude either (1) that during the period between 1:2 and 8:1 a month had been intercalated; or (2) that the symbolic prostration extended beyond the time stipulated in 8:1. Of course, if the prophet's prostration occurred only in a vision, as some scholars contend, it will not be necessary to fit the 430 days into the chronology of Ezekiel's life.

D. Other Details of the Parable (4:7-8): *So unto the siege of Jerusalem you will set your face. Your shoulder will be uncovered.*

You will prophesy against it. (8) Behold, I have placed bands upon you, and you will not turn yourself from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege. During the entire time that he was lying on his side, Ezekiel was to fix his gaze upon the tile that depicted the besieged city of Jerusalem. The fixing of the gaze indicates steadfastness of purpose. He was to have his arm uncovered like a warrior prepared for battle (cf. Isa 52:10). By these actions he was prophesying against Jerusalem (v 7). Verse 8 underscores the discomfort that Ezekiel must have experienced while carrying out this symbolic act. He was not to turn from one side to another. There may be a hint of special divine aid in the statement I lay bands upon you.

Parable of Jerusalem's Famine (4:9-17)

How could Ezekiel be commanded to make bread while lying bound upon his side? Several commentators think that this inconsistency is proof that all of these symbolic actions transpired in vision where such a thing is possible. However, if the prophet's immobilization occupied only a part of each day there is no inconsistency. Once Ezekiel had performed his daily demonstration - lying facing the model of the besieged city - he apparently arose and performed the other symbolic acts that related to the siege.

A. Original Directive (4:9-13)

1. The quality of the food (4:9)

a. Various grains (4:9a): Now as for you, take for yourself wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and fitches. The nature of his food was restricted. His bread was to be made of an odd mixture of grains and seeds. Instead of the normal wheat flour, various kinds of cereals will have to be mixed so as to obtain sufficient quantity to make a cake of bread. Those besieged in Jerusalem will have to eat what they could get. Six different kinds of cereal grains are specified: (1) wheat and (2) barley are frequently mentioned as foods in the Old Testament; (3) beans (pol) are mentioned elsewhere only in 2 Sam 17:28; (4) lentils, (5) millet, and (6) fitches (spelt, RSV), a species of wheat.

b. Mingled grains (4:9b): Put them in a vessel, and prepare them as food for yourself... The various grains were to be placed in one

vessel. In the law of Moses it was forbidden to sow the ground with mingled seeds (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9). Though not specifically condemned, the mixing of these grains and seeds in flour will seem to be banned under the same principle. In a city under siege and in foreign exile, the Jews will not be able to be so scrupulous about their diet.

2. Duration of the diet (4:9c): *according to the number of days in which you are lying upon your side, three hundred ninety days and you will eat it.* The dietary restrictions were to be in force during the 390 days of bearing the iniquity of the people of God (v 9). Here again the question of the duration of Ezekiel's symbolic siege of Jerusalem is raised. Verse 9 seems to suggest that the prophet lies upon his side only 390 days. What happened to the forty days he was to lie upon his right side? Many modern scholars assume that the 390 days are inclusive of the forty days. However, this interpretation runs counter to the explicit statement in v 6 that Ezekiel was to lie on his right side after he had finished the 390 days on his left side. One must conclude either (1) that the dietary regulations of this paragraph were to be observed only during the time when Ezekiel was on his left side; or (2) that the dietary restrictions were observed during the forty days on the right side as well, even though the text does not explicitly so state. Any other interpretations will put v 9 at variance with v 6. God's people were to be exiled from the sacred temple precincts for 390 years, the northern kingdom from 931 to 539 B.C., and the southern kingdom for the last forty years of that period.

Ezekiel's symbolic diet during the days of his "siege" was designed to set forth two basic thoughts: (1) the scarcity of food that will exist in Jerusalem during the final siege; and (2) the impure food that those exiled from Judah will be forced to eat. This point he established during the 390 days on his left side. Continuing this phase of the demonstration during the period he lay on his right side would have been superfluous.

3. The quantity of the food (4:10-11): *Your food that you eat will be twenty shekels in weight for a day. Once each day you will eat it. (11) As for water, you will drink the sixth of a hin by measure. Once each day you will drink it.* The quantity of his food was limited. Ezekiel's diet during the 390 days was to consist of

twenty shekels of food (v 10) and the sixth of a hin of water (v 11). This amounts to about eight ounces of food and two cups of water daily. This is insufficient for maintenance of physical well-being. Only with supernatural assistance would Ezekiel have been able to follow this regime during the symbolic days of siege. In a hot climate this limitation on water is very oppressive. Rationed water is called the water of affliction (1 Kgs 22:27; Isa 30:20). The fact that food was weighed rather than measured indicates the most extreme scarcity (cf. Lev 26:26; Rev 6:6).

The prophet was to partake of his unpalatable meals literally, from time to time (v 10). The rabbis interpreted this phrase to mean once in a twenty-four hour period. Currey concurs. The instruction is to partake of the food at the appointed interval of a day and at no other time.

4. The consumption of the food (4:12a): *As a barley cake you will eat it...* The meager food was to be eaten as barley cake, i.e., he is to eat his meal with all the relish that one customarily gives to barley cakes. Both the eating and the preparation of the food was to be in their presence, i.e., so the exiles could observe. Thus will they come to understand it as a sign of what had befallen them already, and of what will yet befall their brethren in Jerusalem.

5. The preparation of the food (4:12b-13): *and with human dung you will bake it in their presence. (13) The Lord said, In this way the children of Israel will eat their unclean food among the nations where I will drive them. One of the usual calamities of a siege is lack of fuel. To further dramatize siege conditions, Ezekiel was to prepare his food with unclean fuel. The prophet was told to use human dung (v 12) as cooking fuel, that which was revolting as well as ceremonially impure and defiling (cf. Deut 23:12ff.). Barley bread was prepared on hot stones (1 Kgs 19:6) that were to be heated by human excrement. For the moment the ceremonial law was to be overridden so as to make a moral point.*

The significance of the disgusting instruction regarding the use of human dung for fuel is given in v 13. Those Israelites who yet remained in Jerusalem will be forced to eat unclean food among the nations where God will drive them (cf. Hos 9:3). Foreign lands were regarded by the Israelites as unclean. Even those who attempted to maintain

the dietary code will be eating unclean bread because the ritual first fruits of the harvest will not be able to be offered in the temple of the Lord. In addition to the specific prediction being set forth in this action parable, Ezekiel is making a significant point: Israel's position as a separate, sanctified people will be destroyed during the Babylonian exile.

B. Mitigation (4:14-15):

1. *Ezekiel's protest (4:14): Then I said, Ah, O Lord GOD! Behold my soul has not been polluted, and a corpse or that which was torn in pieces I have never eaten from my youth until now. Abominable meat has never come into my mouth.* The command to prepare his food with human dung as fuel shocked the conscientious young priest. He obliquely requested relief from this phase of the object lesson. The first words that Ezekiel speaks in this book are an emotional outburst, Ah Lord God! (cf. Jer 1:6). The godly prophet was not so much concerned with what displeased his taste as what offended his conscience.

From exasperation Ezekiel moved to narrative prayer that is introduced in v 14 with behold. My soul (i.e., I) has not been polluted. He meticulously had sought to abide by the dietary laws from my youth until now. Even in the deprivations of captivity and the spiritual confusion of that episode, he had conscientiously attempted to follow the law of God.

Ezekiel cites three examples of how he faithfully had observed the Old Testament law. (1) He had not eaten of a corpse, i.e., an animal that had not been properly slaughtered. Such meat was forbidden (Lev 17:15; Deut 14:21). (2) He had not eaten what was torn in pieces, i.e., an animal that had been killed by a wild beast. Such was forbidden to the Israelite because the blood had not been properly drained. (3) Abominable meat (PiGG^ol) had never come into his mouth. In its more restricted sense, the Hebrew term refers to sacrificial flesh rendered unfit by disregard for the laws of sacrifice. In a broader sense, the term is used of any forbidden food.

2. The Lord's compassion (4:15): Then He said unto me, See, I have appointed for you cattle dung instead of human dung. You will prepare your food with it. The gracious Lord acquiesced in the request

of His prophet. He permitted Ezekiel to substitute animal dung for the prescribed human dung (v 15). Dried cow dung was not as physically disgusting as human dung. So in the case of Ezekiel, there was a mitigation of the defilement; but still defilement remained, and in exile the people of God were subjected to it.

C. Explanation (4:16-17): He said unto me, Son of man, behold I am about to shatter the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They will eat food by weight and with concern. Water by measure and in dismay they will drink, (17) because bread and water will be scarce. They will be dismayed one with another. They will waste away under their punishment. Shortly God will shatter the staff of bread in Jerusalem. Bread was then, and is still, known as the staff of life because man is so dependent upon it (cf. Lev 26:26; Ps 105:16). The inhabitants of that doomed city will be forced to eat food by weight and drink water by measure. The food and water will be so scarce as to give rise to grave concern and even dismay (v 16). Faced with this lack of food the populace will gradually waste away under the punishment of the Lord (v 17).

The first four verses of ch 5 probably belong as the concluding verses of ch 4. The three discourses in chs 5-7 are related in that they elaborate on the symbolism of 5:1-4. However, each of these discourses has its distinctive thrust. The first is characterized by the dual themes of rebellion and retribution (5:5-17). The focus is on disobedience and desolation in the second discourse (6:1-14). In his third sermon, Ezekiel speaks of chaos and calamity (7:1-27).

Whether these sermons were delivered during the later part of the time of the symbolic siege of Jerusalem, or whether they were given sometime afterwards cannot be determined. In either case, the symbolic actions gained for Ezekiel an attentive audience. It appears that during the period of these public discourses, he was generally treated with respect (cf. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

Parable of the Nation's Fate (5:1-4)

A. *Shaving of the Hair (5:1a):* During the days of his symbolic siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel performed another act. He shaved his head and beard with a sharp sword that he used like a barber's razor. The sword symbolizes the invading Chaldean army. Ezekiel symbolizes the land of Judah.

The coming invader will scrape the land bare (cf. Isa 7:20). He will bring upon it disgrace and mourning. Again Ezekiel was commanded to violate the ceremonial law so as to make a prophetic application. The hair of the priest was a mark of his consecration to God's service (Lev 19:27). Shaving the head was a sign of mourning (Isa 3:24; 22:12). If an Israelite priest shaved his head, he was defiled (Lev 21:5). Ezekiel defiled and humiliated himself as a symbol of the humiliation of the people of Judah who were defiled and no longer holy to the Lord. Nothing was left to do but to mourn their death as a nation.

The hair removed from face and head was to be divided by weight into three parts. The balances that Ezekiel was to use may symbolize justice just as is still the case today. God's judgment is measured, accurate and fair (cf. Jer 15:2).

B. Distribution of the Hair (5:1b-2)

1. *The first third (5:1b): Take to yourself balances, and divide them. A third part you will burn in the fire in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are fulfilled.* Ezekiel's shorn hair symbolizes the population of Jerusalem. The manner of the disposal of the hair indicated the various fates that awaited those rebellious Jews. A third of the hair was to be burned in the midst of the city, i.e., on the tile that depicted the city of Jerusalem. These hairs symbolized those who will die in the horrors of warfare - fire, sword, famine and pestilence - when the city was besieged.

2. The second third (5:2a): Take a third part, smite with the sword around about her. Another third of the hair was to be smitten with the sword around about her, viz., the city. This symbolized the fate of those who tried to escape the city, either during or after the fall. A prime example is King Zedekiah and his associates (cf. 2 Kgs 25:4 ff.).

3. The third third (5:2b): And a third part you will scatter to the wind. And I will unsheath a sword after them. The last third of the hair was to be scattered to the wind. The hairs symbolize those who will be dispersed to foreign lands. Though they had escaped the holocaust at Jerusalem, they will not find peace, for I will unsheath a sword after them (v 2). Jeremiah predicted the same fate for the exiles (Jer 9:15), as did Moses before him (Lev 26:33).

1. Gathering of the Hair (5:3-4)

1. *air bound in the hem (5:3): Take a few in number, and bind them in the hem of your garment.* In this bleak passage, there is a hint of hope. A few of the hairs - presumably those that had been scattered to the wind - were to be retrieved and bound in the hem of Ezekiel's garment. A remnant of those carried off to exile will survive.

2. Hair burned in the fire (5:4): From them take again, and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them. From it a fire will go out into all the house of Israel. Though some will survive, their situation will be desperate. From the hairs retrieved, Ezekiel was to take some and cast them into the fire. The fire here may represent persecution through which some of the Jewish remnant will die. On the other hand, the fire may represent the fire that will destroy Babylon. Those who refused to heed the prophetic admonition to flee Babylon will face this fate.

Thus the general drift of this parable is clear. Ezekiel foresees the total destruction and dispersion of Jerusalem's populace. True faith, however, will survive in a faithful remnant. The expression from them fire will go out into all the house of Israel is difficult. Perhaps the thought is that even the faithful remnant in Babylon will suffer new hardships because of the suicidal rebellion launched by the leadership in Jerusalem.

The Day of the Lord (Ezekiel 6:1 - 7:27)

Syncretism: *the curse of apostate religion* (6:1-14): Whether it is a multi-faith worship service in Canterbury Cathedral in the late twentieth century, or the incorporation of Canaanite deities into the worship of Yahweh, Israel's God, the verdict of God is the same: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exod. 20:3). Nor do we need to think of idolatry in terms of formal worship services. People's gods are what they love, see, serve and worship. It maybe the unholy trio of 's's: sex, shekels or stomach - all three serving self; or, it may be the three 'p's: pleasure, possessions or position, which John describes as 'the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does' (I John 2:16). Verses 1-7 define for us the nature, judgment of and penalty for idolatry.

1. *The nature of idolatry:* Ezekiel mentions ‘high places’, ‘altars,’ ‘incense altars’ and ‘idols’ (6:3,4,6,9). The ‘altars’ were used for the cooking of animal meat devoted to the idol, and ‘incense altars’ were stands similar in appearance to the altar of incense used in Israel’s worship in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Of interest, however, is Ezekiel’s use of the phrase ‘what you have made’ (6:6) to describe their idols. It reminds us of Isaiah’s references to idolatry in Isaiah 44:12-20. He pictures a blacksmith, powerful and strong enough to forge an idol in the fire, who suddenly gets hungry and faint’ Or a carpenter who cuts down a tree, makes firewood with some of it to cook his dinner and makes a god out of the rest! (Isa. 44:16-18).

Preaching at the same time as Isaiah, but in the northern kingdom of Israel rather than in Jerusalem, Hosea depicted the nature of Israel’s idolatry in starker terms (Hosea 4: 13-14). If adultery and prostitution literally characterized what had been happening in their shrines, these terms were also descriptive of their spiritual relationship with God: they had ‘adulterous hearts’ and God was grieved (6:9). Pretending to have a personal and loyal relationship with Yahweh, they were intimate with other gods, too.

2. *God’s assessment of idolatry:* Adultery is a violation of the covenant of marriage. It speaks of betrayal and disloyalty. It tells of love that has grown sour. Idols are ‘evil’ and idolatry ‘detestable’ (6:9; cf. 5:9). It is not morally neutral, or an ‘alternative form of worship’. Man is not free to worship as he likes, and when the church fails to record God’s opprobrium of idolatry, it fails to pronounce his verdict upon such practices. Idolatry is everywhere represented in Scripture as the greatest insult the creature can offer to the Creator. Man’s religions have been his greatest crimes.

3. *The penalty for idolatry:* The warning of the previous chapter, that idolatry sparks off God’s anger and causes it to bum against his people (5 :9,1 I), now explodes with severity: the shrines and their contents will be utterly destroyed and idolaters will be ‘slain’ by the invading Babylonian armies (6:5-7). Death was the required penalty for idolatry within Israel’s theocratic state (Deut. 28:21), and while it may no longer be considered so in our pluralistic states, spiritual death remains God’s threat for habitual, unrepentant idolaters. Idolaters, Paul warned, will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9). The

prophet, having been asked to set his face against the mountains of Israel (6:2), is now asked to clap his hands and stamp his feet(6: II). This seems to represent the way Israel’s enemies will respond to their downfall. The nation that had known such great privileges would ‘fall by the sword, famine and plague’ (6:11), and her enemies would taunt her. No matter where the people might be, they would meet with God’s judgment (6: 12). Chapter 6 ends with a description of Israel’s complete desolation from the southern, deserts to a city called ‘Diblah’ (6:14) in the north.’

