



# EZEKIEL

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# COMMENTARY ON EZEKIEL

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## **Ezekiel Introduction**

### **I. AUTHOR AND DATE.**

Ezekiel was 30 years old when God called him to be prophet.

He was 25 years old when taken captive in 597.

He was one of 10,000 captives (2 Kgs 24:14).

A. Ezekiel (1:3; 24:24):

1. The meaning of his name: "God Strengthens" (24:21, 30:18; 33:28).
  - a. Hebrew - YEHEZGEL.
  - b. LXX - IEZEKIEL.
  - c. Vulgate - EZECHIEL.
2. The man himself:
  - a. He was a priest (1:3).
  - b. He was in exile.
  - c. He was God's spokesman for 22 years, from age 30-52 (40:1).
  - d. He is one of the most striking characters in Israel's history.
  - e. He was influenced by the preaching of Jeremiah. He also knew Daniel (14:14,20).
  - f. He was married (24:15-18).
  - g. Ezekiel has been called, "...neurotic, a victim of hysteria, a psychopath, paranoid schizophrenic" (Stalker 23).
  - h. He was:
    - 1) Convicted of God's hand upon him.

- 2) Deep and thoughtful—one who meditated; everything had a meaning.
- 3) Harsh and blunt in condemnation of sin—in word and action!
- 4) Fearlessly determined.
- 5) A strict moralist—zealous for righteousness.
- 6) Uncompromising (and unpopular!).
- 7) Sympathetic towards his people in captivity.

NOTE: Daniel was deported about 605 (first); Ezekiel in 598 (second).

3. The message he delivered:
  - a. Doom - reason for captivity (1:1-24:27).
  - b. Hope - restoration assured (25:1-48:35).
4. The methods he used:
  - a. Symbolic visions (Apocalyptic).
  - b. Imagery (Visual Aids!).
  - c. Allegories.
  - d. Parables.
  - e. Acted Symbols.
  - f. Riddles/Proverbs.
  - g. Prophecy.

B. Date: 592-570 B.C.:

1. Ezekiel 1:1-2.
2. Ezekiel 40:1 (cf. 29:17).

## II PURPOSE AND THEME.

### A. Purpose:

1. Ezekiel's task was to impress upon the exiles that their enslavement was due to their own sinfulness.
2. He was to destroy the false hopes of an early return (cf. Jer 28:1-17).
3. He was to give the people a message of hope for return and restoration.

### B. Theme—"the soul that sins, it shall die"—"to repent/turn is so to live" (18:20; 23:1; 33:7-16).

1. Here, Ezekiel sets forth individual (personal) responsibility! This is not emphasized by other prophets.
2. Here, we have the promise of God's faithfulness in carrying out His eternal purpose.
  - a. This sinful nation must die,
  - b. But the penitent remnant (individual) will be saved.

## III. OUTLINES (condensed).

### A. Outline 1:

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| I. DESTRUCTION .....  | 1-32  |
| a. Concerning the State of Judah (5 Prophecies) .....       | 1-24  |
| b. Concerning the Surrounding Nations (7 Prophecies).....   | 25-32 |
| II. RESTORATION .....                                       | 33-48 |
| NOTE: Fall of Jerusalem - turning point .....               | 33    |
| a. Concerning Israel (Israel and Judah) (7 Prophecies)..... | 34-39 |
| b. Concerning the New Temple (5 Prophecies) .....           | 40-48 |

B. Outline 2:

I. PROPHECY OF JUDGEMENT AND PRONOUNCEMENT OF SIN.....	1:1-24:27
A. The Prophet's Dramatic Call .....	1:1-3:27
B. The Prophecies Dramatized.....	4:1-5:17
C. The Prophecy of Israel's Doom.....	6:1-7:27
D. The Prophetic Utterance of Jerusalem's Sin and Judgment—Abandoned by God.....	8:1-11:25
E. The Prophetic Utterances Against Jerusalem Continued .....	12:1-24:27
II. PROPHECIES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS .....	25:1-32:32
A. Against Surrounding Tribes.....	25:1-17
B. Against Tyre .....	26:1-28:26
C. Against Egypt.....	29:1-32:32
III. PROPHECY OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION.....	33:1-48:35
A. The Prophet and People are Responsible .....	33:1-20
B. The Turning Point in Ezekiel's Ministry .....	33:21-33
C. The Return of Israel to Land .....	34:1-37:28
D. The Prophecy Against God .....	38:1-39:29
E. The Temple and People in God's Kingdom .....	40:1-48:35

C. Outline 3:

I. CERTAIN DOOM FOR THE PRESENT .....	1-24
A. Vision and Call.....	1-3
B. Denunciation of Sins .....	4-24

II. CERTAIN HOPE FOR THE FUTURE .....	25-48
A. Seven Surrounding Nations to Be Judged .....	25-32
B. Israel to Be Restored and Blessed.....	33-48
1. Concerning the People .....	33-39
2. Concerning Worship in the New Temple .....	40-48
a. The temple .....	40-43
b. Those who may enter.....	44-46
c. Blessings within.....	47,48
D. Another way to view the structure of Ezekiel:	

The book divides into two parts: 1-32 and 33-48. The first thirty-two chapters are about the judgment to come. The turning point is 33:21. The judgment came—the city was destroyed. The last fifteen chapters deal with the restoration of the people after the judgment.

The first section can be divided into five parts.

1. Call and commission .....	1-3
2. Prediction of judgment .....	4-7
3. Reason for judgment.....	8-11
4. Objections to judgment .....	12-24
5. The foreign nations will be judged.....	25-32

The second section can be divided into two parts.

1. Restoration.....	33-39
2. New temple, worship and land .....	40-48

Another key idea is God's Spirit leaving and returning. He leaves the temple in 8-11 and returns in 43. He left when there was judgment, returned after restoration.

#### IV. NOTE ON BIBLICAL AND APOCALYPTIC SYMBOLISM.

##### A. Apocalyptic Defined:

1. From Greek APOKALUPTO which means “to reveal” (cf. 1 Cor 14:6).
  - a. The divine intervention of God in the affairs of men and nations emphasized.
  - b. The deliverance of His faithful people is assured—and judgments poured out upon their enemies.
2. Biblical books that use Apocalyptic language:
  - a. Isaiah,
  - b. Jeremiah,
  - c. Ezekiel,
  - d. Daniel,
  - e. Joel,
  - f. Amos,
  - g. Zechariah and
  - h. Revelation. There is scarcely a symbol used in John which is not found in the Old Testament books mentioned above.
3. These apocalyptic books are noted for their:
  - a. Figures, symbols, imagery,
  - b. Artistic arrangement and finish and
  - c. Double vision (cf. Gen 3:24).

##### B. Purposes of Apocalyptic Language:

1. To comfort God’s people during times of trial.
2. The inspired writer sees beyond his own times to the coming day of the Lord when:

- a. All wrongs will be recompensed and
- b. Righteousness, glory, joy and peace become the abiding portion of the faithful of God.

C. Apocalyptic Symbolism Interpreted:

1. The student must not get lost in the symbols themselves, but must seek to discern and distinguish them from the great truths which they serve to embody.
2. The apocalypses should be compared with each other. This point cannot be overemphasized!
3. Fundamental rules for interpreting symbolic language:
  - a. The names of symbols are to be understood literally.
  - b. The symbols are oftentimes interpreted by the inspired writer (or other inspired writers)—the inspired writer’s interpretation stands! (e.g. Dan 2:31, 36; cf. Rev 1:12-13; cf. 19-20.)
  - c. There is to be found some resemblance (more or less clear) between the symbol and the thing symbolized or signified.
    - 1) Ezekiel saw a resurrection of dry bones—but it meant Israel’s restoration from exile (Ezek 37).
    - 2) Daniel saw a rough he-goat—but it symbolized the mighty Grecian conqueror, Alexander the Great (Dan 8:5,21).
    - 3) John saw candlesticks—but it signified the churches, i.e. the called out people of God (Rev 1:12-13; cf. 19-20).
    - 4) Zechariah saw two olive trees—but they stood for God’s two anointed ones, Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zech 4:2-4; cf. 11-14).
  - d. The chief question to be answered (in view of that mentioned above) is what are the probable points of resemblance between the symbol (or sign) and the thing which it is intended to represent?
    - 1) In seeking answer to this question, we must remember:

- a) In some symbols, the points or resemblance are many and detailed, while in others they are few and incidental (cf. Ezek 1-3; cf. Isa 6:1-8).
  - b) Strict regard must be given to:
    - (1) The historical standpoint of the writer or prophet.
    - (2) The scope of the writing and the context.
    - (3) The meaning of similar symbols elsewhere in the scriptures.
  - c) That the application of the symbols must be consistent and uniform, i.e. not shifting from the symbolical to the literal without any apparent indication in the original text.
    - (1) Ignorance of this rule leads to confusion.
    - (2) Without adhering to such a rule there can be no certainty as to the interpretation and the deduced meanings would be many and contradictory!
- 2) The symbol must be considered in its broader and more common aspects. (As it would naturally present itself to the view of those acquainted with the ways of God and not connected with any smaller incidents or peculiar uses known only to a few.)
- a) The meaning must be determined by an accurate knowledge of the nature of the symbol.
  - b) The import of the symbol (i.e. each separate symbol) must be sought from its name.
  - c) The symbol (i.e. each particular one) has, in general, but one signification (Rev 17:9-10 - two).
  - d) The symbol, (regardless of the connection where it may be found) has always the same fundamental meaning (Ezek 1:5ff; cf. Rev 4:5ff).

# EZEKIEL

## CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. <sup>2</sup>(On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, <sup>3</sup>the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the Lord came upon him.)

Thirtieth Year - there is some discussion as to what this date refers to. Some feel that it is an attempt to date the prophecy more clearly (then the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile). An example of this is that this is the thirtieth year from the time when Hilkiyah the high priest found the book of Torah in the temple (2 Kgs 22:8ff). If you count back from the fifth year of the exile thirty years, you arrive at year 18 of Josiah when the book of the Law was found. However, it is perfectly logical to think that this date refers to the age of Ezekiel when he received the "visions of God."

Fifth day of the fourth month would be July 592 B.C.

Chebar is a minor river or a canal in Babylon. The location of "the river Chebar" (n<sup>e</sup>har k<sup>e</sup>bar) if it can be identified with the Babylonian *naru kabari*, was between Babylon and Nippur

Fifth Year - this would either be 593 or 592 depending on how you calculate the date. The Jews had a sacred calendar in which the New Year began in the Spring, in Nisan (Ex 12: 2). But we also know from the celebration of Rosh Hashanah that the Jews also had a civil calendar in which the New Year began in the fall, in Tishri. This calendar assumes that the Jews began the year in Autumn (September/October) rather than the Babylonian system of the New Year in Spring (March-April):

1:2	July 21	592	30:20	April 19	586
8:1	September 7	591	31:1	June 11	586
20:1	September 1	590	32:1	March 3	585
24:1	January 15	588	32:17	April 16	585
26:1	February	586	33:21	January 8	585
29:1	January 6	587	40:1	April 17	572
29:17	April 16	570			

King Jehoiachin - In Jerusalem Zedekiah was king but Ezekiel chooses to date the prophecy from the reign of Jehoiachin because Jehoiachin was still considered as king and Zedekiah was not really king. Zedekiah was made king in 597 after the second

deportation which took both the legitimate king and Ezekiel along with 10,000 other people (cf. 2 Kgs 24:10-17).

Ezekiel the priest - There is some grammatical ambiguity with “the priest” as it can either refer to the father or the son. It does seem, though, that Ezekiel himself is a priest. This makes several sections especially significant:

1. Chapter 4, where Ezekiel is asked to eat unclean food and
2. Chapter 8, where Ezekiel is taken, in a vision, to see the abominations associated with the temple in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel is called by his name only one other time within this book (24:24). He is described as a “sign” in 12:6,11; 24:24,27. “By his action what Yahweh is about to bring upon his people is already present. The prophet belongs inseparably to the “message” (Zimmerli 54).

Hand of the Lord (1:3; 3:14,22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). This phrase means more than just receiving the message from God, but implies the power of God and the submissiveness of Ezekiel (hand = power Gen 39:8; Ex 3:8).

**<sup>4</sup>And as I looked, behold, a storm wind was from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. <sup>5</sup>And within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. <sup>6</sup>Each of them had four faces and four wings.**

This is the start of his vision and Ezekiel describes it in figurative language called “apocalyptic.” In interpreting this type of literature a person needs to remember several things:

1. The author is trying to paint a picture and all the parts go to form the whole. They do not necessarily have meanings in and of themselves.
2. Notice how many times the word “like” or “as” is used. This is called a “simile” and it tells us that whatever he is describing is only, at best, an approximation to what he is actually seeing.
3. “Likeness” is the Hebrew word *demuth* and “like” is the preposition “k.”

Four living beings - The idea of four may suggest completeness (but there is no way to really be sure). Notice that there are four wings, four scenes of false worship in chapter eight and four plagues in chapter 14 (cf. Isa 11:12). Within the context of this chapter, “four” suggests God’s omnipresence, because His servants are facing all the direction at once so nothing can escape His notice. These are Cherubim (Ezek 10:18-22).

Each of them – “In the description the gender of the verbal and pronominal references to the creatures vacillates. Out of forty-five, only twelve are the grammatically proper feminine plural; the others are masculine plural” (Greenberg 44-45).

**<sup>7</sup>And their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf’s hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup>Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, <sup>9</sup>their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. <sup>10</sup>As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man, all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. <sup>11</sup>Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies. <sup>12</sup>And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go, without turning as they went. <sup>13</sup>In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. <sup>14</sup>And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.**

Their four faces - those of a man, an ox, an eagle and a lion—represent the major areas of created life. “Man is God’s ultimate creation commissioned to subdue the earth; the lion is the king of wild beasts; the ox (or bull) is the strongest of domesticated animals; and the eagle rules the air. The chariot was borne aloft above the totality of creation, a symbol of the fact that nature is under the domination of the Lord (Howie 22).

A midrash to Exodus 15:1 supports the idea presented above: “four kinds of proud beings were created in the world: the proudest of all—man; of birds—the eagle; of domestic animals—the ox; of wild animals—the lion; and all of them are stationed beneath the chariot of the Holy One...” (*Ex Rabba* 23:13). The greatest of animals are only worthy to be the bearers to God Almighty.

It seems the general meaning of the faces could be as follows:

**Man** (rational & moral nature) = wisdom and intelligence.

**Lion** (majesty & strength) = power, rule and authority.

**Ox** (patient & productive service) = labor, strength, diligence and energy.

**Eagle** (winged velocity & swiftness) = vision and flight.

Ezekiel tells us in chapter 10: “and I knew that they were cherubim” (10:20-22). What are cherubim?

1. They always appear in a most intimate relation to the glory of God.
2. They are seen as engaging in worship and service to God.

- a. They are, in Ezekiel's vision, those who bear up and transport the throne of God (cf. 10:1-4).
- b. They are spiritual creatures (some think they are angels of the highest order, but such is not provable by scripture—they are never called angels).

**<sup>15</sup>Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them. <sup>16</sup>The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another. <sup>17</sup>Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions, without turning as they moved. <sup>18</sup>As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rim of all four of them were full of eyes round about. <sup>19</sup>And whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living being rose from the earth, the wheels rose also. <sup>20</sup>Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels. <sup>21</sup>Whenever those went, these went; and whenever those stood still, these stood still. And whenever those rose from the earth, the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels.**

Wheel - This is the **second part** of the vision. Remember that the “wheel” is a symbol for something and it is not meant to be interpreted literally. The “wheel” probably represents the idea of the activity of God or movement of God. The Jews in Babylon perhaps did not believe that God could come to them. The idea existed in the ancient world, and in many Jewish people's minds, that God was limited to one geographical area (1 Kgs 20:23,28). Yahweh was limited to Jerusalem and the surrounding area but He could not come to Babylon. These wheels show otherwise.

Within another - This could mean that the second wheel was concentric to the first wheel, like an archery target, or that it was perpendicular to the first wheel.

Eyes - The “eyes” emphasize the all-seeing nature of God. Even though the children of Israel were in Babylon, a far away country, God could still see what they were doing—both good and bad. This introduces the concept of individual responsibility which Ezekiel takes up in a more complete fashion in chapter eighteen (cf. Ezek 8:12; 9:9; Isa 29:15; Psa 94: 7).

Spirit - the wheels are not inanimate objects, but have spirits inside them.

**<sup>22</sup>Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads. <sup>23</sup>And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one**

also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other. <sup>24</sup>I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. <sup>25</sup>And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings.

Expanse – This is the **third part** of the vision. This is the Hebrew word *rakia* and it is the same word used in Genesis 1:6-8 for the hard plane dividing the upper from the lower waters. It is the word translated “firmament” by the King James Version. The significance of the expanse seems to be that it represents the widespread influence of God.

<sup>26</sup>Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. <sup>27</sup>Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. <sup>28</sup>As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

Throne – This is the **fourth part** of the vision. This is not an actual throne but something similar to a throne.

Appearance - Ezekiel is describing God in very symbolic terms. He is taking great pains to avoid making God creature-like because God is indescribable and He cannot be compared to anything or anyone.

Rainbow - For a Jew the rainbow would have been a symbol of God’s mercy and God’s covenant (cf. Gen 9:13). “Just as the colors of the rainbow are not real but merely the effect of sunlight, so the likeness of the glory of the Lord as visualized by the prophet was only the reflection of the Divine light” (Fisch 8).

Glory - This is the Hebrew word *kabod* and is a technical term for God (Ex 16:7; 24:16; 40:34; Lev 9:6,23; Num 14:10; 16:19; 1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chron 7:1). The “glory” of God was always associated with either the tabernacle or the temple. The glory was not seen anywhere else. By having Ezekiel see the “glory” of God far from the temple would help the Israelites to understand that God is not limited to one place as just the temple at Jerusalem. Before they would have felt cut off from God Almighty, but now they can realize that they can still have a relationship with God. One author has written that “the divine glory that Ezekiel saw was not identified with storm clouds or angelic beings, but was something peculiar to God Himself that exhibited certain human appearances or characteristics (1:28; 3:12,23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22f). In each vision Ezekiel is

careful to distinguish between the glory of God and its attendant circumstances” (Harrison 478).

Ezekiel is a well constructed book. One example of that is the idea of “glory.” In 10:18 the glory departs, but in 43:5 it returns—balanced.

I fell on my face - QUESTION: why does Ezekiel do this? It was death to look upon the face of God (Ex 33:20). When Ezekiel realized whom it was he was looking at, he dropped to the ground and covered his face so that he might live.

## LESSONS

1. This chapter lets the reader know three things about God:
  - a. God can bring judgment. (He has the power - *omnipotence* - to do this, as represented by the four living creatures).
  - b. God can bring about righteous judgment. (He has the knowledge – *omniscience* - to do this, as represented by the wheels and eyes.)
  - c. God will bring about righteous judgment. (He is everywhere – *omnipresence* - not limited to just Judea and no men can escape.)
2. But the rainbow reminds us of God’s mercy. (We are weak but through God’s new covenant we have hope for salvation by the blood of Jesus.)

## CHAPTER TWO

**<sup>1</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!”**

Son of man - This is the first time this key phrase occurs and is found 92 times in the book. The idea conveyed by it is men of service or servants. It is the title most often used for Ezekiel. “In this summons the prophet was not being addressed in the uniqueness of his particular personal being, as would be expressed by his proper name, nor according to his office, but as an individual within the created order, the servant, who is summoned by his master in an act of unprecedented condescension by his divine Lord” (Zimmerli 131).

It does not mean the same thing as in Daniel 7:13 where it is referring to Jesus Christ.

Why did Jesus call Himself the “Son of man”?

1. To stress His humanity,

2. To underscore His intention to be a servant (like Ezekiel) and
3. To be a representative for all mankind on the cross.

Stand on your feet - Reminiscent of Romans 14:4. We need to realize that God will help us do everything He wants us to do (cf. Phil 2:12-13; Heb 13:20-21).

**<sup>2</sup>And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. <sup>3</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. <sup>4</sup>And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’**

He spoke - God wants to talk to all of us and we have the ability to understand that communication.

Spirit - The Holy Spirit had to help him stand because he was so weak. God does not require anything of us that He will not also help us with.

Rebellious people - (vv. 5,6,7,8; see also Ex 32:9). God had to punish the ten northern tribes in 722 (they were assimilated into Assyrian culture) and the southern tribes in 586.

This very day - Even in captivity the people will not repent and turn to the Lord. They are still rebellious.

Stubborn - “Brazen” would be a better translation because this word carries the idea of an individual who refuses to give in or admit guilt. They are shameless (Isa 50:7; Jer 5:3).

Obstinate - Having a heart of stone (Ezek 36:26).

**<sup>5</sup>“As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house— they will know that a prophet has been among them. <sup>6</sup>And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. <sup>7</sup>But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.”**

The purpose of sending Ezekiel is so that they will know that a prophet of God has been among them. It is not so important whether the Israelites listen to God and repent

as it is that God gave them the *opportunity* to repent. They could never say that God did not try.

Listen or not - Ezekiel is supposed to present his messages regardless of whether the people pay attention or not. This lets us know what God considers successful evangelism. It is the FAITHFUL proclamation of God's word regardless of people's response (cf. 3:7). Numbers are not so important to God as faithfulness of His children. Ezekiel is not to hold back because of opposition. *When* he presents this message, *then* the people will know that a prophet has been among them.

Rebellious house (2:5-8; 3:9,26-27;12:2,3,9,25;17:12; 24:3) is the counterpart to the expression "house of Israel" and, by renaming them, God expresses as fully as possible the depth of their sin. It is very appropriate that God renames them because when He renamed Jacob in Exodus 33:22ff, He changed his name to Israel—"he who strives with God." QUESTION: Why did God send Ezekiel to the people? They already knew they were being punished. Jeremiah had sent a letter to the captives (Jer 29) and he had been preaching since 627 B.C.. He had been telling the people what was going to happen (that the city would be destroyed and they would be taken captives) for almost 30 years so why send Ezekiel? Answer: God's great love for the people (2 Chron 36:15; 2 Pet 3:9).

Neither fear - God is talking about personal safety. There is good reason for Ezekiel to fear for his safety but God tells him not to think about that, but only to preach. Whenever you preach the message of God, opposition will come. Whenever you preach the message, you should either comfort the afflicted or afflict the comfortable.

My words - This takes the pressure off Ezekiel because the words which he will speak are not his but God's. If the people do not agree with what he says, they do not agree with God. And if the people reject the words, they are rejecting God. (This is also a good thing to do with our children when they are dealing with peer pressure. If we have them say they cannot do something because "my dad says I cannot," then this takes the pressure off the child and puts it on us who are better able to deal with it.)

Speak - This is all Ezekiel needs to do. If Ezekiel chose not to speak because he knew the people would not listen, then he would be in rebellion. But if he speaks, God will be pleased. This is all God wants for us today—to be faithful to Him. If our gift is mercy or helping others, we need to do that regardless of what other people may do or think.

**<sup>8</sup>"Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you."**

**<sup>9</sup>Then I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it.**

**<sup>10</sup>When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back ;and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.**

Rebellious – It is possible for even the prophet to be rebellious. His rebellion would be seen in a refusal to preach the message God is giving him to preach.

Eat - The object of what Ezekiel is to eat is left vague in order to stress the unconditional submission of the prophet. If he is not going to surrender to God completely, then he will be rebellious just like the house of Israel.

Written—Because “it was written on the front and back” indicates the over-whelming fullness of the message. There is no reason for the prophet (or anyone else) to add to God’s message. It is overflowing with lamentations, mourning and woe.

Lamentations - the results of Ezekiel’s preaching.

## LESSONS

1. All God wants us to do is be faithful to Him.
2. God tells us how to be faithful. That is why He has given (communicated) His word to us so that we know what we need to do to be faithful.

## CHAPTER THREE

**<sup>1</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” <sup>2</sup>So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. <sup>3</sup>And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth.**

Sweet - God’s word is sweet (Psa 19:10; 119:103). As with John in the Revelation, Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll. This illustrates how God’s prophets were responsible for making the message a part of themselves—to take it deep inside them. As with Jeremiah (20:9), the message was a burning fire “in his bones.” No faithful preacher can separate himself from the Word of God. It is a part of his life, a part of his thinking.

**<sup>4</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. <sup>5</sup>For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, <sup>6</sup>nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; <sup>7</sup>yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.”**

House of Israel - This is referring to all the Jews—both the northern 10 tribes and the southern 2 tribes (cf. 2:3). Ezekiel’s mission was to all Jews regardless of where they are.

Unintelligible speech - “We cannot miss the allusion to Isaiah 28:11. There Isaiah’s opponents mock at his speech as unintelligible muttering, and so Isaiah threatens them with a message from God, in an unintelligible foreign language, that of their Assyrian conquerors, about the meaning of which there can be no possible doubt” (Eichrodt 65).

Verse 6b has an alternate translation in the NKJV: “Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you.” saying that had Ezekiel gone to preach to the foreign nations around him, they would have listened to the message even though it came from a “foreign God” (YHWH). But Israel, who should have listened to him, would not.

One scholar writes “the translation of the introductory word ‘but’ and the relating of 6b to Israel is improbable on grammatical grounds. The subject set at the beginning of verse 7 shows that the antithetical assertions about Israel first begin here. Thus 6b is still concerned with the nations” (Zimmerli 93).

Listen - Compare Isaiah 6:9ff. Stubborn and obstinate - Isaiah 48:4; Jeremiah 3:3.

**<sup>8</sup>“Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them though they are a rebellious house.” <sup>10</sup>Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I shall speak to you, and listen closely. <sup>11</sup>And go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’”**

Hard - The same thing happened to Jeremiah in 1:18. This sentence is also a play on Ezekiel’s name because it means “God makes strong or hard.”

Heart - Similar to Job 22:22.

Speak to them - “At bottom this is a revelation of God’s concern for his people, even when, as here, the content of his message is wrath and doom. In his wrath over their evil doing he does not abandon them but sends them repeated warnings of the misfortune that must overtake them; this constant theme of Jeremiah (7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; 44:4) is elaborated in 2 Chronicles 36:15—YHWH God of their fathers sent word to them by his messengers, sending every day anew, because he had compassion for his people and his house. Even when there is little hope of averting the misfortune, a prophet is still sent, so that afterward the people will realize that a prophet had been among them, that is, God had given them warning in due time; it was no lack of consideration on His part but their own heedlessness that caused their downfall” (Greenberg 75).

Ezekiel must, therefore, go and proclaim God's message:

1. Faithfully,
2. Skillfully and
3. Courageously.

**<sup>12</sup>Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place." <sup>13</sup>And I heard the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound. <sup>14</sup>So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong on me. <sup>15</sup>Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Telabib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them.**

Embittered - This could either refer to Ezekiel's righteous anger at the sinfulness of the people or Ezekiel's anger at being given such a hopeless job.

Seven days - "It could be that God allowed Ezekiel a week to acclimatize to his role as a prophet. More likely, however, God wanted Ezekiel to get an accurate measure of how the people were doing spiritually and emotionally. As with every minister, one needs to understand the people before he can truly relate to them and preach a message that "gets them where they live."

**<sup>16</sup>Now it came about at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>17</sup>"Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. <sup>18</sup>When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die;' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>19</sup>Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. <sup>20</sup>Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he shall die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup>However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."**

Word of the Lord - This phrase occurs almost fifty times in this book.

"The theme of this passage is the responsibility of the prophet as a lookout. The image, drawn from the war situation known only too well to the Judahites of the time, first

appears in Jeremiah 6:17 in a denunciation of Judah's ungrateful obstinacy 'and I set watch over you, saying, listen to the sound of the trumpet! But they said, we will not listen.' While in Jeremiah the focus is on God's benevolence, here, with the consequences to the prophet spelled out in detail, the point is the definition of the prophet's responsibility—a new application of the image. Hitherto stated only in terms of message-bearing, the prophet's task is here delineated as a matter of life and death—for himself no less than for his audience. At the same time it is rigidly limited to admonition: the prophet is relieved of what would have been the intolerable burden of answerability for the anticipated indifference of the people" (Greenberg 90).

This is why people should listen to him; because it is God talking and not Ezekiel. He is not speaking on a whim or of his own inspiration as did all the false prophets around him, but it is the Almighty who says that the wicked will die.

Watchman - This is a common concept in the Old Testament and is often applied to God's prophets (cf. Isa 52:8; 56:10; 62:6; Jer 6:17; Hos 9:8; Mic 7:4).

When I say - Greenberg translates the second phrase this way, "and you do not warn him—you do not speak up to warn the wicked man against his wicked course so as to keep him alive, he, the wicked man, shall die because of his iniquity, but I will hold you responsible for his death" (82).

Die - This is referring only to physical death and physical life.

Wicked - Ezekiel is to warn the whole "house of Israel" (3:17; 33:7) and when God uses the singular for "house", He is not saying that Ezekiel had to warn each and every individual. God uses the singular to clarify the principle which is found in the object lesson of chapter 33:2ff. "The lookout sounds his alarm for the entire town; the consequences, however, are described in terms of an individual who ignored it (33:4f). The lookout fails to sound the alarm, and again the misfortune is described as being borne by an individual, although clearly the ensuing disaster would be a general one. It is a manner of speaking: the division of responsibility between the lookout and his clients is discussed in terms of a single client" (Greenberg 95).

Warned the wicked - "The prophet's task is underlined by three verbal expressions; he must warn, speak up to warn, so as to keep alive the doomed. Failing to do so, he forfeits his own life, but by doing so he saves it even though the wicked die" (Greenberg 87).

Righteous - God does not want any to perish (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4), but if they do turn from God, then He will allow them (2 Thess 2:9-10; 1 Kgs 22:22).

Obstacle - "This is the Hebrew word *miskol* and the idea comes closer to "calamity"—not an occasion for sin but a cause of downfall and ruin. Cf. Jeremiah 6:21: 'I shall put

before this people stumbling blocks over which they shall stumble (calamities by which they shall be destroyed)—fathers and children alike; neighbor and friend shall perish” (Greenberg 85).

“It does not here indicate that God deliberately sets out to trip up the righteous and bring him crashing to the ground, but that He leaves opportunities for sin in the paths of men, so that if their heart is bent on sin they may do so and thus earn their condemnation. There is no sense in which stumbling is inevitable: it always involves moral choice, and there was also the watchman’s word of warning to point out where and what the stumbling-blocks were” (Taylor 71-72).

QUESTION: what does this word refer to? (cf. 2 Thess 2:11; Rom 2:24,26,28).

We see, then, that there are **four types of watchmen** portrayed here:

1. Those who fail to do their duty (v.18).
2. Those who warn, but with no positive response (v.19).
3. Those who fail to warn those who have fallen away (v. 20).
4. Those who warn the righteous and who heed their warning (v. 21).

Notice every possible alternative both for the watchman, the hearers and the results –

1. Watchman warns (lives), wicked do not listen (die).
2. Watchman fails to warn (bloodguilty), wicked people (die).
3. Watchman fails to warn righteous man who turned from righteousness (bloodguilty), wicked man (dies).
4. Watchman warns righteous man (lives), righteous heeds warning (lives).

**<sup>22</sup>And the hand of the Lord was on me there, and He said to me, “Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you.” <sup>23</sup>So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face. <sup>24</sup>The Spirit then entered me and made me stand my feet, and He spoke with me and said to me, “Go, shut yourself up in your house.”**

Glory - This is not the same vision as in chapter one but similar to it.

House - It appears that God sent Ezekiel to his own house to begin the first of the lessons. He wants to teach the prophet.