The Lord-Attacker (7:1-27)

The theme of judgment continues throughout chapter 7. Referring to himself as the Lord-Attacker, ‘the Lord who strikes the blow’ (7:9), Ezekiel warns of God’s judgment on ‘the land of Israel’ (7:2; cf. 6:2), using the refrains: ‘The end has come’, ‘The end is now upon you,’ ‘Doom has come upon you’, ‘The time has come, the day is near’ and ‘The day is here!’ (7:2,3,6, 7, 10,12).’ God’s ‘anger’ bums against them (7:3,8); his ‘wrath’ is kindled (7:8,12,14,19); he comes to ‘judge’ his people (7:8); he threatens to ‘turn [his] face away from them’ (7:22; cf. 6:2). Ezekiel’s listeners were no doubt used to referring to God as ‘*Jehovah-jireh*’ (The Lord will provide’, Gen. 22:14) and ‘*Jehovah-nissi*’(‘The Lord is my Banner’, i.e. the Lord who protects, Exod. 17: 15); it must have come as a shock to hear Ezekiel refer to God as ‘*Jehovah-makkeh*’ (‘the Lord who strikes’, 7:9). It is all reminiscent of Isaiah’s predictions a century earlier (Isa. 13), which warned that the ‘day’ of Babylonian invasion was coming (Isa. 13:6). Constant repetition here in Ezekiel 7 of ‘the day’ underlines for us how difficult it was for the Israelites to believe that Jerusalem could be destroyed.

Amos, too, was greeted with incredulity when he prophesied: ‘Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light?’ (Amos 5:20). It is this sense of shock that lies behind the assertion in verse 7: ‘Doom has come upon you - you who dwell in the land,’ Having known the prophecy for over a hundred years, they still do not believe that they - of all people - deserve to be treated in this way! They had believed, rightly, that God’s plan and purpose are invincible; but they had believed, wrongly, that his plan and purpose included every Israelite, no matter how they lived. The covenant curses were an integral part of God’s

message (Deut. 27, 28) - a fact which the Israelites had conveniently forgotten. Moses had reminded them in the wilderness that God confirms his covenant (Deut. 8: 18). That meant that he would keep his promise to save his people and cause them to enter into the richness of his blessing. But it also meant that those who became unfaithful to his covenant would discover that they had rejected his blessing. Their hardness of heart would lead to judgment. Even as Ezekiel speaks these words, the rumbling of a Babylonian army approaching for battle is barely three years away! Four features of these judgment pronouncements are worth noting.

1. *God's anger is personal*: Stressing the use of the first person singular in Ezekiel 7:8-9 makes a telling point: 'I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices, I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you, Then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes the blow.' It was the same message that Amos had preached with faithfulness about Israel's God (Amos 3:6). There is more at work here than some impersonal cosmic law to the effect that sin is always followed by disaster. God himself is angry with his people because of their sin.

2. *God's anger is not capricious or arbitrary*: It is made clear that God's judgment is due to Israel's sin: 'I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices' (7:3; cf. 7:4,8,27). The God of Israel is different from the pagan deities to which Israel had succumbed; he is different in his wrath. He is angry with reluctance. He is slow to wrath (Psalm. 103:8) and unwilling to afflict (Lam. 3:33). As he makes clear later in Ezekiel, he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23,32). It is sin, and only sin, that causes God's anger to burn. As George Swinnock put it, 'Sin is the weight on the clock which makes the hammer to strike.'

3. *God's anger is related to his covenant*: God's anger is different in kind from that of the pagan deities, whose anger was malicious and vindictive. They were characterized by unpredictability. At any moment they might 'see red'. Their anger was no different from that of human beings whose anger is due to temper and loss of control. This is seen in the way some fathers discipline their children, 'as they [think] best'

(Heb. 12:10). Their egos are bruised and they lash out. God never behaves in that way. His wrath is always in response to sin and always in proportion to the sin committed. The threefold use of the word 'repay' (7:3,4,9) suggests a principle: sin receives what it deserves from God - no more and no less. When God judges he does so with equity. His dealings with man are always in terms of his covenant. He has made clear the penalty for infringement and he never once operates outside of these parameters.

4. *God's anger is not partial*: Priests, elders, even 'the king' and 'the prince', will suffer the judgment of God (7:26-27). God is no respecter of persons. One's station in life is no safety against God's wrath when it ignites against sin. From the highest to the lowest, there will be no escape when invasion and war strike Judah in a few years' time. Expanding on this theme at length, chapter 7 suggests that a fourfold problem lay behind their deadly amnesia.

(i). *An arrogant heart*: Ezekiel portrays a rod that has blossomed (7: 10). It is a rod of pride! When we note that the Hebrew for 'rod' (matteh) can also mean 'tribe', the allusion to Judah's arrogance becomes apparent. 'God 'will put an end to the pride of the mighty' (7:24). Despite all that they had received from God, the Israelites had been guilty before of spiritual pride, boasting in the wilderness: 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me' (Deut. 8: 17). Those of us who are acquainted with our own hearts know how prone they are to pride. Solomon's warnings are salutary: 'When pride comes, then comes disgrace' (Prov. II :2). 'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall' (Prov. 16:18).

(ii). *Self-confidence*: Arrogance is quickly followed by confidence in one's own ability to accomplish anything. In the past when enemies threatened, Israel had matched them with superior power. Once again, when Babylon comes, they will 'blow the trumpet and get everything ready' (7: 14), forgetting that unless the Lord fights for them they will be surely defeated. But they will find their strength is gone: 'Every hand will go limp, and every knee will become as weak as water' (7:17). What God said to King Jehoshaphat is a lesson we need to remember at all times: 'Listen... This is what the Lord says to you: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's'" (2 Chron. 20: I 5). God is the Captain of our salvation. The battle is the Lord's. Following the crossing of

the Red Sea, Moses sang, 'The Lord is a warrior; the Lord IS his name' (Exod. 15:3). Israel had forgotten it.

(iii) *The snare of wealth*: When the Babylonians arrive their wealth will be thrown into the streets, perhaps in hope of saving their lives. Their idols, adorned with precious jewels and stones, will be carried off. Wealth, Ezekiel suggests, 'has made them stumble into sin' (7:19). Affluence and prosperity can often prove to be a snare. Jesus spoke of this danger in the parable of the sower and the soils. Some soil failed to produce fruit because of the presence of thorns, which he interpreted as 'the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things' (Mark 4: 19). 'Prosperity is a gift,' Sinclair Ferguson writes. 'It can be a blessing; it is always a test.' The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (I Tim. 6: 10). Martin Luther once suggested: 'There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and the purse.' Jesus made it clear that mammon, an Aramaic word meaning 'wealth', is a rival god (Matt. 6:24). It was the principal cause of the rich young ruler's doom (Matt. 19:21). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, pointed out that living for wealth is daft - because earthly treasures do not last: dangerous - because it makes us focus on things 'below' and disastrous - because serving Master Mammon ends in shipwreck (Matt. 6:19-24).

(iv) *The curse of delay*: In the ensuing disaster that comes upon Jerusalem some will turn to the prophets, priests and elders for guidance (7:26). But these people will have nothing to say. It is too late: 'When terror comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none' (7:25). This is the curse of procrastination. Had they sought peace with God earlier they would have found it; God's arms were ready to enfold them. But now it was too late. The message of these two chapters has been to show that sin cannot go unpunished. Though the 'day of the Lord' in view in these verses has consistently referred to the Babylonian invasion, it must be remembered that this even, like the Assyrian invasion of Israel earlier, was a precursor of the coming of another 'day': an eschatological day at the end of time when the whole world will appear before God's judgment throne (Isa. 2: 12,17; Zeph. 1: 14,15). It is a scene that Ezekiel depicts, too (30:3). It is a day for which we need to be ready. Faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, is the only way to meet it. The possibility remains that we may be brought to face the judgment, only to find that it is too late for us to make

peace with God. We may, like these inhabitants of Jerusalem in Ezekiel's day, wake up to find that the Jehovah-makkeh has broken through the fortifications of our lives and all attempts to find a way out are gone (cf. 7:9).

(iv) *The remnant*: But all is not doom in these chapters God has an inviolable purpose which nothing can destroy - not even the unfaithfulness of Israel. What emerges in this chapter of judgment is a theology of grace, and we must not lose sight of it. A remnant will be saved despite their adultery (6:8). What explains the fact that God perseveres with the incessant grumblers of Moses' day, or the apostate and thankless people of Israel of the seventh and eighth century? It is his covenant of grace! The covenant of love explains why, time and again, God steps in and rescues a remnant from among those whom he judges for their sin (Deut. 7:7-9). God has determined to save his true church, and nothing will gainsay it. This had been Isaiah's word of encouragement when Assyria threatened northern Israel (Isa. 1:9; 6:13; 8:16,18; 17:6; 30:17; 41:8-9; 42:18 - 44:5). It now becomes Ezekiel's hope when Babylon threatens southern Judah, a century later (6:8,10). Some, by means of the trial of exile, will have cause to see the error of their ways and acknowledge their sins (6:7,10). God's purpose is to save a people for himself; saved sinners know God, But some, even then, will have cause only to acknowledge that God is Judge. Even though Ezekiel speaks of these too coming to 'know' God (6: 13,14) he is addressing here even those who perish. 'Such was the character of this knowledge'. Calvin comments, 'that it only frightened them, and did not bend them to humility.' The same discipline hardens one and softens another. It was the same with the experience of execution suffered by Jesus' companions on either side of him at Calvary. For one the cross brought about a spirit of repentance, causing him to cry out for pardon. In the life of backslidden Christians, affliction, as Martin Luther once said, is the best theologian.

Focus: Covenant violation and the book of Deuteronomy

Just before the Lord's people entered Canaan, Moses gathered them together on the plains of Moab and declared to them the Word of God. He spelled out in detail the requirements of discipleship in the kingdom of God. In summary, it was this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' (Deut. 6:5). A generation later, Joshua, giving his final address before

he died, encouraged the settled Israelites in Canaan to do the same: 'So be very careful to love the Lord your God, (Josh. 23: 11). But Joshua did more than encourage the Lord's people to love God. He warned them of the consequences of not doing so. In a sermon that includes three marks of discipleship: humility (i.e. putting God first by acknowledging his power in our lives, Josh. 23:3), obedience to God's Word (23:6) and separation from the world (23:7-8), Joshua also includes a fearful note as to what those who fail to comply with these requirements can expect: defeat, discomfort and disgrace (23:12-13,15-16). Joshua was, in fact, repeating something Moses had made clear: that the covenant of God is a two-edged sword. There are promises, to be sure, and Joshua is adamant that God will keep them: 'You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed' (23:14). No doubt some of Joshua's listeners were ready to sing, 'Great is thy faithfulness' and go home after that. But Joshua is not finished. Being true to the covenant means being true to its sanctions as well its blessings.

God promises to bless those who walk in his ways; but equally, he promises to punish those who do not. 'But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you' (23:15-16). To use a modern phrase, this is 'the down-side' of the covenant. It is what Moses had called the 'vengeance' of the covenant (Lev. 26:25). God will be true to what he has promised - for good or ill! This is something that Moses highlighted in a remarkable chapter in Deuteronomy where he outlines the blessings and the curses of the covenant (Deut. 28). A knowledge of this chapter (as well as chapters 29-32) is crucial if we are to make sense of Ezekiel, for the prophet is ministering during a time of national and spiritual collapse - a judgment brought about because the Lord has found his people guilty of violating his covenant: 'I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant' (Ezek. 16:59).

Chapter 5

Second Vision: Departure of Divine Glory (8:1-11:25)

Ezekiel 8-11 records the details of another powerful vision the prophet received from God. The date is a year and two months after the first vision (compare 1:1-2; 3:15-16; 8:1). This would seem to place it within the 40-day period during which Ezekiel lay on his right side to represent the punishment for Judah's sins - following the 390 days on his left side for Israel (compare 4:4-8). (However, it should be noted that, as sometimes happens with the Hebrew calendar, it is possible that a 13th month had been added to the year, which would mean that the vision of chapters 8-11 occurred just after the 40-day period).

Sins of Israel (8:1-18)

As chapter 8 opens, we find Ezekiel sitting in his house with the "elders of Judah" (leaders among the Jewish exiles in Babylon) in audience to hear what he has to say. No doubt his lengthy mock siege had attracted a great deal of attention. Once again, Ezekiel experiences "virtual reality" by seeing and experiencing in his mind what the others in the room do not. He sees the same glorious figure he beheld in the first vision - that of the Lord (verse 2; compare 1:26-28), the preincarnate Jesus Christ (compare Revelation 1:12-15). The Lord carries

the prophet, who is also a priest, in vision to Jerusalem, to the northern gate of the temple. The north gate was also called the “altar gate,” apparently because sacrifices were killed in its vicinity, on the north side of the altar (compare Leviticus 1:11; compare Ezekiel 40:35-43).

Ezekiel sees the glory of God (8:4) - the cascading illuminations surrounding God’s presence - as he had witnessed in chapter 1. That glory was here at the temple, as were the four transporting cherubim, as we will see in the next few chapters. Yet, as we will also see, God’s glory will soon depart from the sanctuary. Abominations committed here are causing Him to withdraw His presence.

Ezekiel is taken on a tour of the temple area to witness the terrible abominations. He first is told to look around where he has landed in this vision, in the vicinity of the north gate near the place of sacrifice - where a vile image is now located (perhaps implying that sacrifices are made to it).

The image is referred to as the “image of jealousy...which provokes to jealousy” (verse 3). This probably harkens back to God’s commands against idolatry: “You shall not make yourself a carved image...[to] bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God... You shall destroy their [the Canaanites’] altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)” (Exodus 20:4-5; 34:13-14). Israel is God’s wife by covenant, and He is rightly jealous over her loyalty and affections - demanding that she not enter into adulterous relations with other gods, adopting their worship customs. Of course, being provoked to jealousy essentially means being provoked to justified anger, which may be why the Jewish Tanakh translation renders verse 3 as saying, “that was the site of the infuriating image that provokes fury.” The Revised English Bible has “where stands the idolatrous image which arouses God’s indignation.”

There are different ideas as to what this image was. Some propose an image of Tammuz, the counterfeit savior of the Chaldean religion, since his worship is specifically mentioned in the chapter as occurring in the same place (Ezekiel 8:14). Surprisingly, the image could have been that of a large cross. As *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* explains, the modern cross “had its origin

in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the ‘cross’ of Christ” (“Cross, Crucify,” New Testament Section, 1985).

Most scholars, however, feel the image was an *asherah*, the Hebrew term for a sacred wooden image or tree. The reason for this conclusion is because Manasseh “even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made” in the temple of God, and “he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has made Judah sin with his idols” (2 Kings 21:7, 11, NKJV). Even though Josiah purged Judah of idolatry during his reign, the hearts of the people reverted back to Manasseh’s evil after Josiah’s death - which means the priests may have been inclined to reproduce Manasseh’s image. Either way, since the corrupted Jewish worship was often syncretistic - blending true and false worship - it could well be that the idolatrous object, whatever its form may have been, was being used to worship the true God, which He had strictly forbidden.

Next, “Ezekiel was brought into the north entry gate. There he saw a hole in the wall and was told to dig through the wall, enter, and observe what the elders of Israel were doing secretly in the inner court [or, perhaps more accurately, in chambers or a particular chamber adjacent to the north gate] (vv. 7-9). These seventy elders were not the Sanhedrin of N[ew] T[estament] times. That institution had not yet begun. They were most likely the leaders of the nation who based their traditional position on Moses’ appointment of the seventy elders to assist him in governing God’s people (Exod 24:1, 9; Num 11:16-25)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Ezekiel 8:7-9).

Note that these are referred to as the “elders of the house of Israel” (verse 12). The expression “house of Israel” sometimes includes Judah - especially as Judah was supposed to be the faithful remnant of Israel. That Judah of Ezekiel’s day is intended is clear

from the mention of Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, as Shaphan had been Josiah's secretary of state and his other sons, such as Jeremiah's friend Ahikam, came to occupy important positions (see 2 Kings 22:8-14; 2 Chronicles 34:15-21; Jeremiah 26:24; 29:3; 36:10; 40:5, 9, 11; 41:2; 43:6). Moreover, the phrase "house of Judah" is explicitly used in Ezekiel 8:17. Yet it may be that in this vision the 70 elders are also meant to typify, in a broader spiritual sense, the religious leadership of all Israel in a future context (particularly as we will later see other indications that the vision of chapters 8-11 applies to both Israel and Judah in the end time - see 9:9; 11:15, 17-21).

In verses 10-11 of chapter 8, Ezekiel describes the portrayal of idolatrous images on the walls where he has entered, with the elders - shockingly - standing before them as priests with censers. In verse 12, it appears that the honoring of idols is even done privately in the elders' chambers - showing this to be their personal conviction. This seems fairly straightforward and yet the meaning may be broader. While pagan images may have literally been used to adorn the temple complex or its chambers in Ezekiel's time, as they certainly did at earlier times, it is possible that the vision should be understood, at least on some level, in a figurative sense. Perhaps the indication is that the nation's leaders, while practicing what appears to be a form of true worship, are really devoted to false gods and customs of false worship.

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary states that the elders "are here the representatives of the people, rather than to be regarded literally. Mostly, the *leaders* of heathen superstitions laughed at them secretly, while publicly professing them in order to keep the people in subjection. Here what is meant is that the *people* generally addicted themselves to secret idolatry, led on by their elders; there is no doubt, also, allusion to the mysteries, as in the worship of Isis in Egypt, the Eleusinian [mysteries] in Greece, etc., to which the initiated were alone admitted" (note on verse 12).

Such a figurative meaning would apply in the nations of Israel and Judah even today - its leaders and people having rejected true worship for a false Christianity descended in many respects from the Babylonian mystery religion - called in Revelation 17 "Mystery, Babylon the Great." Indeed, as God's "temple" in New Testament times is

His Church (see Ephesians 2:19-22; 2 Corinthians 6:16; compare Ezekiel 11:16) - the true "Israel" of God (Galatians 6:16) - Ezekiel's vision here may even picture, in type, the great apostasy from the truth foretold by the apostle Paul (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The elders are pictured as saying, "The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land" (Ezekiel 8:12). When Ezekiel received this vision, Judah had experienced drought and a series of invasions - King Jeconiah and many people having been dragged away to Babylon. So, the leaders reasoned, God had deserted the land and the people - what did they have to lose! In the next chapter, these words are attributed to both Israel *and* Judah (9:9), so the same false reasoning will be employed in the future as national calamities begin to worsen. How ironic that such reasoning itself eventually leads to even greater calamity (verse 10). Also ironic is that the name of Jaazaniah, the person singled out, means "The Eternal Hears" or "The Eternal Harkens" - implying that God does indeed hear *and see* whatever is going on, and reacts.

Ezekiel is next directed to see the terrible abomination of women at the temple "weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:14). The *Encyclopedia Mythica* says Tammuz was "the Akkadian vegetation-god, counterpart of the Sumerian Dumuzi and the symbol of death and rebirth in nature. He is the...husband of Ishtar. Each year he dies in the hot summer (in the month Tammuz, June/July) and his soul is taken by the Gallu demons to the underworld. Woe and desolation fall upon the earth [in the form of withering vegetation in autumn and winter], and Ishtar leads the world in lamentation [i.e., the weeping for Tammuz]. She then descends to the nether world...and after many trials succeeds in bringing him back, as a result of which fertility and joy return to the earth [in the spring]. In Syria he was identified with Adonis" (<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/tammuz.html>). As was explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 47, the myth of Ishtar and Tammuz may be traced back to the early Babylonian queen Semiramis, wife of Nimrod, the builder of Babel (see Genesis 10:8-10). After Nimrod's death, Semiramis (Ishtar) produced a child through fornication (Tammuz) yet claimed that he was the very incarnation and resurrection of her dead husband, now reborn to life.

Recalling that the symbol for Tammuz was the cross, the idea of the women of Ezekiel's vision weeping before his symbol (which may have been the image of jealousy mentioned earlier), mourning his death and awaiting his resurrection is disturbingly similar to some of what we see today that goes by the name of Christianity. Indeed, the ancient idea of a dying and resurrected saving god has led some to conclude that even the notions of Christ dying for our sins and being raised from the dead derived from paganism. Yet we should understand that though it was concocted by Semiramis, the worship of Tammuz - the fountainhead of the world's idolatry - sprang from Satan, who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). In his inimical deceit, Satan, through this ancient Babylonian religion, counterfeited certain aspects of the imagery of Christ's later execution to subvert and pervert Christianity for some and utterly discredit it for others. On the subversion and perversion side, he has succeeded in convincing most of the world that many of the concepts and practices of his counterfeit religion belong in true Christian worship.

The month of Tammuz was the fourth month on the Hebrew calendar. Lent today overlaps the last month of the Hebrew year and ends in the first month. It is interesting to consider that the Celtic Britons, who centuries ago observed the mourning period more in line with the time Lent is observed today, were Israelites. Perhaps they had begun this practice while still in the Promised Land - as the apostate Jews may have also done. Either way, whether fourth month or first, we should notice that Ezekiel's vision takes place in the *sixth* month (Ezekiel 8:1). Though that might appear problematic, this may just signify the time Ezekiel received the vision, not the time the events depicted in it actually occurred. Indeed, Ezekiel's vision appears in many respects to be symbolic. Even if literal, we should not necessarily conclude that he was seeing things at the temple the very moment they were transpiring. His vision may have been more sweeping in scope, just as many other prophets had visions in a short time of events that would span days, months or even years in their actual fulfillment.

Ezekiel is then taken from the vicinity of the north gate to the court area outside of the Holy Place. He is here presented with another stunning sight - men with their backs to God's temple "worshiping the sun toward the east" (verse 16). "The location for the sun worship

was in the inner court...between the porch and the altar. These 25 men must have been Levites if temple regulations were being followed; otherwise, the area was forbidden (see Num. 3:7, 8; 18:1-7; 2 Chr. 4:9; Joel 2:17)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Ezekiel 8:15-16).

Indeed, this group appears distinct from the 70 image-worshipping elders mentioned previously. "It would seem strange that only a portion of the seventy would have been engaged in the sun worship. The specific numbers of seventy (v. 11) and twenty-five (v. 16) were probably given to aid in distinguishing the two groups. Therefore it is more likely that these twenty-five men were priests though one cannot be dogmatic about it. If they were priests perhaps the number is twenty-five because there was a representative of each of the twenty-four courses of the priests plus the high priest (cf. 1 Chron 23)" (*Expositor's*, note on Ezekiel 8:16). Perhaps the symbolism is to demonstrate that both the civil and religious leadership were engaged in pagan practices - and maybe to show that the same would be true in the end time. (It should also be noted that chapter 11 mentions 25 "princes" giving wicked counsel, with another person named Jaazaniah among them - albeit a different Jaazaniah.)

In Ezekiel 8:16, since the sun was in the east, this logically denotes sunrise, a popular "in-between" moment for sun worship in the pagan world. Consider, as quoted above, "the solemn fast of forty days in honour of the sun." Tammuz was often equated with Baal, and Baal often with the sun. Coming right on the heels of the previous verses, it could well be that what Ezekiel was witnessing was the conclusion of the pagan Lenten season, when Ishtar (or Easter) was deemed to have brought Tammuz (here as the incarnate sun) back from the underworld in a resurrection in the spring, specifically on the feast of Ishtar, known today as Easter. This, then, would have essentially been *Easter sunrise services* - so extremely popular today in the world religion that masquerades as Christianity and yet an utterly vile abomination according to God. Indeed, the symbolism is profound. The worshipers, religious leaders even, turned their backs on God in order to participate - and yet they probably claimed to be honoring the true God (as they still do). What audacity!

Rejection of true worship has resulted in *violence* throughout the land (Ezekiel 8:17) - *bloodshed*, the next chapter explains (9:9). As

for “putting the branch to their nose” (verse 17), the meaning is uncertain. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states: “...a proverbial expression denoting perhaps their scoffing at God and having him in derision; they snuffed at his service, as men do when they *put a branch to their nose*. Or it was some custom used by idolaters in honour of the idols they served. We read of garlands used in their idolatrous worships (Acts 14:13), out of which every zealot took a branch which they smelled to as a nosegay. Dr. Lightfoot (*Hor. Heb. in John 15.6*) gives another sense of this place: *They put the branch to their wrath, or to his wrath*, as the Masorites read it; that is, they are still bringing more fuel (such as the withered branches of the vine) to the fire of divine wrath, which they have already kindled, as if that wrath did not burn hot enough already. Or putting the branch to the nose may signify the giving of a very great affront and provocation either to God or man; they are an abusive generation of men” (note on verses 13-18).

God states that in the time of punishment He will not spare these leaders, even though they cry aloud for help. We must all reject false worship. Yet that is not the only point here. The lesson of this chapter becomes clearer when we examine the next chapters in this section. They show the glory of God departing from the temple because of such abominable practices and attitudes. God’s Spirit leaves when people turn away from Him. He remains only where He is welcome and is obeyed. This is true of nations, church organizations and individuals. And when He leaves, judgment follows.

Punishment to the Sin (9:1-11)

It is a great comfort to believers, that in the midst of destroyers and destructions, there is a Mediator, a great High Priest, who has an interest in heaven, and in whom saints on earth have an interest. The representation of the Divine glory from above the ark, removed to the threshold, denoted that the Lord was about to leave his mercy-seat, and to pronounce judgment on the people. The distinguishing character of this remnant that is to be saved, is such as sigh and cry to God in prayer, because of the abominations in Jerusalem. Those who keep pure in times of general wickedness, God will keep safe in times of general trouble and distress.

The slaughter must begin at the sanctuary, that all may see and know that the Lord hates sin most in those nearest to him. He who was appointed to protect, reported the matter. Christ is faithful to the trust reposed in him. Is he commanded by his Father to secure eternal life to the chosen remnant? He says, Of all that thou hast given me, I have lost none. If others perish, and we are saved, we must ascribe the difference wholly to the mercy of our God, for we too have deserved wrath. Let us still continue to plead in behalf of others. But where the Lord shows no mercy he does no injustice; he only recompenses men’s ways.

The Departure of God’s Glory (10:1-22)

The vision of chapters 8 and 9 continues in chapter 10. Here we have a lesson from God of considerable importance to us. For us to continue as God’s chosen people, He must actually dwell or live among us. The people of Israel came to understand this following their Exodus from Egypt. In Exodus 25:8 God instructed Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” It was God’s intent at that time that He would dwell in the midst of the 12 tribes of Israel in the tabernacle made of goatskins. And His presence was evident in the pillar of cloud illuminated by the divine glory filling the tabernacle (see Exodus 40:34-35). As explained in previous comments, rabbis later designated this glory by the term *shekinah*, meaning “indwelling.”

God’s glory later came to dwell in the temple built by Solomon after his fervent and humble prayer (2 Chronicles 6-7). God chose to allow His presence - again evident through the radiance and splendor of His glory - to remain in the temple for centuries. Yet after the Jews had proven their determination to continue in false, idolatrous worship, the presence of God did eventually leave the Jerusalem temple prior to its looting and destruction by the Babylonians. Even when the second temple was rebuilt in its place after the return from Jewish exile, God’s glory did not occupy it. Moreover, there is no record of the shimmering, luminous glory ever again occupying an earthly building. However, centuries later the shepherds saw the glory appear in the sky as angels announced the birth of the Savior (Luke 2:9). Indeed, the coming of Christ in the flesh was, in essence, God coming to *dwell* with human beings (John 1:1, 14; Matthew 1:23). And after His death and resurrection, He would again do so through the Holy Spirit.

Later, Stephen proclaimed the truth that God no longer dwells in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48). As the apostle Paul explained, God's temple is now His Church, the people whom He dwells in through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). And the initial giving of the Spirit to the Church was accompanied by the miraculous signs of wind and fire, reminiscent of the glory of Ezekiel's vision (Acts 2).

On the night before His death, Jesus relayed some very important guidelines for God dwelling in His people through the Holy Spirit: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to Him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). Notice: in order for the Father and Jesus Christ to dwell with a person, that person must be obeying Christ's words. The apostle Paul repeats essentially the same principle in 2 Corinthians 6:16: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you [Christians] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"

But Paul goes on to follow this with a *warning* from God: "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (verse 17). God dwelling among a people or in the heart and mind of a person is conditional upon that people or person being submissive and obedient to God. The presence of any idol or unclean worship will cause God to withdraw His presence. This is one of the most important lessons God is using Ezekiel to teach us in this chapter.

Ezekiel 10 begins with the image of the living cherubim carrying God's throne. God gives the order to the man in linen to gather coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city of Jerusalem (verses 1-3). This symbolizes that God has now judged the city and it is to be punished and burned, as when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with fire and brimstone (see Genesis 19:24-25). Yet as we've seen, the punishment on Jerusalem is representative of punishment to befall all of Israel (Ezekiel 9:9-10).

The glory or presence of God then begins to move. The step-by-step exit from Jerusalem is recorded for us. As the glory of God moved from the Holy of Holies to the threshold or entryway of the temple (9:3; 10:4), we see that the living cherubim carrying the mobile

throne were waiting outside the temple on the south side (verse 3). The entire house and courtyard were filled with the surrounding cloud and brightness (verse 4). Then, apparently after God assigned the man in linen and the executioners their jobs, He left the temple threshold and ascended His mobile throne above the living cherubim, not returning to the physical Holy of Holies within the temple (verse 18). The cherubim may have moved to meet Him as we see them hovering, with Him above them, at the east gate of the temple (verse 19).

The east gate is probably the one referred to as "the gates of righteousness" and "the gate of the LORD" in Psalm 118:19-20 and the "everlasting doors" in Psalm 24:7, 9. It is called the "Sun gate" in a Talmudic passage (Erubin 5:22c) because the sun would shine through it in the morning. Also through this gate traditionally entered the king and the ark in the sacred processions.

In the next chapter, we will see that when the glory of God leaves the temple through the east gate, it proceeds to the mountain on the east side of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11:23)—after which it presumably ascends to heaven. This path is opposite to the one Jesus Christ will take when He returns to the earth in power and glory in the future. For at that time He will first descend to the Mount of Olives and then, sometime later following the construction of the millennial temple, enter Jerusalem through the east gate, accompanied by the glory of God (Ezekiel 43:1-5; Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-12; Matthew 24:27). Indeed, a principal theme in this vision and the whole of the book of Ezekiel is the departure and eventual return of God's glory to Jerusalem.

The description of the cherubim takes up a lot of Ezekiel 10, paralleling material from chapter 1. Ezekiel describes the transportation system of God's throne almost exactly as he saw it earlier. His word picture of the cherubim, wheels rotating within each other with eyes apparently on the rims, the shimmering light in various colors, and the four faces of a cherub, man, lion, and eagle are almost identical to the previous account. This reveals that he was seeing the same God and the same throne. Since all of the faces are the same as those in chapter 1 with the exception of the "face of a cherub," it is obvious that this face is the same as the face of the ox (1:10).

Another detail to note is that where the wheels are called “Wheel” in the New King James Version of verse 13, others translate the word here as “whirling” or “spinning.” The sound of the cherubim wings became very loud as the throne of God moved out of the temple. It could be heard even in the “outer court” (verse 5). This may symbolize God leaving Jerusalem in a public way, having the fact perceived or loudly proclaimed.

God had in fact prophesied the departure of His glory well in advance. Back in Deuteronomy 31:17-18, He had warned: “Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and *I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them*, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us *because our God is not among us?*’” In Hosea 9:12, God proclaimed, “Woe to them when I depart from them!”

In all these warnings, Ezekiel included, we should recognize that God was not only talking about the ancient destruction He brought on His people. He is also talking about the future - of nations today and of us individually. All of us have a choice before us of whether to be faithful to God or to reject Him. The apostle Paul taught that the greatest mystery of all time is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Jesus Christ living in us through His Spirit is the most wonderful thing a human being can experience in this life. Yet one of the main lessons from Ezekiel is that God stays only where He is wanted and obeyed. This is true of nations, this is true of church fellowships, and this is true of every individual.

God withdrawing is never what He wants - it is people who force it on Him. Whenever His place of dwelling - whether a person, a church or religious organization or an entire nation - is filled with objects of false worship or idols, *there is no more room for Him*. After all, His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14) and He will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). Satan has organized society so that God is squeezed out - we now have no time for Him. Christ illustrated this in the parable of the sower with the new plants being choked by the thorns (see Matthew 13:7, 22). As individuals we often fill our lives with economic pressure, constant entertainment and various pursuits - and then we wonder why God is not truly manifested and

working in our lives. The book of Hebrews warns us not to neglect so great a salvation as that which has been offered to us (2:1-3) - yet we at times come to the realization that we are doing just that. As Paul said to all of us, “It is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom 13:11). May studying God’s message through Ezekiel aid us in doing just that.

In chapter 11 The spirit carries Ezekiel to the east gate of the Temple. He sees twenty-five men there, including Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah. God tells Ezekiel that these guys are bad. They’re falsely informing Jerusalem that they’ll be safe from God’s wrath. He tells Ezekiel to prophesy against them. God says that the people have been smugly claiming that they’re safe in the city like meat in a pot. But in reality, all the corpses in the city will be the meat in the pot, while the people themselves will be taken out of it by the invaders. They’ll be harshly judged by God and lots of them will be killed. It’s payback time for disobeying all his laws.