<sup>25</sup>“As for you, son of man, they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them. <sup>26</sup>Moreover, I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be dumb, and cannot be a man who rebukes them, for they are a rebellious house. <sup>27</sup>But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.”

Bind - This could be interpreted either literally or figuratively. There is no record of any physical restraint of Ezekiel and a figurative application would mean that Ezekiel just was not able to impart his message. Remember that Jesus would do no powerful miracles in His own country because of the people’s unbelief (Mk 6:5-6). So they had, in effect, bound Jesus’ hands. This could be what happened to Ezekiel.

Dumb - the purpose of this silence is so that Ezekiel “cannot be a man who rebukes them.” “It is far more satisfying and realistic to understand this as a ritual dumbness, or a divinely commanded refusal to make public utterances except under the direct impulse of God’s word. From that moment forward, Ezekiel was to be known as nothing but the mouthpiece of Yahweh. When he spoke, it was because God has something to say; when he was silent, it was because God was silent” (Taylor 74).

The people had silenced Ezekiel by closing their minds to the message (remember they are a rebellious house) so God is going to silence the prophet by not allowing him to talk for a time. However, God says that Ezekiel’s silence will not last forever (24:27; 33:22). He will be released from it after news of the destruction of Jerusalem reaches Babylon (cf. 29:21;16:63).

“The context of 29:21 is especially suggestive: if fulfillment of long-delayed prophecies will afford Ezekiel an ‘opening of the mouth’ (‘a claim to be heard’), it is inferable that during the previous period of waiting the prophet felt deprived of such a claim; the incredulous, hostile attitude of the people “closed his mouth” (Greenberg 121).

When Jerusalem was destroyed, it proved that Ezekiel had been saying the right thing all along. The vindication that he felt might have been the reason that God opened his mouth.

“And the restoration of the prophet to normal intercourse with his neighbors reflected and expressed the great turn of God toward His people, now that they were broken by the punishment; for concurrent with Ezekiel’s release from ‘dumbness’ is the second period of his prophecy—the predictions of Israel’s restoration” (Greenberg 121).

Thus says the Lord - Again God drives home the point that Ezekiel will be speaking His (God’s) words and not his own.

## LESSONS

1. God wants us to be faithful to Him, and in those gifts that He has given to us. In the parable of the talents (which is talking about money) the criteria for being faithful was not how much money you had to begin with nor how much you made, but that *you did something* with it (Mt 25:14-29). (Cf. Prov 24:16).
2. The concept of a watchman applies to all of us. With increased knowledge comes increased responsibility (Amos 3:1-2). An obligation exists between us and our families to alert them to the dangers of sin (cf. Gal 6:1).
3. No matter how difficult a job we have in being faithful, or being a watchman, the final lesson is that God will prepare us adequately to accomplish that job (3:8).

## CHAPTER FOUR

In this chapter we have Ezekiel performing *three symbolic acts*. “The reader should remember the Hebrew prophets proclaimed the word of God through action as well as through word. For example, Isaiah walked naked through the streets to dramatize the fact that Egypt and Ethiopia would be captured by Assyrian power (Isa 20:1,2). Jeremiah broke a pottery jar as a symbol of God’s intent with respect to Judah (Jer 19), and when Hananiah broke the yoke of wood, a yoke of iron indicated the captivity which would become unbreakable (Jer 27:1-28:16)” (Howie 25).

Other examples would be Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:30); Zedekiah (1 Kgs 22:11); Elijah (2 Kgs 13:17) and Agabus (Acts 21:10f).

**<sup>1</sup>“Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you, and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps, and place battering rams against it all around. <sup>3</sup>Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.”**

The **first symbolic act** is of Ezekiel laying siege to a model of Jerusalem. “We must imagine that the strange actions which Ezekiel was now told to perform were to be carried out either just inside his house or, more likely, on the open space in front of his doorway. The actions were pointless unless they could be watched by a large number of people, and we must suppose that it was not long before the word got around that Ezekiel was doing some unusual things near his home. In a close-knit city like that of the Tel-abib exiles nothing could be kept secret for long. Stories about life in prisoner of war camps during the Second World War have shown quite clearly how news could spread like wildfire among thousands of internees. Ezekiel’s trance-like state, de-

scribed in 3:15, had obviously been noted and so it was not surprising that some supernatural or ecstatic pronouncement or sign should follow” (Taylor 74-75).

Iron plate - This probably represents God and His anger towards the holy city.

Sign to the house of Israel - This phrase tells us exactly what Ezekiel’s purpose was in laying siege to a representation of Jerusalem. Verse seven tells us that Ezekiel continues to lay siege to the city as well as the “days” (plural) “of the siege” of verse eight.

**<sup>4</sup>“As for you, lie down on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it. <sup>5</sup>For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. <sup>6</sup>When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year. <sup>7</sup>Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and prophesy against it. <sup>8</sup>Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, until you have completed the days of your siege.”**

This is the **second symbolic act** of this chapter. Ezekiel is to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right for 40 days. Northern Israel was destroyed in 722 B.C. by Sargon II of Assyria, after a three year siege of Samaria by Shalmaneser V. So Israel was taken off 130 years before.

Three hundred and ninety days - This figure presents some difficulty for scholars in regards to the text and interpretation. The LXX has 190 days in verse five and 150 inserted into verse four. (This clearly presupposes taking the numbers concurrently.) In order for us to understand the 390 days we need to know when the counting starts or when it ends and we do not know either. It is helpful to remember that:

1. In both cases the period of time referred to means the period of suffering for sins previously committed.
2. Restoration will not take place until these periods of atonement for past sins have been endured. Only then can it be said, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her time of service is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isa 40:2, RSV and mg).
3. “Restoration will come eventually (cf. 37:16ff) and it will be simultaneous for Judah and Israel. These considerations lead to the conclusion that the two periods are to be taken as ending concurrently” (Taylor 79).

Taking into consideration the dates found in 1:2 and 8:1 we can suppose that Ezekiel had anywhere from 413 days (lunar calendar) to 442 days if it is a leap year. So Ezekiel would have had ample time for these actions.

So what do the numbers refer to? If you count back 390 years from any number of dates you arrive at nothing significant and likewise the 40 years for Judah. One solution that has some merit is to understand the 430 years in a figurative sense (cf. Ex 12: 40; Gal 3:17).

QUESTION: Does anyone know what significance the Jew might attach to 430 years? If we set the chronological notion aside we can, with some justice, say that the whole thing is symbolic of another national captivity. Hosea who preached for 38 years starting in 750 A.D. spoke of the captivity of the northern kingdom under Assyrian domination as a "return to Egypt" (8:13). He repeats the threat in 9:3 and then explains that he warns Assyria rather than Egypt. Why did the prophet say Israel would return to Egypt when he really meant Assyria? Because "Egypt" spoke of captivity? "Egypt," as it were, spelled bondage. To threaten the people with "Egypt" was to speak to them of bondage!

"Each of us has a number or a name which brings thoughts to our mind when and every time we think of it. 430 years spoke to the Jew of the terrible time when all twelve tribes endured the house of bondage" (McGuiggan 53).

Ezekiel brings up this point to emphasize the fact that Judah (along with Israel) would go into captivity (Ezek 11:14-15) and this means that all of Judah would go into captivity - including those who were left in the city.

Bear iniquity - This phrase <sup>a</sup>won is found thirty-seven times in the Old Testament and nine times in the book of Ezekiel. It can refer to the atoning act as in Leviticus 16:21f (cf. Ex 28:38; Lev 10:17) or it can refer to punishment (consequences of iniquity) as in Numbers 14:33f. In context it seems that the second definition is the best and that would mean Ezekiel is symbolically bearing the punishment for Israel's sins. It also seems best to understand <sup>a</sup>won as (past) iniquity in verse five and punishment in verse six.

Arm bared - "In this gesture, the prophet's representation of God as the enemy reaches maximum clarity (Isa 52:10)" (Greenberg 106).

Put ropes - metaphor either for divinely imposed restraint or restraint felt imposed by outside forces (cf. 3:25). Remember that Ezekiel was to do other things during this time period (cf. vv. 7,9,11).

**<sup>9</sup>"But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.**

**<sup>10</sup>And your food which you eat shall be twenty shekels a day by weight; you shall eat it from time to time. <sup>11</sup>And the water you drink will be the sixth part of a hin by measure; you shall drink it from time to time. <sup>12</sup>And you shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over human dung.” <sup>13</sup>Then the Lord said, “Thus shall the sons of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nation where I shall banish them.”**

This is the **third symbolic action** Ezekiel performs before the captives of Tel-abib. This symbol represents a siege which will happen to Jerusalem (cf. 4:16).

QUESTION: Why is the bread composed of so many different items? This indicates the scarcity of food.

“*The Babylonian Talmud (Erubin 81a)* relates an experiment made in the third century C.E. (common era) proving that Ezekiel’s bread would not be touched even by a dog” (Greenberg 106).

Note: From a study of Leviticus 19:19, Deuteronomy 22:9 and the Mishnah there was no ritual defilement involved in mixing of the grains for bread.

By weight - Rationed food is another indication of a siege (cf. Lev. 26:26).

Twenty shekels - From archaeological finds we know that a shekel could be 12.2, 11.5 or 9.82 grams. If a shekel is four tenths of an ounce (or 11.4 grams), then this would be about eight ounces.

Time to time - A similar phrase is found in 1 Chronicles 9:25, which makes it clear that it refers to a recurring action which was to take place at the same time each day. Cooke translates “at stated times,” but this is not sufficiently clear without his explanatory note, ‘i.e. at a certain time on one day and at the corresponding time on the next’ (Taylor 82-83).

Sixth part of a hin - This can measure from one pint to two pints (16-32 ounces). This is an extremely small amount of water considering the extremely hot climate. Any siege is a terrible time for humanity! During the siege Jeremiah received only one loaf of bread until it was all gone (Jer 37:21) and the water was almost gone as well (Jer 38:6).

**<sup>14</sup>But I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I have never been defiled; for from my youth until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has any unclean meat ever entered my mouth.” <sup>15</sup>Then He said to me, “See, I shall give you cow’s dung in place of human dung over which you will prepare your bread.” <sup>16</sup>Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror, <sup>17</sup>because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.”**

God commands Ezekiel to cook his food over human dung which would have defiled the food (cf. Lev 17:11; Deut 12:16; Ex 22:31; Lev 22:8; Deut 14:21; Lev 7:18; 19:7). Now Ezekiel speaks out to God for the first time. It is significant that this first spontaneous outburst from the prophet—how he had grown up in the sanctuary—occurred when he was urged to perform a shameful unclean act. God relents and allows him to cook it over cow dung (which would not have made the food unclean).

QUESTION: What is the point of all of this? God wants the people to realize that they will become unclean (cf. “in their sight,” v. 12—the captives saw what Ezekiel did). “The point Jehovah is making is abundantly clear. It is not that the Jews would bake their food this way (literally in captivity) for in fact, the Jew was rather well off after the initial shocks of exile were over and they settled into a fairly prosperous life (cf. Isa 55:1ff). No the uncleanness did not derive from the way in which the food was literally baked, it would result from their being removed from the temple and the sacrificial system” (McGuiggan 56).

“Earlier Amos had threatened the priest Amaziah, ‘You will die in an unclean land’ (Amos 7:17). So also Hosea 9:3, ‘Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.’ With the many rites of consecration which permeated life one could scarcely avoid entering into this realm of uncleanness when they ate the food of a foreign land, and thereby becoming unclean” (Zimmerli 171).

However, we know from Daniel 1 that there was the possibility to avoid gross uncleanness, even in the royal court, and Ezekiel 11:16 points to the possibility of a pure life (albeit reduced). So it could be that 4:15 had a significance for the message preached.

Staff of bread - See Leviticus 26:26; Psalm 106:16. Bread was what sustained people and even now it is a staple of almost every meal (cf. Gen 18:5; Jud 19:5,8).

## CHAPTER FIVE

**<sup>1</sup>“As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it as a barber’s razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair. <sup>2</sup>One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike it with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. <sup>3</sup>Take also a few in number from them and bind them in the edges of your robes. <sup>4</sup>And take again some of them and throw them into the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it a fire will spread to all the house of Israel.”**

This is the **fourth symbolic action** Ezekiel has done. “Each of the four actions described in 4:1-5:4 dealt with a different aspect of the disaster that would shortly befall Jerusalem. First came the fact of the siege (4:1-3), then the duration of the punishment

of Israel and Judah (4:4-8), and then the famine conditions of the siege and of the exile (4:9-17). Last of all came the enacted oracle of the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (5:1-4)" (Taylor 84).

Imagine the scene Ezekiel is creating here! Here we have this prophet whom everyone is talking about then he goes and cuts off his hair! The people might think this indicates mourning (cf. Isa 15:2; Jer 48:37) or disgrace (2 Sam 10:4). But then he divides the hair into three parts. The first part he burns, the second part he hacks at with a sword and the third he throws to the wind. Then he goes around looking for a few strands of hair, binds some of them on his garment, but the rest he burns.

"The symbolism is obvious: a third of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be destroyed within the city, a third would be killed by the sword in fighting around the city (cf. 2 Kgs 25:4-7), and a third would be scattered among the nations and would continue to be harried by hostile forces. From among these survivors would emerge the handful of those who would be preserved" (Taylor 84).

Days of the siege - This is probably refers to when Ezekiel ended his 390 (or 430) days of lying on his side

Fire will go out - Could refer to "further devastation flaming forth from Jerusalem, possibly a reference to the debased remnant who were left in the vicinity of the destroyed city and who had to be purged out after the return from exile (Ezra 4:1-4)" (Taylor 85).

Or the fire could refer to purification and not judgment. This seem to be the thrust of Zechariah 13:8-9.

**<sup>5</sup>"Thus says the Lord God, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her. <sup>6</sup>But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statues more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statues.'"**

God gives the interpretation for His symbolic action. Because of the sin of the city, it will be destroyed.

Center - Jerusalem was not only the center physically, but also spiritually (cf. 38:12). Jerusalem should have been an example among the nations, but she performed sins worse than all the pagan nations around her. She should have known better and done better! She could have shown the whole world the glory of God

Ordinances - This is the Hebrew word *mishpatim* and Jewish commentators understand it as commandments which concern the relationship between man and man.

Statues - This is the Hebrew word *chukkim* and it refers to “the duties of man towards God” (Fisch 25).

This double expression is found in 11:20; 18:9,17; 20:11,13,16,19, 21,24; 37:24 (masculine plural in 11:12; 20:18,25; 36:27).

“Jerusalem’s sin is not something vague, but an affront to the clear, revealed law of God. This is shown in a particular way in chapter 22” (Zimmerli 175).

**<sup>7</sup>“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you, and have not walked in My statues, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,’  
<sup>8</sup>therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations. <sup>9</sup>And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, fathers will eat their sons among you, and sons will eat their fathers; for I will execute judgments on you, and scatter all your remnant to every wind.’”**

Ezekiel 11:12 says that they “have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you,” which seems to contradict verse 7. “To reconcile the apparent contradiction between these words and the statement in 11:12 the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 39b) interprets the passage to mean: ‘In your conduct you have not followed the example of the righteous Gentiles, but you have copied the evils of the corrupt peoples.’ The phrase may, however, be explained in this sense: You have not fallen to the level of heathens but sunk even deeper in wickedness. Compare the indictment in 16:47 (2 Kgs 21:11; Jer 2:11)” (Fisch 26).

I, even I, am against you - Because of their unparalleled sin, God is against them. This is the phrase *hin<sup>e</sup>ni ‘al* (or *‘el*) and it occurs twenty-two times (Nah 2:14; 3:5; Jer 21:13; 23:30-32; 50:31; 51:25; Ezek 5:8; 13:8,20; 21:3; 26:3; 28:22; 29:3,10; 30:22; 34:10; 35:3; 36:9; 38:3; 39:1).

“Accordingly the saying only occurs in prophecy at about the turn of the seventh/sixth centuries B.C., and, apart from Ezekiel 36:9, it always has a threatening meaning. It is also regularly (with the exception of 29:10) connected with the messenger formula or an oracle-formula. Thus in its present connection it contains a wholly threatening divine announcement” (Zimmerli 175).

In sight of the nations - God will make a public example of His people and vindicate His Holy Name.

I will never do again - This is a proverbial remark, otherwise it would contradict Matthew 24:21 and Jesus.

Sons will eat their fathers -This goes beyond what was mentioned in Leviticus 26:29, Deuteronomy 28: 53 and Jeremiah 9:9 (cf. 2 Kgs 6:29). God's unprecedented punishment is heightened by the unheard of patricidal cannibalism.

**<sup>11</sup>“So as I live’, declares the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye shall have no pity and I will not spare. <sup>12</sup>One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.”**

As I live, declares the Lord God - This oath formula is found 16 times in Ezekiel: (5:11; 14:16, 18,20; 16:48; 17:16; 18:3; 20:31,33; 33:11; 34:8; 35:6,11; 17:19; 20:3; 33:27).

Ezekiel uses the phrase regularly (fourteen times) after the oath formula “by my life” taken by God, evidently to heighten its intrinsic solemnity by identifying the swearer unmistakably as God (speaking through the mouth of the prophet). The two occurrences of the oath formula not so qualified (17:19; 33:27) are directly preceded by “Thus said Lord YHWH,” which serves this function...The grossly disproportionate use of this phrase in Jeremiah and Ezekiel correlates with the bitter polemics of these two prophets of doom against rival prophets of weal who insisted that it was they who spoke for God (Jer 23; Ezek 13).

Lord God - This double appellation occurs two hundred seventeen times. Israel's sinfulness is being talked about and “it is the prophet's duty to take them to task in the name of their Lord, against whom they have rebelled. The very pairing of YHWH with “Lord” aims to force upon them awareness of their true state—subjection to a Lord whom they refuse to acknowledge” (Greenberg 65).

Defiled My sanctuary - The details are given in chapters eight and eleven (cf. 2 Kgs 21:7).

Have no pity - This phrase in Ezekiel (7:4,9; 8:18; 9:5,10) “is a characteristic expression of God's grim resolve to punish renegade Israel. It shows clearly (what merits repeated emphasis) that the normal, basic attitude of God toward Israel is not determined merely by law, but by love. It is his proper manner to spare and pity, but there is a level of human guilt at which this mode is set aside, and the standard of his judicial righteousness comes into force” (Greenberg 115).

One third - This justifies the interpretation we presented earlier in the chapter. The Biblical narratives may be read in 2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; Jeremiah 39:1-18.

**<sup>13</sup>“Thus My anger will be spent, and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I shall be appeased; then they will know that I, the Lord, have spoken in My zeal when I**

have spent My wrath upon them. <sup>14</sup>Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by. <sup>15</sup>So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you, when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath, and raging rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken. <sup>16</sup>When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I shall send to destroy you, then I shall also intensify the famine upon you, and break the staff of bread. <sup>17</sup>Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword an you. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

This final section expands what the judgment will entail and exactly why it will happen (v. 15, to warn the nations around Jerusalem).

“This amounts to a reversal of the intention of the covenant, which was originally that Israel should be a witness to the nations of God’s truth and mercy: in Israel all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 22:18). But the result of her sins was that she become a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror (15). The words are piled on top of each other to express the accumulation of ridicule which will come upon the stricken city of Jerusalem. Their fulfillment is to be found in Lamentations 2:15-16” (Taylor 87).

Then they will know - This is the first time that this expression occurs and what it means is that only when judgment has passed will they know and recognize that God’s hand was behind it all.

My Zeal - This is the Hebrew word *qin’a* and it is common in Ezekiel (8:3,5; 16:38, 42; 23: 35; 36:6; 38:19).

“By *qin’a* is meant the resentful rage of one whose prerogatives have been usurped by, or given to, another. Among humans, it seizes the husband who suspects his wife of adultery (Num 5:14ff) or knows her to have been faithless (Prov 6:34). Since YHWH’s relation to Israel is figured as a marriage (see chapter 16), *qin’a* is appropriate for His rage at Israel’s breach of faith with Him” (Greenberg 115).

## LESSONS

1. God does punish people, especially His children. In 5:9 God says His punishment will be very severe, so severe in fact, that in 5:10 inhabitants of Jerusalem will resort to cannibalism in order to survive.
2. God always has a reason for punishment He brings. In 5:5-7 we see the reason for Jerusalem’s punishment is because she did not allow her light to shine before

the nations, but instead “rebelled...more wickedly than the nations which surround you,” and “rejected My ordinances.”

3. God’s temporal punishments do not last forever (5:13). God does not punish His children from spite or vindictiveness as a human might, but only to get us to repent (cf. Rev 2:21; 16:9,11).

## CHAPTER SIX

Thematically, chapter six continues chapters four and five with its prediction of the devastation of the land, and the death and dispersal of its inhabitants. Points of linguistic contact are “I am bringing the sword against you” (vv. 3; 5:17), derivatives of *smm* (vv. 4,6,14; 4:17; 5:15), “spend my fury against” (vv. 12; 5:13), “sword, famine and plague” (v. 11 cf. 5:17). The indirect contact of prophet and audience also continues; at the start, the address is to the countryside, later (v. 4b) to the inhabitants of the land. There is as yet no direct address to the exiles.

Calvin remarks on this: “Thus God obliquely signifies, first, that the Israelites were deaf, and then unworthy of the trouble which Ezekiel would spend in teaching them.”

He compares Ezekiel’s address to the countryside with the anonymous prophet’s address to the altar in 1 Kings 13:20: “‘That was no common reproof, to pass by the king as if he had been only the shadow of a man, and to admonish the dead altar.’ This is an interesting analogy, though in the case of Ezekiel, the obliqueness had more to do with shy withdrawal. Ultimately, however, rejection and alienation are at the bottom of both phenomena” (Greenberg 139).

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, <sup>3</sup>and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: “Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. <sup>4</sup>So your altars will become desolate, and your incense altars will be smashed; and I shall make your slain fall in front of your idols.”’”**

The word of the Lord - This phrase occurs fifty times in this book and is used to introduce a new section.

Set your face - This phrase occurs in 6:2; 13:17; 21:2,7; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2. Where did this phrase come from? One author has written that “Balak attempts no less than three times, from three different places, to obtain a proper curse against Israel from the seer. It is said of each of these places that Balaam could see the camp of Israel (Num 22:41; 23:13; 24:2). In Numbers 23:13 we can see the belief of Balak that Balaam could not curse properly because he could not see the entire people, but only a

part of it. Numbers 24:2 appears to say that the spirit of Yahweh came upon Balaam at the time when he saw Israel with his own eyes. The eye to eye contact of the man of God with those who were to face him through his word of power is regarded as necessary in every case...We may question further whether there is also a connection between this prophetic action and God's "turning of His face" against someone, which is mentioned in Israel's sacred law" (Zimmerli 183).

Mountains of Israel - This phrase occurs in 6:2-3; 19:9; 33:28; 34:13-14; 35:12; 36:1,4, 8; 37:22; 38:8; 39:2,4,17. This expression refers to the whole land of Israel and is not meant to be interpreted literally. Notice how well balanced the book of Ezekiel is. In 6:2 the mountains are being rebuked, but in 34:9 the mountains are being consoled.

High places - God gave the command in Deuteronomy 12:2 that the Israelites were to destroy all the high places

Idols - This is the first occurrence of the Hebrew word *gillulim* in Ezekiel. This word only occurs forty-eight times in the Old Testament and thirty-nine times within the book of Ezekiel (Lev 26:30; Deut 29:16; 1 Kgs 15:12; 21:26; 2 Kgs 17:12; 21:11,21; 23:24; Jer 50:2). These are the gods the people think will protect and care for them but instead they (the people) will die in front of them. "In the book of Ezekiel we find in the foreground the idea of abominable uncleanness (cf. 16:36), which was brought into Israel by the representatives of a non-Yahwistic cultic holiness and which rendered the Israelites who used them unclean (20:7; 23:7)...The judgment which Yahweh brings upon the land by the sword, by a deep inner logic of righteousness, the consequences that the cult places of the mountains of Israel, which are outwardly places of venerable sanctity, although in Yahweh's eyes they are places of abominations, are to be publicly desecrated by the dead of Israel lying there" (Zimmerli 187).

**<sup>5</sup>"I shall also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols; and I shall scatter your bones around your altars. <sup>6</sup>In all your dwellings, cities will become waste and the high places will be desolate, that your altars may become waste and desolate, your idols may be broken and brought to an end, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be blotted out. <sup>7</sup>And the slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the Lord."**

Scatter your bones - This was considered to be a terrible punishment in the ancient world (cf. Psa 53:5; 141:7). This was also a fitting demonstration of the futility of idol worship. The most devoted worshipers will be killed, then the altar will be defiled by the bones of its own worshipers (cf. 2 Kgs 23:15-20).

Cities - This could be very small settlement. A "remark made to Egyptologist, Flinders Petrie, by an Arab who pointed to three tents in a valley and said, 'Behold the city of the sons of my tribe'" (Fisch 30).

Works - This could refer to their idols (cf. Hos 14:3; Jer 10:3,9) or perhaps altars (cf. Isa 17:8).

You will know that I am the Lord - This phrase occurs seventy-two times in Ezekiel. "The name Yahweh is properly synonymous with power (to punish and to rescue), sovereignty, holiness and authorship and control of events. Presently it is not recognized as such either in Israel, who are apostate or faithless, or among the nations, who are idolatrous. But when disaster strikes them or they experience a miraculous deliverance, the God who announced the event through the prophet will be acknowledged as possessing the attributes properly attached to His name (cf. Jer 16:21; Isa 52:6)" (Greenberg 133).

**<sup>8</sup>"However, I shall leave a remnant, for you will have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the countries. <sup>9</sup>Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations. <sup>10</sup>Then they will know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them."**

Remnant - Some of the Israelites will survive (cf. 12:16; 14:22) and after all is said and done they will recognize that God has been right all along and they were properly punished for their sins and then they will turn to the Lord and worship Him only (cf. Isa 17:7; Lev 26:40-41). Those who survive in exile will confess their guilt; their uncircumcised hearts will be humbled.

"The theme recurs in Ezekiel, each time with significant variation. In 12:16 the remnant survives "in order that they may relate all their nations among the nations into which they have come, that they may know that I am YHWH" (it is not clear who is to be convinced of YHWH's godhead, the remnant or the nations). A didactic role is envisaged for the remnant: to teach, by the tale of their wicked conduct, the justice of God's punishment... The next occurrence of the three, in 14:22f, shows marked progress. A remnant will be extricated from the ruin of Jerusalem for the sake of the exiles (for the first time explicitly brought into the picture), so that the exiles may see their depraved state at first hand. "When you see their conduct and their misdeeds you will be consoled over the evils that I brought upon Jerusalem... and you shall realize that not for nothing did I do all that I did to it"...the purpose of preserving them is to vindicate God's evil decree: the manifest depravity of the survivors will convince the exiles that the fall of Jerusalem was deserved, and that will be their consolation" (Greenberg 140-141).

Escape - These people survived not because of their righteousness, but in order to testify to the truthfulness of God's judgment.

Remember - "A threefold new event is to take place among these survivors through the harshness of their experiences: a remembering, a loathing and a recognition...In the Old Testament 'remembering' means more than a sad and romantic turning back to what once was, with some enjoyment of the recollection and regret at the ills of the present. In the Old Testament 'to remember' is a genuine grasping of a reality which then becomes a new living and present fact...We must also add to this immediately that this biblical "remembering" of God is never without an element of 'recollection' (formulated in the perfect) of an action of God towards man accomplished in history. Thus the remembering of Yahweh by fugitives of Israel scattered among the nations was directly a remembering of the God who had destroyed those whose 'heart had turned away from Him and whose eyes had lusted after their idols.' The death which Yahweh had brought upon the mountains of Israel by the sword of judgment would from now on be a part of the 'remembering' which determined Israel's faith" (Zimmerli 189)

I have been hurt - God is hurt any time we sin.

Heart...heart...eye - "Man's responsibility has been described not only by his inner being (heart), but also by an organ which opens the inner life of man to the external world and give access from the physical world to the inner life. It was in this totality of heart and eye that Israel had sinned. This shows a genuine awareness that it is the eyes in particular which turn in faithlessness to idols, flattered by a sense of their beauty. It is through the gate of the eye that temptation comes to man (Gen 3:6; Mt 5:28f; 6:22f), so that the heart, which should not only be regarded as the center of feeling but as the center of man's thought and will, breaks faith with Yahweh" (Cf. Num 15:39)" (Zimmerli 189).

I have not said in vain - The destruction of Jerusalem and the deaths of so many people will not be in vain because then the people will know that "I am the Lord" (vv. 7,10,13, 14). This gives us one of the reasons for God's judgment.

**<sup>11</sup>"Thus says the Lord God, 'Clap your hand, stamp your foot, and say, "Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, which will fall by sword, famine, and plague! <sup>12</sup>He who is far off will die by the plague, and he who is near will fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged will die by the famine. Thus shall I spend My wrath on them. <sup>13</sup>Then you will know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green tree, and under every leafy oak—the places where they offered soothing aroma to all their idols. <sup>14</sup>So throughout all their habitations I shall stretch out My hand against them and make the land more desolate and waste than the wilderness toward Diblah; thus they will know that I am the Lord.'"**

Clap your hand - Clapping of hands and stomping of feet, in the context of Ezekiel, seem to indicate triumph at the vindication of God (cf. 21:14,17). These actions were more suited to the Ammonites of Ezekiel's time than to us (25:6).

“The taunt-song was a literary device in Hebrew poetry which could even be put into the mouth of God without any sense of inappropriateness. So we should perhaps interpret it for what is said about a particular situation and recognize that poetical zeal for God would probably be expressed somewhat differently in the cold light of prose” (Taylor 91).

The joy comes from the judgment being rendered among the nations themselves.

“At the same time, however, 21:14,17 show that the prophet was not expressing by his action a gloating gesture of an onlooker, but was giving expression to the action of Yahweh Himself in which He triumphantly settled accounts with His enemies, and ‘vented His fury’ among them (21:17; cf. 5:13)” (Zimmerli 184).

Ezekiel will clap his hands because justice is finally done.

Spend My wrath - The anger of God is not like the anger of men. When God gets angry, He does not stay angry. Rather, the anger of God is more of a releasing of anger because of the continual stubbornness of His people. Once He has spent His anger, then He does not have anymore of it left (at that particular point in time.) Verse 12 is talking about the inescapable nature of God’s wrath.

Thus they will know that I am the Lord: It was important that God’s people learn three vital lessons:

1. The Lord alone is God,
2. The Lord alone is Judge and
3. The Lord alone is Savior.

It will be in the fulfillment of these events that these three vital points will be learned. Men of every generation and people need to learn these same three lessons. What happens in Ezekiel is merely a demonstration of what will eventually be learned by all in the final judgment (cf. Phil 2:9 -11; Rev 20:11-14).

## LESSONS

1. There is no middle ground in the worship of God. The people were trying to worship Him in the temple and their false gods in the “high places.” This is wrong! God demands all or nothing from us. What sort of “idols” have we put on a equal (if not higher) level with God? Where are our priorities?
2. Ezekiel 6:9 tells us something about our relationship with God. It tells us that our sinful actions do hurt God. If we say that we love God, then we should not want

to hurt Him. If we do not want to hurt Him, then we should not make an idol in any area of our lives.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“Language and ideas characteristic of Ezekiel are combined in our chapter with an unusually rich array of poetic elements echoing passages from elsewhere in the Bible. Abrupt changes in perspective, obscurity, even incoherence (verse 11b), bespeak a passion and excitement that could not be contained in the prophet’s usual prosaic frame-work, and that sought release in language and figures drawn from the reservoir of Hebrew poetry evidently known to him. As in the few other instances in which he demonstrated his poetic range (e.g., ch. 21 and 28:11-19), the modern interpreter encounters insuperable difficulties in following him” (Greenberg 163).