As Ezekiel’s making this prophecy, Pelatiah falls down and dies. Ezekiel himself falls down and asks if God’s planning to destroy everyone from Israel. God tells Ezekiel that his own kin, his fellow exiles, and the whole House of Israel have strayed from God and are losing their land as punishment. But he’s going to re-gather them from exile in the future and give their land back to their descendants. They’ll be able to follow all of God’s laws at that time, and he’ll give them a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. But the people who worshipped idols and abominations will definitely be punished. The chariot with the cherubim and the glory of God finally flies away. The spirit brings Ezekiel back to Babylon, where he tells the exiles about what he saw.

Chapter 6

Symbols and Sermons (12:1-17:24)

The introductory phrase the word of the Lord came to me (v 1) indicates the beginning of a new series of messages. In all likelihood, the symbolic actions and oracles recorded here date from the same time as those in the preceding section, viz., in the summer of 592 B.C. In this unit Ezekiel's purpose is to defend and reinforce the announcement of Jerusalem's coming judgment. In Ezekiel each vision is followed by a message that expands and develops the concepts in the vision. Ezekiel's inaugural vision (chs 1-3) is followed by the announcements of judgment on Jerusalem. The vision of Jerusalem's iniquity and judgment (chs 8-11) is elaborated in chs 12-19. The focus is on the wickedness of the Judean leadership.

The messages in chs 12-14 have four subdivisions, with each subdivision itself being a logical bifid. Ezekiel has here incorporated (1) two symbolic actions that he performed (12:3-20); (2) two popular sayings that he corrected (12:21-28); (3) two scathing oracles that he delivered (13:1-23); and (4) two objections to the judgment that he answered (14:1-23).

In ch 12 Ezekiel was commanded to demonstrate to the captives in Babylon, through the medium of symbolic

actions, the certainty of Judah's destruction. In the parable of the fugitive he assumes the role of a refugee who tries to flee a beleaguered city (12:1-16). The second parable sets forth the hardships that will be experienced when Jerusalem comes under siege (12:17-20). Prophecies of speedy deliverance were current in both Jerusalem and Babylon. The teaching of this section is especially aimed at countering this false optimism.

In ch 13 Ezekiel directs his attack against those who spawned the blasphemous proverbs that he has just refuted in 12:21-28. Ezekiel denounces these prophet-types for undermining the stability of the nation at a time when it needed to be built up. He speaks first of the condemnation of the prophets (vv 1-16), and then of the prophetesses (vv 17-23). In order to grasp the magnitude of the problem faced by the faithful herald of God's word in this period, Jer 29 should be read in connection with these denunciations. Two charges are leveled against the national prophets: (1) they had undermined the nation (vv 1-7); and (2) they had encouraged false security (vv 8-16).

In ch 14 Ezekiel deals with two theoretical objections that might be raised against his announcement of Jerusalem's judgment. The first is this: How can God punish his people for sins into which they have been led by men claiming to be prophets? (vv 1-11). The second objection raises the question of how God could destroy the holy city when there were still some righteous people within (vv 12-23).

The justification of God's judgment against Judah continues in chs 15-17, but the nature of the defense changes. Here Ezekiel employs parables or allegories to paint a rather gruesome word picture of the ingratitude, sin and rebellion of God's people. He describes:

- ❖ The useless vine (15:1-8): The earlier prophets frequently spoke of Israel as the vine of God. That figure, while beautiful to contemplate, can lend itself to gross distortion in the minds of hypocrites. People might think that, because of the accident of birth, they were branches of the true vine that could never be destroyed. In ch 15 Ezekiel sets forth a parable, as later the greater Son of Man will do (John 15), to expose the groundlessness of such a notion.
- ❖ The faithless wife (16:1-43): In four paragraphs Ezekiel reviews the past and future dealings between God and his people. In unfolding

this allegory, Ezekiel discusses (1) the circumstances of Jerusalem’s birth (vv 1-7); (2) the marriage and adornment of Jerusalem (vv 8-14); (3) the infidelity of the bride (vv 15-34); and (4) the punishment of the harlot (vv 35-43).

- ❖ The fallen sister (16:44-63): Jerusalem was unfaithful in marriage and as a mother. The children are literal children, as in vv 20-22. Likewise, the husbands here are not gods or Yahweh (as in ch 23), but the human fathers of the children in these cities. Jerusalem and her sisters personify the married female population of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom; the married men collectively are the husbands of these mothers. The point is that in sacrificing their children, the mothers have condemned the fathers of the children as well the three sisters - Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem
- ❖ The lowly vine (17:1-21): In ch 17, Ezekiel contrasts the current ruler in Jerusalem, with the future son of David who will lead god’s people. The former is compared to a lowly vine (vv 1-21), and the latter to a stately cedar (vv 22-24). King Zedekiah had committed an act of treachery against Nebuchadnezzar by breaking his solemn oath of allegiance to Babylon. He had sought military aid from Egypt. In this oracle, delivered shortly before 586 B.C., Ezekiel predicts the extinction of Zedekiah’s dynasty and the fall of Jerusalem. He first presents his parable (vv 1-10) and then makes an application of what he has said (vv 11-21).

The section closes with a brief and optimistic parable of the stately cedar (17:22-24). The message of doom in the preceding parable and application is tempered by a word of hope in vv 22-24. God in his sovereign grace is about to act. Nebuchadnezzar had cut a twig from the cedar. He had removed it to far off Babylon (cf. vv 3f.). God, however, will now cut a twig from that same royal cedar tree and plant it upon a high mountain (v 22). The basic idea is that the Davidic dynasty will be reinstated and will achieve a prominence that it had not heretofore enjoyed. The messianic king of the house of David is in view here. Jesus of Nazareth now occupies the throne of God and rules over the New Israel of God.

The prophet’s purpose in these eight chapters has been to reinforce the announcement of Jerusalem’s judgment by refuting the notion that Jerusalem could never be destroyed. Ezekiel addresses with seven

false attitudes that are in some cases explicitly stated, and in other cases implied in the text. The chart below will serve as a review of the argument found in chs 12-17.

Review of Chapters	
popular rationalization	prophetic response
Prophecies of doom have failed to materialize. God loves us too much to destroy us (12:22).	This proverb will soon cease. The day is at hand (12:23).
Judgments against Judah belong to some distant future age. No cause for alarm now (12:27).	No more delay. The word will be fulfilled in your lifetime (12:25-28).
Prophets and prophetesses have assured us this is a time of peace.	The prophets are unreliable. They have received no message from the Lord (13:1-23).
Righteous people still live in Jerusalem. God will spare the place on their account.	Even if Noah, Job or Daniel lived there, they will only be able to save themselves (14:12-23).
Israel is God’s choice vine. God should care for her.	God had indeed continually cared for Israel; but through out her history she continually had rebelled against Him (ch 16).
This generation is being judged for crimes committed by previous generations.	The present generation has rebelled by seeking aid and security from Egypt and breaking a solemn oath to Nebuchadnezzar (ch 17).
If God punishes men for the sins of their fathers, of what value is repentance.	Each man is responsible for his own deeds (ch 18).

Chapter 7

Basic Doctrines (18:1-19:14)

In chs 18-19 Ezekiel brings to a close the long section of his book that began in ch 12. Two important doctrines are discussed in this chapter. In vv 1-20 Ezekiel develops at length the doctrine of individual responsibility, and in vv 21-29 he implicitly affirms the doctrine of freedom of the will or self determination.

Principle of Personal Responsibility (18:1-20)

In vv 1-20 Ezekiel develops his teaching that every individual is responsible for his own conduct before God. A person's fate is not determined by the goodness or wickedness of others, even his nearest of kin. The righteous are blessed by God. The wicked live under His curse.

A. The General Principle (18:1-4)

1. *An inapplicable proverb (18:1-3)*: The sinners in Israel countered Ezekiel's parable (masal) by making (lit., proverbial) a proverb (masal) of their own. Sinful men always tend to underestimate their own wickedness. They blame their tribulations on others. So it was with the men of Israel. They attributed their suffering to the sins of their fathers. The proverb that was once current in Jerusalem (Jer 31:28) was now being heard in

Babylon: The fathers have eaten sour grapes 407 (i.e., have sinned), but the teeth of the children are set on edge (i.e., they were being punished).

Where did such an idea arise? Possibly from a misunderstanding of passages in the law of Moses such as Exod 20:5 where God is said to visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Or possibly the proverb arose out of the prophetic teaching that because of the sins of Manasseh, the nation will be destroyed (2 Kgs 21:10-12). The former passage actually teaches that sin, even though forgiven, often has unavoidable repercussions in the lives of one's children. The latter passage indicates that the origin of Judah's sin was Manasseh. The following generation will be destroyed because it still practiced the grotesque idolatry introduced during Manasseh's reign. The perverse proverb that in effect challenged the justice of God will no longer be employed in the future, Experiences will prove it to be untrue (v 3).

2. *A valid principle (18:4)*: ***Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sins, it will die.*** God is the creator of all individuals. Though physically related, the father and son are separate entities in His sight. Each must give account of himself to his Creator. The individual who sins, he will die. More than premature death is intended here. The sinner is dead in sin during his physical life. Eventually he experiences the second death.

B. A Righteous Man (18:5-9)

The man who practices justice and righteousness lives under the blessing of God. This person is described in some detail in vv 5-9. The characteristics of a righteous person fall into four legal areas.

1. *Cultic purity (18:5-6a)*: The righteous man has not participated in the pagan rituals at the "high places." These rites normally involved eating of sacrificial meals (cf. Deut 12:2-4). He has not lifted up his eyes to idols, i.e., offered prayer to them in expectation of aid. Baal is particularly in mind.

2. *Sexual ethics (18:6b)*: The righteous man has not committed adultery in violation of the seventh commandment. He has not approached, i.e., sexually, a menstruous woman. He has observed

the sexual taboos of the law of Moses (cf. Lev 18:19; 20:18; Deut 22:22).

3. *Social ethics (18:7)*: The righteous man has not engaged in any fraudulent dealings with his fellowman. He has complied with the law of Exod 22:25f. This law compelled creditors to return to borrowers any item of collateral that might be necessary to their well-being (cf. Deut 24:6; Amos 2:8). He has never resorted to violent robbery in order to enhance his wealth (cf. Exod 20:15; Lev 19:13). He has fed the hungry and clothed the naked (cf. Deut 15:7-11; 24:19-22; Isa 58:7).

4. *Business ethics (18:8)*: The righteous man has not lent money on the express condition of receiving interest, nor has he accepted interest offered to him voluntarily by the debtor. The laws on money lending are found in Exod 22:24; Lev 25:35ff.; Deut 23:20. He has withdrawn his hand from iniquity. The sin probably intended here is giving false weight or measure (cf. Lev 19:35). As an arbiter of disputes, he has been scrupulously fair.

5. *Summary (18:9)*: In summary, the righteous person has walked in the my statutes, rather than in his own way, or in the ordinances of the nations. To the best of his ability, he has observed the divine laws. He deals truly, i.e., his observance of God's law is motivated by love for the truth, not by any personal motive.

C. A Wicked Son (18:10-13)

1. *Depiction of the wicked son (18:10-13a)*: The prophet describes a son who is the exact opposite of the just man described above. He is a man violence who even commits murder. He is not beneath practicing any of the sins that his father so carefully avoided.

2. *Death of the wicked son (18:13b)*: Should such a wicked man escape divine retribution? Certainly not! The law required the death penalty for such crimes as murder, idolatry, and adultery. The righteousness of his father could not save him. His blood will be on him, i.e., he alone bears responsibility for his life of sin. The executioner (Nebuchadnezzar?) will not be held guilty (v 13b).

D. The Penitent Son (18:14-19)

1. *The choice of the son (18:14)*: The third specific case cited by Ezekiel is that of a son who reflects upon the consequences of his father's sin. He resolves to abandon that sort of behavior (v 14).

2. *What the son chooses not to do (18:15-16a)*: The son does not participate in any of the activities that brought his father under civil and divine judgment.

3. *What the son chooses to do (18:16b-17a)*: The son shows positive good will toward the less fortunate.

4. *Contrasting fates (18:17b-18)*: The son is not executed because of his father's sin. The father dies for his blatant iniquity, but the son is spared.

5. *An explanation (18:19)*: This teaching absolutely refutes the notion current in Ezekiel's day that innocent children were punished for the sins of their fathers.

E. Conclusion (18:20): The lengthy treatise on personal responsibility reaches its climax in the crystal clear assertion of v 20. Wicked men bear the responsibility for themselves. They suffer the consequences of their wickedness. Neither iniquity nor righteousness is inherited. The individual's righteousness or wickedness will be upon himself, i.e., he will bear the responsibility of his own conduct.

Potential of Personal Repentance (18:21-32)

Ezekiel carries his subject one step further. Men are not locked in, either genetically or environmentally, to a life of sin. By the grace of God, and the assertion of their own free will, men can change their character, conduct and destiny. In these verses the basic thesis is that men are not punished for sins after they repent of them.

A. Penitent Sinner (18:21-23)

1. *The promise (18:21)*: In genuine repentance there are two clearly defined steps, viz., turning from sin, and keeping the law of God. The Jewish rabbis speak of the essential elements of repentance being remorse and amendment. If a wicked man genuinely repents he will escape the divine death sentence.

2. *The explanation (18:22)*: Why does the penitent sinner escape judgment? The answer is simple: None of his former transgressions will be remembered against him. Sins not remembered are forgiven. Because of his present righteousness, he will live, i.e., in communion with God and as a member of the Lord's people.

3. *The implication (18:23)*: God takes no delight in the fact that sinners must die for their sins. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). The repentance of the wicked causes no change in the will of God, since his will is that all men should have life eternal.

B. A Backslider (18:24)

1. *Backsliding is possible (18:24a)*: A righteous man is one who is in the right relationship with God. Such a person can backslide to the point of being lost. He can choose to follow in the path of iniquity, and become involved in all the abominations of the wicked. He will die in his transgressions. One must be faithful until death in order to receive the crown of life.

2. *Backsliding is punished (18:24b)*: The former righteous acts of the backslider are not credited to his account. Such a backslider has committed a trespass and a sin. He has rebelled against God in casting aside his former way of life. He willfully has adopted a sinful life. For this twofold transgression he must die the death of a sinner.

C. An Objection Answered (18:25-29)

1. *The brief answer (18:25)*: Is it not your ways that are not even? The justice of God is frequently called into question by perverse and ignorant men. The Jews in Jerusalem and Babylon were saying (or at least thinking) that God's manner of ruling the universe was inconsistent. God is unchanging in his nature. He is absolutely righteous. He must therefore punish sin. At the same time, he is merciful and gracious. He is, therefore, inclined to recognize the feeble efforts of his children to walk in his way. God does not change; but men constantly change in relationship to God. The rays of the sun are constant; but in the course of the earth's rotation darkness falls upon a portion of the planet.

2. *First illustration (18:26)*: The righteous man who turns away from the warmth of God's love faces inevitably the darkness of death.

3. *Second illustration (18:27-28)*: And when the wicked man turns from his wickedness that he has done, and executes justice and righteousness, he will cause his soul to live. (28) Because he considers, and turns from all his transgressions that he has done, he will surely live, he will not die. By the same token, the wicked man, by an act of his own free will, may decide to walk in the light of God's word. He will do those things that are lawful in the eyes of men and right in the sight of God. Thus he will save his life (v 27). His consideration of the fate of the wicked causes him to make this about face (v 28).

4. *Concluding answer (18:29)*: In view of the facts presented above, how can the house of Israel continue perversely to charge God with inconsistency? If they have experienced the wrath of God, it is because they have changed in relationship to him.

D. Warning and Exhortation (18:30-32)

1. *The warning (18:30a)*: God judges each individual separately on the basis of his current standing with the Lord.

2. *The appeal (18:30b-31)*:

a. The negative aspect (18:30b-31a):

1. *Sin a stumbling block to be avoided (18:30b)*: Ezekiel pleads with his hearers to repent and to seek to get others to repent. Otherwise, iniquity will be a stumbling block that will ultimately mean their doom.

2. *Sin a loathsome thing to be cast away (18:31a)*: Like an unclean and loathsome thing, all transgression must be cast away. The idea is once again of distancing oneself from sin.

b. *The positive aspect (18:31b)*: The sinners must make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit, i.e., they must have a firm resolve to be faithful and obedient. Failing to make the negative and positive adjustments for which Ezekiel pleads exposes one to God's wrath. Those who do not repent will die a tragic and unnecessary death.

3. *Basis of the appeal (18:32)*: God does not desire to punish sinners. Therefore, repentance is urgent. Wise men will avail themselves of his grace.

Bitter Dirges (19:1-14)

In ch 19 Ezekiel becomes a sympathetic mourner. God is grieved over the impending fate of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is told to give vent to his emotions as a means of illustrating the divine agony. The dirge falls into two sections: vv 1-9 lament the fate of Judah's last kings; vv 10-14 bewail the fall of Jerusalem.

Dirge over Judah's Kings (19:1-9)

As for you, take up a lamentation concerning the princes of Israel... Some may have trusted in the wisdom of their national leaders to extricate Judah from iron grip of Babylon. Ezekiel responded to such misplaced trust with a lament (qina), i.e., funeral dirge, for the princes (i.e., kings) of Israel (v 1). The fates of the three sons of godly King Josiah - Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim (plus his son Jehoiachin) and Zedekiah - are mentioned.

A. First Whelp (19:1-4)

1. *The lioness (19:2)*: The house of David is the mother of these princes. She is compared to a lioness because the tribe of Judah in general (cf. Gen 49:9), and the family of David in particular, were symbolized by a lion. As long as Judah remained faithful to the Lord, she dwelt securely and fearlessly among the young lions, i.e., surrounding nations. The period of King Josiah is in view. Tiny Judah was independent and prosperous during the reign of this godly king.

2. *The reign of the young lion (19:3)*: The royal lioness (house of David) reared up one of her whelps to become a young lion. The reference here is to Jehoahaz who became king of Judah at the age of twenty-three when his father was slain by Pharaoh Neco in the battle of Megiddo (cf. 2 Kgs 23:31ff.). As a young lion Jehoahaz learned to catch prey, i.e., to have hostile relations with other nations. He devoured men, i.e., he ventured to war. The implication is that Jehoahaz was hostile to Neco of Egypt.

3. *Capture of the young lion (19:4)*: The nations, i.e., Egypt and her vassal states, listened unto him, i.e., took up the challenge that he hurled at them. The young lion was lured to the pit, and captured therein. He was bound in fetters and taken to Egypt (v 4). The allusion is to the capture of Jehoahaz by Pharaoh Neco in 609 B.C. (2 Kgs 23:33).

B. Second Whelp (19:5-9)1. *Reign of the second young lion (19:5-7)*

a. *His power (19:5-6)*: When the lioness (Davidic dynasty) saw that Jehoahaz had been deported, she was disappointed. She took another of her whelps and trained him to be a young lion (v 5). He took his place among the other lions (kings). He quickly learned the ruthless conduct that oriental kings manifested (v 6).

b. *His ruthlessness (19:7)*: He knew their widows. He laid waste their cities. The land and its fullness was desolate because of the noise of his roaring. Because of his misrule, he knew their widows, i.e., he caused many women to lose their husbands and sons. Because of his boisterousness (noise of his roaring), he brought destruction and desolation upon his land. Did Ezekiel have in mind Jehoiakim who ruled Judah from 605-598 B.C., or his son Jehoiachin who ruled but for three months early in 597 B.C.? Jewish commentators generally prefer the former, modern commentators the latter. Some details of the allegory seem to fit best the one, and some seem to point to the other. On the whole, however, the Jehoiachin interpretation is superior.

2. *Capture of the second young lion (19:8-9)*: Then the nations cried out against him, round about from provinces. They spread their net over him. He was taken in their pit. (9) They put him in a cage with hooks. They brought him unto the king of Babylon. They brought him into strongholds so that his voice might not be heard again upon the mountains of Israel. The nations led by Nebuchadnezzar attacked the kingdom of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. The young king was taken captive (v 8). He was brought before the king of Babylon. Thus did his rule over Judah come to an end. The growl of this young lion was no longer heard in the land (v 9).

Dirge Over Judah's Collapse (19:10-14)

A. *The Vine in its Glory (19:10-11)*: The figure changes in v 10. The mother is now the state of Judah, and she is compared to a vine rather than a lioness. The vine had its blood, i.e., sap, and was full of vigor. Because this vine was planted near abundant water, the vine was fruitful (v 10). The allusion is to former days when the nation prospered under the rule of righteous kings.

The vine put forth strong rods - strong and resolute kings who ruled over the nation. Among the other thick branches (prosperous nations), Judah had a position of honor (v 11).

B. *The Vine Plucked up (19:12)*: Judah the exalted vine was plucked up and cast down to the ground. The present lowly position of the nation could only be due to divine determination. The east wind (Nebuchadnezzar and his armies) dried up the fruit of that ignoble vine. Enormous tribute to Babylon over several years had drained the royal coffers of Judah. The strong rod of that branch - the last king of Judah - had been broken off and withered by that mighty king from the east. The fire of war and divine judgment had consumed Zedekiah. He lost his crown and his eyesight before being carried away in humiliation to Babylon.

C. *The Vine Transplanted (19:13-14)*:

1. Location of the transplantation (19:13): The once luxuriant vine planted by many waters is now forcibly transplanted to the wilderness of exile in Babylon.

2. Reason for the transplantation (19:14a): The fire that will ultimately destroy the nation had gone out of the rod. Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon was the cause of the ruin that engulfed the nation of Judah. With the deportation of Zedekiah, the royal house of David was reduced to insignificance so that there is in her no strong rod to assume the rule.

D. Conclusion (19:14b): This is a lamentation, and it became a lamentation. Chapter 19 is a prophetic lamentation spoken before the final calamity took place. What is here recorded as prophecy became the general theme of the national lamentation after the disaster had transpired.

Chapter 8

Israel : Past and Future (20:1-24:27)

Eleven months intervene between Ezekiel's last series of oracles and the present utterances. He effectively had shattered Judah's insane hope that judgment will never fall on Jerusalem. Chapters 20-24 are explaining the past and present of Israel. The past and the continuing present sinfulness of Israel had led her to the future judgment.

Every argument put forth in objection to his dogmatic assertion of imminent judgment had been rebutted. Ezekiel may have passed the past eleven months in silence. Late in the summer of 591 B.C. news of Egyptian military victories in Africa spawned new delusions of deliverance among the Jews in Judah and in Babylon. King Zedekiah was now looking to Egypt for assistance against Babylon. Sometime between the end of 591 B.C. and the summer of 589 B.C., Zedekiah formally severed his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. This question was uppermost in the minds of the captives was, What bearing will this political realignment have on the fortunes of Judah? In response to this unasked question, Ezekiel speaks of (1) the past corruption of the nation (20:1-29); (2) the future

restoration of Israel (20:30-44); and (3) the imminent judgment of Jerusalem (20:45-21:32).

Israel's Past Corruption

After a brief introduction to this section (vv 1-4), Ezekiel traces Israel's waywardness through the period of Egyptian bondage (vv 5-9), wilderness wandering (vv 10-26), and settlement in the land of Canaan (vv 27-29).

How could God suspend or cancel the threat of judgment when they continued to defile themselves by such degrading religious practices? Their defilement drove a wedge between them and their God. Under present circumstances, he refused to be inquired of by them, i.e., he will grant them no special insight into what the immediate future held in store beyond the threats that he had already announced through his prophet.

In the Hebrew Bible, v 45 becomes the first verse of ch 21. Clearly this is a better arrangement than that adopted by the Authorized Version and subsequent English translations. What is said in 20:45-49 has no connection with what immediately precedes, but rather sets the stage for what follows in ch 21.

A. God's Directive (20:45-47a): In another revelation from the Lord (v 45), Ezekiel was told set your face toward the south. This prophetic formula was previously used in 6:2 and 13:17. Ezekiel was to direct his attention, verbally and perhaps physically as well, toward the south. He was to preach the word of the Lord in that direction. These instructions are given to Ezekiel from the perspective of the Babylonian army that will approach Jerusalem from the north. The whole of Judah is the forest of the south that Ezekiel was to address in this utterance (v 46).

B. Judah's Devastation (20:47b-48): The entire forest will be consumed by an unquenchable fire kindled by God Himself. Fire here is symbolic of the devastation wrought by the Chaldean armies. What few righteous there might have been (every green tree), as well as the hardened sinners (every dry tree), will be affected by that conflagration. From one end of the land to the other, every face will be seared by the hot flames of judgment (v 47). That destruction will

be of such proportions that the all flesh, i.e., the entire world, will recognize it as an act of divine judgment (v 48).

C. Ezekiel's Complaint (20:49): Ezekiel's audience was not so spiritually perceptive as to be able to grasp the significance of this parable and others like it (cf. chs 15-17). His auditors were holding Ezekiel up to ridicule because of his use of the parabolic method. He could hear them whispering to one another and referring to him as a maker of parables (lit., a riddler of riddles). With sorrow, exasperation and perhaps indignation, Ezekiel turned to God in a brief narrative prayer. No petition is directly stated; but Ezekiel is obliquely requesting that he be permitted to put his parable into plain language (v 49).

Israel's Imminent Judgment (21)

Chapter 21 opens with an explanation of the Parable of the Forest Fire that was related in the closing verses of the preceding chapter. To his parable Ezekiel adds a song about a sword (21:8-17). This song becomes the springboard for two oracles dealing with the words of the king of Babylon (21:18-27), and the sword that will one day fall upon Ammon (21:28-32).

Ezekiel already had taught that as regards to final judgment, the righteous will not be destroyed with the wicked (ch 18). Of necessity, however, in temporal judgments the entire population of an area will be affected. Other peoples besides Israel will feel the effect of the sword of the Lord that at this point was wielded by the Chaldeans (v 4). Four expressions set forth the physical and psychological reaction to the news of Jerusalem's destruction in v. 7: (1) every heart will melt; (2) all hands will be slack; (3) every spirit will be faint; and (4) all knees will drip with water, i.e., kidney functions could not be controlled. Nonetheless, that bad news was coming. When it came it will prove to be a true account of what had actually happened in Jerusalem (v 7).

God addresses the sword (king of Babylon) in v 16. This agent of divine judgment is urged to make a decision as to which direction he will move, but to get on with the judgment (v 16). It is, after all, Yahweh who had given that command with a gesture of supreme authority (clap my hands together). When the divine sentence had been executed against Judah, God's anger will be appeased. God had spoken. What

he had said must come to pass. With these words the song of the sword ended. There followed another interval of silence (v 17). Judah will be carried into exile; but Ammon will be destroyed in the midst of their land. For Ammon there was no hope of restoration like that which Ezekiel portrays as Israel's future. Ammon will pass into oblivion. Such was the final decree of the sovereign ruler of all nations (v 32).

In chs 22-24, Ezekiel continues to hammer away at the theme of Israel's defilement. Again his underlying premise is that Judah deserves the forthcoming judgment. By means of three oracles, two parables and a symbolic action, the prophet underscores the defilement of the land of Israel in the past and in the present. Each chapter in this section forms a distinct unit that may be titled as follows: (1) A Sinful Nation (22:1-31); (2) A Sad History (23:1-49); (3) A Significant Date (24:1-27).

Chapter 22 contains three separate oracles, each of which begins with the phrase, the word of the Lord came to me (vv 1, 17, 23). These messages originally may have been uttered on separate occasions. However, there is logic in the grouping of these three messages here. They share the common theme of the defilement of Israel. One might suggest the following titles for these three sermons: (1) The Bloody City (vv 1-16); (2) The Smelting Furnace (vv 17-32); (3) The Corrupt Land (vv 23-31).

As in chs 16 and 20, Ezekiel sets forth Jerusalem's abominations. In 22:1-16 Here, however, the prophet exposes present, rather than past sins. The thought in v 15 that the exile will purge the filthiness from Judah is amplified in this paragraph. The house of Israel, i.e., Judah, has become like a metallic ore, a mixture of various minerals and impurities that must undergo a smelting process. They once were silver; now they are dross, i.e., worthless. The reason for the corruption is that its prophets, priests and the leaders are corrupted:

- ❖ The prophets had entered into a conspiracy, a solemn pact that they will predict only peace and security for the nation. Their loud oratory, like the roar of a lion, was only the prelude to national disaster. The character of these men was indicated by their greed. In exchange for treasure and precious things, they will paint the future in the most optimistic hues. But the results of this kind of

prognostication were disastrous. Lives will be lost and widows made numerous by the ruinous national policy that they encouraged (v 25).

- v The priests were not one whit better than the prophets. Instead of teaching the law of God and exemplifying its contents, they had done violence to God's law. They failed to teach it. They violated its teaching. They profaned the holy things of God by not adhering to the regulations that served to underscore the sanctity of the temple. They failed both in their private lives and in their public teaching to differentiate between holy and common, i.e., they allowed holy things to be used in profane ways (cf. Lev 10:10f.). Likewise, the Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean was ignored both as regards meat fit for food, and as regards the ritual purity of worshipers. They hid their eyes from the sabbaths of God, i.e., they looked on indifferently as God's people desecrated those sacred days. By means of all the above named transgressions, the priests had done violence to God's law. They had profaned, i.e., treated disrespectfully, the Lord God (v 26).
- v The princes, like fierce wolves, shed blood and destroyed lives so as to enrich themselves. Probably these men used legal machinery to achieve their ends (v 27).

Prophets were supposed to rebuke wicked men, expose national corruption and warn of impending disaster. Judah's prophets, however, had whitewashed the leadership. They supported their dangerous international policy by proclaiming falsehood. They used pagan divination to conjure up some of their lies. Yet they brazenly announced their prophecies with Thus says the Lord (v 28; cf. 13:10).

The population was thoroughly corrupt. God could find no moral leader to stand in the breach in the moral wall that protected Judah from judgment (cf. 13:5). Morality is like a wall that shields a people from divine wrath. Where that wall breaks down, judgment enters. Judah needed a national leader of the highest quality to use his influence for good to repair that broken wall. None was available (v 30). The moral collapse of a nation is inevitably followed by its physical destruction. So certain is the judgment that God uses the past tense to describe what will yet befall Judah. There was no escape! (v 31).

In ch 23 Ezekiel vividly portrays the history of the sister kingdoms of Israel and Judah.⁴⁵⁸ In ch 16 God likened Jerusalem to a prostitute. The same figure is used of the entire nation here. The emphasis in the previous allegory was on spiritual fornication with Canaanite cults. Here the emphasis is on Israel's political adultery, i.e., political alliances with foreign powers. Chapter 16 stressed the beginnings of Israel's history, whereas ch 23 places more emphasis on her later history.

The allegory begins with the introduction of two women, daughters of one mother. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had their origin in the united nation of Israel that existed from the time of Egypt to Solomon (v 2). The tribes of Judah (represented by Jerusalem) and Ephraim (represented by Samaria) had experienced the Egyptian bondage. Even in that formative period of Israel's history, the sisters had shown inclinations toward idolatry. Using the figure of sexual license - the fondling of the breasts - Ezekiel describes how God's people lost their virgin chastity even before leaving Egypt (v 3).

The sisters are given similar names. Such was the practice in the East. Samaria is Oholah (she who has a tent). The significance of this name is not clear. It may refer to Samaria's propensity for heathen tent-shrines. Jerusalem is Oholibah (my tent is in her). Perhaps this name has reference to the tent that David erected in Jerusalem to house the ark of God. God says that both cities became mine, i.e., they belonged to the Lord as his possession. This is usually taken to indicate marriage, although the text does not make this clear. Both cities bore sons and daughters. These children most likely referred to their inhabitants and satellite towns.

Chapter 24 begins with an important chronological note. Three things of importance happened in the ministry of Ezekiel on that date. Ezekiel (1) delivered a judgment parable (vv 1-14), (2) received word concerning two judgment signs (vv 15-27), and (3) uttered four oracles condemning neighboring nations (25:1-17).

According to v 1, Nebuchadnezzar began his attack against Jerusalem in the ninth year (of Zedekiah), the tenth day of the tenth month. The Jews commemorated this date for centuries by fasting (Zech 8:19). Ezekiel was told to write the name of the day of the week and the day of the month (this very day). This written record was to be made so that later when the news filtered back to the

captives in Babylon the genuine prophetic foresight of Ezekiel would be authenticated.

Parable of The Cooking Pot (24:3-14)

1. On that fateful day, Ezekiel set forth a parable concerning Jerusalem. For the third time he expresses his thoughts in a song. The inhabitants of Jerusalem previously had used the image of a caldron to support their delusion of invincibility (cf. 11:3). Now Ezekiel gives the true interpretation to that image. A pot is filled with water and placed on the stove. This symbolizes the first stage of the siege of Jerusalem.