“Verses 2-13 consist of three short oracles, all in similar vein, linked together by the common phrase ‘the end has come,’ ‘your doom has come,’ ‘the time has come.’ The fact that the message needed so much reiteration can only be understood against the background of popular belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem. Its destruction was inconceivable to the Israelite mind. As long as God was God, God’s temple and God’s city would stand” (Taylor 92).

**<sup>1</sup>Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming from the four corners of the land. <sup>3</sup>Now the end is upon you, and I shall send My anger against you; I shall judge you according to your ways, and I shall bring all your abominations upon you. <sup>4</sup>For My eye will have no pity on you, nor shall I spare you, but I shall bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the Lord!’”**

Land of Israel - This is the phrase *admat yisra’el* and is not the usual phrase for “land of Israel.” “It evokes the earth of the cultivated homeland lived on by Israel; it is particularly poignant in the mouth of an exile” (Greenberg 145).

*Admat* means “soil of.” This phrase occurs seventeen times (7:2; 11:17; 12:19,22; 13:9; 18:2; 20:38,42; 21:7-8; 25:3,6; 33:24; 36:6; 37:12; 38:18-19) in Ezekiel but not anywhere else. The closest is Isaiah 19:17 which has “land of Judah.”

“Israel is addressed as ‘the land of Israel,’ although in Ezekiel’s day the people were only living in the Judean remnant of the land. The address ‘land of Israel’ shows that this Israel was an entity which possessed its secret in its divine election (Ezek 20:5), but which could be described not only as a phenomenon preserved by a purely spiritual bond, but also as a land. Thus conversely this land also defined Israel because it was the physical pledge of the people’s election by God” (Zimmerli 204).

The end is coming - This was a standard announcement of doom (cf. Gen 6:13; Lam 4:18; Amos 8:2).

I shall judge you - This is the Hebrew word *sapat* and it has the sense of “punish” here. “The following parallel phrase *natan ‘alayik* “bring” (repay - NKJV) does not mean “charge you with” as it is usually rendered but “impose on you (the penalty for).” This is seen in Jonah 1:14, where the desperate sailors, about to throw Jonah into the sea, pray to God, “do not lay upon us (the penalty for shedding) the blood of an innocent man.” What they fear is not divine indictment but a divine punishment. Similarly, in Ezekiel 23:49, “(Your executioners) shall lay upon you (the penalty of) your depravity, and you shall bear the guilt (equals ‘suffer the punishment’) of your idolatry.” Again, since the subjects are not judges (or plaintiffs) but executioners, their acts are not a rare proffering of charges, but a carrying out of a penal verdict” (Greenberg 147).

My eye will have not pity - “Besides being a Father of mercy, He is also a God of justice; or rather, the exercise of justice is in itself an act of mercy, since its purpose is purification from sin and the restoration of harmony between God and man. But they who are inveterately evil fail to use the opportunity which even Divine mercy offers (cf. Isa 26:10)” (Fisch 34).

This is the second time we have encountered this phrase. “Pity” is the Hebrew word *hamal* and “spare” is *hus* and it occurs in 5:11; 7:4,9; 8:18; 9:5,10. Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel does not talk about Judah’s repentance (cf. Jer 18:7-11; 25:4-7; 26:3-6; 35:15) and the failure of the repentance (cf. Jer 5:1-6; 9:5-9; 5:21, 23,25; 13:23; 6:19; 19:15; 15:6-9; 6:27-30; 7:23-29).

“He begins with the assumption that there is no hope for Judah, and thus he preaches denied mercy, rejection and annihilation from the outset. His public ministry begins in chapter 4 with punishment already inevitable, beyond a chastising or purgative level” (Raitt 47).

“Because those who had gone with him into Exile based their hopes not upon God but upon Jerusalem’s escaping destruction and quickly returning from captivity, Ezekiel had to proclaim the destruction of Judah in the most uncompromising term. The only suggestion of the possibility of a national repentance which the book preserves is in 14:6. But in certain isolated sections of the book, especially chapter 18 and less so portions of chapters 33 and 34...Ezekiel opens up the possibility of repentance for the individual...Having totally given up on national repentance, having promised the annihilation of Jerusalem and the departure of God’s glory from the temple, and stung by questions of God’s justice in letting the innocent suffer equally with the guilty, Ezekiel opens up the substantially new teaching of repentance for the individual to show that there is hope for those who accepted the Exile with faith in God’s abiding Lordship and justice” (Raitt 48-49).

<sup>5</sup>“Thus says the Lord God, ‘A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming!’”

Unique disaster - This is talking about the destruction of the temple. It is saying the same thing as 5:9. Because of their terrible wickedness, God was going to an equally terrible thing—destroy the temple!

**6“An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come! 7Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near — tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains. 8Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you, and spend My anger against you, judge you according to your ways, and bring on you all your abominations. 9And My eye will show no pity, nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the Lord, do the smiting.”**

I, the Lord, do the smiting - “To hearers and readers who were used to names of God like ‘*Jehovah-hireh*’ and ‘*Jehovah-niss*’ (Gen 22:14; Ex 17:15), it must have come home with tremendous force to have Him described as ‘*Jehovah-makkeh*.’ The Lord who had provided and protected was about to strike” (Taylor 93).

**10“Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed.”**

Rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed - This could be referring to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Isa 10:5; Jer 50:31). The certainty of the day of doom is compared to a budding rod.

**11“Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their multitude, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them.”**

All that was important to them—their jobs, houses, wealth—will be lost. It is the classic (and oft repeated) problem of misplaced priorities. Jesus dealt with this same problem when He asked: “For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?” (Matt 16:26).

**12“The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude. 13Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.”**

Let not the buyer rejoice - “It is customary that a buyer rejoices in his purchase and a seller is sorry that out of need he had to part with his property; compare the Talmudic adage, ‘people say, if you have bought, you gained, if you have sold, you have lost’ (*Baba Mesi’a* 51a)” (Greenberg 149).

The buying and selling of land was not wrong or a sin, but it was the attitude (cf. Jer 32:6-12).

“Buying and selling are colorful signs of life in the orient where every market is at the same time an occasion of calculated play, in a quite special way. Rejoicing and mourning are the two poles of human emotion. In both spheres which the saying brings together, the day of God breaks up the natural course of things, in that horror and paralysis take hold of men (cf. 24:1ff; Jer 16:1ff). Thus we have here not the idea of a threat to those who rejoice and a consolation for those who mourn, which would both be quite normal emotions and so signs of real life, but only a reference to the fact that an all-destroying terror would fall upon both the man who rejoices and the one who mourns” (Zimmerli 208).

**<sup>14</sup>“They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle; for My wrath is against all their multitude. <sup>15</sup>The sword is outside, and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city. <sup>16</sup>Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity. <sup>17</sup>All hands will hang limp, and all knees will become like water. <sup>18</sup>And they will gird themselves with sackcloth, and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame will be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads.”**

They have blown the trumpet - This is showing the futility of armed resistance. God is against them. Who can stand?

The sword is outside - “There is no protection from the wrath of God. Outside the city is the sword of the marauder and inside is the marauding famine and pestilence. There is no place to run from God. He is of great patience but once the decision has been made that the transgressor has gone too far, there is no place to hide” (McGuiggan 77).

All knees will become like water - This is indicating the extreme fear among the people. “One who hears the blare of horns and recoils in fright, the clash of shields and recoils in fright, the flashing of swords and water flows upon his knee” (*Sotah* 44b).

**<sup>19</sup>“They shall fling their silver into the streets, and their gold shall become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their appetite, nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling. <sup>20</sup>And they transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it; therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them.”**

Abhorrent thing - This is the Hebrew word *niddah* and refers to the menstrual impurity (Lev 15:19; 18:19 cf. Ezek 22:10). “On the day of reckoning, the desperate inhabitants

will cast away their wealth as something of extreme impurity (cf. 36:17), because they will neither be able to buy food nor ransom their lives with it” (Fisch 38).

Occasion for stumbling - “This expression (*miksol ‘awon*) is peculiar to Ezekiel; it recurs in 14:3,4,7 applied to idols; in 18:30 to unrepented transgression; in 44:12 to Levites who served at the illegal shrines. The usage in chapters 14 and 44 shows that the two nouns are bound together, precluding the theoretically possible construction here, ‘their iniquity was a stumbling-block.’ In accord with Ezekiel’s use of ‘stumbling-block,’ the phrase means ‘cause of downfall (consisting) of iniquity’ or ‘the iniquitous cause of their downfall... How their gold and silver became an iniquitous cause of their downfall is told in the next verse” (Greenberg 152-153).

Made the images - They used the jewelry to make idols (cf. Ex 32:2-4). This was an act of ingratitude toward God because He had given them that wealth (cf. Deut 8:18; Ezek 16:17).

**21““And I shall give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it. 22I shall also turn My face from them, and they will profane My secret place; then robbers will enter and profane it.””**

All that was a source of pride and treasured will become unclean. It was these things that brought about their fall

Secret place - This is talking about the temple. “The emotive words used are a healthy reminder to the reader that when God acts in judgment He Himself suffers pain and grief as well as those whom His holiness has condemned” (Taylor 94-95).

God is going to allow even the temple to be profaned and defiled—something the Jewish people thought would never happen.

**23““Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence. 24Therefore, I shall bring the worst of the nations, and they will possess their houses. I shall also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned. 25When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none. 26Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will be added to rumor; then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders. 27The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I shall deal with them, and by their judgments I shall judge them. And they will know that I am the Lord.””**

Worst of the nations - This is talking about Babylon (cf. 28:7; 30:11). The Babylonians were feared warriors who were known for their brutality and cruelty (Hab 1:6-7).

Seek a vision from the prophet - "Cessation of oracles ("visions") was a sign of God's displeasure (1 Sam 14:37f; 28:6) held over the people as a threat (see especially Amos 8:4); at the time of the fall it seems to have materialized (Lam 2:9). The paralysis of the other two classes of counselors is caused by the terror of the enemy" (Greenberg 156).

## LESSONS

1. God postpones judgment as long as He possibly can but eventually, if no change has come, it must fall (cf. Rev 2:21). God wants us to repent and be saved and He gives us all the time in the world but if we ignore Him, then we will be lost.
2. In verses 25-27 the people now realize that God's judgment has come upon them. They want to turn to God, to hear a word of comfort from God's prophets or priests, but there is none, because it is too late.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Chapters 8 and 11 (to oversimplify a little) speak of the reasons behind the coming judgment and chapters 9 and 10 speak of the judgment as already on the people (chapter 9) and on the city itself (chapter 10).

"Chapter 8 will stress the religious corruption of the people of Jerusalem as Ezekiel will see for himself as he is taken "in the visions of God" to that wicked city. Chapter 11 will stress the political and moral corruption of the people. Chapter 9 will show the judgment falling on all those without the mark of God on them and chapter 10 will speak of the burning of the wicked city with coals of fire from between the cherubim and it will tell us that the destruction of the city is the work of the cherubim which are described again as in chapter one" (McGuiggan 83).

"After receiving the announcement of "the end" in chapter 7, due to the social and religious wrongdoing of the people, the prophet is made witness in a vision to the corrupt practices of the Judahites and is shown their destruction" (Greenberg 200).

As will be seen, Ezekiel is shown **four abominable acts** being committed by his people:

1. Set up "idol of jealousy" at temple (8:5-6),
2. The "hidden" idolatry of the 75 elders – worship of unclean animals and creeping things (8:7-13),
3. The women weeping for Tammuz (8:14-15) and
4. The 25 sun worshipers (8:16-18).

<sup>1</sup>And it came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell on me there. <sup>2</sup>Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. <sup>3</sup>And He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. <sup>4</sup>And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.

Sixth month - If this was a leap year Ezekiel would have finished his symbolic action of chapter four, twelve days ago.

Elders of Judah - The people realized that Ezekiel was a prophet (Ezek 2:5) and they wanted to hear a word from the Lord. Several times throughout the book the elders come to consult with Ezekiel (14:13; 20:1; 33:31).

Appearance of a man - Some translations have “fire” instead of “man.” If it is to be translated “man”, then this is referring to somebody other than God—perhaps an angel. If it is to be translated “fire” then this is talking about God (cf. 1:27). The NKJV and KJV translate it “fire” but all the rest of the versions read “man.” “Modern commentators follow the LXX and read *ish* (man) for *esh* (fire) in conformity with 1:26; but there the noun is *adam* and no explanation is offered why Ezekiel did not use it here. This verse is obviously based on 1:27 which supports the M.T. (*Masoretic Text*)” (Fisch 41).

Greenberg agrees with Fisch that it should read “fire” but Zimmerli thinks it should read “man.”

Form of a hand - The context lets us know that this is talking about God. “The prophet carefully avoids the anthropomorphic suggestion as far as possible; hence ‘the form of a hand’ instead of ‘a hand’” (Fisch 41).

Visions of God - This is the second vision Ezekiel has.

“Ezekiel tells of things which were shown to him during the ecstatic experience in the context of a vision from God. For all those matters which belong to features of interpretation and stylizing in his description he undoubtedly seeks to point to things which really happened in Jerusalem. Only so does the accusation which justifies the ensuing judgment upon Jerusalem carry real weight” (Zimmerli 245).

Idol of Jealousy, which provokes to jealousy - “The rendering of the noun *kin’ah* in relation to God by ‘jealousy’ has caused confusion among Biblical scholars. The truth is that the noun, when it relates to Divine disfavour, has nothing in common with jealousy.

It is derived from the verb *kanah*, 'to acquire as one's own property,' and denotes in the first instance the vindication of one's rights. The phrase *semel hakkin'ah hammakneh* (the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy) has the meaning, 'the image of outrage authority, which provoketh Him to vindicate His exclusive rights'...The term *kin'ah*, describing God as being zealous for His violated rights, is used in Ezekiel and in other parts of the Bible only in respect of the cardinal sins of idolatry and immorality" (cf. *The Soncino Chumash* on Num 25:11).

"Attributing *kin'ah* to God is simply an expression of certain retribution for these offenses which undermine the existence of human society. Ezekiel, in particular, laid stress on this doctrine in repeatedly employing the term *kin'ah* with reference to these sins" (Fisch xv).

This word occurs in Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Joshua 24:19; Nahum 1:2.

"In verbal and substantival usage *kin'ah* is repeatedly a designation for the jealous anger of Yahweh against everything hostile to Him" (Zimmerli 239).

This word is used in Ezekiel 5:13; 8:3; 16:38,42; 23:25; 36:5f; 38:19; 35:11; 39:25; 31:9.

QUESTION: What might be the "idol of jealousy?" This could be the graven image Manasseh built in 2 Kings 21:7 (cf. 2 Chron 33:7,15). This image was originally removed by Manasseh and Josiah, but it could have been restored under Zedekiah.

The glory of the God of Israel - "It is remarkable that, despite all the corruption that existed, Ezekiel should say that 'the glory of the God of Israel was there.' It was as if he wanted to throw into sharp relief the difference between the God who belonged there and the deviations which were practiced there, so ranking the crimes all the more heinous. Perhaps he was also trying to say that God would stay with His people until the very last moment of their rejection of Him" (Taylor 97-98).

**<sup>5</sup>Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes, now, toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance. <sup>6</sup>And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, that I should be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations."**

Son of man - God is asking Ezekiel if he realizes the significance of what he is seeing. "Here he is! The young prophet, back in his beloved Jerusalem. Jerusalem! The city of David, but more important, the city of the Living God. The city which houses the temple and house of the Lord God of Israel. The center of truth and purity; the center of learning for the heathen...So the romantic would think; so the young prophet wants to believe. But God shows Ezekiel how truly wicked the city and its people have become.

The young prophet must understand that the people are driving God away from his dwelling place in the midst of them “ (McGuiggan 86-87).

That I should be far from My sanctuary - Other versions translate it “removing themselves from my sanctuary” (Greenberg 164).

“It is difficult to know whether God or the people is the subject of the verb. Either way “removing themselves from” (*rahaq me'al*) “implies more than a physical distancing; it includes sentiments of indifference or hostility where attachment formerly existed—i.e., alienation (Jer 2:5; Ezek 44:10; Job 19:13); here the bestowal of worship on objects outside the sanctuary, in disregard of the divine presence inside it (cf. vv. 15-16)” (Greenberg 168,169).

**<sup>7</sup>Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. <sup>8</sup>And He said to me, “Son of man, now dig through the wall.” So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. <sup>9</sup>And He said to me, “Go in and see the wicked things they are committing here.” <sup>10</sup>So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.**

Every form of creeping thing - (cf. Deut 4:16-18). This is the second abomination God shows Ezekiel. “To the priestly mind it was especially offensive that creatures which were unacceptable for ordinary food and were classed as abominations were the object of pious worship here” (Zimmerli 241).

**<sup>11</sup>And standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.**

Seventy elders - “It is scarcely accidental that in this outer area the lay representatives of the people were to be found. It appears probably, from Exodus 24:1,9, where seventy elders of Israel were summoned, as the distinguished men of the people (verse 11), to see God and to eat the covenant meal before Him on the mountain of God, and from Numbers 11:16 (24f), where seventy elders share something of the spirit of Moses, that there was an institution, sanctified by ancient tradition, of seventy elders as the representatives of Israel. What Ezekiel sees therefore is not a chance group, but the representatives of Israel, as they had once stood before Yahweh at the making of the covenant” (Zimmerli 240).

Jaazaniah the son of Saphan - The naming of this man “suggests a direct indictment by Ezekiel of a man whose family had been prominent in Jerusalem’s public life. ‘Shaphan’ is probably to be identified with Josiah’s secretary-of-state (2 Kgs 22:3), and Ahikam, another of Shaphan’s sons, was an influential supporter of Jeremiah (Jer 26:24). Clearly Jaazaniah was the black sheep of a worthy family” (Taylor 99).

**<sup>12</sup>Then He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land.’” <sup>13</sup>And He said to me, “Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing.”**

The Lord does not see - These elders, who were to be leading the city in faithful worship of God, are engaged in idol worship in secrecy because they think that God cannot see in the dark (cf. Psa 10:11; 94:7; Job 7:18-19; 22:13-14). “The motive of the two constitutive elements of the vision is provided by the repeated, twofold assertion of the culprits, “YHWH does not see us; YHWH has left the land” (8:12; 9:9). By way of confuting the first part, God takes the prophet on a tour of the temple area, showing him the various abominations practiced there, and checking on the prophet’s observation by asking him at each site, “Do you see, man?” The prophet knows that God has seen all, including the clandestine rites of the elders who believe Him blind to them” (Greenberg 200).

**<sup>14</sup>Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. <sup>15</sup>And He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these.”**

Women were sitting there - This is the third abomination Ezekiel sees. Notice that it involves women. QUESTION: Why does God consider what the women were doing as being worse than what the elders were doing? Women are the backbone of any society. A man can go bad, but still the woman can raise Godly children. This can be seen in our present day society in which so many men have left their families, but still the mothers raise good children. But when the women go bad, then the whole family is going to go bad (cf. Jer 44).

Weeping for Tammuz - “It came from Babylonia, and can be traced there as far back as 3,000 B.C.E., so that it is one of the oldest forms of religious worship in the world, and has not altogether disappeared even now. Tammuz (Akkadian *Duzu*, from the Sumerian *Dumuzi* meaning “faithful son”), the youthful husband, or son, or lover of Ishtar, was looked upon as the god of vegetation and beneficent floods. Every year, at the time of greatest heat, when plants withered and rivers ran dry, he was believed to vanish into the underworld, and in the following spring to return again...The time of his departure was celebrated with public dirges” (Fisch 44).

So notice what the women are doing—they are worshiping a Babylonian God (Tammuz is the Babylonian Duzo) because obviously this god must be much stronger than Yahweh because the people were conquered. Also, they are showing more emotion for a distant god than for Yahweh who is very near to them.

**<sup>16</sup>Then He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.**

Twenty-five - This is the final abomination God shows to Ezekiel. These twenty-five men were probably priests because the priests were to offer prayers between the porch and the altar (Joel 2:17).

“*Mishnah Kelim* 1.9 ranks it only less than that of the sanctuary proper, the eighth of ten degrees of sanctity. This sacred space is taken by men who give the sanctuary their backs and bow toward the sun; such contempt of YHWH is counted as the climactic abomination” (Greenberg 171).

1 Chronicles 24:7-18 and Isaiah 43:28 indicate that David divided the priesthood into twenty-four courses and, counting the High Priest, that would make twenty-five. Therefore, the twenty-five men could be representative of the whole priesthood.

Faces toward the east - “The entrance to the Temple was on the east side and the Holy of Holies on the west in order to eliminate the popular sun-worship which was practiced toward the east. These idolaters turned deliberately in that direction to demonstrate their denial of God and their belief in the sun-god. The Rabbis detect in the seemingly superfluous phrase ‘with their backs toward the temple’ a wanton affront of the Divine presence whose abode is in the west’ (*Yoma* 77a). ‘The *Mishnah* records that the offending words were recalled in the celebration of the drawing of water during the Festival of Tabernacles. ‘When the celebrants reached the gate which leads out to the east, they turned their faces from east to west (thus facing the Temple) and said, ‘Our fathers who were in this place stood with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the sun towards the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned to the Lord’” (*Sukkah* V.4) (Fisch 45).

Prostrate - “The unusual Hebrew form *mishtachawithem* is traditionally explained as a compound of two verbs, *mashchithim* (they destroy) and *mishtachawim* (they worship), signifying the dual nature of their offense: the degradation of the Temple and the worshipping of the sun-god (*Talmud Yerushalmi* and *Targum*)” (Fisch 45).

**<sup>17</sup>And He said to me, “Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. <sup>18</sup>Therefore, I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them.”**

Is it too light a thing - “It seems awfully clear to me that the Lord is graciously attempting to persuade the young man of the justice and necessity of the judgment to fall on this people” (McGuigan 88).

Putting the twig to the nose - We are not really sure what this is referring to, but it certainly angered God! There are some scholars who believe this was a practice done out of respect for the sun-god, not wanting to defile the solar rays with their breath. Therefore, the twig served as a filter for one’s breath.

My eye will have no pity - Four times God asked Ezekiel if he had seen this (47:6). God is wanting Ezekiel to understand why He is going to do what He is about to do. God is showing Ezekiel just how wicked Jerusalem is and how deserved the destruction is.

## LESSONS

1. One cannot underestimate the significance of the father in the home. If the mother is serving God properly and teaching the children, then the children have a good chance of overcoming a bad influence from the father (if the father *is* a bad influence). Think about all the awards you have seen presented on television. Usually the first person whom a man thanks is his mother rather than his father, because the mother had such a profound influence in shaping his life.
2. In the second abomination God points out that He sees everything we do—even those things which we do in secret. It is entirely possible to fool the community, the church and even our families in regards to our spirituality, but we cannot fool God and someday “God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl 12:14).

## CHAPTER NINE

In 8:18 God pronounced coming punishment. Now, in Ezekiel’s vision, this punishment is executed.

**<sup>1</sup>Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, “Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” <sup>2</sup>And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.**

Executioners - “This rendering seeks to convey the ambiguity of *pequdda*, meaning both ‘visitation, punishment (Num 16:29) and functionary’ (2 Kgs 11:18)” (Greenberg 175).

Each executioner has his “battle ax” ready for judgment. It is noteworthy that judgment is to begin at the altar, because it was there that: a) they defiled God’s altar and b) they set up the altar of jealousy. It is also significant that the six executioners, plus one scribe, make a total of seven – a number representing completeness in biblical numerology.

**<sup>3</sup>Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. <sup>4</sup>And the Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.” <sup>5</sup>But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare.”**

Glory of the God Israel - God is preparing to leave His temple and makes a preliminary move here.

Put a mark - The word for “mark” is the Hebrew letter *tau* and it had the shape of an “x” during this time period.

“The mark does not answer to anything in historical reality—it is simply a visionary device. It has no objective reality. Rather than say in plain words: ‘The righteous are exempt from this judgment.’ God gave that message in picture form. The message exemption was real enough, the way it was signified in the vision has no corresponding reality outside the vision” (McGuiggan 96).

It is interesting to note the similarity with Revelation 7:2-3, where righteous people are marked; and Revelation 13:16, where evil people are marked. So all are marked, it just depends on whether the person is righteous or wicked (cf. 2 Tim 2:19).

Who sigh and groan over all the abominations - “It is worth noting that the procedure for inflicting God’s punishment was selective, in keeping with the principle of 18:4 ‘the soul that sins shall die.’ The basis for exemption from the slaughter was the individual’s deep concern over the city’s apostasy. This was what Amos had looked for among the luxury loving revellers of Jerusalem and Samaria whom he castigated with his tongue. Their most grievous sin was that they ‘did not grieve over the ruin of Joseph’ (Amos 6:6). In both cases the criterion that was needed was not strictly a religious quality, like faith, or an outward act, like sacrifice, but an affair of the heart—a passionate concern for God and His people” (Taylor 102-103).

“The existence of a pious remnant is surprising after the total assertions of sin in Ezekiel 8 (cf. 2 Kgs 19:15-17)” (Zimmerli 248).

**<sup>6</sup>“Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who were before the temple.**

Little children - Since we are interpreting this vision in a spiritual sense, does that mean that the “little children” here are lost spiritually? No! Ezekiel is not dealing with the salvation of children at all. Ezekiel’s requirement is those who “sigh and groan over all the nations.” Ezekiel mentions “little children” only to show how inclusive this statement is—no one shall escape!

Start from My sanctuary - This is similar to the idea expressed in 1 Peter 4:7.

Do not touch any man on whom is the mark - “The righteous, in the vision, are not to die! Did any die in the historical judgment which fulfilled this vision? Ezekiel 21:3-4 says that righteous did die along with the wicked. What did this exemption consist of? It is clear it did not produce immunity from dying in the Babylonian invasion for many righteous died at that time. Here is an important truth—all suffering is not punishment! The faithful were not punished even though they suffered. The vision promises immunity from dying, but that is only the pictorial form of the real promise. The real promise and assurance behind the picture is that the invasion is no punishment on the righteous! But, someone replies, what is the difference, the righteous and the wicked die, God gave them nothing in that case. Ah, there is all the difference in the world between suffering with the guilty and suffering because of guilt. There is all the difference between dying “in the Lord” and dying out of the Lord. In this vision too, the judgment on the ungodly is signified by their being killed, all and every one of them. But this was not historically fulfilled either.” (McGuiggan 96-97).

It could be that when Ezekiel says, “I alone was left,” it meant that he was the only righteous individual in the city or it could mean that he was the only righteous individual within the temple.

**<sup>7</sup>And He said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” Thus they went out and struck down the people in the city.**

Defile the temple - “Contrast 2 Kings 11:15: Athaliah is deliberately dragged out of the temple before being executed; here, since these men had already defiled the house with idolatry, it is no matter if they are killed there. God’s shocking command expresses the total unfitness of the temple for His presence” (Greenberg 177-178).

**<sup>8</sup>Then it came about as they were striking and I alone was left, that I fell on my face and cried out saying, “Alas, Lord God! Art Thou destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Thy wrath on Jerusalem?”**

Alas, Lord God - “As he beholds the sentence of death being executed in this vision, the prophet twice cries out on behalf of the condemned people (9:8; 11:3). These are

the only instances of Ezekiel's attempt to intercede for his people, and they may have to do with his (visionary) presence amidst the slain. The otherwise striking omission of intercession from the book is perhaps connected with its unconditional message of doom; compare how God repeatedly thwarts Jeremiah's attempts at intercession (Jer 7:16; 14:7-15:4)" (Greenberg 203).

"In the intercessions of Ezekiel it is striking that the prophet, even when he has been shown that the 'remnant' of the pious will be saved (v. 4), puts the question to his God: 'Will you destroy the remnant of Israel when you pour out your wrath over Jerusalem?' We can answer this with a reference to the stereotyped formulation of such prayers of intercession (11:13, cf. also 'the remnant of Joseph,' Amos 5:15), but it must also be affirmed that a judgment which begins right in the sanctuary must necessarily raise the question whether a remnant of the people of God should at all find the possibility of protection from God once the center of life, the place of the divine presence, had been destroyed" (Zimmerli 249).

**<sup>9</sup>Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood, and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!' <sup>10</sup>But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare, but I shall bring their conduct upon their heads."**

The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see - This first assertion turns out to be ironically prophetic. "God had in fact not left the land when the people believed He had, but now their behavior brought it about" (Greenberg 200).

**<sup>11</sup>Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as Thou hast commanded me."**

This lets us know that some of the people were still righteous. This chapter is part of Ezekiel's continuing education, the continued sinfulness of the people, and the absolute necessity of God's judgment.

## CHAPTER TEN

God is in charge of all the vengeance described in chapter nine. This chapter serves to demonstrate the glory of God and His right to act in judgment (cf. Rom 12:19ff).

**<sup>1</sup>Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them. <sup>2</sup>And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim, and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he entered in my sight.**

Coals - The coals will purge the people of sin as in Isaiah 6.

<sup>3</sup>Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court. <sup>4</sup>Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Moreover, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. <sup>6</sup>And it about when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, "Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim," he entered and stood beside a wheel. <sup>7</sup>Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took some and put it into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took it and went out. <sup>8</sup>And the cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings. <sup>9</sup>Then I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone. <sup>10</sup>And as for their appearance, all four of them had the same likeness, as if one wheel were within another wheel. <sup>11</sup>When they moved, they went in any of their four direction without turning as they went; but they followed in the direction which they faced, without turning as they went. <sup>12</sup>And their whole body, their backs, their hands, their wings, and the wheels were full of eyes all around, the wheels belonging to all four of them. <sup>13</sup>The wheels were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels. <sup>14</sup>And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of a cherub, the second face was the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Four wheels beside the cherubim - This is similar to the account given in chapter one. "The main object of the repetition is to illustrate that though one of the faces of the four creatures was now changed from that of an ox to a cherub (v.14), it was the same scene as the prophet had seen in the earlier vision" (Fisch 53).

Some scholars feel that this is too repetitious and has been added by someone else.

"The point is one of emphasis. Ezekiel is being told of the terror that is to come (and is thus emboldened to speak) and we are being told that the judgment is just and is being carried out, not irrationally, but with forethought. If we were to leave out scripture because it is so like other pieces of scripture, then we would have to leave out much of the Gospels" (McGuiggan 105).

Face of a cherub - Why do we have the change from a bull's face to that of a cherub? The ancient rabbis wrote that "Ezekiel prayed concerning the bull's face, and it was turned into that of a cherub; he said, 'Lord of the universe, how can an accuser (for the bull recalled the golden calf) be an intercessor (the function of these angelic creatures in rabbinic theology)?" (*Hagigah* 13b)" (Greenberg 183).

Another more modern explanation is that “the mention of the cherub must imply that the prophet here identifies with the chariot as a whole (the cherub collectively) the animal whose face he noticed most clearly as the chariot moved. The chariot stands at the south side of the Temple (to the south of Ezekiel), and moves eastward (v. 19). Hence, if the face of the man is that which looks in front, the face of the leading cherub which Ezekiel sees most clearly will be that on the left of the human face, i.e. the ox-face; taking the rest in order, he will naturally mention the faces of the man, lion and eagle” (Fisch 54).

The next question that comes to mind is why did not Ezekiel call the “living creatures” of chapter one cherubim?