2. *Filling the pot (24:4-5)*: The chunks of meat placed in the pot symbolize the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the fugitives from other towns who sought refuge there. The good pieces of meat and choice bones represent the civil and military leaders (v 4) who come from the choice of the flock, i.e., the upper classes. Bones as well as meat - the total population - were to be placed in that pot, with the bones under the meat. Ezekiel is then to bring the pot to a boil until even the bones - the toughest members of society - are brought to a boil (v 5). The boiling water points to the destructive turbulence of the Babylonian siege.

A. First Woe (24:6-8)

1. The prophet drops the symbolism in v 6 and sets his message in plain prose. He pronounces a woe on the bloody city of Jerusalem, the pot whose filth had never been removed. The reference is to the bloodstains of the innocent who had been murdered in Jerusalem. Piece by piece the chunks of meat in that pot will be removed. By this the prophet means that the destruction of the city and the deportation of the inhabitants will take place in stages. No lot is fallen on the content of that pot, i.e., the deportation will be indiscriminate.

2. *Judgment explained (24:7-8)*: Openly and unashamedly crimes had been committed in Jerusalem. Evidence of bloodshed could be seen throughout the place. It was as though Jerusalem had smeared blood on a bare rock that was in plain view. The law required animal blood to be poured to the ground and covered with dust (cf. Lev 17:13). However, no similar effort had been made to conceal the blood of humankind unjustly slain (v 7). God will preserve those

bloodstains in plain view, so that he might execute divine wrath on those responsible (v 8).

B. Second Woe (24:9-14)

1. *Boiling stage* (24:9-10): A second time the sentence against Jerusalem is pronounced. They had piled one sin on top of another. God will now make the pile great, i.e., he will heap up the fuel for their punishment (v 9). God will gather the wood, kindle the fire, and prepare the mixture of spices to be added when the meat had been sufficiently cooked. It was God's purpose to consume the meat (population of Jerusalem) and burn the bones (leaders, especially military leaders) in that pot (v 10).

2. *Melt-down stage* (24:11-12): After the contents of that pot (Jerusalem) had been consumed, God will see to it that the pot itself was melted down, thereby removing the filth (v 11). Thus Jerusalem will be purified by the conflagration. God had attempted from time to time to purge Jerusalem, but to no avail. This may be an allusion to the deportations of 604 B.C. and 597 B.C. The uncleanness of the city could only be removed by the drastic process of melting down the caldron, i.e., destroying Jerusalem (v 12).

The prose conclusion to the Song of the Pot uses the first-person singular pronoun seven times. All efforts to reform the nation through prophetic admonition had failed. No further effort in that direction will be attempted. All that remained was for God to pour out his wrath and purge the place by total destruction. Lewdness in Ezekiel is used in a figurative sense for negotiating military treaties and idolatry.

Chapter 9

God's Judgment on the Gentile Nations (25:1-32:32)

Ezekiel 25-32 are God's pronouncement of judgment on the Gentile nations. Seven nations are warned of coming judgment with Tyre and Egypt given the most space. The narrative is interrupted twice, first for the prophecy of the re-gathering of Israel into her lands, (28:25-26) and second, to announce Babylon's victory over Egypt. (29:20-26) There is a proliferation of sevens in this study: seven nations, seven oracles of judgment on Egypt. The number seven represents God's completeness in His being and His work. The message of these chapters is the completeness of God's judgment on the Gentile nations. That very message also contains the completeness of God's promise of restoration to His People Israel. Notice as you study these verses that each of the nations is judged for their sins committed towards Israel.

A. God's judgment on Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia (25:1-17)

Before we begin be aware of the pattern of the prophecies: (1) There is a reason, a "Because." It tells why God is judging them. (2) There is a "Therefore" the result of their sin - what God was going to do.

“Therefore, behold I am going to...” (see 25:4) (3) There is a “Then or Thus” which gives the end result of God’s judgment, usually something like, “Thus you will know that I am the Lord.” (25:7)

Judgment on Ammon (25:1-7), Ammon had been an enemy of Judah since the days of the judges. (see Judges 10:6-11:33) She had been conquered by Israel but later conspired with Babylon against Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar chose to attack Judah rather than Ammon they rejoiced, rather than go to Israel’s aid. (v.3; cf. 21:18-27) (1) Her “Because” she said, “aha! Against My sanctuary when it was profaned...” (v.3) “because you have clapped your hand and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel...” (v.6) Why would they suffer God’s judgment? Because of their attitude towards Israel when Nebuchadnezzar conquered her. (2) Her “Therefore,” (v.4 and 7) they will be invaded and they will fall and their capitol city would become camel pasture. She will be destroyed with no promise of restoration. (vv. 4,5;7) (3) Her “Thus” - “You will know that I am the Lord.” (v.7)

Judgment on Moab (vv. 8-11), Moab’s hostility towards Israel went back to the days of Balak King of Moab. (Numbers 22-24) During Jehoshaphat’s reign she united with Edom in an attempt to defeat Judah. (2 Chronicles 20:1-23) Moab supported Babylon and attacked Judah after Jehoiakim’s revolt. (2 Kings 24:2) (1) “Because,” (v.8) Ezekiel said Moab’s sin was her contempt of God’s people - “she is like all the nations.” (2) “Therefore,” she will lose her eastern defenses - three cities, and she would be overran by the same nomadic tribes as Ammon. (vv. 9-10) (3) “Thus I will execute judgment on Moab, and they will know that I am the Lord.” (v.11)

Judgment on Edom (vv. 12-14), Edom also had long standing conflict with Israel, actually from the days of the exodus - she refused to allow Israel to pass through her territory. (Numbers 20:12-21) (1) Her “Because” - “Edom has acted against the house of Judah to take revenge.” (v.12) (2) Her “Therefore,” God will lay His vengeance on her destroying man and beast. God will send His vengeance by “the hand of My people Israel.” (v.14a) (3) “Thus they will know My vengeance declares the Lord.” (v.14b) Edom was conquered by the Nabateans during the intertestamental period. The remnant of the Edomites (also called Idumeans) moved west to the Negev. Later

they were forced to become Jewish converts (Josephus The Antiquities of the Jews 13. 9. 1). Thus the Edomites lost both their country and their national identity.

God’s judgment on Philistia (Ezekiel 25:15-17), Philistia had been a lifelong enemy of Israel. (1) “Because” she took revenge with scorn on Israel, (v.15) (2) “Therefore” God would “stretch out His hand against the Philistines, even cut off...destroy the remnant, and execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes.” (vv. 16-17a) (3) “Thus they will know that I am the Lord...” (v.17b)

B. God’s judgment on the nations of Tyre and Sidon (26:1-28:26)

God’s judgment on Tyre is in four separate oracles beginning with, “The word of the Lord came to me.” (26:1; 27:1; 28:1,11).

The first oracle predicts Tyre’s complete destruction. Ezekiel received this oracle in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, however he did not identify the month. The eleventh year of Jehoiakim’s exile was 587-586 BC. Jerusalem fell on July of 586 B.C., which may have been the background of this prophecy. Ezekiel used the same “because/therefore/then you will know” format as in the last chapter. (1) The “because.” (v.2) God’s judgment was coming on them because Tyre rejoiced over Jerusalem’s fall. They were glad she had been “laid waste.” They said her doors have been broken and opened to allow the people of Tyre to enter and loot. (v.2)

“Therefore” God promised to bring many nations against Tyre, “as the sea brings up her waves.” (v.3) Tyre’s pride was her sea going trading, now her judgment would come like a violent ocean storm. The storm will leave her, “a bare rock.” This is a play on the name “Tyre” which means “a rock” or “hard pebble.” (v.4) God said He would bring Nebuchadnezzar “king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army...against you.” He will slay their daughters on the mainland – Tyre had both a mainland and an island. (vv.7-8) The siege will be fierce and it will be Tyre’s gates that will be entered – by invading forces. (vv.9-14) (3) The “then” “All the princes will go down to the sea...they will strip themselves of their embroidered garments, put on trembling...sit on the ground, and be appalled. They will take up a lamentation over you...” (vv.15-17). Their destruction will be great the Lord will make it “a desolate city.” (v.19) Then He

will take them down to the pit - the place of death and they will not be inhabited again. "But I will set glory in the land of the living." (v.20b) This could only be reference to the restoration of Israel. Catch the contrast here, Tyre rejoiced that Israel was conquered by Babylon, they saw it as a possible windfall for themselves. Not so, first because God will set His glory in Israel the land of the living. Second because Tyre will be destroyed never to rise again. God said to her very clearly, "You will never be found again." (v.21b)

The second oracle is a funeral dirge over the fallen city. (27:1-36) Tyre's coming destruction was certain, therefore the funeral dirge could begin. The dirge could be names, "The Sinking Ship of Tyre" since the song compares her to a sinking ship. Keep in mind that Tyre was the master of the seas at this time. The first section, written in poetic style, describes her former beauty, quality, and magnificence. (vv.1-9) The second section, vv. 10-25, is written in both prose and poetry. It lists the nations who traded with, even depended on Tyre, for merchandise. Notice that Judah depended on her for wheat, honey, oil, and balm. (v.17) The third section records the lament of those who traded with her as they witnessed her death at sea be the sea. The lament closes with, "and you will cease to be forever." (vv.26-36)

The third oracle is against the ruler of Tyre (28:1-10): "The word of the Lord came again to me saying," introduces the next oracle. It is directed to "the leader of Tyre," or "the man at the top." (v.2) Up to this point God through Ezekiel has been addressing the city state of Tyre, now He turns his attention to the ruler, the prince, the leader. His name was Ethbaal III, he ruled from 591-590 B.C to 573-572 B.C. This leader had a pride problem, "And you have said, 'I am a god.'" But God said to him, "Yet you are a man and not God." (v.2) Ezekiel then asked, in irony, the king if he were wiser than Daniel? Daniel the prophet also in captivity in Babylon had already distinguished himself as wise, but attributed his wisdom to God not himself. Ethbaal III did believe he was wiser than Daniel (vv.3-5).

In two "Therefore" statements God confronted the King telling him of the ruthless nations that will come upon Tyre and take it down to the pit, "and you will die the death of those who are slain." (v.8) Ezekiel asked if he would say he was a god in the presence of his slayer. He further prophesied that Ethbaal III would die at the hand of strangers, then it would be evident that he was not a god. This king

who claimed deity would die the death of the uncircumcised meaning a death of shame, "for I have spoken! Declares the Lord God!" (v.10)

The last oracle is a lament concerning the "king" of Tyre. Again the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel with this prophecy in the form of a lamentation, a dirge. (vv.11-12a) Notice it is a lamentation over, "the king of Tyre." (v.12a) The first ten verses were addressed to the "ruler" who believed himself to be a god. These verse are addressed to a "king" in terms that could not apply to a mere man. He was someone who was in Eden the garden of God, v.13, he was a cherub who guards, v.14, and he was on the holy mountain of God, v.14b. Some say it refers to Adam, but he was never a cherub nor did he reside on the holy mountain. Most scholars believe it is a description of Satan in all of his grandeur. (28:11-19) Some highlights: (1) he had the seal of perfection, v.13, (2) he had the beauty and the wealth of the finest of gems, nine of the twelve gems of the breast plate of the priest are listed, v.14b, (3) he was an anointed cherub - a higher ranking angel, v.14, (4) he was on the holy mountain, usually refers to Jerusalem, probably to heaven here, v.14c, and he walked in the midst of the stones of fire, possibly a reference to the fiery stones of God's fiery wall of protection. (cf. Zechariah 2:5) Whatever the identification, Ezekiel was stating that Satan had access to God's presence. (v.14d) (5) He was "blameless" from the day he was created until unrighteousness was found in him. (v.15) Then he was internally filled with violence. (v.16) Is this the description of the king of Tyre or of Satan? It appears both, the king of Tyre was the very likeness of Satan and was under Satan's control. (6) He is judged for his sin with fire and will cease forever. (vv.17-19)

"The Bible Commentary" has this insight, "Though Ezekiel presented the fall of Satan as a single act, it actually occurred in stages. Satan's initial judgment was his expulsion from the position of God's anointed cherub before His throne. God expelled him from the mount of God (heaven, v.16; cf. v.14). Satan was cast from God's government in heaven (cf. Luke 10:18) but was still allowed access to God (cf. Job 1:6-12; Zech. 3:1-2). In the Tribulation Satan will be cast from heaven and restricted to the earth (Rev. 12:7-13); in the Millennium he will be in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3); and after his brief release at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-9) he will be cast into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:10).

The judgment against Sidon and the prophecy of Israel’s restoration (28:20-26): God will set His face against Sidon and she will no longer be a source of contention for Israel. Sidon was closely aligned with Tyre and most likely committed the same sins. God’s judgment on Sidon would, (1) cause the Sidonians to acknowledge God. Notice the repeat of, “and they will know that I am the Lord.” (28:22, 23, 24) (2) Their judgment would also remove the “prickling briar or a painful thorn” they had been to Israel. (v.24)

In the midst of this judgment God said that just as He revealed His glory to Sidon in judgment so He will reveal His glory to Israel in gathering her from the places of exile and restore her to her land. Israel will live in her land, being fulfilled today, and will enjoy God’s blessings, security, and prosperity. When God ultimately punishes her enemies and blesses His Chosen People, they will recognize their Lord, “Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.” (v.26)

A. God’s judgment on Egypt (29:1-32:32)

In seven oracles beginning with, “The word of the Lord came to me,” Ezekiel delivered God’s words of judgment on Egypt. The oracles describe: (1) The fierceness of the sins of Egypt and her judgment. 29:1-16 (2) Egypt’s defeat by Babylon (29:17-21) (3) The destruction of Egypt and her allies – Lament over Israel (30:1- 19) (4) The scattering of Egypt, (30:20-26) (5) Egypt is likened to Assyria and like her will be concurred by Babylon. (31:1-18) (6)The lament of Pharaoh (32:1-16) (7) Egypt’s descent into Sheol. (32:17-32)

Chronological Sequence of Ezekiel’s Foreign Nation Oracles			
Text	Date (Yr/Mo/Da)	ModernDating	ForeignNation
29:1	10/10/10	Dec 29, 588	Egypt
30:20	11/1/7	Apr 30, 587	Egypt
31:1	11/3/1	Jun 21, 587	Egypt
32:1	12/12/1	Mar 4, 585	Egypt
32:17	12/?/15	Mar 18, 585	Egypt
29:17	27/1/1	Apr 26, 571	Egypt

In chs 29-32 ninety-seven verses are devoted to the fall of Egypt, more verses than are contained in 1 Peter, more than 2 Timothy and

more than are in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Why such a large section devoted to this one heathen power? Ezekiel agreed with Jeremiah that God had bestowed universal sovereignty temporarily on Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon’s principal rival in the sixth century was Egypt. The other nations condemned in this section were minor irritations to Nebuchadnezzar; but Egypt had the potential of presenting a serious obstacle to Yahweh’s will for Babylon.

Egypt had been very much involved in encouraging Judah’s final revolt against Babylon. The main point stressed by Ezekiel and the other Hebrew prophets is that the final destiny of Israel was in the hands of God, not the hands of human monarchs. Furthermore, the prophets dared to preach what was in their day a revolutionary doctrine: even the destiny of the superpowers was determined by God - and God was Yahweh! Israel might be small; but Israel’s God was great to the ends of the earth. Israel appeared to be only a pawn in the hands of political strategists; but Israel’s God was powerful, and in reality those strategists were but pawns in his hand. Thus the oracles against Egypt - and others like them - were not merely designed to vent the frustrations and hostilities that Israel felt toward her neighbors. These oracles served to underscore vital points of theology - the sovereignty, omniscience and omnipotence of Israel’s God.

The Egypt oracles are similar in structure: a general threat against Pharaoh under some allegorical designation; amplification of the general threat with regard to the instrument of punishment, the destruction of the country and the disposition of its inhabitants; a description of the effect that the fall of Egypt will have on other nations.

Chapter 10

Restoration of Israel (33:1-39:23)

Ezekiel called the exiles to acknowledge that - just as God was the cause of their captivity - He was also the hope of their restoration. Ezekiel 33-48 sounds this theme. The word of the prophet, and his role as a watchman, was confirmed when the exiles were informed that Jerusalem had fallen (2 Kings 25). Ezekiel likewise announced that the LORD's jealousy for His own glory through His people in His land would certainly lead to a time of His favor and protection.