“It may be that Ezekiel is saying that only when he saw the cherubim in the Temple did he realize that these were the very creatures which he had seen in his vision by the river Chebar. This is a reasonable explanation, because Ezekiel had not yet qualified as a priest before he went into exile and so he would never in person have seen the cherub-figures carved on the inside walls of the Temple (1 Kgs 6:29) and on the double doors (1 Kgs 6:35) and on the Temple furnishings (1 Kgs 7:29,36), where only priests could see them clearly. But there is no need to press the point too much, for he could hardly have been brought up in a priestly family without this kind of knowledge. It is just that for reasons of literary artifice he deliberately withholds the identification until this stage” (Taylor 104).

“In addition to this it must be borne in mind that Ezekiel is the only person who claims to have seen the heavenly cherubs; the only cherubs previously seen by humans were the statues in the inner sanctum, which were only approximations” (Greenberg 183).

**<sup>15</sup>Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar. <sup>16</sup>Now when the cherubim moved, the wheels would go beside them; also when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them. <sup>17</sup>When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still; and when they rose up, the wheels would rise with them; for the spirit of the living beings was in them. <sup>18</sup>Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.**

Now we see some more significance in this repeated section. God is departing. Previously the glory of the Lord was over the threshold; now it has departed from that place.

**<sup>19</sup>When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord’s house. And the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.**

It is almost as if God is reluctant to leave. Yet the people did nothing to keep this glory with them. The glory of God will completely abandon the city in 11:23. They were wrong in assuming that God would continue to make His abode in the midst of a rebellious and adulterous people. Six centuries later another generation was to reject the “glory of God” in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to them: “your house is left to you desolate” (Mt 23:38).

**<sup>20</sup>These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim. <sup>21</sup>Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and beneath their wings was the form of human hands. <sup>22</sup>As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. Each one went straight ahead.**

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**<sup>1</sup>Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the Lord’s house which faced eastward. And behold, there were twenty-five men at the entrance of the gate, and among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people.**

Twenty-five men - In chapter eight the twenty-five men were priests (or so I believe) and because the message of these twenty-five men is not of priests, but of leaders, I believe these to be different men.

Jaazaniah son of Azzur - This is not the same Jaazaniah of chapter eight (notice that they have different fathers).

**<sup>2</sup>And He said to me, “Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city,**

Devise iniquity - This is referring to a “defiance of the prophet’s warnings and planning a revolt against Babylonian authority which, in fact, ended in disaster. Like Jeremiah (27:12ff), Ezekiel condemned rebellion against the king of Babylon as a revolt against God’s will (cf. Ezek 17)” (Fisch 57).

**<sup>3</sup>who say, ‘Is not the time near to build houses? This city is the pot and we are the flesh.’ <sup>4</sup>Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy!”**

Is not the time near to build houses? - “The possible interpretations of these words are as follows:

1. “AV translates, ‘It is not near’ (i.e. the threatened judgment); ‘let us build houses.’ This sentiment expresses confidence that all will be well and, if building houses is taken as a symbol of peaceful activity (cf. 28:26), it advocates a policy of ignoring the threat of a further Babylonian invasion. A

variant of this is to interpret 'houses' as 'fortifications', but this is not warranted by the ordinary Hebrew word *battim*, though it would fit a context of warlike preparations. A more serious weakness of this interpretation is the linguist one. The Hebrew reads *lo' begarob benot battim*, literally 'not at hand to build houses.' The infinitive 'to build' can hardly become the hortative 'let us build', and the word 'at hand' must be complementary to the idea of 'house building.'

2. "On the basis of Jeremiah 29:5, Keil took 'house building' as a reference to living in exile and this slogan as a deliberate attempt to ridicule Jeremiah's policy. The meaning would thus be 'the house building in exile is still a long way off; it will not come to this, that Jerusalem should fall... into the hands of the king of Babylon.' This ingenious suggestion presupposes, however, that reader as well as hearer would automatically recognize the allusion to Jeremiah's teaching, and this must be considered very doubtful.
3. "The RV and RSV margins phrase as a question: 'Is not the time near to build houses?' That is to say, 'We are quite safe: let us carry on our normal peacetime occupations.' This is not impossible, and the LXX also translates interrogatively 'have not the houses been recently rebuilt?' But it is not easy to see why the advocates of such peaceful policies should be condemned by Ezekiel as devising iniquity and giving wicked counsel.
4. "There is much to be said, therefore, linguistically and in the context, for the RV, RSV rendering, namely that it is inappropriate to be building for peace when danger threatens. The only right policy is to prepare for war in the firm assurance that the city defenses will be impregnable: the defenders will be as safe from the fires of war as meat is in the cauldron that protects it from the flames. Such an attitude would readily be seen by Ezekiel to be sheer folly and deserving of the sternest condemnation. It not only ignored the explicit warnings of Jeremiah that resistance to Babylon would bring greater disaster than submission (cf. Jer 21:8-10), but it also reeked of the sublime self-confidence which was to be Jerusalem's undoing" (Taylor 108,109).

Number four is the solution I choose as the correct one within the context of the Ezekiel.

"In their evil counsel, the rebel leaders urge preparation for war with Babylon; consequently normal occupations, such as house building must be deferred for a later period" (Fisch 57).

This city is the pot and we are the flesh - "In assuring themselves of the adequate protection which the walls of Jerusalem would afford them in the event of an attack by

the army of Babylon, the planners of the rebellion used a simile familiar at the time. The pot protects the flesh within it from the fire, and the meat is only removed after it has been sufficiently cooked. Similarly, the walls of the city would give protection to its inhabitants, and only a natural death, not the sword of the enemy, would end their lives. Ehrlich offers a different interpretation of the verse. He construes the first clause as interrogative and gives the phrase 'to build houses' the meaning which it has in 1 Chronicles 17:10 'to establish a dynasty.' Now that Nebuchadnezzar has carried off the king, Jehoiachin, and his household, have we not the opportunity of seizing power for ourselves? As a caldron only serves for cooking meat in it, so the State only exists for us to secure advantage from it! On this view, the rebels are represented as being self-seekers and not patriots" (Fisch 57).

Prophecy - "The repetition expresses the importance of the call to the prophet and the urgency of the message he is to deliver" (Fisch 57).

**<sup>5</sup>Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the Lord, "So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts."**

I know your thoughts - All through this book Ezekiel is trying to emphasize that God knows everything—even our thoughts and what we do in secret.

**<sup>6</sup>"You have multiplied your slain in this city, filling its streets with them."**

Your slain - "The figure of the pot and flesh is given a new meaning. The corpses of innocent people slain in the streets of Jerusalem will be the flesh which will remain in the pot, but they who engineered the rebellion and shed blood will be dragged out of the city to suffer the punishment they deserve" (Fisch 58).

**<sup>7</sup>"Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of the city are the flesh, and this city is the pot; but I shall bring you out of it.**

**<sup>8</sup>You have feared a sword; so I will bring a sword upon you,' the Lord God declares."**

Feared a sword - "With all their talk about security (v. 3), the leaders really feared an attack from Babylon and turned to Egypt for help (17:15). Their fears will be justified by events" (Fisch 58).

**<sup>9</sup>"And I shall bring you out of the midst of the city, and I shall deliver you into the hands of strangers and execute judgments against you. <sup>10</sup>You will fall by the sword. I shall judge you to the border of Israel; so you shall know that I am the Lord."**

Border of Israel - 2 Kings 25:1-7 tells us that Zedekiah and the princes with him were judged and killed at Riblah on the borders of Israel.

**<sup>11</sup>“This city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be flesh in the midst of it, but I shall judge you to the border of Israel.”**

This city will not be a pot for you - The leaders were saying Jerusalem was a pot and the people flesh. (“We are in danger while in the city, so it must be fortified.”) But God tells them that the danger they will face will not be in the city, but on the borders of the nation.

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

But have acted according to the ordinances of the nations - “Their wickedness consisted in, among other things, doing the ordinances of the nations around them. Chapter 5:7 says just the opposite. There we are told they did not do the ordinances of the nations around. If all scripture were to be literally understood we would have a contradiction here; but, of course, all scripture is not to be literally understood. Ezekiel 16:47 is the answer in regard to these two passages” (McGuiggan 113).

**<sup>13</sup>Now it came about as I prophesied, that Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, “Alas, Lord God! Wilt Thou bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?”**

Pelatiah son of Benaiah - “The text does not insist on it, but it seems reasonable to suppose that Pelatiah was a known figure in Jerusalem and that his death, which was seen in the visions, actually took place far away in Jerusalem at that very moment. Subsequent reports of the incident reaching the exiles would have confirmed the authenticity of the vision and of Ezekiel’s supernatural powers. Similar instances may be found in the events relating to the siege and fall of Jerusalem (cf. 24:2,16,27). The incident so frightened Ezekiel, as another such occurrence did the early church (Acts 5: 5), that he again pleaded with God for his people (cf. 9:8). It is this intercession which leads into the second of his messages in this chapter, relating to a hopeful future for the despised exiles” (Taylor 110).

**<sup>14</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>15</sup>“Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Go far from the Lord; this land has been given us as a possession.’**

“It is early to be finding at this stage a prophecy of hope for the exiled city. In the main this was kept for the period after the fall of Jerusalem, i.e. in chapters 33 onwards. But other passages in these opening oracles indicate that God had plans to restore a remnant of His people (e.g. 5:3; 6:8-9; 12:16; 16:60, etc.), and these would return to their native land to become the heirs of all their nations’ heritage and not least to enjoy a new covenant relationship with their God. In this Ezekiel was aligning himself with the

hopeful outlook of his older contemporary, Jeremiah (cf. Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:39f)” (Taylor 110).

Your brothers - “Only here is mention made in so unusually personal a way of Ezekiel’s brothers.

Fellow exiles - “The following ‘fellow exiles’ clearly points in the same direction. Of the fourteen occurrences of the word no less than nine came in the extensive law of the Jubilee Year in Leviticus 25 (vv. 24,26,29,31,32,48,51,52) which regulates the redemption and return of close possessions... Thus we must see this word to mean the circle of those from whom a man could be called upon to help his family, especially on an occasion incurring the law of redemption” (Zimmerli 261).

“But this seems to be a poor translation on the part of the NAS. It literally means ‘your redemption men’ and refers to your next of kin i.e., the kinsmen duty bound to redeem you and your property if you are reduced to alienating them (Lev 25:25-55). The term fits the context in which rights in an inheritance are at issue. The threefold repetition of kinship expressions at the beginning of the statement, followed by the elaboration ‘all... Israel entire,’ underlines the extent of the diaspora, as if answering the prophet’s concern (v. 13) over Israel’s extinction: the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah can hardly be complete when the diaspora is taken into consideration. ‘All the house of Israel entire’ (recurs only in restoration prophecies 20:40; 36:10), as opposed to those in the homeland, must include all Israelites in exile, the northern deportees as well as the exiles of Judah” (Greenberg 188).

This land has been given us - “The Jerusalemites’ arrogation to themselves of all the exiles’ property (11:14f) on the ground that the latter had been removed from YHWH belongs to this vision as another aspect of the central issue of YHWH’s nearness and distance. It appears that after the deportation of King Jehoiachin and Judah’s aristocracy, a question arose as to their rights in the land and in YHWH (the interconnection of these two comes out in the incident recorded in Joshua 22). Only the homelander could carry on the traditional temple worship of YHWH, just as only they actually possessed the land. A claim followed that they alone constituted henceforth ‘the people of YHWH’ and the heirs to the covenant promises. To the general claim, Jeremiah 24 addresses itself; the homelander are likened to a basket of bad figs, destined for destruction; the exiles are good figs, destined for replanting in the land. They shall be given a heart to know YHWH, and through them the ideal relationship with Him will be reestablished: ‘They shall be my people and I will be their God.’” (Greenberg 203-204).

**<sup>16</sup>“Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Though I had removed them far away among the nations, and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.””**

**<sup>17</sup>“Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “I shall gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel.””**

Sanctuary for them for a little while - “To the humiliating allegation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the exiles, being far removed from the temple, forfeited the Fatherhood and protection of God, comes the Divine retort that they still preserve their relationship to Him by their Houses of Worship and Houses of Learning, each of them serving the purpose of a miniature Temple in which the spirit of God was present (*Megillah* 29a). The Synagogue is even now called ‘a little sanctuary’ in allusion to this verse. The rendering ‘a sanctuary for a little while,’ is less probably, as Ezekiel nowhere expresses the thought that the captivity is soon to be ended” (Fisch 60).

M<sup>e</sup>at is in apposition to *miqdas*, as in ‘ezer m<sup>e</sup>at “ little help” (Dan 11:34).

**<sup>18</sup>“When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. <sup>19</sup>And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,**

I shall give them one heart - “Note the divine initiative of verse 19—it is God who gives the new heart, and the new spirit within them. Here the stress is on the divine initiative but in 18:31 the stress is on the human cooperation with God. The story here of God making the first move in the direction of a reconciliation between Himself and His creatures is taught all through the Bible. 2 Corinthians 5:17ff and Romans 5:6ff give us that story in explicit terms. But surely 1 John 4:19 is as clear as any passage in the Bible on the matter. God is the one who initiates moral reformation. Philippians 2:12-13 specifically says so. And listen to Hebrews 13:20-21: ‘May the God of peace... equip you with every good thing for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ...’ (NIV) We need to not only preach this, we need to expound it—God is not only the justifier of the sinner, He is the sanctifier of the sinner” (McGuiggan 114-115).

Compare 1 Corinthians 12:6; John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 3:5.

One heart - “In Jeremiah 32:29 ‘one heart’ is complimented and explained by ‘one way’— singleness of mind and constancy of conduct. The contrasting expression is *beleb waleb* (Psa 12:3) ‘with two hearts,’ i.e., insincerely” (Greenberg 190).

**<sup>20</sup>that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. <sup>21</sup>But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I shall bring their conduct down on their heads,” declares the Lord God.**

I shall be their God - “As always, the covenant promise of blessing and union with God as His peculiar people (20) is set alongside the solemn consequences that will come upon the heads of those ‘whose heart goes after’ all the corrupt practices from which they are to keep themselves free (cf. 18). It is worth remembering that God’s blessings

always have a reverse, as well as an obverse, side. They are never to be thought of as a superlative collection of benefits available for all those who wish to take advantage to them. Moses set before the people 'a blessing and a curse' (Deut 11:26); Christ spoke of two ways, one leading to life and the other to destruction (Mt 7:13f). The infinite gain of heaven is always matched in scripture by the irreparable loss of hell" (Taylor 112).

**<sup>22</sup>Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. <sup>23</sup>And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. <sup>24</sup>And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me. <sup>25</sup>Then I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.**

Glory of the Lord - God's glory and His presence left the temple at this time and He would not return until chapter 43:1-4. One of the reasons we study the Old Testament is to try to understand some of the concepts found in the New Testament. One such concept is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 6:19; 1 Thess 4:8; Gal 4:6; Acts 13:52; 11:24; 6:3). God tells us that our body is the temple of God and God dwells in it (1 Cor 6:19) but many people choose to misunderstand this teaching, consequently bringing forth various arguments to confound the truth. One argument is that if God actually dwells in us, then when we sin He must leave. But by looking at this passage in Ezekiel we can learn that God stayed in His temple until the last moment—when the people had completely apostatized. Before that, even though the people had been sinning for several centuries, God did not leave His temple. And this is the same with us. God will not leave His temple, our body, until the last possible moment when we will not repent. But if we ever do repent, then God will return just like He does in Ezekiel.

### **Lessons concerning "The Withdrawal of God"**

1. It is never by His own will—sinful man forces Him to do so.
2. It signals trouble once He is gone (cf. 2 Thess 1:7-9; Jas 4:8).
3. It does not indicate that all have lost His presence or that, while life goes on, will not find Him willing to return.

Let us talk about the structure of this vision (8 -11). We have:

1. Audience of elders (8:1a).
2. God's hand falls upon the prophet (start of vision) (8:1b).
3. God seizes figure and Spirit takes him to Jerusalem in a vision (8:2-3).

4. God goes eastward and Spirit takes him back to Chaldea in a vision (11:22-24a).
5. The vision “lifts off” the prophet (end of vision) (11:24b).
6. The prophet tells the elders what he saw (11:25).

The rest of the vision would look something like this:

- I. Justification of the punishment (8:5-10:7).
  - A. Sin (cultic abominations capped by social wrongdoings) 8:5-18.
  - B. Punishment (punishment grounded on social wrongdoings) 9:1-10:7.
- II. Center of the vision—the glory of God (10:8-22).
- III. An assurance of survivors (11:1-21).
  - A. Sin (a cabal charged with social wrongdoings) 11:1-13.
  - B. Punishment (answers question of verse 13. Preferment of exiles over Jerusalemites sunk in cultic abominations) 11:14-21.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

“In the present chapter, the prophet receives the command to demonstrate to the captives in Babylon through the medium of symbolical actions the certainty of the nation’s approaching doom. They were still possessed of a false confidence in the security of Israel, the indestructibility of the temple and the permanence of the Davidic dynasty. Ezekiel assumes the role of a refugee who tries to escape from a beleaguered city. By so doing he personifies what is about to happen to the population of Judea. The remnant of the people will be banished from their land, and the king who will attempt to flee from the condemned city will be captured and brought to Babylon where he will die. In another symbolical act, Ezekiel portrays the hardships in the besieged Jerusalem. As for the current argument that prophecies which foretell evil need not be taken seriously, he emphatically warns the people that the impending disaster is near at hand and they would be soon convinced of the authenticity of his prediction” (Fisch 63).

“The argument of the book so far has consisted mainly of the iteration of Ezekiel’s message that Jerusalem is doomed. He has demonstrated this by symbolic action, in vision and by spoken oracle. He has given adequate justification for such a fate by

describing the iniquities, religious and moral, which have brought it on. Now a new series of actions and oracles attempts to deal with objections that people raise to this horrifying prospect. The section could, in today's idiom, be entitled 'objections to judgment,' as long as it is understood that the objections are raised only to be demolished. They are the objections of those who say, 'we have heard all these threats before, but nothing has ever come of them.' Or of all the false prophets who claim equal authority for oracles which promise peace and safety. Or of those who think that it is impossible for the Lord to cast away His people: they must be delivered, either for the sake of the righteousness of the few, or on the ground of God's covenant-mercies in times past. Note in passing the parallelism between the acted prophecies of chapters 4 and 5, following directly after the first account of his vision, and those of chapter 12, which follow the second account" (Taylor 113-114).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house."**

"The people to whom Ezekiel was sent were from the outset called a 'rebellious house.' On this occasion the deserved appellation is given to them once more. Because they are rebels the prophet is instructed to go through the motions of preparing baggage for exile. Bag and baggage were to be openly displayed in the sight of the people of Tel-abib, who had already experienced flight and exile, so that they might understand what was about to happen to Jerusalem. The baggage was to be made ready in the day, but escape would begin at evening. Thus there would be protection from the sun and also escape from detection by Chaldean guards along the way" (Howie 35).

Who have eyes to see but do not see - This is a familiar refrain in the prophets (cf. Isa 6:9; Jer 5:21) and it is indicating the stubbornness of the people. Isaiah preached over 180 years before and the people are still guilty of the same sins. For fourteen months Ezekiel had been telling the people that the city would be destroyed, but they refused to listen to him.

**<sup>3</sup>"Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself baggage for exile and go into exile by day in their sight; even go into exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand though they are a rebellious house."**

In their sight - Literally "to their eyes." This is repeated seven times in verses 3-7, emphasizing that the prophet must force himself on their attention. Even so, they may refuse to take notice ("understand" of the next clause is literally "see") since they are rebellious.

Perhaps they will understand - There is always hope that people will listen to the message of God. But because people will not listen should never be used as an excuse not to give the message. It is not as important to God whether *people listen* to

His message as it is that *we proclaim* that message. God just wants us to be faithful and do our job— regardless of what happens.

**<sup>4</sup>“And bring your baggage out by day in their sight, as baggage for exile. Then you will go out at evening in their sight, as those going into exile. <sup>5</sup>Dig a hole through the wall in their sight and go out through it. <sup>6</sup>Load the baggage on your shoulder in their sight, and carry it out in the dark. You shall cover your face so that you can not see the land, for I have set you as a sign to the house of Israel.”**

In the dark - “The Hebrew noun is not the usual *choshech* but *alatah* which, apart from verse 12, occurs again only in Genesis 15:17. It signifies the darkness which follows a sunset” (Fisch 64).

You shall cover your face - “Some believe that this is symbolic for it corresponds to the night departure and to the exiles’ ignorance (darkness, blindness) concerning the foreign land to which they were to go. Others feel that it is talking about shame felt by the exiles over their disgrace (cf. Jer 9:18). Covering the face was, however, also a sign of grief (2 Sam 19:5 with a different verb)” (Greenberg 210-211).

However, it seems best to understand this phrase in connection with verse 12b and the fact that Zedekiah was blinded by the Babylonians.

**<sup>7</sup>And I did so, as I had been commanded. By day I brought out my baggage like the baggage of an exile. Then in the evening I dug through the wall with my hands; I went out in the dark and carried the baggage on my shoulder in their sight.**

And I did so, as I had been commanded - Once again Ezekiel shows himself to be very different from his people. He obeys where they are rebellious; he sees where they do not and he hears when they refuse to do so.

Wall - “The wall referred to is that of a house (Hebrew *qir*) as distinct from home, which means a city wall) and is an indication of the settled manner of life of the exiles who must have lived in typical Babylonian dwellings built of sun dried bricks (cf. 8:1; Jer 29: 5)” (Taylor 115).

**<sup>8</sup>And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup>“Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, ‘What are you doing?’ <sup>10</sup>“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ‘This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem, as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.’ <sup>11</sup>“Say, ‘I am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them; they will go into exile, into captivity.’”**

Has not the house of Israel - “In the Hebrew the interrogative often expresses an affirmation. The meaning is, ‘the people have surely asked thee’” (Fisch 65).

This burden concerns the prince - In Hebrew this is *hannasi hammassa hazze*.

“This alliterative phrase is patterned after Jeremiah 23:33. The meaning of the sentence is: this burden—the exile’s pack—represents the chief (i.e. prince or king) and the Israelites of Jerusalem; they will be taken out of the city into exile. Two things are un-expected: the reference to two subjects, the chief (king) and the people, and the symbolic character of the exile’s pack (*massa* is linked with *nasa ‘al katef*, ‘carry/the pack/ on the shoulder’ in verses 6ff); but as we shall see, the double aspect of the prophet’s actions (predictive and symbolic) carries into the rest of the interpretation as well” (Greenberg 211-212).

All the house of Israel - “The analysis of the inhabitants of Jerusalem into ‘chief (king) and house of Israel’ follows a common practice of pairing king and city/people as equal partners in a unity of destiny. Often in the Book of Joshua the defeated are recorded as (the populace of) a certain city and its king (6:2; 10:28ff; etc.); Amaziah’s summary of Amos’ seditious prophesying mentions only king and people (Amos 7:11); compare Hosea 10:7 (‘Samaria is destroyed, its king is like foam,’ the verse is to be so divided). The particular humiliation of the king, on account of which he is singled out, arises from the popular conception of him as a talisman. Striking testimony to this estimate of Zedekiah is Lamentations 4:20, in which the king is called “out breath of life” and his shadow is a guarantee of life among the nations” (Greenberg 212).

I am a sign to you - God explains what Ezekiel’s symbolic actions meant.

**<sup>12</sup>“And the prince who is among them will load his baggage on his shoulder in the dark and go out. They will dig a hole through the wall to bring it out. He will cover his face so that he can not see the land with his eyes. <sup>13</sup>I shall also spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. And I shall bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans; yet he will not see it, though he will die there.”**

I shall also spread My net over him - “The king’s intended flight from the doomed city will be frustrated by God. Rashi and Kimchi (Rashi = Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105, Jewish commentator and David Kimchi, 1160-1235 Jewish commentator) quote a legend that there was a subterranean passage from Zedekiah’s palace to the plains of Jericho through which he attempted to escape. To thwart his plan, God caused a gazelle to run along the top of that passage pursued by Babylonian soldiers. When they reached the exit of the passage, they saw Zedekiah coming from it and so captured him” (Fisch 66).

Compare Jeremiah 39:7; 52:4-11 and 2 Kings 25:1 -7 where the Babylonians blind Zedekiah so that he does not see the land although he will die there.

**<sup>14</sup>“And I shall scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I shall draw out a sword after them. <sup>15</sup>So they will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them the nations, and spread them among the countries. <sup>16</sup>But I shall spare a few of them from the sword, the famine, and the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”**

And I shall scatter to every wind - “The language of verse 14 is reminiscent of 5:2, as all the armies and helpers (literally ‘help’, the abstract being used for the personal plural) of the prince are scattered with the sword. Their experiences will teach them what otherwise they would never have meant, namely that I am the Lord. What men fail to appreciate in prosperity, they will occasionally learn through adversity” (Taylor 116).

So they will know that I am the Lord - Everything that God did and will do to the people had the direct purpose of forcing them to realize that “I am the Lord.”

“When the prophecies of doom are fulfilled, the remnant of Israel which is scattered among the nations will realize that God is not only the Creator, but also the Ruler of the universe, and that punishment of the wicked is an essential feature of His sovereignty over mankind. This they will transmit to their conquerors, so that these will also learn the true nature of God” (Fisch 66).

But I shall spare a few of them - “Only as they confess their people’s sins among the nations will it be seen that Israel’s God is both holy and powerful: without such admissions He would simply be regarded as incapable of protecting His people against the enemy. Ezekiel here shows his passion for Yahweh’s vindication in circumstances which, without his message, would have brought nothing but disgrace in heathen eyes upon His name” (Taylor 116).

**<sup>17</sup>Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>18</sup>“Son of man, eat your bread with trembling, and drink your water with quivering and anxiety.”**

Eat your bread - In 4:10 Ezekiel’s eating of the meal was to symbolize the scarcity of the food but here it is indicative of the fear and terror that would seize the people when Babylon laid siege to the city. God lets them know that this judgment will come about because of “the violence” of the people and when it is all done, then they “will know that I am the Lord.”

**<sup>19</sup>“Then say to the people of the land, ‘Thus says the Lord God concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel,’ they will eat their bread with anxiety and drink their water with horror, because their land will be stripped of its fullness on account of the violence of all who live in it. <sup>20</sup>And the inhabited cities will be laid waste, and the land will be a desolation. So you will know that I am the Lord.”**

People of the land - "This phrase (Hebrew *'am ha'ares*) is used consistently to refer to the peasant population of Judah, as distinct from the ruling classes, and particularly to those left there during the exile" (Taylor 117).

"Before the exile it was the designation of the land owning full citizens of Judah with military responsibility. Only after the exile did the title drop to becoming a deprecatory designation by the pious of the poorer part of the nation, who were despised for their unfaithfulness to the law" (Zimmerli 209).

This phrase is also used in Ezekiel 7:27.

**<sup>21</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,**

The word of the Lord - "There now follows a group of oracles, extending from 12:21 to 14:11, which all relate to the problem of true and false prophecy. This must have been an acute problem for all the prophets of Old Testament times and especially for men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, whose message did not naturally commend itself to their hearers. The struggle between Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer 28) illustrates the issue clearly. Here were two men speaking contradictory words, ostensibly from the Lord. The bystanders were helpless to know which was true. The simple rule of thumb given in Deuteronomy 18:22, the fulfillment of the word spoken, was too far distant to be an immediate guide, and the test of orthodoxy given in Deuteronomy 13:1ff was not relevant to the issue. In the even the verbal contest escalated until Jeremiah pronounced a death prophecy, which did take effect and was his vindication. But this could hardly happen every time" (Taylor 117-118).

**<sup>22</sup>"Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The days are long and every vision fails'?"**

The days are long and every vision fails - This is only four words in Hebrew and all of us understand the power behind a short pithy phrase. Many of our own proverbs were originally longer, but they were shortened to give them strength; so we lose some of the strength of the original Hebrew here. People were saying that they had heard all these prophecies before but nothing ever happened, so there was no reason to become worried now that another prophet was saying the same thing. They have the same attitude as those found in Zephaniah 1:12. This is an Old Testament parallel of 2 Peter 3:4ff.

"From God's retort (v. 25b) that fulfillment will surely come 'in your time (literally days),' it may be inferred that the 'time' alluded to here is to be measured in lifetimes. Generations have lived under the shadow of unfulfilled prophecies; this circumstance has given rise to the disbelief epitomized in this proverb" (Greenberg 227).

**<sup>23</sup>"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel." But tell them, "The**

**days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision. <sup>24</sup>For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. <sup>25</sup>For I the Lord shall speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I shall speak the word and perform it,” declares the Lord God.”**

The days draw near - “The resulting sentence means, ‘the time of the event (realization) of every prophecy is near.’ The expression ‘the time is near’ belongs to doom proclamation, as in 7:7 *qarob hayyom* (the plural *yamim* literally ‘days’ is used here to keep as close as possible to the language of the proverb; but see 22:4). When doomsday comes, the content of every prophecy will materialize; it will then be manifest that none lapsed” (Greenberg 227-228).

“The judgment was to occur soon. I would ask you to notice how the phrase ‘at hand’ is used here. It is used in opposition to ‘many days to come’ (v. 27). There is to be no ‘deferring’ of the judgment (v. 25). Should this not tell us something about the phrase in such passages as Revelation 1:3 and 22:10? It seems clear to me that ‘at hand’ carries within it, two thoughts: 1) It speaks of something near, soon, not far away (time wise); 2) It speaks of something definitely yet future. This would mean that in, say, Mark 1:15 the kingdom was soon to be established and that it had not yet been established. The passage in Isaiah 13:6 is thought to be a plain objection to this view but it seem to me that we are using our inability to match 13;6 with the ‘at hand’ noting to offset the clear meaning of the words ‘at hand.’ I mean we have viewed Isaiah 13:6 as a reference to the Medo-Persian destruction of Babylon (about 200 years after Isa 13:6 was written). This gave us the difficulty of ranking ‘at hand’ elastic enough to cover 200 years so we have become wishy-washy on ‘at hand.’ Liberal scholars have insisted on letting ‘at hand’ mean just that, ‘at hand’ and have claimed the passage was written close to the time of Babylon’s fall. I do not think either of these positions is necessary. I believe the ‘day of the Lord’ on Babylon culminated with the fall of Babylon, but that Isaiah 13 includes God’s bruising of Babylon at the hands of the Assyrian kings like Sargon and Sennacherib who ruled in Isaiah’s day. In any case, the use of the phrase is clear in this Ezekiel passage. So with a blunt rebuke God dismisses an insolent proverb” (McGuiggan 127).

False vision or flattering divination - “The epithets ‘idle vision, empty divining’ are appropriate from the people’s estimate of prophecy, and, in a way, admit its validity. The verse gives the ground of verse 23a: why will the popular proverb go out of use? Be-cause with the arrival of doomsday the woe—prophecies will cease being (regarded as) idle and empty!” (Greenberg 228).

For I the Lord shall speak - “Or, ‘I am the Lord; I will speak.’ The subject is emphatic in Hebrew. That which He speaks will assuredly come to pass by His will. In the past He deferred the execution of His threats to enable the people to avert them by their repentance. On the present occasion the judgment He decrees will be performed ‘in your days’: there will be no deferment” (Fisch 68).

**<sup>26</sup>Furthermore, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>27</sup>“Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies of times far off.’ <sup>28</sup>“Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed,”” declares the Lord God.**

“This section repeats the thought of verses 21-25. The repetition is intended to emphasize that the predicted judgment is both absolute and immanent; it does not belong to the class of prophecies which are conditional upon the future conduct of the people” (Fisch 68).

Even if Ezekiel’s words were true, the people did not believe they would affect them. Ezekiel does acknowledge that there were delays in *other* prophecies—but not in his! These people are going to see first hand the actual fulfillment of Ezekiel’s words.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“After inveighing against the popular illusions as to the safety and peace of the country, Ezekiel denounces the persons who are the originators of such unfounded and misleading confidences” (Fisch 69).