Ezekiel justified his prophetic ministry by stating that the LORD had set him as a watchman to warn Israel of the coming judgment (ch 33). Earlier in the record of Ezekiel's prophecy he stated that he was a watchman from the LORD (3.16-27), warning God's people of what would happen if they did not repent. Ezekiel may have stated his role a second time so as to provide further credence to his messages. The job description of a watchman was not complicated: if Ezekiel was faithful to announce the word of the LORD regarding a particular situation, then each hearer was responsible for his response; if Ezekiel failed to speak the message he heard, then he would bear the reproach that would

have been leveled against his audience. Ezekiel thus warned the exiles of the word of the LORD: "I will judge each of you according to his ways, house of Israel" (v. 20). The message of the prophet was clear: one's righteous past was futile if they turned straightway into rebellious behavior; likewise, if one had a sordid history - but turned in repentance and practiced covenant faithfulness - they would live. The fact that many argued, "The Lord's way isn't fair" (v. 17), reveals the pride of their heart; they thought themselves a part of "the righteous" group who may perish for a mild lapse into idolatry when in fact they were of "the unrighteous" who had been unfaithful to covenant obligations. One could not accuse God of callousness toward His people; rather He announced: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live. Repent, repent of your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?" (v. 11). The fact that a fugitive from Jerusalem arrived in Babylon and announced the destruction of Jerusalem confirmed Ezekiel's prophecy - and his faithfulness as a watchman (vv. 21-22).

Ezekiel announced the day when Israel would enjoy the LORD's favor even beyond that experienced under the reign of King David (chs 34-37):

1. The LORD's flock would be saved from selfish shepherds (34.1-31). Ezekiel proclaimed the LORD's displeasure with the shepherds of Israel. The elders of the land had given detailed attention to their own interests, but ignored God's flock; they were fat, the sheep were scattered - and when they did rise from the couch and take up their staff; they "ruled them with violence and cruelty" (v. 4), he said. The prophet announced that only the LORD could pastor His flock in their present situation: "See, I Myself will search for My flock and look for them...I will bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries, and bring them into their own land" (v. 13). All of this would be done with justice (v. 16), and accord the coming "covenant of peace" (v. 25) - when the LORD would "appoint over them a single shepherd, My servant David, and he will shepherd them. He will tend them himself and will be their shepherd. I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be a prince among them" (vv. 23-24; cf. John 10.11, 16).

2. The LORD's land would be restored (35.1-36.15). When Israel and Judah were ravaged by the Assyrians and Babylonians, Edom rejoiced and said: "These two nations and two lands will be mine, and we will possess them" (35.10). For this - and in light of the LORD's jealousy for His land and His people - He promised to avenge their mockery, announcing to Israel's enemies: "I will make you a desolation" (35.14). The zeal of the LORD had prompted the Exile, and the zeal of the LORD would bring about the restoration of even the mountains of Israel (cf. ch 6) - since the insults of the nations had filled the LORD's ears (36.1-15)

3. The LORD's honor would be restored (36.16-38). This restoration would be for the LORD's honor, not for the righteousness of His people - who had even profaned His holy name among the nations where they were scattered (vv. 16-38). In this act of grace, all would know that Israel's God is the LORD (v. 36)

4. The LORD's people would be resurrected (37.1-14). Ezekiel prophesied to the "dry bones" of Israel who were scattered throughout Babylon and foreign lands. This too was so that the LORD would be known to His people, the One who promised: "I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it" (v. 14)

5. The LORD would make an eternal covenant with His united people (37.15-28). Here God declared His displeasure at the divided kingdom (cf. 1 Kings 12). Ezekiel was told to make two sticks - one representing Israel and the other Judah - into one, and explain the word of the LORD: "They will no longer be two nations and will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will not defile themselves any more with their idols, their detestable things, and all their transgressions. I will save them from all their apostasies by which they sinned, and I will cleanse them... My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow My ordinances, and keep My statutes and obey them" (vv. 22-23a, 24)

Finally, Ezekiel guaranteed that the LORD would protect Israel (chs 38-39). The prophet announced several oracles against the nation Gog, perhaps a mysterious synonym for Babylon, each beginning with the phrase: "This is what the Lord GOD says..." Ezekiel emphasized

the sovereignty of God throughout the episode, especially in that the LORD would bring this pagan people against Israel (38.1-9). This nation would in turn invade Israel from the north during the time of the nation's strength in God's grace (38.10-16). God would respond by displaying His judgment against Gog (38.17-23) - a battle so devastating that seven years would be required to plunder Gog, and the same number of months to bury their dead (39.1-16). Ultimately, birds and beasts would consume many of the slain (39.17-24). This great victory would conclude the time of restoration Ezekiel had announced - for the sake of God's jealousy toward His holy name (39.25-29).

Ezekiel 33-39 rivals the most important sections of the Old Testament for significance in the storyline of Scripture. The prophet's themes lay a foundation for understanding the character of the Messiah and His kingdom, the inauguration of the new covenant and the coming of the Spirit, and the final judgment of those who oppose God's people:

1. Ezekiel proclaimed the future Messianic Kingdom. In Ezek 37.24, Ezekiel prophesied concerning the day when the LORD would gather His people to the Promised Land, saying: "My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow My ordinances, and keep My statutes and obey them." Jesus employed the prophet's shepherd motif to describe His own ministry - in contrast to that of the Pharisees - saying: "I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me" (John 10.14), and, "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10.27). In Ezek 37.26, Ezekiel prophesied concerning the future day of restoration, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. I will establish and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary among them forever." This prophecy goes beyond anything described in the days of the Old Testament, finding its fulfillment uniquely in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 6.16; Heb 8.7ff; 13.20). Indeed, Ezekiel's prophecy: "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. When My sanctuary is among them forever, the nations will know that I the LORD, sanctify Israel" (37.27-28), lays the foundation for understanding God's presence in Christ (John 1.14), and among His people in the eternal state (Rev 21.1-4, 22-27)

2. Ezekiel announced that the exiles restoration to the Promised Land would be characterized by their spiritual transformation. In Ezek 36.24-27, Ezekiel spoke God's word of promise to the exiles, saying: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will place My Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances." Moses had prophesied the same generations earlier (Exod 30.6). Similarly, in Ezek 37.14, the prophet recorded the declaration of the LORD concerning the future of His people: "I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it." When the apostle Paul defended his apostleship to the Corinthians, he did so in light of the fact that the expectations of Moses and Ezekiel had been fulfilled; he wrote, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone, since it is plain that you are Christ's letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh" (2 Cor 3.2-3). How could this be? The apostle John understood the Spirit to have been given to believers after the time of Christ's death and resurrection (John 6.45), and Jesus Himself said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth." (John 14.16-17a), and, "When the Counselor comes, the One I will send to you from the Father - the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father - He will testify about Me" (John 15.26)

3. The prophet foretold of the final battle the LORD would wage against those who oppose Him and His people. From his apocalyptic vision, the apostle John understood the sovereignty of God over those who oppose God's people, and that Satan - the one who stands behind all evil - would receive a measure of God's wrath appropriate for one who had deceived Eve in the Garden, and so many nations throughout history; he wrote:

"When the 1,000 years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. Their number is like the sand of the sea. They came up over the surface of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them. The Devil who

deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20.7-10).

Importance of the Interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39

In chs 38-39, Ezekiel is predicting an unparalleled invasion by a dreadful foe. Commentators generally concede that these chapters contain an apocalyptic element. In apocalyptic literature, the setting is usually the end of the age. This kind of literature is full of symbols, especially numerical symbols. Great catastrophes befalling God's people and dramatic rescues by divine agencies characterize this type of writing. Most of the characters are painted much larger-than-life in these word pictures. Deliberate vagueness and purposeful incongruities are further identifying marks of apocalyptic.

One can note at least three incongruities in the Gog-Magog chapters: (1) In 38:4 the Lord brings Gog forth, but in 38:10 Gog himself devises the plan of attack; (2) in 38:18-22 Gog is overthrown by earthquake and storm, but in 39:1-2 Gog is still very much active; (3) in 39:4 Gog and company are devoured by birds and animals, while in 39:11-16 the bodies of the fallen host are buried; but again in 39:17-20 the carcasses of the fallen enemy are picked clean by birds and beasts. As in apocalyptic literature in general, "the final catastrophe is looked at from various angles, without any attempt to trace logical order in the sequence of events." The purpose of apocalyptic writing such as this is the "unveiling" of the future, not in the sense of chronicling every event prior to its occurrence, but in the sense of showing God's lordship over the future. It serves the function of letting the faithful know that God knows where history is heading, and that he is ultimately in control of the situation. Thus apocalyptic literature guides and strengthens God's people in dark days of uncertainty. Having recognized the apocalyptic elements within these two chapters, commentators are still divided as to the fulfillment of the prediction here made. Four major categories of conclusions have been formulated.

A. The Historical Views: Some commentators hold that the invasion of Gog was an actual event, future from the standpoint of Ezekiel, but ancient history from the present-day vantage point. Gog has been identified with every outstanding general from the time of

Ezekiel to the time of Christ and even beyond. Among those suggested are Cambyses king of Persia, Alexander the Great, Antiochus the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus Eupator, and Mithridates king of Pontus. Within this general category of approach, perhaps the strongest case can be made for equating Gog with Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus Epiphanes was a bitter opponent of the Jews in the second century before Christ. The center of his kingdom was in Antioch on the Orontes River. To the east, his territory extended beyond the Tigris. To the north, his reign extended over Meshech and Tubal, districts of Anatolia.

In his excellent commentary on the Book of Revelation, William Hendriksen argues that Ezekiel's Magog represents Syria, and Gog, Antiochus. He comments as follows on the relationship between the Gog invasion of Ezekiel and that recorded in the Book of Revelation: "... The Book of Revelation uses this period of affliction and woe as a symbol of the final attack of Satan and his hordes upon the church." That Ezekiel's description of the defeat of Gog (Antiochus) is an appropriate type of the final overthrow of the enemies of God can be seen in the following parallels pointed out by Hendriksen:

- ❖ The *last* great oppression of the people of God under the Old Testament era was sufficiently severe to typify the *final* attack of anti-Christian forces upon the church in the New Testament age.
- ❖ The armies of Gog and Magog were very numerous and came from wide-ranging territories. This would be most appropriate to symbolize the *world-wide* opposition to the church in the days just preceding the second coming.
- ❖ The persecution under Antiochus was very brief, but very severe. The tribulation through which God's people will pass toward the end of the present dispensation will apparently also be of short duration, but extremely severe (cf. Rev 11:11).
- ❖ Defeat of Gog and Magog was unexpected and complete. It was clearly the work of God. So also will be the sudden overthrow of the eschatological Gog and Magog of the Book of Revelation. Linking the invasion forces of Ezek 38-39 with the hosts of Antiochus Epiphanes is an interpretation not as easily overturned as some commentators seem to think. It will not do, for example, to argue that the timeframe for the Ezekiel passage is the latter years

or latter days (38:8, 16). These expressions are clearly used in the Book of Daniel to include events that transpired after the Babylonian captivity. Especially weak is the argument that the apocalyptic character of these chapters necessitates a prophecy dealing with the end-time. Clearly Daniel uses highly symbolic (apocalyptic?) language to describe certain events in the intertestamental period (Dan 8), as does Zechariah as well (Zech 9:11-17). Furthermore, the ruthless assault of Antiochus against Israel and the divine protection of God's people in the midst of that assault are major themes in the prophecies of Ezekiel's contemporary Daniel (Dan 8:9-27; 11:21-35). Why should it then be thought strange that Ezekiel would devote two chapters to describing, in highly idealized language, this same invasion?

B. The Literal Futuristic View: Some commentators believe that the invasion of Gog and Magog has not yet occurred. Ezekiel is describing the final invasion of the land of Israel by a ruthless coalition following the Millennium. C. I. Scofield popularized this view. He writes: That the primary reference is to the northern, (European) powers, headed up by Russia, all agree 'Gog' is the prince, 'Magog,' his land. The reference to Meshech and Tubal (Moscow and Tobolsk) is a clear mark of identification. Russia and the northern powers have been the latest persecutors of dispersed Israel, and it is congruous both with divine justice and with the covenants that destruction should fall at the climax of the last mad attempt to exterminate the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem. The whole prophecy belongs to the yet future 'day of Jehovah' and to the battle of Armageddon ..., but includes also the final revolt of the nations at the close of the kingdom-age... A disciple of Scofield, John F. Walvoord, cites two reasons for believing that a Russian invasion of Israel is being prophesied. First, he points out that three times in chs 38-39 the invading armies are said to come from the extreme north (38:6, 15; 39:2). Second, he points to the fact that Gog is said to be "the prince of Rosh." The nineteenth century lexicographer Wilhelm Gesenius is cited as the authority for equating Russia with Rosh. The geographical argument offered by Walvoord is weak. Jeremiah frequently speaks of armies coming from the uttermost parts of the earth by which he means no more than Babylonia. In some sense Mount Zion itself is said to be situated in the uttermost part of the north (Ps 48:2).

The etymological argument offered by Walvoord linking Russia with Rosh is also weak. For one thing, the precise translation of the Hebrew term rosh is uncertain. Several modern versions render the word as an adjective modifying the word prince. Even conceding that Rosh is a proper name here (as in ASV and NASB), that by no means proves that Rosh is to be identified with Russia. For one thing, hard etymological evidence for this identification is lacking. Rosh is here connected with Meshech and Tubal, now generally accepted as being regions in eastern Anatolia.

Genesius was making an intelligent guess at the identification of Rosh, but he was writing at a time when Assyrian texts mentioning these places were not available. His etymologies are now generally disregarded. Even the dispensational writer Feinberg rejects the Rosh=Russia identification. A cylinder text of the Assyrian king Sargon mentions a land of Râshi on the Elamite border. The same text speaks of Tabalum (Ezekiel's Tubal) and the land of Mushki (Ezekiel's Meshech). Could this Râshi be Ezekiel's Rosh? In any case, the evidence seems to point to Rosh as a region of Anatolia far north of Israel, but far south of Russia. Patrick Fairbairn does perhaps the best work in setting forth the arguments against any literal interpretation of Ezek 38-39. He enumerates six arguments that are here summarized:

- ❖ It is impossible to identify Gog and Magog with any historical person or place.
- ❖ It is improbable that such a conglomerate army as is here described would ever form a military coalition.
- ❖ The size of the invading force is disproportionate to that of Israel or any spoil that they might have derived from Israel.
- ❖ The mind cannot imagine a situation in which it would take seven months to bury slain soldiers, much less the utilization of discarded weapons for seven years as fuel. Fairbairn conservatively estimates that the corpses would have to number over three hundred million. How would any living thing survive the pestilential vapors arising from such a mass of corpses?
- ❖ The gross carnality of the scene is inconsistent with messianic times.

- ❖ This prophecy was the same that had been spoken in old times by the prophets (38:17). While no prophecies concerning Gog and Magog are recorded elsewhere, prophecies of a final assault against God's people and the miraculous overthrow of the invaders is a constant burden of prophecy.

C. Future Idealistic View: Since there are no clearly identifiable historical events to which the prophecy can be attached, it is possible that this invasion is yet future. The commentators holding to the future idealistic view would distinguish between what is of primary and what is of secondary significance in the two chapters. The primary significance is that the ruthless enemies of God's people will attack with the avowed intention of utterly destroying them. God will rescue his people by divine agencies. The secondary or "representative" elements in the two chapters are the place names, the weapons used, the chronological statements and the like. The future idealistic school interprets Ezek 38-39 this way: God's people will face implacable enemies; the leader of the enemy will not necessarily have the name Gog, nor will he fight with bows and arrows. By his use of the same names, and a short summary of the same description, the Apostle John has shown that he regarded Ezekiel's vision as typical, and its fulfillment still future. Thus the commentators holding the future idealistic view see in Ezek 38-39 the final climatic struggle between the forces of good and evil. With the help of God, his people will ultimately be victorious in this struggle.

D. Prophetic Parable View: The parabolic view of Ezek 38-39 is very popular among conservatives as well as liberals. These chapters illustrate a great truth, but refer to no specific event in time and space. Israel can have assurance from these chapters that, once restored, the power of God would protect her from the worst foe. At the same time, the church can gain strength from this passage in that here is a promise of God's deliverance from the most severe attacks. Gardiner sets forth this view when he states that... there are several clear indications that he did not confine his view in this prophecy to any literal event, but intended to set forth under the figure of Gog and his armies all the opposition of the world to the kingdom of God, and to foretell, like his contemporary Daniel, the final and complete triumph of the latter in the distant future. Thus according to this view, Ezek

38-39 speaks of concepts, not events, the clash of ideologies rather than armies.

Those who seek to identify Gog with some ancient tyrant, and those who seek here specific predictions of some imminent attack upon the Zionist state of Israel are equally wide of the mark. This apocalypse “deals with every threat to faith in every time and every nation.” In criticism of the parabolic view, three points need to be made.