“Among the denunciations of Israel in the first division of the Book of Ezekiel, this chapter stands out for its sympathy with my people (*‘ammi*, seven times), when God is eager to protect from its self-serving leaders. Such benevolence and such a portrayal of Israel as victims recur only in chapter 34” (Greenberg 245).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, ‘Listen to the word of the Lord! <sup>3</sup>“Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are full of their own spirit and have seen nothing.**

Word of the Lord came to me - “Once more we hear the familiar formula: the word of Jehovah came unto him and we are again reminded of the high claim of the scriptures. But the familiar formula takes upon it special significance at this place. The false prophets were prophesying ‘out of their own hearts’ and Ezekiel is telling us that this is a bonafide message from God. If you emphasize ‘ the word of Jehovah came unto me’ you will get his point. The religion of these prophets is man-made religion; it is God made in the image of evil. Self-made religion is vain (Mt 15:9). Self-made religion is in conflict with God (Mt 15: 3,6). Self-made religion will be rooted up (Mt 7:24-27; 15:13). The lying prophets are here told (with words laced with sarcasm): ‘Hear the word of the Lord”” (McGuigan 135).

Prophecy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy - There are few true prophets of the Lord at this time (Ezekiel and Jeremiah may be the only ones). But there were scores of false prophets. These were generally men who prophesied for hire and were virtually “yes men” to the king.

From their own inspiration - “The condensation of the prophets is based, not upon any immorality or villainy of which they may be guilty, but on the way in which they compose their pronouncements. This throws a great deal of light incidentally on the genuine prophetic consciousness in Israel. These foolish prophets ‘prophesy out of their own minds (literally ‘out of their heart’ but in Hebrew the heart, *leb*, was the organ of thought and will as well as being the seat of the emotions). The parallel phrase, ‘who follow their own spirit’ (3), suggests a conflict between the human spirit and the Spirit of God. The truly inspired prophet was to be so dominated by the Spirit of God that his own spirit was in subjection to its influence. There was in prophecy the sense of divine invasion which produced a message that had a quality of supernatural ‘otherness’ about it. It was not simply the product of a human mind. This does not mean that ordinary thought-processes were despised by the prophets: the artifice and skill of their compositions bear witness to that. It does mean, however, that human thought had to be ignited and raised to a higher degree of intensity by the Spirit before a prophet could be sure he was truly a spokesman for the Lord. Though some tried to work this up by self-inflicted means, like the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the true prophet knew that it was not his own doing. ‘The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?’” (Taylor 120-121).

Compare Numbers 16:28; 1 Kings 12:33; Jeremiah 23:16 as opposed to 2 Peter 1:21; Jeremiah 5:30-31; 14:14.

Woe to the foolish prophets - “The Hebrew for ‘foolish’ (*nabal*) denotes a person without perception of ethical and religious claim. He says in his heart ‘there is no God’ (Psa 14:1)” (Fisch 69).

This word covers more than mere stupidity. Some translators translate it as ‘vile’ (Fisch 69).

“The fool was spiritually and morally insensitive; he was inclined to blasphemy (Psa 74:18) and to atheism (Psa 14:1); he was churlish and arrogant, like his namesake Nabal of Carmel (1 Sam 25); he was capable of gross immorality (2 Sam 13:13). He was in fact the very antithesis of all that the wise man stood for in terms of spiritual perception, self-discipline, restraint, godly fear and humility. For prophets to be described thus was strong language indeed, but when we remember that Jeremiah had accused two of them of committing adultery with their neighbors’ wives (23:14; 29:23), we can see that it was fully justified. The whole of Jeremiah 29 really needs to be read in conjunction with Ezekiel’s denunciations in order to appreciate the complexity of the problem with which these two men of God were faced” (Taylor 120).

**<sup>4</sup>“O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins. <sup>5</sup>You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the Lord. <sup>6</sup>They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, ‘The Lord declares,’ when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word. <sup>7</sup>Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, ‘the Lord declares,’ but it is not I who have spoken?”**

Your prophets have been like foxes among ruins - This quote illustrates that these false prophets had no real concern for the people.

“The point of this comparison is not certain and is variously explained. If a man enters through a breach in a ruined building, the fox lurking there flees through another breach and does not make a stand against him” (Rashi).

“As foxes enter a vineyard through ruined walls and destroy its fruits, so the false prophets communicate their falsehoods to the morally weak to the detriment of the whole nation” (Kimachi).

“Possibly the meaning is that foxes find natural habitat among ruins, and similarly among a people in process of dissolution false prophets discover a sphere of activity, because in an atmosphere of insecurity there is eagerness to listen to an optimistic speech. In this way they intensify national danger and make the approaching doom still more certain” (Fisch 69).

Jackals scavenger in ruins (Lam 5:18); the sight of them making, or enlarging, breaches in tumbled walls was familiar (Neh 3:35). They thus benefit from and contribute to ruin.

Gone up into breaches - “A related image: cultivated vineyards and fields were protected from marauders by (stone) fences (Num 22:24; Isa 5:5; Prov 24:31; Psa 80:13). Israel lay defenseless before God’s punitive stroke, for its integrity (fence) was destroyed (breached) by iniquity. The figure is spelled out in Isaiah 30:13. The prophet’s task was on the one hand to warn people of their iniquity (build a fence), and on the other, to intercede with God on their behalf (stand in the breach). Psalm 106:23 employs the latter figure in describing Moses’ archetypal actions in the crisis of the Golden Calf (Ex 32 cf. Ezek 22:30)” (Greenberg 236).

Nor did you build the wall - “The stubborn resistance to the authority which is the source of any commission is shown quite directly in the prophet’s refusal to accept responsibility in Israel. Prophecy in Israel was never a private experience, but a gift given by Yahweh for His people’s good (Amos 2:11). Ezekiel knows, as the written prophecy which preceded him, that Israel, in the time of its going astray (Ezek 14:11; 44:10,15; 48:11), stood under the serious threat of the coming ‘day of Yahweh’ (chapter 7), which was to take on historical form in the impending war. Where, however, the enemy in war had already made breaches in the walls of a city (2 Kgs 25:4), then it was the duty of

those who were concerned for their city to go into these breaches (22:30) and to climb up on the threatened places in the face of hostile fire, or, if others were already there, to work feverishly for the setting up of a new defense wall hurriedly built from stones... even this duty of defending the breaches and closing the threatened gaps the prophets have neglected towards their people. To the question, what is meant by these statements without metaphor? a twofold answer can be given: verse 10 mentions that the prophets disobediently preached peace when they ought to have spoken of the coming judgment. The didactic story of Jonah shows in chapters 3 and 4 how a city could be saved by the giving of a threatening message of judgment. It is this saving function which the prophets of Israel have neglected for their people. Besides this there may be in mind the task of intercession, which was in a special way incumbent upon the prophets, as in Jeremiah 27:18. True prophecy had to know that in a time of danger it had to choose, like Moses, to fulfill the responsibilities of its task in complete disregard of its own concerns (Ex 32:9-14,31-34; Num 14:11-20; Psa 106:23; Isa 53:12). Instead of this the prophets of Israel had handed on uncritically their delusory visions and spoken of them, perhaps personally quite sincere in their beliefs in their deceitful message” (Zimmerli 292-293).

Yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word - “In fact they know nothing of what the future holds for the nations since they receive no enlightenments from God; all they do is to hope that their forecast will be confirmed by events” (Fisch 70).

**<sup>8</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord God. <sup>9</sup>“So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God. <sup>10</sup>It is definitely because they have misled My people by saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace. And when anyone builds a wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash; <sup>11</sup>so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out. <sup>12</sup>Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, ‘Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?’”**

In this section God gives **four reasons why He is against these false prophets:**

1. *They have spoken falsehood* (literally “vanity”) meaning they have given the people things that had no spiritual value (v. 8).
2. *They have seen a lie*—demonstrating that their “visions’ were full of untruth and error (and were probably things they made up anyway v. 8).
3. *They misled the people*—promising peace when God’s true prophets were predicting calamity as a result of the people’s sinfulness (v. 10).

4. They “plastered” the truth—covering up the true problems of the nation and creating a spiritual wall that looked sound and strong. However, at the first blow this wall would quickly crumble.

My hand will be against the prophets - “The punishment is described in three steps which form a climax. At present these prophets possess influence, they are counselors and leaders; when Israel is again a nation upon his own land, they shall have no place in the council of the people. Now they occupy a high place in the roll of citizens and bear distinguished names; then their names shall not be written in the writing (i.e. the book or register-roll) or the house of Israel (cf. Isa 4:3; Ezra 2:62). And finally, they shall not have a place in the land at all; Israel will return while they will perish. Jeremiah had already used similar language in regard to Shemiah, a prophet who misled the exiles (cf. Jer 29:32)” (Fisch 70-71).

Definitely because - This is the Hebrew phrase *ya’an ub<sup>e</sup>ya’an* and it only occurs here and 36:3 and Leviticus 26:43.

“The repetition of the conjunction solemnly emphasizes the offense and impending judgment of the false prophets” (Fisch 71).

And when anyone builds a wall - “The word ‘wall’ (*chayits*) is chosen by Ezekiel because it signifies a wall consisting of stones heaped one upon another which are not cemented together (it has this meaning in the *Mishnah*, cf. *Shebiith* 3.8), and conjures up a very forceful metaphor. Instead of giving the people sound advice in a time of crisis, the false prophets have created in them a spirit of complacency and unwarranted security. They have not built for them a wall which will withstand the storm, but something which will collapse at a touch and leave them exposed” (Fisch 71).

Fisch translates this phrase as “a slight wall.”

Plaster it over with whitewash - “As said expressly in 22:28, ‘they’ who daubed the wall were the prophets: the people built the dry wall—a figure of their unfounded optimism, while the prophets daubed it with worthless stuff (i.e. the whitewash)—their self-inspired predictions of well-being. Such a structure will offer no shelter from the storm (God’s wrath)” (Greenberg 238).

**<sup>13</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “I will make a violent wind break out in My wrath. There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath. <sup>14</sup>So I shall tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the Lord. <sup>15</sup>Thus I shall spend My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it over with whitewash; and I shall say to you, ‘The wall is gone and its plasterers**

**are gone, <sup>16</sup>along with the prophets of Israel who prophesy to Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,' declares the Lord God.**

I shall tear down the wall - "The image of the collapsing wall is already found in Isaiah 30:13. Whilst there it was used for a collapse brought about, not by any outward pressure, but solely by the inner weakness of the wall, here it is used openly for the divine day of crisis coming in outward misfortune, which will reveal its hidden flaw" (Zimmerli 295).

Bring it down to the ground - "In Lamentations 2:2 it is Judah's fortresses that have been 'leveled to the ground,' while in Micah 1:6 the foundations of Samaria are to be exposed. The language of this clause is thus more appropriate to massive demolition than to the fall of a mere wall; it facilitates the intrusion, in the next clause, of the reference to Jerusalem" (Greenberg 238).

When it falls, you will be consumed in its midst - "When it (fem.) falls and you perish within it (fem.). The reference is not to the wall (masc.) but to the city of Jerusalem (cf. 5:12). In its rendering of verse 13, T (*Aramaic Targum*) had already supplied the political referents of the natural elements; here it perceives the shift from wall to city and extends it over the whole verse: 'I will demolish the city in which you have prophesied falsely; I will cast it to the ground so that its foundations are exposed; it will fall and you will perish within it.' Note that in this interpretation prophets in Jerusalem are referred to" (Greenberg 238).

"At this stage the figure of the wall, which began by representing popular optimism, comes to be identified with the city of Jerusalem, on whose impregnability their empty hopes had centered. The strongest condemnation, however, goes not to the people but to those who led them into error. 'Woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!' (Mt 18:7)" (Taylor 123).

"Two substitutes for true prophets are denounced: counterfeit prophets in the exile (vv. 2-9) and in Jerusalem (vv. 10-15), and fortune-tellers (among the exiles?). Each in their own way vitiated the oracles of God and Ezekiel's mission. The counterfeit diverted the people's minds from the impending doom, and thus guaranteed it. The divine anger at them often breaks out in the prophecies of Jeremiah (e.g. 14:14; 23:16-23). They are unaware of the 'tempest of YHWH, the fury that has gone forth' against the wicked (23:19). They promise, 'all will be well with you; no evil will befall you' (verse 17); they 'heal the fractures of my people superficially, saying, all is well when nothing is well' (6:14 8:11). Their effect is to 'strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that they do not repent each one of his evil' (23:14). These counterfeits will die by the sword and famine when Jerusalem falls (14:15). Passages in Jeremiah's letter to the exiles denounce 'prophets and diviners' among them who 'beguile' them (Jer 29:15,18,23,28). The false hopes they inspired can be inferred from Jeremiah's insistence that the exile will be long, and that they may therefore settle down and build their lives in Babylonia. There was thus no difference between the exile and Jerusalem in this matter; both

contained counterfeit prophets who thwarted the prophets of doom. And just as Jeremiah could fulminate against such men both at home and abroad, so might Ezekiel” (Greenberg 244).

Along with the prophets of Israel - God makes it clear that the prophets lie at the heart of this curse. They are to blame. Feelings of peace and security have always given people an attitude of indifference. People and nations of affluence today would be wise to pay attention!

**17“Now you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who are prophesying from their own inspiration. Prophecy against them, <sup>18</sup>and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the women who sew magic bands on all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature to hunt down lives! Will you hunt down the lives of My people, but preserve the lives of others for yourselves? <sup>19</sup>And for handfuls of barley and fragments of bread, you have profaned Me to My people to put to death some who should not die and to keep others alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies.””**

“When true religion does not fulfill its assigned role properly substitutes for it begin to appear in numerous places and countless forms. The women described in verses 17-23, obviously soothsayers, witches or sorceresses, are good examples of such perverse substitutes for religion. We should not be surprised that this type of activity was found alongside the high religion of Israel; even church people today are fascinated by such expressions of the occult as crystal-ball and horoscope readings” (Howie 38).

Sew magic bands on all wrists - Bracelets that were thought to transmit the power of the sorceress to the prophetess. The KJV translates the word “bands” as “pillows.”

To hunt down lives - “Lives” is the word for soul (Hebrew *nepes*).

“It is not possible that the word for soul could have the meaning of a disembodied spirit: this is totally unhebraic concept. It means the total person, the self, not just a part of him. By their sorceries these women were trying to possess and dominate those who came under their influence, and like so many witch-doctors they held the power of life and death over them” (Taylor 124).

“‘Hunt’ is the Hebrew word *soded* which is an intensive of *sud*, ‘hunt down’ (not kill), probably with reference to any objects (*n<sup>e</sup>pasot* ‘persons’). A like phrase recurs in Proverbs 6:26, ‘a married woman can trap (*tasud*) an honorable person (*nepes*) with her wiles’; it is a figure for the enticement of gullibles. Theories based on the notion of the magical catching of disembodied souls disregard the absence of evidence that *nepes* ever has such a sense in Hebrew” (Greenberg 239-240).

For handfuls of barley...you have profaned Me - "The fortune-tellers degraded God by invoking Him in their hocus-pocus (Mesopotamian diviners and exorcists regularly invoked deities). Being so closely associated with 'profanation,' the barley and bread are to be taken, not as the paltry price of their service, but rather as means of divination" (Greenberg 240).

Thus their services were bought, and bought cheaply! This proves they were hirelings.

Put to death some who should not die - It is not at all clear exactly how these women were "killing" the people.

One suggestion is that "they were simply speaking their influential words in the right circles against the righteous whose words would bury their business. In Jeremiah 26:20-24 we read of a prophet called Uriah who spoke saying the city would be destroyed. By and by he was killed at the insistence of the false speakers. Jeremiah himself almost met the same end and were it not for influential friends he would have been killed. From a passage such as the one we are considering we can easily conclude that these women prophetesses had a hand in such purges" (McGuiggan 141).

**<sup>20</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against your magic bands by which you hunt lives there as birds, and I will tear them off your arms; and I will let them go, even those lives whom you hunt as birds. <sup>21</sup>I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the Lord. <sup>22</sup>Because you disheartened the righteous with falsehood when I did not cause him grief, but have encouraged the wicked not to turn from his wicked way and preserve his life, <sup>23</sup>therefore, you women will not longer see false vision or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the Lord."**

"In contrast to the condemnation of the prophets (8f, 13ff) the prophetesses appear to be treated quite lightly. Their power is broken and their 'delusive visions' will be seen no more, but apparently they will not suffer more than the loss of their influence and livelihood (23). Their fault is no more than that they have 'disheartened the righteous' and encouraged the wicked' (22). They have in fact caused damage to the people's moral and abused the influence which the uncertain times thrust into their hands. They have been moral bloodsuckers at a time when the people needed as never before to lean upon the one holy God who treats them all as individuals with the strictest fairness and impartiality. They offered the promise of a spurious salvation, when true safety was available to all who would turn from their wicked ways. Mild as it was, they certainly earned their condemnation" (Taylor 125).

## LESSONS

1. There is a difference between the true prophet of God and the false. Notice that the false prophets were giving a message that the people wanted to hear; they were giving them hope (but a false hope) and they were more numerous than the true prophets of God. The false prophets were “prophesying out of their own inspiration,” they “were foolish,” they “follow their own spirit,” they “are like foxes among the ruins” and “prophesy and then hope that it will come true.”
2. Contrast their characteristics with those of Ezekiel. Ezekiel always had “thus says the Lord” and he was not foolish but obedient. He was a watchman helping the nation of Israel and he knew that what he said would come true.
3. Today, when we are examining a person and a teaching, we need to see if his teaching agrees with the Bible and if his characteristics are those of a man like Ezekiel or of the false prophets.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“After dealing with the false prophets in the preceding chapter, Ezekiel now turns to the people whose encouragement and patronage are responsible for their activity. They respond to a popular demand and announce what the men who inquire of them want to hear. No genuine revelation from God is possible in such circumstances. All that a true prophet can bring to the people is an exhortation to abandon their evil ways” (Fisch 75).

**<sup>1</sup>Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me. <sup>2</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>3</sup>“Son of man, these have set up their idols in their hearts, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?”**

Some elders of Israel came to me - Perhaps they came to learn the situation in Jerusalem. They received a scorching sermon instead!

Have set up their idols in their hearts - An idiom which means “have set their mind upon their idols.”

“The phrase does not imply that they were worshiping idols, but that their thoughts were influenced by pagan ideas, such as believing in magical spells and divination. This has been a ‘stumbling block’ to them wilfully placed by themselves in their way and leading them into ‘iniquity’” (Fisch 75-76).

They had made themselves unfit for divine truth (cf. 2 Thess 2:10). While in Babylon they adopted idolatrous ways.

Should I be consulted by them at all - “A better translation is ‘Shall I allow Myself to be inquired of,’ a question expressing an emphatic negative. They have come to Ezekiel to seek guidance in their perplexity, but I shall certainly not give it to them?” (Fisch 76).

**<sup>4</sup>“Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Any man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in the matter in view of the multitude of his idols, <sup>5</sup>in order to lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel who are estranged from Me through all their idols.””**

Speak to them - “While God’s refusal to answer the people accords with the traditional principle that sin silences the oracle (e.g. Ezek 7:26), the idea that the very resort of sinners to God is itself a mortal offense is singular. No less so is the fact that God’s refusal to respond is conveyed in a response; to these sinners God does speak, if only to justify to them His silence. Evidently more than a mere rebuff to ordinary sinners is being communicated” (Greenberg 252-253).

Sets up his idols in his heart - “The prophet refrains from charging his audience with open idolatry; he reads in their minds. Modern commentators have interpreted this as an attribution of ‘syncretism,’ the worship of YHWH alongside alleged deities of the popular religion, a kind of ‘halting between two opinions’—but the prophet does not say that. Overtly, it would appear, the people’s conduct had been blameless; indeed had they been idolaters no reason can be found for ignoring it until this moment of recourse to YHWH. Since when did YHWH tolerate idolatry in Israel so long as the culprits refrained from seeking His oracles? That the elders came to Ezekiel for an oracle shows that in their own estimation they were true devotees of YHWH, worthy of His attention. God’s indignant response shows how gravely He and his people differ in their conception of the religious reality. The situation resembles that of chapter 20: there too some elders come on an inquiry; they are rebuffed, and the thought of assimilation to the idolatrous nations is imputed to the people (verse 32: ‘what has risen onto your spirits’). There too interpreters have translated into empirical reality what the prophet charges to the people’s thoughts; but can it be that simple? Is it plausible that subverters of YHWH’s authority would have sought an oracle from Him from the zealot Ezekiel? The ‘idols’ in the people’s thoughts and ‘before their faces’ must be a rubric for an unregenerate state of mind. The assurance, fed by the false prophets, that all was well between Israel and YHWH, confirmed the people in their course, a course which, as the exile had proved, stood under God’s condemnation. To presume that normal relations existed between Israel and its God in these circumstances was infuriating obtuseness. God was present among the exiles only ‘as a small sanctuary’; here Ezekiel defines that conception in an original manner. Communication between heaven and earth moves in one direction only. For His own purposes, God will not be accessible for human purposes. There will be no heavenly response to man’s requests for allaying anxiety, no benevolent condescension to movement initiated from below—

not before ‘their uncircumcised heart shall humble itself’ (Lev 26:41)” (Greenberg 252-254).

**<sup>6</sup>“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. <sup>7</sup>For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the Lord will be brought to answer him in My own person. <sup>8</sup>And I shall set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I shall cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the Lord.””**

Repent and turn away from your idols - “The way to this right relationship is by repentance (literally ‘return’) and rejection (literally ‘cause to return’) of their idolatry. The usual term for repentance, from the Hebrew root *naham*, is basically an emotional word meaning ‘to be sorry,’ ‘to grieve.’ Ezekiel however chooses the more practical word ‘to turn back’ (Hebrew *sub*) and he uses it twice in slightly different form to produce the effect which only the RV retains: ‘return ye, and turn yourselves” (Taylor 126).

Make him a sign and a proverb - “A warning, a lesson, as in Numbers 17:25 the sprouted staff of Aaron is to be preserved as ‘a sign to rebels’ of the election of the priestly line. The doom of the inquirer will serve as a warning for all who would force themselves on God” (Greenberg 250).

**<sup>9</sup>“But if the prophet is prevailed upon to speak a word, it is I, the Lord, who have prevailed upon that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. <sup>10</sup>And they will bear the punishment of their iniquity; as the iniquity of the inquirer is, so the iniquity of the prophet will be, <sup>11</sup>in order that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me and no longer defile themselves with all their transgressions. Thus they will be My people, and I shall be their God,”” declares the Lord God.”**

I, the Lord, who have prevailed upon that prophet - “The meaning appears to be: if the prophet, entering into the ‘heart’ of the idolaters, the circle and direction of their thoughts, and the general spirit which animates them, gives them a prophetic oracle which coincides with the line of their thoughts, and thus helps to foster their delusions, that prophet himself has been seduced or enticed; and it is the Lord Who has enticed him. The passage has a resemblance to 1 Kings 22:23. There a lying spirit came forth from the Lord and entered into the prophets of Ahab and deceived them, so that they entered into the designs of the wicked king and gave an answer favorable to him. Here it is the Lord Himself Who entices the prophet. In both cases this enticement or deception was in punishment for previous sins” (Fisch 77).

“If the prophet does give a response to an inquirer of this sort, it is clear indication that the man is a false prophet. He is ‘deceived’ and it is the Lord who has deceived him.

Cooks comments: “such a statement is only intelligible when we remember that ancient habits of thought overlooked secondary causes, and attributed events directly to the action of God” (151). He also compares Amos 3:6 and Isaiah 45:7. “This does not mean that the prophet who acts wrongly is not a free agent and bears no responsibility. He is deceived because he has lost his spiritual perception. He fails to detect the insincerity of his inquirer and he works up some answer, as the false prophets of chapter 13 did, without a true divine inspiration” (Taylor 127).

“The problem of the disobedient prophet, which is here given concrete form beyond the firm traditional statements of Ezekiel 13:1-16, in a way peculiar to Ezekiel, was of concern both to prophecy and the law-givers (Deut 13:2-6; 18:20). That the people knew of the possibility of a prophet being deceived is shown by the narrative of the prophetic school in 1 Kings 13. With Ezekiel it undergoes a grim heightening in the statement that what at first appears to be an occasion of human guilt may be a serious involvement in divine punishment” (Zimmerli 308).

Prevailed - “This seems to be a rather poor translation. This is the Hebrew word *putta*, ‘to fall into error,’ see Jeremiah 20:10, which Moffat excellently renders, ‘perhaps he will make a slip;’ the implied agency, temptation or sin, is here startlingly identified in the next clause as God” (Greenberg 251).

Other translations are “befooled” (Zimmerli 302), “enticed” (Fisch 77), “misled” (Greenberg 247) and “deceived” (Eichrodt 179).

**<sup>12</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>13</sup>“Son of man, if a country sins against Me be committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast, <sup>14</sup>even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,” declares the Lord God.**

Noah, Daniel and Job - The righteousness of Noah and Job were legendary. The naming of Daniel, however, is especially worthy of note here since Daniel was a contemporary of Ezekiel. Daniel is in the high places (kings and princes) and Ezekiel with the common people. Jeremiah also worked with the people who stayed in the land of Judah. Thus all the people will be able to hear God’s word. This also verifies that Daniel was recognized *in his own time by his own people* as a prophet of God. Thus, when Daniel spoke or wrote the people would *instantly* accept his work as canonical and of equal merit with earlier writings. There is no truth to modern notions that Old Testament books, such as the writings of Daniel and Ezekiel, were composed over long periods of time and were not officially accepted until the century or two before Christ.

“These verses are an answer to the objections of those who say that God will not be as ruthless in His judgment as prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel were saying He would be, because He cannot afford to ignore the righteousness of some of His godly people.

To do so, they claim, would make God unjust. God would surely spare His people out of respect for the prayers and piety of the minority of faithful men who staked their all upon Him. This attitude is nothing less than using the saints as an insurance policy to cover the sinners. A community is a trifle embarrassed to have a saint among its number, but it derives a sense of security from his presence, rather like possession of a religious lucky charm... Ezekiel's message is that there are no party tickets to deliverance. The righteous man saves none but himself" (Taylor 127-128).

If a country sins against Me - "Committing a trespass (RV) is far too mild a translation for a strong Hebrew very with its cognate accusative following it. The root meaning is of 'acting treacherously' and so breaking a solemn covenant. It is used of the sin of Achan in relation to the devoted thing (the herem, Josh 7:1) and of a wife's adulterous act (Num 5:12), both of which incurred the death penalty. The meaning here is similarly of a land which by its unfaithfulness deserves the ultimate in punishment" (Taylor 128-129).

"Inasmuch as the hypothetical land of verses 13-20 is not specifically that of Israel, this will be the only passage in Hebrew scripture in which 'trespass (against YHWH)' is predicated of a non-Israelite subject. Since the term refers to misappropriation or violation of the holy things or oath of YHWH, properly speaking, only those who know YHWH can be guilty of trespass against Him. However, note that in Jeremiah 50:14 and Ezekiel 16:50 the wrong-doing of Gentiles toward YHWH is also described in terms used otherwise only of Israel. This is either a glimmer or a religiously more unified view of mankind than is usual for Ezekiel, or a coloration of the hypothetical by the underlying reference (and later explicit application) to Jerusalem" (Greenberg 257).

They could only deliver themselves - "Now it was inferable from Abraham's famous plea on behalf of Sodom that even a few righteous men, like Abraham, might save a city, or that, at the least, one righteous man (Abraham) might save even his undeserving kin (Lot and his daughters; cf. Gen 19:29). [PERSONAL NOTE: Let us remember that the Bible calls Lot a 'righteous man' (2 Peter 2:7).] The exiles might plausibly have banked on such a doctrine, for surely there were among Jerusalem's prophets and priests some righteous who could protect the city, or among the exiles some whose sufferings had purged them in sight of God. Might there not thus be hope for the kin left behind in the homeland? Against such a hope the prophet counterposes his argument. The true doctrine of retribution (to be spelled out in chapter 18) is that even paragons of virtue (the likes of whom do not exist in the depraved city or among the exiles) could not save any but themselves in a general doom; the exiles hold to wrong doctrine and therefore to a vain hope. Nonetheless it was true that there would be survivors, as Ezekiel several times proclaimed (6:8; 7:16; 12:16), and as the curses of the covenant had predicted (Lev 26:39ff). The prophet now brings the article of faith into the context of parental anxiety through a wry linguistic innovation: the survival of depraved son and daughters and their arrival among the exiles would 'console' the parents, not through relief at their escape, but by allaying the exiles doubts about the justice of Jerusalem's fate! In the prophet's overriding concern for theodicy, he transforms every situation into

a witness to God's justice; only the vocabulary betrays the underlying human anguish that is overlaid by and submerged under the prophet's theocentrism" (Greenberg 261-262).

**<sup>15</sup>"If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, <sup>16</sup>though these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord God," they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate."**

"The prophet now turns from famine to wild beasts. Desolation would cause the wild beasts to wander into the land and infest it. Of course it was not rare for wild animals to plague the land (e.g. 2 Kgs 17:24-26; Jer 12:5). The story is the same here. If God should send trouble in the form of wild beasts into the land this would be the signal that people have really gone too far and the presence of a few righteous men would make no difference" (McGuiggan 151).

**<sup>17</sup>"Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, 'Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,' <sup>18</sup>even though these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters, but they alone would be delivered."**

"And this sore judgment is that of military invasion. Would God have foreign troops march over His land destroying towns and taking captives if the nation had not been radically provocative? The very presence of the troops is an indication of the wickedness of the land. It is obvious that the nation is not being overrun due to God's weakness—sin is the problem. Jehovah does not judge without real cause" (McGuiggan 151).

**<sup>19</sup>"Or I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it, to cut of man and beast from it, <sup>20</sup>even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness."**

"Righteousness is neither negotiable nor transferable. The unrighteous are not immune from judgment due to any connection with a righteous person. Righteousness refers to a personal relationship between God and man (cf. Ezek. 18:20). And the fourth instrument of judgment is pestilence. God, in this case permits disease to multiply and this results in death. A nation plagued by disease must have gone beyond the redemption point. In all of these illustrations the one thing that comes through is this—God does not judge without sufficient reason. A land desolated by God by either of these sore judgments is a land that has asked for it" (McGuiggan 151).

**<sup>21</sup>For thus says the Lord God, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it! <sup>22</sup>Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it. <sup>23</sup>Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it,” declares the Lord.**

Sword, famine, wild beasts and plague - here we have Ezekiel’s and Jeremiah’s “triad of doom” plus one - wild beasts. There simply is no escaping God’s judgment!

You will see their conduct and actions - “The context demands that these words refer to ‘unrighteous doings’ for which due punishment has been rated out, and Cooke points out that in Ezekiel ‘doings’ (action - NAS) always has a bad sense. So the remnant of the fugitives would be wicked men; they would ‘lead out sons and daughters’ in a way that not even the three righteous heroes would have been allowed to do (16,18,20) and it would all take place in order to convince the exiles of God’s justice, that He had not brought about the destruction of Jerusalem ‘without cause’(23)” (Taylor 130).

They will comfort you - “At first sight it is hard to imagine how the sight of evil men suffering punishment ‘will console you.’ The word is an unusual one. At its heart, the Hebrew root *naham* means ‘to breathe a deep breath.’ In the form in which it is used here, traditionally translated by the words ‘comfort’ and ‘console’, it means to soothe, to calm down, to cause someone to breathe slowly and deeply. Such comfort is imparted by bringing good news (as in Isa 40:1) or by giving adequate reason to explain what would otherwise be disturbing (as here). As Snaith has pointed out, the word in Hebrew means not to comfort in sorrow, but to comfort out of sorrow, i.e. to bring new facts to bear upon a situation so that the hearer’s attitude of mind is changed. It is with this very purpose in view that the unrighteous survivors of Jerusalem’s overthrow were to be allowed to escape. Only then would the embittered exiles see the justice of it all” (Taylor 130-131).

## LESSONS

1. When people separate themselves from God’s truth, they get the kind of preaching and teaching they desire or choose (2 Tim 4:2-6).
2. When people do not want to submit to God’s will, then they will submit to the will of sin or Satan (Rom 6:13).
3. The righteousness of another person or member of our family will not affect God’s judgment upon us.

4. When God does something it is because He has a good reason (cf. v. 23). Man may not completely understand the reason why God does something, but must learn to trust His infinite wisdom (as with the example of Habakkuk).

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“In this brief chapter, Ezekiel seeks to justify the pending national catastrophe. True, Israel is God’s vine which He hoped would bear precious fruit, but it has degenerated into a wild vine and become valueless. It does not bear fruit nor has its thin wood any material value. Like a log both ends of which are consumed by fire and the middle section charred, Israel is weakened by the loss of the Ten Tribes and by the threat of his hostile neighbors. The remaining singed wood is only fit for fuel, and similarly destruction is the people’s fate. The parable gives the answer to the complacent thought that Israel, God’s elect, must ipso facto be imperishable. The covenant relationship between Him and the nation only remains valid if Israel is loyal to Divine Sovereignty. Treachery dissolves it” (Fisch 81).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest? <sup>3</sup>Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?”**

How is the wood of the vine better than any wood - “The prophet is asked what makes the vine distinctive. There is only one answer—it brings forth fruit for food and drink. This is what is being implied in this verse. This is the lesson that needs to be absorbed. Israel existed not because of her military power or her cultural contributions to the other nations. She was there to bring forth fruit unto God” (McGuiggan 157).

“The nation in comparison with other nations had never been (except a time or two in the past) comparable to the major powers. The only distinctive thing about them was that they had been chosen by God and were the nation which had Jehovah as their God. Aside from that, they were a poor weak little nation” (McGuiggan 155).

Take a peg from it - This same word is used in Isaiah 22:23,25.

**<sup>4</sup>“If has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends, and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything? <sup>5</sup>Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!”**

Put into the fire for fuel - “The wild vine is only fit for fuel, and should a part of the branch to be thrown into a fire and taken out after the ends had been consumed, what is rescued from the flames is quite useless. The meaning of the parable is: Israel, numerically smaller than other peoples, is compared to a vine (Isa 5:1ff) which has

thinner branches than other trees. By failing to produce the spiritual fruits for which he is destined, Israel becomes comparable to the wild vine and is therefore only fit for the fire of Divine punishment. This process of judgment has already begun. Its ends are already consumed in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the Judean captivity in 597 B.C.E. What remains, Jerusalem, is like the singed wood from which nothing can be made” (Fisch 82).

While it is intact, is it not made into anything - “When the whole branch is valueless, how can a fragment of it be of use! So, if the whole nation, consisting of the twelve tribes, failed in its purpose, what hope is there of the remnant in Jerusalem?” (Fisch 82).

**<sup>6</sup>“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘As the wood of the vine the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; <sup>7</sup>and I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. <sup>8</sup>Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,’” declares the Lord God.**

“Comparison of the vinestock to Jerusalem (a surrogate for Judah/Israel) is a grotesque distortion of the traditional use of the vine as a figure for Israel. The figure of the vine aptly expressed several aspects of Israel’s relation to its God. As the vinedresser lovingly cultivated his vineyard, expecting a good reward, so God cultivated and tended Israel, expecting its faithful obedience (Isa 5:1-7); as the vinedresser transplanted shoots into good soil, so God transplanted Israel from Egypt to Canaan (Psa 80:9). Israel was God’s ‘beloved planting’ (Isa 5:7). While this figure was used in eulogistic self-description in Israel’s prayers (‘turn...and attend to this vine’ Psa 80:15), prophets turned it to polemical purpose: both Isaiah (5:1ff) and Jeremiah (2:21) spoke of the disappointment of the divine vinedresser, whose labors yielded only bad grapes. NOTE: Ezekiel did this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Why speak of fruit at all, when the only appropriate element of comparison was the base wood of the vine whose destiny was destruction?” (Greenberg 268).

So have I given up - “Better, ‘appointed, destined’ and ‘so do I give’ should be ‘so have I appointed,’ or ‘so will I destine,’ the prophetic perfect which vividly describes an action as performed although its fulfillment has yet to take place” (Fisch 82).

“The sense as well as the grammar demands that we follow RV mg., ‘so have I given,’ for the inhabitants of Jerusalem were according to the analogy consigned to the fire when the Babylonians first assaulted their city. It was a past event which the temporary relief of Zedekiah’s puppet reign had not affected” (Taylor 132).

They have acted unfaithfully - “The Hebrew is the same as that rendered ‘trespassing grievously’ in 14:13. It denotes rebellion against God by the practice of idolatry” (Fisch 83).

## LESSON

God wants us to be fruitful and faithful (cannot be one without the other). Our lives should show the world who God is and the greatness of His name. If we are not being fruitful either as an individual or in a corporate sense (i.e. the Church), then God will do to us what He did to the Israelite nation, punishment.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“It had been the genius of Hosea to understand the relationship between the Lord and His people in terms of the covenant of marriage, and he had drawn on the experiences of his own wife’s unfaithfulness to demonstrate Israel’s spiritual adultery. Hosea had stressed by contrast the faithful covenant—love that God still showed to His wayward bride (Hos 2:14-20). Ezekiel drew on this analogy of the marriages but couched it in terms which might well have been borrowed from a popular oriental tale of a foundling child being rescued by a passing traveler and eventually wedded by him. The idea of the ‘rags-to-riches’ plot has endeared itself to every generation and every culture that likes listening to good stories. As told by Ezekiel, however, the story is no longer endearing. It has great pathos in its conception, but only a tragic crudity in its telling. The Christian reader may, not surprisingly, feel nauseated at the indelicate realism of Ezekiel’s language, but Ezekiel meant it that way. He was telling of ugly sins and he made the parable fit the facts.

“Instead of dealing with a particular objection, voiced or implied, against his message of judgment on Jerusalem, Ezekiel in this chapter gives a survey of Israel’s spiritual history from her earliest origins up to his own day. This in itself should be enough to justify the Lord in His decisive action against Jerusalem. At the same time, Ezekiel sees beyond the immediate catastrophe of judgment to God’s ultimate purpose of restoration and forgiveness (53-63)” (Taylor 132-133).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, <sup>3</sup>and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Jerusalem, “Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. <sup>4</sup>As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. <sup>5</sup>No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.””**

Make known to Jerusalem - Jerusalem was just a sorry little worthless town when it began. Not even its parents (foreign nations) cared a thing about her. (See also Isa 1:10).

From the land of the Canaanite - “When Jerusalem’s origin is said to be from the land of the Canaanite several references seem combined, e.g. the fact that Jerusalem was a Canaanite city; that Israel first became a family in Canaan (verse 4); and that having originated there its moral character corresponded to its Canaanite origin and had cleaved to it all through its history” (Fisch 84).

“An allusion to the fact that Jerusalem was a Canaanite city, or more probably because it was in Canaan that Israel first became an established nation. The statement is heavy with sarcasm, however, for the term ‘Canaanite’ was a by-word for moral decadence. Nor must we take the accusation of mixed parentage out of its satirical context, for Hebrew tradition looked by to pure Aramaen stock (Deut 26:5) through the patriarchs. The element of truth in Ezekiel’s words is to be found in the undoubted fact that Israel assimilated many foreign influences from her Canaanite environment as well as from non-Semitic sources” (Taylor 133).

“Since the city of Jerusalem is addressed - symbolizing Israel - its pagan antecedents are exploited for reprobating the people. ‘Land of the Canaanite’ (instead of the usual ‘land of Canaan’) emphasizes the pagan pedigree; biblical ethnography connects Canaanites, Amorites and Hittites very closely, and these three to the Jebusites, the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the city (Gen 10:15f; Jud 19:11f; 2 Sam 5:6). B. Mazar combines the meager data on pre-Davidic Israelite contact with Jerusalem (including traditional data that Ezekiel may have known) thus: In Joshua’s time, Adonisedeq, king of Jerusalem, headed an alliance of Amorite kingdoms in the south of the country (Josh 10:1,3). After Joshua’s death (second half of the thirteenth century B.C.E.), the city was razed and the Amorite element wiped out (Jud 1:8ff). The Jebusites, apparently belonging to the Hittites and their satellites, migrated from the north during the first half of the twelfth century B.C.E., after the destruction of the Hittite empire. This is the background of Ezekiel 16:3 (*Jerusalem Through the Ages (Hebrew)*). Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1964, p. 4)” (Greenberg 274).

Your were not rubbed with salt - “It was an ancient custom to rub a child at birth with salt to harden and strengthen its body. In connection with childbirth Dr. Masterman describes present-day custom in Palestine: As soon as the navel is cut, the midwife rubs the child all over with salt, water and oil, and tightly swathes it in clothes for seven days; at the end of that time she removes the dirty clothes, washes the child and anoints it, and then wraps it up again for seven days—and so until the fortieth day (*Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 1918, pp. 118f)” (Fisch 84).

**<sup>6</sup>“When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’  
<sup>7</sup>I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall, and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare. <sup>8</sup>Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered**

**your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord God.**

“In distinction from 22:2ff, but in agreement with 20:4ff (cf. further the secondary 23:36ff), the judgment of the people in what follows is not kept in the form of a simple listing of sins, but in the style of a historical narrative. This is the specific language of Old Testament faith, according to which both the divine encounter and the human disclosure in the face of this encounter repeatedly occur in the sphere of a divine summons and a historical response on the part of Israel. This motif is not an unusual one for Hebrew prophets. Thus according to Hosea 9:10 Yahweh had found Israel ‘like grapes’ in the wilderness. Similarly Deuteronomy 32:10 and also more obscurely Jeremiah 31:2f and Ezekiel 16 speaks of the newborn child, abandoned by its parents, when Yahweh passed by as a foundling child in the open country and whom He had adopted” (Zimmerli 336).

Then I passed by and you - “The second occasion of Yahweh’s passing by is introduced like the first without a motive. The sovereign freedom of Yahweh, who is wherever He wills to be and who is therefore always present at the right time, is to be seen in this. Yahweh affirms what verse 7 has described, on the basis of what He Himself has seen, and does not shrink from the view that He is waiting until the time is ripe. Then He affirm his choice” (Zimmerli 339-340).

Age for fine ornaments - The growth of the nation is described figuratively under the imagery of a girl developing to maturity. “Excellent beauty” (or in the NASV “age for fine ornaments”) is literally ‘ornament of ornaments’ and is defined in what follows as the physical attributes of a beautifully formed woman, viz. a full bust and long hair.

Yet you were naked and bare - “The word for naked (*erem*) need only mean insufficiently clad (cf. Isa 20:2ff), and the same probably applies to ‘bare’...The Jewish commentators interpret: although Israel in Egypt was physically developed, he was still spiritually and morally immature” (Fisch 85).

But Greenberg translates it, “You were stark naked” (277).

Time for love - Greenberg translates this as ‘age of loving’ and *dodim* is specifically used for sexual loving (Ezek 23:17 cf. Prov 7:16; S of S 4:10; 7:13)” (277).

I spread my skirt over you - “The second time the traveler passed by he finds that his rescued waif had come of marriageable age. He uses the customary symbolic act of spreading his ‘skirt,’ i.e. the lower part of his long flowing tunic, over her (cf. Ruth 3:9), thus claiming her in marriage. He then proceeds to clean and purify her, because her outward state had not improved with the passing of time: she was still naked and blood-stained. But with her benefactor’s attentions and his gifts of clothing and jewelry she became a queen among the nations and her beauty was renowned far and wide” (Taylor 135).

“The election of the bride takes place under the protection of legal custom, as can also be seen elsewhere. The ‘covering’ of a person’s nakedness is the opposite to the conduct of an adulteress and that of a disobedient son in a lifting up or removing of the skirt (Hos 2:4-15)” (Zimmerli 240).

Entered into a covenant - “The reference in verse eight to entering ‘into a covenant with you,’ while a legitimate expression for the marriage contract (cf. Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14), hints at the historical reality of which this story is but the allegory. It seem therefore quite permissible to historicize the description of this courtship and to see the covenant of marriage as a reference to the Sinai covenant, the time at which Israel in the purpose of God had come of age as a nation” (Taylor 135-136).

“The assertion that the tale is remote from Jerusalem’s history loses most of its weight when it is realized that Jerusalem stands for Israel; God entered into a covenant only with the people, never with the city (v. 8). On the contrary, it would seem that only on the basis of Israelite history can the details of God’s passing by the girl twice and the untended interval between be explained. In the scheme of exposure stories, between the foundling’s rescue and revelation, it lives under the care of a guardian. Here the girl grows up so untended that her body remains filthy till the time of her marriage. God’s abandonment of the girl after He commanded her preservation until her nubility is an artificial adjustment of the narrative to the Exodus tradition. During the long interval of the Egyptian bondage, Israel flourished and grew, apparently forsaken by its God, until the time of redemption arrived, when it was taken by God to be His people (the child’s abandonment in the ‘field’ and its development ‘like the plants of the field’ recall the Israelites’ labor ‘in the field’ and God’s wonders worked against Egypt, ‘the field of Zoan’ (Ex 1:14; Psa 78:43). The further inference may be ventured that the rejection of the child by its Canaanite parents somehow refers to the forced immigration of Jacob’s family into Egypt because of famine in Canaan, where they were providentially sustained (Gen 45:7; 50:20)” (Greenberg 301).

**<sup>9</sup>“Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. <sup>10</sup>I also clothed you with embroidered cloth, and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. <sup>11</sup>And I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. <sup>12</sup>I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.”**

I bathed you with water - “Yahweh’s choice, in which He makes the girl His own and also thereby becomes hers, is not simply a legal action. This is shown further in the rich fulness of gifts which are given to the chosen girl and which are described in verses 9ff” (Zimmerli 240).

Embroidered cloth - Many-colored cloth is mentioned in Psalm 45:15 in connection with the dress of a queen; in Judges 5:30 among the booty desired by the royal women.

The word is otherwise found only in Ezekiel, apart from 1 Chronicles 29:2 (Ezek 16:10,13, 18; 17:3; 26:16; 27:7,16,24). The participle in the Priestly sphere, denotes the weaver in colors in the making of the sacred tent (cf. Ex 26:36; 27:16; 28:39)" (Zimmerli 340).

Sandals of porpoise skin - "The 'badgers' skin' (AV) is the same material used in the covering of the Tabernacle (Num 4:6ff; Ex 26:14). The various translations give 'seal-skin' (RV), porpoise skin' (RV mg.), 'leather' (RSV). 'Badger' is certainly not right, because the skin had to be both suitable for shoes and also large enough for one of the them to cover the ark. The likeliest candidate is the dugong, a seal-like animal of the order Sirwda, which is found in the Red Sea; its skin is used by the bedouin for making sandals. There may well be a connection between the Arabic for this creature, and the Hebrew word here (*tahas*)" (Taylor 136).

But Greenberg writes that *tuhās* seem to be cognate with Akkadian *dusu* (*tuhšia*) goat/sheep leather out of which luxury boots and sandals were made (278).

**<sup>13</sup>"Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. <sup>14</sup>Then your fame went forth the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord God.**

"For the rich fare (13), reminiscent of God's bounty to Israel, see Deuteronomy 32:13f; Hosea 2:8. This verse (14) brings the climax of God's gracious and lavish generosity to undeserving Israel. Her life, her married status, her wealth, her beauty, are all entirely due to the Lord who chose to do this for her. She contributed no merit or worthiness of her own: it was all of grace. The same truth is expressed by Old Testament writers in Deuteronomy 7:7f; 9:4ff; 32:10; Jeremiah 2:2; and Hosea 9:10. It is also carried over into New Testament though, as it represents perfectly the love and initiative of God in finding, saving and entering into covenant with people who would otherwise be doomed to die. Then, having made them His, He pours upon them every gift and blessing that earth or heaven affords (cf. Rom 8:32; Eph 2:3-8)" (Taylor 137).

**<sup>15</sup>"But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. <sup>16</sup>And you took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors, and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen. <sup>17</sup>You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them. <sup>18</sup>Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them. <sup>19</sup>Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil, and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened," declares the Lord God.**

“The very things which God had given Israel became the means of her downfall: her beauty (15), garments (16,18), jewelry (17) and food (19), even the children of her union with the Lord were used as offerings for pagan sacrifice (20f.). She had forgotten the warning of Deuteronomy 6:10-12: ‘And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers...to give you, with great and godly cities, which you did not fill,...then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’” (Taylor 137).

You trusted in your beauty - What does this pure and beautiful girl do? She plays the harlot (idolatry).

“Aware of her loveliness and her renown as a beautiful woman, she felt that she need not be dependent upon her ‘Husband,’ since she would have many admirers who would lavish gifts upon her. Secondly Israel lost his sense of reliance upon God, and forsook His worship for the idolatry of his neighbors’ gods in the belief that these would assure him success” (Fisch 87-88).

Male images - probably referring to male sexual organs—appealing to the powers of reproduction. These images were worshiped. There are countries today which still practice this.

**<sup>20</sup>“Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me, and you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? <sup>21</sup>You slaughtered My children, and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. <sup>22</sup>And besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.”**

Your sons and daughters...you sacrificed them to idols - “Cf. Jeremiah 3:24 ‘The Shame (= Baal) has eaten up the property of our fathers since our youth—their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters.’ Child sacrifice in the Valley of Ben-Himan is referred to in Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5 (‘burning their sons and daughters in fire’) 32:35 (‘delivering /literally ranking pass over/ their sons and daughters to Molech’); it was one of the practices Josiah abolished in his reform (2 Kgs 23:10 - ‘he polluted the tophet which was in Valley of Ben-Himan so that none should deliver his son and daughter by fire to Molech’). Ezekiel uses the full ‘delivered by fire’ in 20:31; here the abbreviated ‘delivered’ is amply defined by ‘slaughter’ in verses 20f (see 23:37). Kings Ahab (2 Kgs 16:7) and Manasseh (2 Chron 33:6) are taxed with this practice, and 2 Kings 17:17 ascribes it to the northern kingdom in the preceding century as well” (Greenberg 281).

“It was abhorrent to the true religion of Israel, for whom the ancient tradition of God’s thwarting of the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah must have been a permanent reminder that such behavior was not required (Gen 22:13). Though it was by some mistakenly regarded as being the ultimate in religious devotion, Micah taught that

something far deeper and more demanding was asked by Yahweh of His worshippers (Mic 6:6-8)" (Taylor 138).

You did not remember the days of your youth - "This was the cause of the behavior which is so strongly censured. Were Israel mindful of his origins and the part God played therein, he could not be guilty of his infidelities" (Fisch 89-90).

Greenberg translates 20a-21 "As if your harlotry was not enough, you slaughtered my sons as an offering and delivered them over to them!" (271).

**<sup>23</sup>"Then it came about after all your wickedness ('Woe, woe to you!' declares the Lord God), <sup>24</sup>that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. <sup>25</sup>You built yourself a high place at the top of every street, and made your beauty abominable; and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry. <sup>26</sup>You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry."**

Woe, woe to you - "The Targum explains the repeated 'woe' as: woe unto thee because of thy sinfulness and woe unto thee because thou hast not repented of thy sin" (Fisch 90).

You also played the harlot with the Egyptians - "Specific harlotries with Egyptians (26), Philistines (27), Assyrians (28) and Babylonians (29) refer not only to religious infidelity but to political intrigue and alliances. These were repeatedly attacked by the prophets, notably Isaiah (20:5-6; 30:1-5; 31:1) and Hosea (7:11 12:1), but the temptation for the small state of Judah to turn to their more powerful neighbors was always great, even though it never seemed to do them any good when they succumbed to the temptation. Ezekiel tells of an appeal to Egypt by Zedekiah (17:13-17), but it only provided temporary relief (cf. Jer 37:3-5). The hostility of the prophets to such political affiliations was only partly because they regarded them as showing a lack of trust in the protecting power of Yahweh. The main reason was that in any such alliance between a lesser and a greater power, it was normal for the weaker party to take into its religious system the gods and worship of the stronger as sign that they were accepting his patronage. So here the religious and political are closely intertwined in the interpretation of the allegory" (Taylor 138-139).

**<sup>27</sup>"Behold, now, I have stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations. And I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct. <sup>28</sup>Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied; you even played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. <sup>29</sup>You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied."**

I have stretched out My hand against you - “Ezekiel points out incidentally the consequences of Israel’s prostitution of herself. God’s reaction was that He was provoked to anger (26), for which His appointed punishment was to diminish her ‘allotted portion’ (27), which refers to the loss of territory by enemy annexation. We know from the Taylor Prism that Sennacherib did just that in 701 B.C. (His /Hezekiah’s/ towns which I had despoiled I cut off from his land, giving them to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, King of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza, and so reduced his land - *Documents of Old Testament Times* Edited by D. Winton Thomas, 1958, p. 67). Her paramours, while taking advantage of her licentiousness, were in fact disgusted and ashamed because of it (27). And she herself found no satisfaction in what she did, but craved insatiably for more (28,29). Quite apart from the allegorical interpretation of these verses, they stand as a shrewd observation for any generation on the effects of prostitution on the three parties most closely involved” (Taylor 139).

The Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct - Even the foreign nations (cf. Jer. 2:11) were ashamed of Jerusalem. People do not respect vacillating conduct—jumping from one God to another. Even wicked people know limits. Jerusalem passed even that. Lewd = lust for the most base sensual pleasures.

Even with this you were not satisfied - This shows exactly why God so often warned of foreign alliances. They never provided the satisfaction that was anticipated. Israel so often failed in faith and went seeking these foreign alliances (see Isa 7).

**<sup>30</sup>“How languishing is your heart,” declares the Lord God, “while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot. <sup>31</sup>When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square, in disdain for money, you were not like a harlot. <sup>32</sup>You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband! <sup>33</sup>Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries. <sup>34</sup>Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different.”**

How languishing is your heart - “I.e. how degenerate, morally weak. The feminine form of the noun for ‘heart,’ which occurs nowhere else, is used here to emphasize the woman’s debased character” (Fisch 91).

Instead of her husband - “Better ‘under their husband,’ i.e. while married (cf. for this idiom Num 5:19)” (Fisch 92).

“*Tahat* means ‘under the control, authority of (a husband) in 23:5 and Num 5:19f,29” (Greenberg 284).

No one plays the harlot as you do - She was more depraved than the ordinary sacred or secular prostitute. She knew no moral boundaries.

“The perversion which marked Israel’s behavior is that, whereas the common prostitute plied her trade for hire, Israel ‘scorned hire’ (31). Indeed Ezekiel goes so far as to say that no one solicited her, but that she did the soliciting and actually bribed men to come to her (33-34). Ellison well comments: ‘The adulteress may by some be excused by the strength of passion and blind love, but for a harlot there is no excuse except that of stark necessity. But for Israel there is not even this excuse. She has not been paid by her lovers, but has paid those that have taken their pleasure of her’ (cf. Hos 8:9)” (Taylor 139).

**<sup>35</sup>Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>36</sup>Thus says the Lord God, because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols, <sup>37</sup>therefore, behold, I shall gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I shall gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.**

“Because Israel had courted the favours of heathen kingdoms and bribed them for support in times of national emergency, and because she was sold on every kind of pagan practice and willingly absorbed foreign cults as the whim took her, God pronounces His unmistakable word of judgment upon her. Maintaining the language of the allegory, He promises that Israel’s own lovers will be the agents of her destruction. They will surround her and expose her publicly (37) and inflict upon her the punishment due to adulteresses and infanticides (38). This applies well to the ravages of the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadrezzar, but Ezekiel 25 castigates the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites and the Philistines also for their part in the total overthrow, so the words ‘all your lovers’ (37) are truer than would at first appear” (Taylor, 139-140).

Hear the word of the Lord - “In direct address, introduced by a summons to pay attention (6:3; 13:2; 18:15; 21:3; 25:3; 34:7,9; 36:1,4; 37:4)” (Zimmerli, 346).

Expose your nakedness to them - “The public degradation of a harlot by exhibiting her naked is mentioned in Hosea 2:12; Nahum 3:5; Jeremiah 13:22,26. A modified form appears in Mishnah Sotah 1.5, inflicted on a suspected adulteress before her trial (as here); the rationale expressed there—‘she exposed herself for sin, God therefore exposes her’—fits the case, for this humiliation corresponds to the indictment of verse 36a. Such uncovering of nakedness or turning back clothing is distinct from the stripping of the adulteress, which occurs after her conviction (v. 39)” (Greenberg, 286).

**<sup>38</sup>Thus I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. <sup>39</sup>I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. <sup>40</sup>They will incite a crowd against you, and they**

**will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. <sup>41</sup>And they will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I shall stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers.**

I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery - Literally, "I will judge you with judgments of..." etc., referring to the punishment for adultery and child murder. For the latter, see verses 20f, 36. She is going to receive what she deserves.

I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy - "Literally, 'I will give (or, make) thee the blood of,' etc. The sense is, I will make thee the object of My bloody fury and jealousy, i.e. of My fury and jealousy which can only be assuaged by blood" (Fisch 93).

They will incite a crowd against you - "After all her possessions have been taken from her, she will be executed (Lev 20:10) by stoning (Deut 22:23f) - a public mode of punishment expressing the outrage of the city - then her corpse will be butchered... The executioners are a *qahal* - a term used for an assemblage of armed forces (17:17; 26:7; 32:3,22f; 38:4,7,13,15) as well as for crowds (27:27,34). In the restatement of the allegory of 23:24, it serves for the assemblage of peoples attacking Jerusalem. Hence *qahal* here (and in parallel 23:46f) probably intrudes reality into the metaphor once again: armies would overwhelm Jerusalem" (Greenberg 287).

They will burn your houses with fire - "So too, 23:47. Another intrusion of reality into the figure; Jeremiah was constantly threatening Jerusalem with capture followed by burning (e.g. 32:29; 34:22; 37:8; 38:18). A fixed formula of Assyrian royal inscriptions reporting a successful campaign against a resistant or rebellious city is 'I destroyed, tore down, burned down city X.' This expected fate did overtake the city, 2 Kings 25:8ff tells how after its fall it was systematically burned down and demolished.

In the sight of many women - "'Women' = nations (5:8); the world is divided into Jerusalem's 'Paramours' (allies) - males, and all others who are (at least potential) rivals or enemies—hence, females; cf. 'the Philistine women' of verse 27" (Greenberg 287-288).

**<sup>42</sup>"So I shall calm My fury against you, and My jealousy will depart from you, and I shall be pacified and angry no more. <sup>43</sup>Because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged Him by all these things, behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your own head," declares the Lord God, "so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your other abominations."**

I shall calm my fury against you - "Such references to fury, jealousy and wrath are readily misunderstood by readers of the Old Testament (though the New Testament is not without such language), who think of these as essentially human and sinful qualities. Certainly the expressions are vigorously anthropomorphic, but then any language about a personal God must be. They need to be understood not in the light of human

emotions of vindictiveness and malice, but in the context of God's righteousness, holiness and consistent purity. Tasker sums it up well by saying: 'Just as human love is deficient if the element of anger is entirely lacking...so too is anger an essential element of divine love. God's love is inseparably connected with His holiness and His justice. He must therefore manifest anger when confronted with sin and evil'" (Taylor 140).

Because you have not remembered the days of your youth - "All these calamities will befall them because they had been forgetful of, and ungrateful for, the kindnesses God had done for them in their national infancy" (Fisch 95).

**<sup>44</sup>"Behold, everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb concerning you, saying, 'Like mother, like daughter.' <sup>45</sup>You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and children. You are also the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. <sup>46</sup>Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters."**

"At this stage Ezekiel takes up a completely new allegory, but links it on to the first by the reference to Israel's mixed parentage so as to make it appear an expansion of what has gone before. Two sisters, Samaria the elder and Sodom the younger, are invented for the sinful Judah, but the prophet says that even though they were in their day a by-word for complacent prosperity and pride (Sodom 49-50), and religious nations of every king (Samaria 51), Judah's sins have outstripped their both in number and in intensity (52). In so doing Judah is said to have 'justified her sisters' (52; AV, RV), or better, 'made your sisters appear righteous' (RSV). There will, however, be a day of restoration for Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem, but this will bring nothing but a heightened sense of shame and further humiliation for the harlot city" (Taylor 140-141).

Who loathed her husband and children - "This verse explains the proverb just cited. The low state of morality which obtained among the Canaanites is found in Judea and Jerusalem" (Fisch 95).

"It is easy to see how Samaria and Sodom 'loathed their husbands and their children'; the husband was Yahweh (cf. Hos 2:16), whom they had rejected by their proud and idolatrous ways, and the children were those whom they had sacrificed at heathen altars. It is less easy to see the logic of the Hittite mother loathing her husband, unless we understand it also as a reference to Yahweh, whom even the heathen were expected to serve (cf. Theodoret's comment: 'He shows by this, that He is not the God of the Jews only, but of Gentiles also; for God once gave oracles to them, before they chose the abominations of idolatry' (quoted by Keil, p. 222n)" (Taylor 141).

**<sup>47</sup>"Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they. <sup>48</sup>"As I live," declares the Lord God, "Sodom, your sister, and**

**her daughters, have not done as you and your daughters have done. <sup>49</sup>Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.”**

Verse 47 has an alternate translation. Greenberg translates the verse as, “Did you not follow their ways and commit their abominations? Very soon you became more corrupt than they in all your ways” (272).

Fisch translates it as “Yet hast thou not walked in their ways, nor done after their nations; but in a very little while thou didst deal more corruptly than they in all thy ways” (96).

Greenberg writes, concerning the phrase “very soon”, “Literally ‘in but a short while’; temporal *kim’at* occurs in Isaiah 1:9, ‘we should soon have become like Sodom’; Psalm 81:15, ‘I would soon bring their enemies low’ (both adduced by Ibn Janah). The *hapax qat* has an Arab equivalent meaning ‘only, solely,’ and serves to intensify the adverb (‘soon’). For the thought of this verse cf. 5:5ff., where it is asserted that Jerusalem was worse than her neighbors” (289).

Fisch writes about “in a very little while” - “For only twenty-three years after Samaria’s fall did Israel remain faithful to God; soon after Hezekiah’s death and the accession of Manasseh the corruption of Judah set in (Kimchi). The word *kat* in the phrase ‘very little’ has puzzled modern commentators, but Eitan (Jewish Orientalist, *A Contribution to Biblical Lexicography*) corroborates it by references to a similar root in Ethiopic” (96).

“In verse 47 we learn that Judah was so wicked that she did not think the wickedness of Samaria and Sodom was bad enough. He tells her she did not do what the others did and yet in 11:12 she is said to have done what they did. Which is correct? Both are correct. This verse (and 5:7) stress the fact that Judah went beyond the others in her wickedness. What the others did, she did, but she did more!” (McGuiggan 170).

She did not help the poor and needy - “The proverbial prosperity of the cities of the plain (Gen 13:10, ‘like the garden of the Lord’) nurtured in them pride and arrogance, ending in their committing abomination (sodomy - cf. Gen 19:5f; Lev 18:22; 20:13). Prosperity, as a cause of iniquity, e.g., Deuteronomy 8:12; 32:15. The expressions ‘satiety of bread and careless ease’ (the latter a construct pair of synonyms) stands in apposition to ‘pride’ (*ga’on*), the subject of *haya*” (Greenberg 289).