- ❖ Many of those holding this view fail to take the oracle as a serious teaching of the word of God. However, within these two chapters, there are seven distinct claims to inspiration. This is a divine revelation and not Ezekiel’s speculations.
- ❖ The parabolic view does not unite the interpretation of these chapters with a real return of God’s people to their land. Yet history records the fulfillment of many items in the background and setting of this prophecy.
- ❖ Those holding this view do a rather poor job of correlating the predictions of Ezekiel with the Gog-Magog prophecy of Rev 20:9.

Ezekiel’s prophecies regarding the invasion of Gog are enigmatic and difficult. Honest and capable expositors will continue to have differences of opinion regarding the specific fulfillment of the prediction. Probably Ezekiel is speaking about a specific event that has not yet transpired. That he employs hyperbole, symbolism and apocalyptic imagery is readily admitted. That the passage has an application to any situation in which God’s people are under trial may also be readily admitted. But that which Ezekiel had in mind was an eschatological event - the final showdown between God’s people and their enemies.

Chapter 11

God’s Future Temple (40:1-48:3)

Two temples of Yahweh have been located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in times past. Solomon’s Temple called by the Jews, the “First Temple” was destroyed by the siege of Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon on the 9th of Av in 586 BC. Some seventy years later, approximately, Jewish exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem to build an altar, the “Second” Jewish temple, and finally the walls of the city. Although modest in comparison to the First Temple, the Second Temple was later greatly enlarged and expanded by Herod the Great. This latter temple was the Temple in which Jesus was dedicated, and where He taught and cast out the money changers on two occasions.

The Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus, found Jewish believers assembled for prayer in the temple courts (Acts 2). There the Holy Spirit came from heaven to begin the calling out of a new group of believers (both Jews and Gentiles) - a body now known as the church of Jesus Christ. Preaching by the Apostles and public miracles recorded in the book of Acts took place in the courts just outside this Second Temple. But

the now-magnificent Second Temple was destroyed by General Titus and besieging Roman armies on the 9th of Av in AD 70. This destruction had been predicted by Jesus earlier (see Matthew 24, Luke 21). Since AD 70 no Jewish temple has been built on the Temple Mount, therefore no blood sacrifices for sin have been possible for religious Jews, up to the present day.

The New Testament contains three references to a Third Jewish Temple standing on the site at the end of the present age. Likewise there are Scriptural reasons (Christians believe) that a the coming Third Temple will be followed by a Fourth. The location of the First and Second Temples is a matter of keen interest among devout Jews in Israel today as the Third Temple must be built on the consecrated ground of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem where the First and Second Temples stood. This site is currently under the control of the Muslim WAQF. This article concerns primarily the Fourth Temple, usually called “Ezekiel’s Temple.

The Third and Fourth Jewish Temples

Only a small number of Orthodox Jewish believers in Israel today believe that the coming Third Temple will be built *by the Jewish Messiah* when he appears. Groups such as The Temple Institute believe it is incumbent upon them to make all possible preparations in advance - and to build the Third Temple when the freedom to do so is gained on the Temple Mount - whether or not the Messiah arrives before or after a Third Temple is erected.

The post-exilic prophet Zechariah (who wrote around the year 500 BC) says that Messiah, whom he calls the “Branch” would Himself one day build a temple in Israel. The Branch will be an individual in whom the offices of *both* King and High Priest are combined: “Take from them (the returning exiles from Babylon) silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it upon the head of (Yeshua) Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both.”’” (Zechariah 6:13.)

Christians believe that the promised Messiah, Jesus (Yeshua), has already come to earth once—and will come a second time to establish his millennial kingdom on the earth, ruling thereafter from Jerusalem from the throne of His forefather King David. The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews describes the once-for-all, fully-efficacious, blood sacrifice of Jesus as the true Lamb of God. In contrast, the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant were but shadows pointing to Messiah’s coming. Although the New Testament speaks three times of the existence of a Third Jewish Temple in Jerusalem at the end of the present age, as we have already discussed, the fate of that Third Temple is not given in the New Testament.

A great and devastating earthquake is associated with the second coming of Jesus to the Mount of Olives which apparently will destroy most of the city of Jerusalem at that time. Major topographic changes will occur throughout the land of Israel as well.

These changes in the entire land when Messiah comes are spoken of in numerous passages of the Bible:

- ❖ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:1-5, quoted in Luke 3:5)
- ❖ But on that day... says the Lord GOD, my wrath will be roused. For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. (Ezekiel 38:18-22)

- ❖ The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city [Jerusalem] was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundred-weight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague. (Revelation 16:17-21)
- ❖ For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD your God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one. The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft upon its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s wine presses. (Zechariah 14:2-10)

Thus it is reasonable to suppose that the Third Temple will be destroyed by the final earthquake at Messiah’s appearing in glory, or

by the final military invasion of Jerusalem during World War III spoken of also by Zechariah in the above passage.

The prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48) describes in great detail a temple in Israel that is much too large to fit on the present Temple Mount site. The Temple of Ezekiel proper measures about feet square, and it sits in the middle of a large consecrated area (See inset in diagram below). Ezekiel’s temple is also very different in many details from any previous temples that have existed in Israel (or elsewhere). Therefore most Bible scholars believe there will one day exist in the Holy Land a Fourth or “Millennial” Temple.

Ezekiel also describes the reapportionment of the land in specific lots during the millennial kingdom. The temple and the temple district are not part of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem according to the details of this reapportionment. Note that the Temple area will be located to the North of rebuilt Jerusalem:

“When you allot the land as a possession, you shall set apart for the Lord a portion of the land as a holy district, twenty-five thousand cubits long and twenty thousand cubits broad; it shall be holy throughout its whole extent. Of this a square plot of five hundred by five hundred cubits shall be for the sanctuary, with fifty cubits for an open space around it. And in the holy district you shall measure off a section twenty-five thousand cubits long and ten thousand broad, in which shall be the sanctuary, the most holy place. It shall be the holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, who minister in the sanctuary and approach the Lord to minister to him; and it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary. Another section, twenty-five thousand cubits long and ten thousand cubits broad, shall be for the Levites who minister at the temple, as their possession for cities to live in.”

“Alongside the portion set apart as the holy district you shall assign for the possession of the city an area five thousand cubits broad, and twenty-five thousand cubits long it shall belong to the whole house of Israel.”

“And to the prince shall belong the land on both sides of the holy district and the property of the city, on the west and on the east, corresponding in length to one of the tribal portions, and extending

from the western to the eastern boundary of the land. It is to be his property in Israel. And my princes shall no more oppress my people; but they shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes.” (Ezekiel 45:1-8.)

“Adjoining the territory of Judah, from the east side to the west, shall be the portion which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand cubits in breadth, and in length equal to one of the tribal portions, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the midst of it. The portion which you shall set apart for the Lord shall be twenty-five thousand cubits in length, and twenty thousand in breadth.” (Ezekiel 48)

According to many Christian Bible scholars, the Fourth Temple (Ezekiel 40-45) will be “memorial” - a teaching center apparently to instruct men about the holiness of God and proper worship during the coming kingdom of Jesus on the earth. As sinful men and women continue to be born into the world in the millennium, the temple is supposed to remind everyone of the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross, as the “Lamb of God,” some two thousand years earlier.

Although Ezekiel is a much-neglected book, several good commentaries complete with detailed analysis of the chapters on the Millennial temple are in print. In addition Mr. John W. Schmitt of Portland, Oregon (Ref. 3) has devoted many years to a study of Ezekiel’s Temple, and to the construction of several fine scale models used for educational purposes.

Ezekiel had planned to enter the priestly service in the First Temple when he reached thirty years of age. His plans were cut short in 597 when King Nebuchadnezzar raided and captured Jerusalem after a brief siege, taking with him young king Jehoichin and “all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths.” (2 Kings 24:14). (By way of reference, Daniel and his three friends of the tribe of Judah plus others from Jerusalem had previously been taken to Babylon in a raid by General - soon to be King - Nebuchadnezzar after the battle of Carchemish in 605. That famous battle ended the rule of Egypt in the ancient world).

In the fifth year of his own exile from Jerusalem, that is in 593 BC, Ezekiel was called by God to exercise a prophetic ministry to the

house of Israel which he continued until about the year 570. Ezekiel was married, in fact his wife died as a sign from God on the day the siege of Jerusalem began, (24:18).

Ezekiel’s temple and the millennium occupies the last eight long chapters of his book. He gives 318 precise measurements of the temple using some 37 unique words that are architectural terms, such as “door-posts,” “windows,” etc. Ezekiel received this great wealth of information on the millennial temple in the year 573 BC in the form of a vision and a personally conducted tour of the temple by “a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze.” (Evidently *the* Angel of the Lord). “He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand and he stood in the gateway.” (40:3) The tour began at the Eastern Gate - which was closed:

“Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. And he said to me, “This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.” (44:1-3)

The present Golden Gate in the Eastern Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is walled shut. Jewish and Arab tradition teaches - probably because of a misinterpretation of this passage in Ezekiel - that the Jewish Messiah is to enter the Golden Gate. For that reason the gate was walled up by the Arabs in the 11th Century after the Crusades, (if not earlier) or perhaps by Suleiman the Magnificent in AD 1539-1542 - to prevent the Jewish Messiah from entering. The much older gate beneath the present Golden Gate, or else another (as yet undiscovered) gate in the Eastern wall could have been the one used by Jesus when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday riding on the foal of a donkey.

In addition to being a very large and complex structure Ezekiel’s temple differs in several very important ways from any previously existing Jewish temple. These have been catalogued by researcher John Schmitt, a Portland, Oregon Bible scholar, as follows:

Features Unique to Ezekiel's Temple

- ❖ No wall of partition to exclude Gentiles (compare Ephesians 2:14) The Gentiles were previously welcome in the Outer Courts, but excluded from the inner courts on pain of death.
- ❖ No Court of Women (compare Galatians 3:28 (Outer Court and Inner Court only))
- ❖ No Laver (see Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3)
- ❖ No Table of Shewbread (see Micah 5:4, John 6:35)
- ❖ No Lampstand or Menorah (see Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12)
- ❖ No Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6)
- ❖ No Veil (Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 27:51)
- ❖ No Ark of the Covenant (Jeremiah 3:16, John 10:30-33)
- ❖ Major Changes to the Altar: The sacrificial Altar will be approached by a ramp from the East. Previous altars were all approached from the South. Now there will be stairs to the altar, not a ramp as previously. The top of the altar is now described by the Hebrew word "*ariel*" [Isaiah 29:1] meaning "hearth of God" or "lion of God." [Rev. 5:5].

If the previous temples, as well as the Tabernacle of Moses, are pictures for us of man as the dwelling place of God, then Ezekiel's temple may be intended to teach us about the marvelously new resurrection bodies waiting for every believer when he leaves this present life (2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Believing saints from the Old Testament epoch, saints from the Christian era, and all those raised from the dead at the rapture and at the second coming of Christ in glory receive new resurrection bodies, like that of Jesus, as detailed in 1 Corinthians 15. Yet, after the Battle of Armageddon, Jesus will gather all the survivors of the nations outside Jerusalem and determine which individual sons and daughters of Adam are worthy to enter the Millennial Kingdom on earth. This is the famous judgment of the sheep and the goats described by our Lord in Matthew 25:31-46, and also given by the prophet Joel:

- ❖ "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it. "What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will requite your deed upon your own head swiftly and speedily. For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. But now I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will requite your deed upon your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far off; for the LORD has spoken." Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior."
- ❖ Hasten and come, all you nations round about, gather yourselves there. Bring down thy warriors, O LORD. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. And the LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it. "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water;

and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the valley of Shittim. "Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the LORD dwells in Zion." (Joel 3)

The criterion for judgment at this time will be how individuals Gentiles have treated the Jews, especially believing Jews who constitute "true Israel." The "Sheep" category clearly represents those righteous gentiles whose hearts are right before the Lord, that is they are all regenerated men and women, but individuals who have not previously received their resurrection bodies. They will repopulate the earth, according to Christian belief, during the thousand year reign of Messiah under greatly improved living conditions:

"But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their children with them. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD." (Isaiah 65:18-25)

During this thousand year reign of Yeshua over a restored earth, with Satan locked away in the abyss (Rev. 20:2), sinners will be born on the earth and will need to be instructed in matters of God's grace and mercy. For this reason most commentators on Ezekiel believe that the Fourth Temple will be Memorial in nature, looking back in

time to the cross of Jesus Christ, just as the Tabernacle and First and Second Temples pointed ahead in time to the cross. The prescribed worship services of Ezekiel's temple are also described for us in great detail by the prophet. The priests presiding over the temple services will be of the line of Zadok (44:15) who proved faithful after the failure of the Levitical priests in the line of Eli (1 Samuel 2:35, 1 Kings 2:26-27, 35). The Millennial Temple will not have a separate High Priest. Instead the previously separate offices of King and Priest will be combined in the Messiah as noted, (See Zechariah 6:9-15)

Approximate Distribution of Land to the Twelve Tribes during Messiah's Coming Reign

In addition to the physical differences in Ezekiel's Temple a number of changes are made in the annual cycle of Jewish feasts. It is very clearly that the Millennial Temple sacrifices are definitely not a reinstatement of the Mosaic system. Another feature of the Millennial Temple is the presence of a great stream of fresh water which issues from beneath the Southern wall of the Temple. Ezekiel describes this river, which divides into two branches and flows Westward into the Mediterranean Sea and also Eastward into the Northern end of the Dead Sea, freshening all the land South of Jericho,

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me round on the outside to the outer gate, that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side. Going on eastward with a line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the loins. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through.

And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw upon the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other.

And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish; for this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea; from Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” (47:1-12)

This same stream of water seems to be identical to that described in Zechariah 14:8 and Joel 3:18. If so then the site of the Fourth Temple would seem to be on or near the present Temple Mount in Jerusalem. If this is so, then the city of Jerusalem will evidently be rebuilt to the South since the temple holy district is specified in Ezekiel 48 as North of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. Some commentators have suggested that the Millennial Temple will be located at Shiloh, 31 kilometers to the North of present day Jerusalem.

A second reason for believing that the site of Ezekiel’s Temple may be near the present Temple Mount is found in Ezekiel’s description of the return of the Lord to dwell forever with His people Israel. The Lord says the people will no longer defile the temple site with the dead bodies of their kings. Since there are so many cemeteries on and around the Temple Mount this would require a special ritual cleansing of the entire area (described by Ezekiel), and of course the relocation of the rebuilt City to the South of the Temple district as we have already noted:

Afterward he (the angel of the Lord brought me (Ezekiel) to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory. And the vision I saw was like the vision which I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision which I had seen by the river Chebar; and

I fell upon my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple; 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 in the midst of the people of Israel for ever.

And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their harlotry, and by the dead bodies of their kings, by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations which they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. Now let them put away their idolatry and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst for ever. “And you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple and its appearance and plan, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, portray the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, and its whole form; and make known to them all its ordinances and all its laws; and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe and perform all its laws and all its ordinances. This is the law of the temple: the whole territory round about upon the top of the mountain shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple. (Ezekiel 43:1-12)

Jerusalem, the rebuilt city in Israel, on earth, during the Millennium, should not be confused with the heavenly city known as “New Jerusalem,” referred to in the New Testament, (Hebrews 11:16, 12:18-29, Revelation 21-22) which seems to take the form of a great orbiting or stationary satellite above the earth. This vast city whose dimensions are of the order of 1500 miles on a side, may be connected to the millennial temple by a space-time gate way. The New Jerusalem does not include a temple (Revelation 21:22, 23) - “The Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb, are its temple.”

During the millennial kingdom sin will continue to exist on the earth, but all forms of defilement and sin are clearly excluded from the New Jerusalem, and guarded against by the complex rituals proscribed for the Temple of Ezekiel on the earth. Ezekiel saw in a great vision the

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departure of the glory (the *shekinah*) of God from the Temple of Solomon, (Ezekiel 9:1-11:25). In a subsequent vision of Jerusalem in 573 BC, eighteen years later, Ezekiel was shown the future return of the Shekinah to Israel and to the Temple (43:1-12). That future day had also been foreseen by the prophet Isaiah:

In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing For those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy - everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain. (Isaiah 4:2-6)

Although we are given much information in the Bible on Tabernacle and Temples, the principal Biblical emphasis is not on buildings but on men and their character, scripture does not negate the use of shadows and symbols. “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest. All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the man to whom I look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word’” (Isaiah 66:1, 2).