<sup>50</sup>“**Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it. <sup>51</sup>Furthermore, Samaria did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they. Thus you have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed. <sup>52</sup>Also bear your disgrace in that you have made judgment favorable for your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than**

**they , they are more in the right than you. Yes, be also ashamed and bear your disgrace, in that you made your sisters appear righteous.”**

Samaria did not commit half of your sins - “For the thought cf. Jeremiah 3:11: ‘Wayward Israel has proven herself more righteous than faithless Judah.’ Characteristically, Ezekiel carries the thought to an extreme: Jerusalem is here the active subject; let her be mortified for having ‘made her sisters (look) more righteous than she,’ for having indeed (inadvertently) interceded (*pillalt*) on their behalf, for having, finally, provided them comfort (see verse 54)” (Greenberg 289).

**<sup>53</sup>“Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity, <sup>54</sup>in order that you may bear your humiliation, and feel ashamed for all that you have done when you become a consolation to them. <sup>55</sup>And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to their former state, and you with your daughters will also return to your former state.”**

Become a consolation to them - “Judah was a ‘comfort’ to them in her greater guilt. If God restores her, He must assuredly restore them who had sinned less” (Fisch 97)!

“Your misfortune gave them solace of company in their own; so 32:31 speaks of Pharaoh’s consolation at seeing all the other kings lying in Sheol when he arrives. Alternatively, your extreme wickedness gives them room to extenuate their behavior” (Greenberg 290).

“What is the point of speaking of Sodom’s restoration (v. 57)? It has the same point as calling Sodom Judah’s sister! It has the same point as saying Judah’s parents were Hittite and Amorite. It is to make Judah know her abominations. The Lord is saying: ‘You are so wicked, in order to show mercy to you I have to bring Sodom back up!’ Judah had made Sodom look good. She (by her conduct) gave Sodom a case against God. God did not intend us to understand Judah was the offspring of an Amorite and a Hittite; He did not intend us to understand Judah was Sodom’s sister and He did not intend for us to understand Sodom was going to be restored. They are so wicked, God says, ‘they have made Me look bad in putting Sodom down. I have to restore her to justify my giving Judah a break.’” (McGuiggan 170-171).

And your sisters...will return to their former state - Jeremiah similarly prophesied the restoration of Israel’s neighbors (cf. Jer 12:14ff; 48:47; 49:6,39). They all went into it together and they will all come out together. They are going back to the time when they were not cared for and were left to ruin.

**<sup>56</sup>“As the name of your sister Sodom was not heard from your lips in your day of pride, <sup>57</sup>before your wickedness was uncovered, so now you have become the reproach of the daughters of Edom, and of all who are around her, of the daugh-**

ters of the Philistines— those surrounding you who despise you. <sup>58</sup>You have borne the penalty of your lewdness and abominations,” the Lord declares. <sup>59</sup>For thus says the Lord God, “I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant.”

Sodom was not heard from your lips - Did you not smugly hold up the cities of the plain as an object lesson in your prosperous days? The viciousness of Sodom and its punishment were such popular themes that prophets habitually referred to them (Amos 4:11; Isa 1:9f; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 49:18; 50:40). Judah had looked upon Sodom’s sin and assumed an attitude of superior righteousness. Any nation may appear righteous when compared to another nation.

For thus says the Lord God - “The Hebrew prophets never left their people in despair. The most vehement denunciation and the direst threats are followed by words of hope. Judah has been unmindful of, and faithless to, the covenant with God and must suffer the consequences; but He will remember and renew it forever. Whatever may be in store for the nation in the near future, He will not completely repudiate them” (Fisch 98).

<sup>60</sup>“Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. <sup>61</sup>Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. <sup>62</sup>Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, <sup>63</sup>in order that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,” the Lord God declares.

I will remember My covenant - “The pronoun ‘I’ is emphatic in the Hebrew. God can do what man is unable to do. With the human being adultery renders the marriage covenant null; God, however, will ‘remember’ it and permit the nation’s sufferings to wipe out the guilty past” (Fisch 99).

“The pronoun appears in Hebrew after the verb, thus doubly emphatic; unlike you, I will remember my former covenant with you. So again verse 62: unlike you, I will maintain My covenant with you” (Greenberg 291).

I will establish an everlasting covenant with you - “Unlike the phrase *karat b<sup>e</sup>rit*, which refers always to making of a new covenant (see 34:25; 37:26 - with reference to the ‘covenant of peace,’ a divine boon of the new future order), *heqim b<sup>e</sup>rit* usually means ‘maintain a covenant’ already concluded (Gen 17:19,21 - I will bless Ishmael, but my covenant ‘*aqim* with Isaac; Lev 26:9: I will make you fertile and numerous, and *h<sup>e</sup>qimoti* my covenant with you; Deut 8:18: *l<sup>e</sup>haqim* his covenant that he swore to you), although many believe that it also has the sense of establishing a new covenant (e.g., in Gen 6:18; Ex 6:4). In our passage, the continuity of the ‘eternal covenant’ with ‘the covenant of your youth’ is suggested by remembrance of the latter serving as the motive of the

former. *Heper* of verse 59 and *hegim* of verse 60 will thus be antonymous verbs with the same *b<sup>e</sup>rit* as object; cf. the identical antonymy in Numbers 30:14-16. Yet the language is equivocal enough to leave open the possibility of a disjuncture between the two. Clearly declared is the origin and basis of the 'eternal covenant' in God's memory of 'the covenant of your youth'; in the future as in the past, God's tie with Israel will be self-motivated, an expression of His concern and His nature, rather than of any quality or merit of Israel" (Greenberg 291-292).

"Now in 34:25, Ezekiel mentions a new future 'covenant of peace' which will make (*krt*) with Israel; when this is iterated in 37:26 it is further qualified as an eternal covenant. Critics have noted that elsewhere in Ezekiel *krt* alone is employed for making a covenant (17:13); combining this with the preceding date, they have concluded that Ezekiel's concept of the eschatological covenant between YHWH and Israel regarded it as a new beginning, not a continuation of the old covenant, and that his term for making it was *krt*, not *hqym*. It follows that our passage is not from Ezekiel. The supposed discord vanishes however, when the covenant of 34:25 is correctly understood not as the grand bond between God and people, but as a specific assurance of everlasting physical security in the land. In future, the contingent blessing of Leviticus 26:6 that obedience would be rewarded by God's 'granting peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will rid the land of vicious beasts and no sword shall pass through your land'— that blessing would be realized forever: 'I will make with them a covenant of peace, and I will rid the land of vicious beasts, so that they can dwell secure (even) in the wilderness, and sleep (even) in forests' (Ezek 34:25). That is indeed a new covenant, never before made (*krt*); its subsequent qualifications as eternal, if not a borrowing from our passage, is no more significant than the identical qualification of several such specific covenants in the priestly writings: the sabbath (Ex 31:16); the priestly emoluments (Num 18:19); the hereditary privilege of a priestly family (Num 25:13). It does not signify that the 'covenant of peace' is the great link between God and Israel thus repeating in different terms the purport of 16:60,62. Rather, our passage will, with 20:37, be the only reference to the great eschatological covenant using the term *b<sup>e</sup>rit* (the other references use the double adoption/marriage formula, 11:20 14:11). The use of *hqym* (verse 60), taken with the explicit reference to the ancient covenant, suggests that— whether or not it is conceived as a continuation of it—the eschatological covenant will reaffirm the ancient one. Nothing in this passage indicates a hand other than Ezekiel" (Greenberg 303-304).

In order that you may remember and be ashamed - "Israel's duty always to remember YHWH's redemptive and sustaining deeds (particularly in her prosperity) - as the chief motive of obedience to His commandments is a Deuteronomic commonplace (5:15; 8:2-18; 11:15; 16:12; 24:18,22; 32:5). The priestly writings, on the other hand, extol YHWH's remembrance of His covenant as a feature of His trustworthiness (Gen 9:15f; Ex 2:24; 6:5). Especially germane is the epilogue to the covenant curses in Leviticus 26:42ff. At the sight of the remnant of penitent exiles - 'Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham...Yes even then when they are in the land of their enemies I will

not spurn or reject them so as to destroy them violating my covenant with them; for I YHWH am their God. I will remember in their favor the covenant with the ancients, whom I freed from the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God, I YHWH.’ Our oracle contrasts human dereliction toward this duty with divine fulfillment of it. Wanton Jerusalem did not, in her willfulness, remember her lowly beginnings and all that she owed to God (vv. 22,43), for which she paid the ultimate penalty. But YHWH will remember the ‘covenant of her youth’ (v. 60) and restore the prodigal to a glory greater than her former state. The effect will be to awaken in her a memory of her former abominable behavior, and she will be ashamed” (Greenberg 305-306).

But not because of your covenant - Judea will not be restored to her ancient glory which included Samaria and Sodom in her territory (as part of the former covenant) since that has been broken.

When I have forgiven - “When God forgives our sins, He also forgets them (Isa 43:25). But the sinner can never completely forget: Paul remembered that he had persecuted the Church (1 Cor 15:9; 1 Tim 1:13)...The value of such memory is that it keeps a man back from pride. Not even the justified sinner should forget that he has a past of which he is right to be ashamed” (Taylor 142).

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“After his condemnation of the people, Ezekiel censures king Zedekiah’s act of treachery towards Nebuchadnezzar in breaking his solemn oath of loyalty and in seeking aid from Egypt. The prophet predicts the extinction of Zedekiah’s dynasty and the fall of Jerusalem. This oracle was delivered shortly before the disaster in 586 B.C.E. In an easily understood allegory Ezekiel likens Babylon and Egypt to two great eagles. One, Babylon, broke off the top of a cedar, i.e. carried off king Jehoiachin to Babylon and replaced him by the inferior Zedekiah. But this ‘vine of low stature,’ who owed his kingship to Nebuchadnezzar, revolted and turned to Egypt, the other great eagle, for help” (Fisch 100).

“Duality pervades the prophecy: fable and interpretation, two eagles, two plants, two modes of punishment, two planes of agency (earthly and divine), doom and consolation. With this duality agrees the double command with which the oracle opens: “Pose a riddle and tell a fable”—an indication that more is here than meets the eye. As a whole, the bipartition of the oracle—in this case, poetic fable and prose interpretation—with and added coda evoking its beginning (poetic and in term of the fable) is a familiar pattern (chapters 13,16)” (Greenberg 317-318).

**<sup>1</sup>Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, <sup>3</sup>saying, “Thus says the Lord God, “A great eagle with great wings, long pinions and a full plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar. <sup>4</sup>He plucked off the**

**topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders.”**

Propound a riddle and speak a parable - “Ezekiel is commanded to convey his message in the form of a riddle which requires some intelligence to solve, but at the same time to develop the application so as to bring it nearer to the form of a *mashal*, an allegory whose meaning is less disguised and more readily grasped” (Fisch 100).

“The poem which Ezekiel recites is both a ‘riddle’ (Hebrew *hida*), which means anything put enigmatically and requiring explanation, and an ‘allegory’ (Hebrew *masal*), which is the same as the word translated ‘proverb’ in 12:22. The *masal* was an extensive literary type, covering everything from a pithy epigram to a lengthy allegory or a psalm. Its root meaning is the verb ‘to be like’, ‘to compare’, but this does not restrict its use to similes or parables. The essence of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, the repetition of one idea in slightly different terms as in a verse like Psalm 6:7. In the Book of Proverbs this parallelism usually draws out an antithesis, as in Proverbs 13:17. In both examples, however, the parallelism amounts to a form of ‘comparison’, and so the Hebrew *masal* can be applied to it. The denominative verb *masal* can, in fact, be rendered ‘to speak in poetical sentences’” (Taylor 143).

“A *hida* (riddle) is an obscure saying from which something else is to be understood, while a *masal* (fable) is a likening of one matter to another—so this *masal*, in which the king is likened to an eagle, is at the same time a *hida*, since none but the discerning can understand it. The essence of the *hida* was opaqueness and mystification, while that of the *masal* was illumination. While the two terms appear in parallelism (Psa 49:5; 78:2; Prov 1:6) they are not interchangeable (as Jud 14:12ff and 1 Kgs 10:1 show); here they may point to the two levels on which the fable moves” (Greenberg 309).

A great eagle with great wings - I.e. Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon, comparable to the eagle which is the king of birds. Another point of comparison is the tendency of each to swoop down on his prey. The plunderer of a nation is often described as an eagle (cf. Deut 28:49; Isa 46:11; Jer 48:40; Hos 8:1).

The topmost of its young twigs - The allusion is to the young king Jehoiachin, carried off by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in the year 597 B.C. (cf. 2 Kgs 29:15). Jehoiachin was the 19<sup>th</sup> king of Judah (out of 20).

**<sup>5</sup>“He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed it beside abundant waters; he set it like a willow. <sup>6</sup>Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine, and yielded shoots and sent out branches.”**

The seed of the land - this may be a reference to Zedekiah, the twentieth and final king of Judah.

Planted it in fertile soil - The eagle took pains to locate the plant in the most promising site: a fertile field, abundantly watered.

He placed it beside abundant waters - “Here is doubtless a reference to Babylon; cf. ‘O thou that dwellest upon many waters’ (Jer 51:13). The meaning is that although Nebuchadnezzar set Zedekiah upon the throne, the Judean king was to feel himself dependent upon Babylon like a stalk which draws its sustenance from nearby water” (Fisch 101).

But it may be that Fisch is taking the figure too far. It seem better to understand the “many-waters” as only referring to optimum growing for the seed and not necessarily as a reference to Babylon.

“Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah and established him as king with every opportunity to grow and prosper—he set him up as king with the right opportunities and in the right circumstances which would promise contentment for a king as a tree in good soil and beside many waters would be the right circumstances for a tree to prosper. It became (the figure changes) a spreading vine instead of a willow tree. It was planted as a ‘willow tree’ and not as an oak. The oak or the cedar would speak too clearly of strength and independence. A ‘willow’ tree (with its bending and stooping stature) expresses just what Nebuchadnezzar intended (v. 14). The figure then changes to that of a vine which spread under the eagle which planted it. The vine was supposed to act gratefully toward the kingdom that gave it sustenance. It flourished under Nebuchadnezzar” (McGuigan 177-178).

**<sup>7</sup>“But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it. <sup>8</sup>It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit, and become a splendid vine.”**

Another great eagle - “The Hebrew for ‘another’ is literally ‘one.’ This eagle, described as less powerful than the other, is Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt to whom Zedekiah appealed for help in contravention of his covenant with Babylon. Pharaoh himself later fell victim to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer 44:30)” (Fisch 102).

It was planted in good soil - Zedekiah, whose throne was safe and protected by Babylon, would have succeeded in strengthening his kingdom and securing the throne for his children. He had, therefore, no need to look to Egypt for support. Like so many before him, he foolishly saw security in those foreign alliances.

Planted - “This is the Hebrew word *s<sup>e</sup>tula* and some versions translate it as ‘transplanted’ instead of ‘planted.’ From this they infer that the eagle transplanted the vine. But there is no indication that Egypt did anything to Zedekiah. But Zedekiah did reach

out to Egypt himself. “As for the nation itself, neither the referent (fickle Judah) nor the figure (vine) signaled defection by change of location; they reached out from where they were in a new direction—an idea perfectly figured in verses 6 and 7b. The trend of these moderns has been to supply a motive of self-improvement to the vine’s defection. But nothing in verses 5-7 suggests that the first eagle begrudged the vine anything that would enhance its glory - as a vine. On the contrary, he took care to plant it in a fertile field and beside an abundant supply of water; his only requirement was subservience. It is going beyond the text to say that the vine was motivated by discontent at some unexpressed check on its growth. Verse 6 ends with the new vine thriving; no motive is given for its sudden shift in allegiance in verse 7, indicating that it was gratuitous. The rationale found by some moderns in verse 8 confuses the issue by (at least partially) justifying the vine and retrospectively denigrating the first eagle; it also weakens the climax obtained when verse 8b is taken as the destiny intended by the first eagle for the vine—now forfeited. The idea that the first eagle wished the vine well is supported by the parallel of God’s intention regarding the cedar’s twig in verse 23, except that the eagle’s plan was thwarted while God’s will succeed. Accordingly, we are to understand that although at the time of its defection the vine had developed only ‘rods and boughs’ (verse 6c), had it remained loyal it would have attained to branches, fruit and majesty (verse 8b). RSV’s substitution of ‘branches’ (*p’rwt*) for ‘fruit’ (*pry*) in verse 8b misses the climactic expression of a lost opportunity. By turning its back on its benign master and his benefits, the ungrateful vine lost forever the chance of developing the vine’s majesty he had intended for it” (Greenberg 312-313).

**<sup>9</sup>Say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers - so that all its sprouting leaves wither? And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from its roots again. <sup>10</sup>Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it - wither on the beds where it grew?”’**

Will he not pull up its roots - “The subject of the verb is the first eagle, Nebuchadnezzar. The vine will be uprooted, its fruit cut off and its leaves wither. Zedekiah’s monarchy will be destroyed, all the heirs to the throne killed, and all the nobles of Judea will perish” (Fisch 103).

Neither great strength nor by many people - “Pharaoh, who made a military alliance with Zedekiah, will not come to his rescue at the critical moment. As so often with Ezekiel, here too he drops the metaphor and speaks in plain terms, referring to ‘great power’ and ‘much people.’ The rendering of A.V. and R.V., ‘even without great or much people to pluck it up by the roots thereof,’ is closer to the Hebrew and means that Nebuchadnezzar will not require a display of great force and a numerous army to destroy the Judean kingdom” (Fisch 103).

**<sup>11</sup>Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>12</sup>“Say now to the rebellious house, ‘Do you not know what these things mean?’ Say, ‘Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes, and brought them to him**

in Babylon. <sup>13</sup>And he took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, <sup>14</sup>that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant, that it might continue. <sup>15</sup>But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?”

“The most notable feature of the prophet’s explanation is the way it shows how the dependent relationship imposed by Nebuchadnezzar on Zedekiah is regarded as amounting to a solemn covenant which the vassal breaks at his peril. Whatever may be thought of the standards of heathen nations, and Nebuchadnezzar’s policy was undoubtedly to make his neighbors weak and to keep them weak (14), Zedekiah had no option but to submit to his overlord. By sending ambassadors to Egypt, he ‘despised the oath’ and ‘broke the covenant’ (18), and, says Yahweh, this was ‘my oath’ and ‘my covenant’ (19). Such rebellion would bring not only the displeasure of Babylon, but the punishment of God— though in practice the one was identical with the other (20). The implications of this attitude are far-reaching. It indicates that agreements entered into and obligations incurred by worshippers of God are as binding as if they had been made with God in person. What applied in the elemental code of international politics among the small states of the Middle East in the sixth century B.C., must surely apply with equal force to international agreements in today’s more enlightened (?) world. And what applies to nations must presumably be binding for social and personal relationships as well. The breaking of a treaty, a contract, a promise or any other kind of covenant involves God as well as the person who is thus aggrieved. The historical situation outlined in these verses is illuminated by the narrative in Jeremiah 37, which shows that an Egyptian force was apparently sent in the direction of Jerusalem, probably in the summer of 588 B.C., in response to Zedekiah’s overtures and that the approach of this army caused a temporary lifting of the siege of Jerusalem which a Babylonian punitive force had already begun in January of the same year (2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 52:4). We know nothing of the fate of the Egyptians but we can presume that their efforts were unsuccessful, and possibly only half-hearted as well, because the siege was soon renewed for a further year until Jerusalem finally fell in July 587 BC” (Taylor 145-146).

Putting him under oath - This was done in the name of God to secure Zedekiah’s loyalty to Babylonian leadership (cf. 2 Chron 36:13). Influential leaders of Judea were also taken to Babylon as hostages to guarantee the observance of the terms of the treaty (cf. 2 Kgs 29:15).

<sup>16</sup>“‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die. <sup>17</sup>And Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build siege walls to cut off many lives. <sup>18</sup>Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape.’”

Pharaoh. . .will not help him in the war - Egypt had never been faithful to alliances—why should she now? (cf. 2 Kgs 24:7; Is 36:6; Ezek 29:6-7).

He despised the oath by breaking the covenant - “Zedekiah had sworn an oath to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of God. In despising this oath Zedekiah had made it clear that Jehovah did not mean much to him. Jehovah’s name was made to look unimportant to Nebuchadnezzar for manifestly anyone who swore by his God and then proceeded to despise the covenant did not think his God very important. And if the servant of that God did not regard Him as important, how could we expect the foreigners to hold Him to be important?” (McGuiggan 180).

**<sup>19</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head. <sup>20</sup>And I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there regarding the unfaithful act which he has committed against Me. <sup>21</sup>And all the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to every wind; and you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken.”**

My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke - “The violation of an undertaking given in the name of God, even with a heathen like the king of Babylon, is equal to breaking a covenant with God him Himself. The sanctity of an oath could not be more emphatically stressed” (Fisch 105).

“Another example that goes the other way is found in Joshua 9:3-21 where the Gibeonites who should have been destroyed make a covenant with the children of Israel by lying to them and telling them they were from a land far away instead of saying that they lived in Canaan. In 2 Samuel 21 Saul killed the Gibeonites and God brought down wrath upon them for violating their oath. “According to the accepted view (based on 2 Chron 36), the climax of the oracle consists of God’s identifying the Babylonian king’s treaty enforced by oath as his own. M. Tsevat (*JBL* 78 /1959/, 201-4) has argued that Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah swear allegiance to him by YHWH when he appointed him king; that, furthermore, Ezekiel - uniquely among the prophets - regarded that exhorted oath as binding. Tsevat ascribes to Ezekiel the singular doctrine that even such an oath is protected by the absolute injunction to honor one’s word found in Leviticus 5:4 with respect to individuals...But even granting the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar did adjure Zedekiah by YHWH, is the natural sense of verse 19 that YHWH solemnly makes that oath His own? ...The natural—indeed the obvious—construction of verse 19 is to make ‘my curse-oath...and my covenant’ in YHWH’s speech refer to His covenant with Israel (as in 16:59), which the king was held responsible to maintain. Indeed, the historian of the Book of Kings holds it as established doctrine that the kings are responsible for covenant violations of their kingdom (1 Kgs 12:28ff; 14:15f); public violations of the Torah of Moses are laid at the door of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:8-11). Ezekiel so far shares this view as to blame the religious ‘straying’ of Israel on the

dereliction of its kings (34:6). As for Zedekiah, 2 Kings 24:18 judges him 'evil in the sight of YHWH,' and in Ezekiel 21:30 the prophet brands him a 'desecrated, wicked man.' There is, then, warrant for taking verse 19 according to its natural sense, and seeing in all of B2 (vv. 19-21) a shift from earthly to divine matters. Both fable and its earthly interpretation are suddenly transposed into an allegory of the relation between God and (the king) of Judah. The earthly suzerain, Nebuchadnezzar, will not let rebellious Zedekiah get away with his treachery, how much less will the divine sovereign countenance the Judahite's breach of faith with him. By this understanding of the course of the oracle, two turnabouts are assumed in the audience perception of it. What may vaguely have been thought to be an allegory of apostasy is interpreted as wholly political; but then the political transaction is used as a model from which a theological analogy is drawn." (Greenberg 321-322).

**<sup>22</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "I shall also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I shall pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I shall plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup>On the high mountain of Israel I shall plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. <sup>24</sup>And all the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will perform it."**

Thus says the Lord God - "The repetition of the personal pronoun is to emphasize that this time it will be God, not Nebuchadnezzar, who will cut off a twig from the cedar. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar removed it to Babylon for destruction (verse 3f), God will bring it back to the holy city and replant it in the sacred soil where it will grow into a great cedar" (Fisch 106).

"All parts of the prophecy are now mutually illuminated: the fable is truly a riddle (*hida*) - solved by identifying its human referents, all on an earthly plane. Then an allegorical cast is thrown on both by the rise to the divine plane of interpretation; that is, all the preceding political transactions are but a 'likening' (1) to the relations between God and the Judahite king (Note the correspondence between the sequence of *hida* and *masal* in verse 2 and their literally realization). Finer points emerge: the dual agents of punishment in the fable (eagle and wind) presage the earthly and divine planes of the real punishment of Zedekiah. Moreover, the divine oath introducing the earthly interpretation of the fable, and expressing God's guarantee that the human suzerain will vindicate his violated compact, is given a new dimension by the parallel oath introducing the divine plane of events. Events on the two planes are indeed parallel and simultaneous: for his own reasons Nebuchadnezzar will punish the Judahite rebel, but in so doing he will (all unknown to him) be executing the design of the divine architect of history upon the king responsible for violation of his covenant with Judah" (Greenberg 322-323).

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“It seems that Ezekiel’s fellow-exiles uttered charges against Divine justice in regard to their fate. Considering themselves better men than their fathers, they attributed their suffering to the sins of their ancestors, voicing their bewilderment and chagrin in the proverb once current in Jerusalem, ‘the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’ (Jer 31:28). To this allegation the prophet devotes the whole of this chapter, which may be divided into two principle parts: (i) Every individual is held responsible for his own conduct whether he be good or bad; neither the wrong-doings nor the righteous deeds of others—not even those of the next-of-kin determine the fate of a man. The righteous will enjoy God’s favour, and the wicked will be doomed. (ii) Man is not the slave of a predestined fate; his conduct is not dictated by instinct and inherent inclination. He is free to choose between good and evil; he has the power to repent and amend his former way of life. As a fitting summary, Ezekiel concludes with an urgent call to the house of Israel to cast away all their sins and make for themselves ‘a new heart and a new spirit,’ for God is not only a just Judge but also a merciful Father who delights in the well-being of His children” (Fisch 107).

“Let us note two factors which made the proverb eminently reasonable and doubtless accounted for its widespread appeal. First, the concept of continuing responsibility for ancestral sins is a deeply rooted belief inherited from the Ten Commandments at Sinai. ‘I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me’ (Ex 20:5). Secondly, it had been the basis of much of Ezekiel’s own teaching, namely that the sufferings of the exile could be traced back to the persistent rebellion, idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant of previous generations of Israelites. The exile was, in effect, merely the due consequences of these accumulating acts of disobedience. Furthermore there was the element of apparent injustice in the way in which God’s judgment fell indiscriminately upon the nation, upon both the bad and the good. To this Ezekiel replies by asserting, without however arguing the point, that in God’s eyes people are individuals and He treats them as such. Every man is a matter of concern to Him, ‘All souls are mine’ (4). The righteous man will live; the wicked will die. Everyone will be responsible to God for his own conduct. To this Ezekiel would surely add that, so far from having their cause to blame their sinful forbears for their present sufferings, the exiles were more guilty than their fathers because they had sinned more and their idolatries were greater (cf. chapter 8). It could not all be blamed on Manasseh and his reign of wickedness” (Taylor 147-148).

“This classic statement of individual responsibility must not, however, be taken in complete isolation. It is not a flat contradiction of the traditional view of corporate responsibility. It is rather a counterpoise to it. The corporate unity of the family or tribal group was of the esse of Hebrew psychology. It was bound up with the idea of the continuance of the family line by direct sonship, as well as with the covenant relationship that existed between the God of Israel and the community of Israel. To have denied all this would have needed more than a bare assertion. The whole attitude of

life would have had to be radically rewritten and dogmatically reformulated by Ezekiel. Communal solidarity and corporate responsibility were facts, to which experience bore witness. Ezekiel's aim is to show that they are not the only facts. God's redeemed community is a nation of righteous or repentant individuals. And in the situation with which the prophet was immediately concerned, it was dangerous for the exiles to be concealing themselves behind an unbalanced view of their national responsibility in order to avoid the prophetic demand for repentance and a new way of life" (Taylor 148).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge?’ <sup>3</sup>“As I live,” declares the Lord God, “You are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. <sup>4</sup>Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.”**

The fathers eat the sour grapes - “In Jeremiah 31:28 the verb is in the perfect, but here in the imperfect mood: ‘the fathers eat.’ The proverb means, ‘Is it just that one generation who should be punished for the sins of its predecessors?’ What may have given rise to this belief was the statement made in the name of God that the sins of Manasseh were the cause of Israel’s downfall (cf. 2 Kgs 21:10-12), although the disaster happened about half a century later. But the people misunderstood the words. What they implied was that Manasseh was the originator of evils which were continued by later generations who suffered the consequences of their own sins” (Fisch 108).

Lamentations 5:7 has the same idea.

Not going to use this proverb...anymore - Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Deuteronomy 24:16 should have told them that this proverb was not true, but they heard only what they wanted to hear.

All souls are mine - “Since God is the Creator and Owner of all individuals, they must each stand in the same relationship to Him. Even father and son, who are physically related to one another, are separate entities in the sight of God; therefore the failings of the father cannot determine the destiny of the son” (Fisch 108).

“This sentence appears to take the form of a syllogism, but the meaning of the premises and their relation to the conclusion are not perfectly clear. The argument seems to say: Since I, as the dispenser of life, own everybody; since, therefore, I have an equal stake in fathers and sons (or: therefore fathers and sons are alike to me); hence sinners appear to me not as fathers or sons but simply as sinful individuals, and as such each takes the consequences only for his own conduct. This denies that any person is morally an extension of another; God does not ‘get at’ a sinner through his son, nor does He impose punishment on the son as a ‘limb’ of the father. The sinner, like everybody, is a discrete moral entity in God’s sight; he is not a father or a son” (Greenberg 328).

Soul - “As in 13:20, the word ‘souls’ must not be understood in terms of disembodied spirits. The Hebrew soul (*nepes*) represented the totality of the person or the life-force within him. No one English word can translate the various nuances which the four uses of *nepes* in this verse carry. Possibly the nearest rendering, to avoid the ambiguous word ‘soul,’ would be ‘All lives are mine; the life of the father...the life of the son...the person that sins shall die’” (Taylor 149).

**<sup>5</sup>“But if a man is righteous, and practices justice and righteousness, <sup>6</sup>and does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor’s wife, or approach a woman during her menstrual period - <sup>7</sup>if a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing, <sup>8</sup>if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity, and executes true justice between man and man, <sup>9</sup>if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live,” declares the Lord God.**

“The examples given are of a righteous man doing right (5-9); a wicked son of a righteous father (10-13); and a righteous son of a wicked father (14-18). Described in terms of three generations of one family they may well suggest the lives of the three great kings of the seventh century: Hezekiah, Manasseh his son, and Josiah the grandson of Manasseh” (Taylor 149).

“Here God outlines the character of a righteous man. Not the character of one who is called righteous but the character of one whom God regards as righteous. If he is just and does what is right...he shall surely live’ (v. 9). His life is one of high moral conduct and he refuses to get himself involved in the garbage of life” (McGuiggan 188).

Does not eat at the mountain shrines - “He has not worshipped the idols which were installed on mountains and high places, and has not partaken of the sacrificial meal which was part of the ritual” (Fisch 109).

Ezekiel enumerates more sins (cf. Lev 25:14 - same verb; Ex 22:25,26; Lev 19:13; Deut 15:7-11 and Isa 58:7 have the same idea).

Does not lend money on interest - For the law on the subject (cf. Ex 22:24; Lev 25:35ff; Deut 23:20). The repetition here suggests that he did not lend money on the condition of receiving interest, nor did he accept interest, nor did he accept interest offered to him voluntarily by the debtor upon paying his debt.

Or take increase - “Both are forms of interest on loans. The distinction is explained in Leviticus 25:36: ‘You shall not charge him interest on a loan, either by deducting it in advance from the capital sum, or by adding it on repayment.’ A literal rendering of ‘discount’ is ‘something bitten off.’ This prohibition against exploiting poorer members

of the community reflects Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36ff; Deuteronomy 23:20. The shunning of injustice, etc., follows such instruction as Leviticus 19:15" (Carley 117).

**<sup>10</sup>“Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood, and who does any of these things to a brother <sup>11</sup>(though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain shrines, and defiles his neighbor’s wife, <sup>12</sup>oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore a pledge, but lifts up his eyes to the idols, and commits abominations, <sup>13</sup>he lends money on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.”**

“This passage makes it clear that a man may be righteous before God (and surely God would not call him righteous and just and true if he made no attempt to bring up his child in the way of the Lord!) and have a child who is an abomination. ‘Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ That is not intended to be an iron clad rule for it would work both ways and those trained in sin and debauchery would never be converted. No one would argue that the scripture cited would be the general rule; but no one with sense would deny the clear teaching of this section of Ezekiel. We cannot forever cast suspicion on the godly parents of wicked kids and inwardly hold them responsible. A child can have the greatest father possible and still become a rebel. I know that is right for Adam had the best possible Father and he went wrong. Now get off their backs and pray for their children instead of working their case with your eyes and your heart. ENVIRONMENT, GOOD OR BAD, IS NOT OMNIPOTENT!” (McGuigan 189).

Will he live - Should such a wicked man escape retribution because of the righteousness of his father? The question assumes a “no” answer. That answer is obvious.

**<sup>14</sup>“Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father’s sins which he committed, and does not do likewise. <sup>15</sup>He does not eat at the mountain shrines or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, or defile his neighbor’s wife, <sup>16</sup>or oppress anyone, or retain a pledge, or commit robbery, but he gives bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing, <sup>17</sup>he keeps his hand from the poor, does not take interest of increase, but executes My ordinances, and walks in My statutes; he will not die for his father’s iniquity, he will surely live. <sup>18</sup>As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.”**

He will surely live - This is the third generation. This Hebrew word order here is emphatic. Could the wickedness of the father be imputed to the son? No! This gets rid of the doctrine of original sin which says that the little baby needs to be baptized because of the sin the child has inherited.

**<sup>19</sup>“Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has**

observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. <sup>20</sup>The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

Yet you say - The current belief that even the innocent son is punished for the sin of his father is stated and refuted by the prophet. The son, he stresses, is not affected by the evil deeds of his father. This also gets rid of the false doctrine of predestination. It is only the person who sins who will die.

<sup>21</sup>"**But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.** <sup>22</sup>**All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.** <sup>23</sup>**'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'"**

The doctrine of personal accountability is supported by the efficacy of repentance. No individual is punished for his own sin after he has repented: why, then should he be penalized for the sins of another?

Turns from all his sins...and practices justice - "The two stages of genuine repentance are defined; turning away from a sin committed and loyal obedience to the will of God. The essential elements of penitence, as taught in the Torah and by the rabbis, are regret for past sin and a determination to avoid them in the future; remorse and amendment" (Fisch 112).

Rather than that he should turn from his ways and live - The repentance of the wicked causes no change in the will of God, since His will has always been that man should live. The change in the fate of the individual is effected by his own change of heart which is subject to his will. God desires that all men be saved (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).

<sup>24</sup>"**But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.** <sup>25</sup>**Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?** <sup>26</sup>**When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die."**

For his treachery...and his sin - "The Hebrew *ma'al* (trespass) means in the first instance 'treachery.' The evildoer's sin is twofold: he becomes a rebel against God,

regretting his former righteous way of life; and he wilfully adopts a sinful life. For both these offenses he suffers the penalty” (Fisch 113).

This also refutes the false doctrine of “once saved always saved.”

Yet you say, the way of the Lord is not right - That is, “His manner of ruling the universe is inconsistent.”

Is it not your ways that are not right - “It seems that the doctrine taught by the prophet gave rise to the criticism: if man is free to change his way of life from wickedness to righteousness and vice versa, this implies a change in the attitude of God towards man and so points to a defect in His nature. To this reasoning the prophet replies that it is not God who makes the change but man himself. God always bestows His blessing upon man, but it is for him to be worthy of receiving it. As rain cannot fertilize the soil unless it has been cultivated, so man can only benefit from God’s benevolence when he has retained his moral capacity for its reception. Biblical phrases which apparently ascribe inconstancy to God, such as ‘it repented the LORD that He had made man’ (Gen 6:6), are only an anthropomorphic form of expression” (Fisch 113).

“The wonder of these passages is that God bothers to justify Himself at all. Here is the ungodly man calling God into question. Here is the sinful creature accusing the Creator of acting immorally” (McGuiggan 193).

**<sup>27</sup>“Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. <sup>28</sup>Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. <sup>29</sup>But the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?”**

Practices justice and righteousness - “Things ‘lawful’ are things which may be judged by the law courts; things ‘right’ are acts of righteousness, deeds of religious courage and of mercy of which God alone is judge” (Fisch 114).

**<sup>30</sup>“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord God. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. <sup>31</sup>Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord God. “Therefore, repent and live.”**

Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit - “The language is that of human exhortation. It would be unfair to Ezekiel to suggest that he regarded these as being anything other than gifts of God. He himself says so in 36:26, ‘A new heart I will give

you, and a new spirit I will put within you.’ Individual effort and activity are needed, however, at the human level in order to effect repentance and enable the spiritual reformation to take place. Fatalism results in inactivity and is deadly to the soul. To live by the proverb of verse 2 is to capitulate and die. Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Taylor 151-152).

In this chapter Ezekiel has related five possible “spiritual states” –

- Righteous grandfather (lives).
- Unrighteous son (dies).
- Righteous grandson (lives).
- Righteous man turns to wickedness (dies).
- Wicked man turns to righteousness (lives).

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

“After stressing the forthcoming calamity and justifying the Divine dispensation, Ezekiel becomes a sympathetic mourner. Speaking in God’s behalf, he gives expression to his grief over the tragic fate of the last kings of Judah and over the fall of the State. Comparing the young Judean rulers to whelps, he bemoans their disastrous end. Jehoahaz, who reigned only three months, was banished by Pharaoh and led in chains in Egypt where he died in 608 B.C.E. Jehoiakim, the brother and successor of Jehoahaz, was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and transported to Babylon, dying on the way in 597 B.C.E. (according to some authorities he died in Babylon). Jehoiachin, who succeeded his father, was exiled by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon after reigning for three months. Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, revolted against his overlord, was captured and blinded in 586 B.C.E. With that event Judah’s national life collapsed and the dynasty came to an end” (Fisch 115).

“This poem is the first example Ezekiel has given us of the *qina*, variously translated ‘dirge,’ ‘elegy’ or ‘lamentation.’ It consists of a composition written in the distinctive mournful tones of the *qina* rhythm, in which the two members of the couplet are of unequal length in the patten of 3:2. Only rarely can this rhythm be caught in an English translation, because in Hebrew the beats are usually one to a word and when translated a single Hebrew word often needs several English words to express its meaning. Verse 2b illustrates the metre best:

1(in the midst) 2(of lions) 3(she couched),  
1(rearing) 2(her whelps).

“Other examples of the same metre in Ezekiel are found in 26:17f; 27:3-9; 28:12-19; 32:2-8. It occurs frequently elsewhere in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (where even Psalm 23 uses it) and in prophetic laments, and of course it is typical of much of Lamentations” (Taylor 152).

“The Judeans held stubbornly to the notion that the Davidic house could suffer no real setback for God had made promises to David (see Psa 89, for exile) and to his seed that he would always be with them. As Ezekiel speaks Zedekiah is on the throne. He is the seed of David and so, it is believed, nothing drastic could happen. In the parable of the lioness and her cubs (1-9) Ezekiel will remind them that they have already seen kings of the family of David torn from their place of authority. If it could happen to them it could happen to Zedekiah. The young kings of Shallum (Jehoahaz) and Jehoiachin (not, Jehoiakim) were taken off into captivity where they were to die. The Judeans had seen this and should have learned not to be unduly optimistic. The parable of the vine tells a similar story but it adds that the fire which destroys the vine comes out of the branches of the vine. The branches (or rods) stand for the rulers, the kings. The prophet will remind the people that (among other things) the rulers had always been the downfall of the nation. To trust in Zedekiah is foolishness. The bottom line is this, the misery and mourning that has been experienced by Judah in times gone by is not completed. Though the royal line is still represented by Zedekiah, the people were not to be fooled into believing that everything would ‘turn out all right.’ The time for romanticism was long gone” (McGuiggan 201).

**<sup>1</sup>“As for you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, <sup>2</sup>and say,’ What was your mother? A lioness among lions! She lay down among young lions, she reared her cubs. <sup>3</sup>When she brought up one of her cubs, he became a lion, and he learned to tear his prey; he devoured men. <sup>4</sup>Then nations heard about him; he was captured in their pit, and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt.’**

Take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel—notice that Ezekiel still refuses to use the word “king” in reference to the kings of Israel. Ezekiel favors the word *nasi* instead of *melek* (cf. 7:27; 12:12).

What was your mother? A lioness among lions - “The designation ‘mother’ is applied to the house of David, compared to a ‘lioness’ because Judah (cf. Gen 49:9), and particularly the kingdom of David, are symbolized as a lion” (Fisch 115).

“The fate of Jehoahaz. The ‘lioness’ is to be understood not as Hamutal, wife of Josiah and mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, but as the nation who mothered these kings. Lions, incidentally, were common in Palestine until shortly after the Crusades, and Hebrew had five different words to describe them (all of which occur in Job 4:10f, and three of which are found here in verse 2). For the lion as a part of the national Davidic imagery, cf. Genesis 49:9 Micah 5:8 and possibly 1 Kings 10:19f. Muilenburg refers to the royal lion on the seal of Shema found at Megiddo” (Taylor 153).

He devoured men - “Jehoahaz reigned for only three months, so the description of his renown must be regarded as a poetic transference to express the glory of the Davidic line which Jehoahaz represented. He was carried off to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kgs 23:33) and eventually died there, as Jeremiah had foretold (Jer 22:10-12; Shallum was another name for the same man)” (Taylor 153).

2 Chronicles 36:1-4 tells us that he was only twenty-three when he ascended to the throne and when he was taken by Pharaoh Necho the Jews passed over his older brother, Jehoiakim, to make Jehoahaz king. Neither medieval nor modern commentators have arrived at a consensus regarding the referents of the figures in the allegories. Only the first cub-king can be firmly identified: he stands for Jehoahaz, son of Josiah and Hamutal; crowned by the people after his father's death, he was almost immediately deposed by Pharaoh Necho and brought in fetters to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:30-34). The capture and deportation to Babylon of the second cub-king fits the cases of Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim and Nehushta (24:8ff), and (still in the future from Ezekiel's perspective) Zedekiah, son of Tosiah and Hanutal (1 Chron 3:15; 2 Kgs 24:18ff). A decision in favor of Jehoiachin can invoke the analogy of Jeremiah's two laments in chapter 22: in verses 10-12 Jeremiah sympathizes with the cruel fate of Jehoahaz, condemned to die in exile, while in verses 24-30 he foretells, with emotion, the fate of Jehoiachin to die in a foreign land, never to see a descendent of his on the throne of David. The combination of piteousness and humiliation in these two figures and the balance of their ignominious fates—the one deported to the west, the other to the east—makes them fit themes for a poetic dirge. According to this interpretation of the cub-kings, their mother-lioness will be an emblem of the nation or the dynasty (cf. Hos 2:4; Ezek 16; 23:2; Isa 50:1).

**<sup>5</sup>When she saw, as she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. <sup>6</sup>And he walked about among the lions; he became a young lion, he learned to tear his prey; he devoured men. <sup>7</sup>And he destroyed their fortified towers and laid waste their cities; and the land and its fulness were appalled because of the sound of his roaring. <sup>8</sup>Then nations set against him on every side from their provinces, and they spread their net over him; he was captured in their pit. <sup>9</sup>And they put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him in hunting nets so that his voice should be heard no more on the mountains of Israel.'**

She took another of her cubs - "Modern commentators hold that Jehoiachin is intended, and Jehoiakim is omitted from the last kings of Judah in the elegy because he died a peaceful end. But the Jewish commentators identify the second 'whelp' with Jehoiakim, the half-brother and successor of Jehoahaz. From the various accounts of Jehoiakim's fate (cf. 2 Kgs 24:1ff; Jer 22:18f; Dan 1:1f; 2 Chron 36:6) it appears that he was twice taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar. The first time he was carried to Babylon, as stated in Daniel, and subsequently reinstated. After three years' subservience to Nebuchadnezzar, he again rebelled against him, as recorded in 2 Kings 24:1 where 'he turned, and rebelled' is idiomatic for 'he again rebelled.' As the consequences of this rebellion he was finally dethroned and taken to Babylon. It is this final phase of his career which the prophet predicted in the words, 'he shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem' (Jer 22:19)" (Fisch 116-117).

“A number of commentators insist on identifying this young lion as Jehoiakim since he followed Jehoahaz as king and ruled for eleven years. Perhaps they are correct but that does not look good to me. Read Jeremiah 22:13-19. There we are told that while Judah was going through fire he was building himself grand houses and using slave labor into the bargain. The prophet scathes him for trying to make his name as a builder while his fore-runners made their nation in righteousness (especially his father, Josiah). We are explicitly told he would go unlamented and would suffer the ‘burial of a donkey.’ Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem and (according to Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10:6-3) without siege is received into the city by Jehoiakim who had rebelled. The scripture speaks of Nebuchadnezzar binding Jehoiakim in fetters ‘to carry him to Babylon’ (2 Chron 36:6) but according to Josephus, Jehoiakim died (at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar?) and was buried outside the city wall in what was no ‘burial’ at all (‘without any burial’ - Josephus). None of this will fit into the text of Ezekiel here. This Jehoiakim was not to be lamented while the prince in our text was to be lamented. The wording of our present text clearly suggests a prince who would endure exile (v. 9) but this did not happen to Jehoiakim. So, while I can see some point in mentioning that Shallum was succeeded by Jehoiakim and therefore Jehoiachin is not in view in this section, I do not think the succession issue is of any importance” (McGuiggan 204).

**<sup>10</sup>‘Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard, planted by the waters; it was fruitful and full of branches because of abundant waters. <sup>11</sup>And it had strong branches fit for scepters of rulers, and its height was raised above the clouds so that it was seen in its height with the mass of its branches.’**

Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard - “Although the picture has changed, the ‘mother’ is still to be taken as the nation Israel. The symbol of the vine and the vineyard was a favorite with Ezekiel (15:1-6; 17:1-10) as well as with other writers (Isa 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Psa 80:8-16 cf. Mt 21:33-41; Jn 15:1-8). It had an honourable ancestry from Genesis 49:9-12, where can be found the same imagery of lions, sceptres and vines as Ezekiel uses here. In this allegory the vine, planted in a well-watered land, flourishes and sends out sturdy shoots like so many royal sceptres, and these represented the nation’s succession of rulers. When the vine was pulled up by its roots, however, its strong stem withered away and was burnt. The vine was transplanted to a desert land and at the same time fire came out of its chief branch and destroyed all its fruit and the rest of its foliage. This is clearly a reference to Zedekiah, the last ruler of Israel, who was regarded as the cause of the nation’s ultimate collapse” (Taylor 154-155).

**<sup>12</sup>‘But it was plucked up in fury; it was cast down to the ground; and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong branch was torn off so that it withered; the fire consumed it. <sup>13</sup>And now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. <sup>14</sup>And the fire has gone out from its branch; it has consumed its shoots and fruit, so that there is not in it a strong branch, a scepter to rule. This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.’”**

Fire has come out from its branch - “And what is the reason for the judgment on these Judean lords? The fire which consumes them comes from their rods. The rulers who rule the people are responsible for the terrible plight of both themselves and the people. There is no point in looking to Zedekiah for deliverance because he too is making his contribution to the destruction of the royal line and the people as a whole. The chapter closes by reminding the people that lamentation has been experienced and will be. There is no deliverance for them no matter how fervently the false prophets preach. No leader but God is worthy of trust and no leader but God can bring deliverance. Doom is coming despite Zedekiah” (McGuiggan 205).

“Some have taken this oracle to be a continuation of the eagle-cedar-vine allegory of chapter 17; the two are indeed similar. But our dirge differs from the political allegory of chapter 17 in its distinguishing between generations (parent-offspring) and its moral grounds for punishment (cruelty, pride), instead of the political ground of chapter 17. Both features reflect something of the themes of the intervening chapter 18. In the light of 18:10, ‘a violent (*prys*) son,’ it is also interesting that Isaiah 35:9 parallels ‘lion’ with ‘a violent (*prys*) beast’; could the unusual adjective in chapter 18 have triggered the lion figure of chapter 19?” (Greenberg 359).

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Notice the difference between this chapter and chapter eighteen. In chapter eighteen the stress was on individuals and their responsibility for their own lives, but in chapter twenty the stress is on the continuance of sin. Ezekiel is not saying that Jerusalem will be punished because of the sins of her forefathers, but that she has continued in those very same sins for which Israel, in the past, was punished and she should not expect to be treated any differently now. This is an illustration of the proverb “like mother like daughter.”

“The discourse in this chapter is a reply to some of the elders who came to the prophet to inquire about the ultimate fate of Jerusalem, and perhaps also to request that he might invoke God’s mercy to annul His decree regarding the impending destruction of the State. On Divine authority Ezekiel replies that the tragic fate of Jerusalem is irrevocable, because the same stubbornness and disobedience to the law of God which characterized their ancestors in Egypt, the wilderness and the Holy Land are still prevalent among their contemporaries. Yet the destruction of the Temple and the fall of the State will not mean the end of the covenant which God had made with Israel. Any attempt on their part to terminate that covenant and to assimilate themselves to other nations will be frustrated by His intervention. the wicked who persisted in eliminating God from their lives will perish, and only the righteous remnant will return to a reborn and purified Zion, and there dedicate themselves to the service of God” (Fisch 120).

“Unlike the illustration of the foundling child (chapter 16) and the parable of Oholah and Oholibah (chapter 23), we have here a description of Israel’s past history of continuing rebellion against the Lord, expressed in actual historical terms without the aid of

metaphor and allegory. The chapter traces the main events of the past, beginning with Egypt and leading on to the Exodus, the wilderness experience, like in Canaan and eventual dispersion among the nations. There are a number of themes which recur:

- (a) “The rebelliousness of Israel, despite God’s merciful treatment of them in giving them numerous blessings and in repeatedly withholding His wrath from being poured out upon them.
- (b) “The wilderness wanderings, as being more than simply an episode in Israel’s history. They represented a state of mind and its consequences. So the final period of Israel’s history, the dispersion in exile, is seen as a reversion to the wilderness life which had preceded the settlement in Canaan (verse 35: ‘I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples’).
- (c) “The motive of Yahweh’s concern for His own name. This is a new feature in Ezekiel’s writing and it appears later in chapter 36 and 39, but it is not wholly absent anywhere from the prophet’s thought. Its significance is that it represents a cessation by God of His covenant blessings towards Israel because they had so completely abandoned their own responsibilities under the covenant. All the covenant requirements, like the statutes and ordinances of Sinai, had been broken and the covenant sign, the sabbath, had been profaned: God was therefore justified in carrying out the sanctions of the covenant. He was still, however, a God of mercy but now His merciful acts were prompted primarily by concern for His own ‘name’ (i.e. glory, reputation), and with an eye to the conclusions which would be drawn by the watching nations of the world” (Taylor 155-156).

“Summing up the structure and design, the oracle falls into two main corresponding parts: A. a description of past, mainly cultic, guilt articulated in a series of three graduated episodes of like form capped by a fourth differently formulated (verses 1-29); B2. a briefer description of the future as a new exodus consummated by the acceptable worship of God on His holy hill (vv. 33,44). Connecting the two is B1, a short denunciation of the present ‘audience’ (vv. 30-32) in which one circle is closed—the question of God’s response to the elder’s inquiry—and another is opened—the rectification of the present wrong doings. Two matters are thus intertwined: onto the refusal to respond to inquiry is superimposed the cultic issue, whose past aspect serves to ground the refusal but then links up with present and future to provide a conspectus of the entire course of Israel’s sacrificial worship” (Greenberg 381-382).

**<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. <sup>2</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>3</sup>“Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” declares the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by**

you.”<sup>4</sup>“Will you judge them, will you judge them, son of man? Make them know the abominations of their fathers;

In the seventh year - 590 B.C. A little under a year has passed since he last noted the date (8:1). A duration of about 3½ years would elapse and then the siege of Jerusalem would begin.

I will not be inquired of by you - “In 36:37 the opposite is stated: ‘I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel.’ This demonstrates that God will respond differently as the situation dictates (cf. *The Jewish Midrash - Cant. Rabba* 7.8)” (Fisch 120).

Will you judge them, son of man - The purport of the question is: will you act as champion, or advocate, on their behalf? The answer is that the present is not the time for Elijah to assume that role. His job is to “cause them to know” the reason for their dangerous plight which will be evident to them when they survey the national past. Greenberg translates this as, “Will you arraign there?” and notes that this phrase occurs in 22:2 and 23:36.

“Arraign comes closest to the intention, which is that the prophet bring a bill of indictment. Interrogative *h* here conveys impassioned or indignant affirmation, as in 1 Samuel 2:27; Jeremiah 31:20 (*BDB*, p. 210a, def c.)” (Greenberg 363).

The abominations of their fathers - “The reason given for the refusal to answer the elders’ inquiry is cryptically given as ‘the abominations of the fathers’ (4). To interpret this as an accusation against the elders on the grounds of their forefathers’ sins would involve a denial of much that Ezekiel has been arguing in relation to individual responsibility. The point is that for some unexplained reason the inquiry is an impertinent one and needs only a rehearsal of Israel’s past sins to show that history has answered the question for them. This explains the impatience of the repeated ‘will you judge them’ (4), a phrase which has the force of an imperative: ‘set out the case against them.’” (Taylor 156-157).

#### Section #1: Apostasies in Egypt (vv. 5-9)

<sup>5</sup>and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “On the day when I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God, <sup>6</sup>on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.”’

“In three phases, formulated in schematic parallelism, the ‘saving history’ of the credo which accuses Israel is unfolded in a casuistic legal style, which was familiar to the prophet from his priestly background. Each of the three phases shows how Israel received the instruction of its God in an area of life which was intended by God to bring

salvation (vv. 5-7, 10-12, 17-20). Each time Israel behaved rebelliously against this instruction (vv. 8a,13a,21a) so that Yahweh's holy anger blazed up and threatened the destruction of Israel (vv. 8b,13b,21b). Then Yahweh repeatedly restrained Himself 'for His name's sake' (vv. 9,14, and 17, 22). In an evident heightening this restraint is increasingly elaborated with stronger threats of judgment (lacking in the first phase; in the second phase verses 15-16; in the third phase verses 23-26). Thus the three phases do not stand simply alongside each other as cases to be considered individually (which distinguishes them from the legal casuistic of Ezekiel 18), but possess an inner historical movement towards judgment, which then stands as a concrete threat over the third phase. For the immediate present of the exiles being addressed it was a reality which had already taken place" (Zimmerli 407).

On the day when I chose Israel - This is the only occurrence in Ezekiel of *bahar*, the key term in Deuteronomy for God's relation to Israel. For Moses, election was "a dialectical process": it spoke of the love of YHWH and required loyal obedience on the part of His people. The word unmistakably demands a response from Israel. The verses that follow exemplify this two-way process perfectly.

Swore to the descents of the house of Jacob - "The frequency of the strong word of asseveration, 'I lifted up my hand' (RSV - I swore), in verses 5,6,15,23,28 and 42, illustrates the abundance of God's grace in so binding Himself to His covenant mercies to Israel. This grace was first shown in the self-revelation of Yahweh to Moses (Ex 6:2-8) in the words, 'I am the Lord (i.e. Yahweh) your God.' It is regarded in this passage as the moment in time when the Lord 'chose' Israel, the only occasion incidentally when this word is used in Ezekiel. Israel's history begins therefore, not with Abraham, but with Moses and the burning bush and the name of Yahweh, revealed as the definitive name of Israel's covenant God" (Taylor 157).

"In Exodus 6:8 the promise is said to have been made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Since the first two had other sons, Ishmael and Esau respectively, it is explained that the fulfillment was to be restricted to the seed of Jacob" (Fisch 121).

"God begins back before the Egyptian oppression. Even then they were a rebellious people. He might have destroyed them even then in the midst of the land of Egypt (v. 8) but for His own name's sake He decided not to. He did not wish to give the pagans opportunity to malign His name by saying that the God who had chosen Israel could not bring them into a land of their own (v. 9). Notice that in verse 5 we have God 'electing' Israel. Then in verse 6 we have God 'providing' for Israel (notice the land 'I had searched out' which implies His getting everything ready). But notice too that God 'revealed' Himself to Israel (v. 5). So we hear of God here electing, revealing and providing" (McGuiggan 211-212).

"The solemn oath of verse 5 is now revealed as pertaining to the gift of a choice land for Israel; see, again, Exodus 6:8—and note how Ezekiel, in contrast, makes the Israelites in Egypt, not the patriarchs, the recipients of the oath. Ezekiel's disregard of the

patriarchs is perhaps deliberate (for his acquaintance with them is proven by the term 'house of Jacob' in verse 5 and the reference to Abraham in 33:24), chosen for the effect gained by juxtaposing God's total gracious treatment to Israel with Israel's total rejection of Him from their first encounter with Him as a nation, which was in Egypt. Ezekiel could not well have started Israel's career of apostasy with the patriarchs, the archetypal pious recipients of God's blessings" (Greenberg 364).

I had selected for them - The word "selected" (*twr* literally "searched out") is used of God's advance scouting for campsites during Israel's trek through the wilderness (Deut 1:33; in Num 10:33 it is the ark that scouts) and of the twelve spies who spied out the land for the Israelites (Num 13:1,16, etc.). This is depicting God surveying the earth to find the choicest land for Israel (cf. Ex 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; 14:8; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:9,15; 31:20).

<sup>7</sup>**"And I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.'**  
<sup>8</sup>**But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the lands of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt."**

Cast away...the detestable things - The Israelites followed some of the religious practices of their Egyptian neighbors (cf. Josh 24:14).

"Yahweh's election does not only mean a blessed destiny. It is a summons which calls for responsibility. With a significant fresh introduction Yahweh's demand in term of law, which had been proclaimed of old in Israel covenant cult, is formulated in verse 7...In comparison with the Pentateuchal narrative it is striking how decisively Ezekiel summarizes the process of revelation into a single event. What is there broken up into at least three acts: Yahweh's revelation of His name in connection with the call of Moses (Ex 3:6); the giving of the promise of the exodus and the settlement of the land by Moses to the people (Ex 4:30f; 6:6 . . . simply demands this, and the carrying out is not explicitly narrated); the giving of the laws on the mount of God in the wilderness (Ex 19ff), is here concentrated at the beginning in the act of revelation to Israel whilst it is still in Egypt. Also the promise of the land, which according to the patriarchs, is here included without any reference back to earlier events. We must be careful here not to draw conclusions about a different view of the history which Ezekiel may have received and seek to find a tradition of a giving of the law to Israel whilst it was already in Egypt. The arbitrary summarizing is Ezekiel's own work and is to serve to strengthen his message" (Zimmerli 408-409).

They rebelled against Me - “What is here narrated is not recorded in the Pentateuch. It may well be believed that while the Israelites were in Egypt, the pure faith inherited from the patriarchs was contaminated by local heathenish ideas and practices. According to the *Midrash Rabba*, Exodus 4:3, the wicked among the Israelites perished and were buried during the plague of darkness, so that the Egyptians should not say that an epidemic had been inflicted by God on His people” (Fisch 122).

But I acted for the sake of My name - “Since YHWH made known to Pharaoh His intention to free Israel from Egypt (according to the priestly strand of the Ex tradition, e.g., Ex 6:11; contrast 3:18 and 5:1), He could not now destroy them without injuring His reputation. This consideration, urged by Moses on God, obtains Israel’s release from punishment after the Golden Calf episode and the fiasco of the spies (Ex 32:12; Num 14:15f; Deut 9:28). Having derived it from the wandering traditions, Ezekiel antedates its operation to the Egyptian sojourn, where he places Israel’s first rebellion” (Greenberg 365).

“Were the Israelites not liberated from Egypt, the nations would not attribute it to Divine retribution but to His lack of power (cf. Num 14:16; Deut 9:28). God’s reluctance to punish His people ‘for the honour of (his) name,’ or ‘for (his) name’s sake,’ is the recurrent theme of this chapter. For the Israelite, a man’s name represented what the person was in himself. So by God’s ‘name’ was all that He represented in term of faithfulness and power. To prevent the misconception of God being limited to a given earthly locality, the stream of thought represented by Deuteronomy personified the name of God as the form of His presence in the Jerusalem temple. God dwells in heaven (Deut 26:15), but He causes His name to dwell at His chosen sanctuary (12:5 and 11). Once God had revealed His name to Israel, respect for Him among the nations was linked with the fate of His chosen people. The appropriate punishment for their idolatry - leaving them in Egypt - would have shown Him in the eyes of the nations to be fickle and powerless. But His name would thus have been profaned” (Carley 129).

That it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations - “The ‘name’ of Yahweh expresses His nature, His total personality as He has revealed Himself. It is parallel to His ‘glory’ i.e. His glorious majesty, and it can refer to His reputation in the eyes of men. If men think right thoughts about Him and recognize His attributes for what they are and so worship Him, they may be said to ‘sanctify’ Him; and conversely, to misunderstand His nature and to regard Him less highly than He ought to be regarded is to ‘profane’ His name. It is the duty of the new Israel, as it was of the old Israel, to see that God’s name is not profaned through inadequate witness to His nature and His truth. The believer’s sins and shortcomings inevitably result in such profanation. But God can and does frequently take special measures to counteract this and to ensure that faithful witness to Him and His power is not completely extinguished” (Taylor 157-158).

I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt - God had revealed Himself to Israel by the plagues and conveyed to them His intention to liberate

them. All this was equally demonstrated to the Egyptians. Therefore, if the Israelites failed to follow God's procedure for release they would have profaned God's name.

Section #2: Apostasies in the Wilderness (vv. 10-26)

<sup>10</sup>“So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.  
<sup>11</sup>And I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. <sup>12</sup>And also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.”

Brought them into the wilderness - “The pattern of grace, rebellion and wrath withheld, which is attributed to Israel's history in Egypt in verses 5-9, is not worked out in relation to the wilderness period. First, in verses 10-17, there is mention of the gracious deliverance of the Exodus, the gift of the Law and the ordaining of the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant. It is worth noting that, despite New Testament strictures on the spiritual value of the law as an instrument of salvation (e.g. Jn 1:17; Acts 13:39; Rom 3:20; Gal 3:19ff), it is quite clearly regarded as a gracious gift of God through Moses to His people and it was ordained so that by the observance of it ‘man shall live,’ i.e. ‘prosper,’ both materially and spiritually (cf. Deut 4:40; Josh 1:7f). In face of Israel's rejection of His grace, the Lord ‘thought’ to destroy them utterly (13) and ‘swore’ not to allow them into Canaan (15), but even these decisions were changed in the face of His overriding concern for His name. There is nothing inconsistent in the Deity changing His man, or ‘repenting,’ under such circumstances” (Taylor 158).

I gave them My statutes and...My ordinances - At Sinai, (cf. Neh 9:13f; Lev 26:46; for the Sabbath, see Ex 31:12ff).

If a man observes them, he will live - Literally “which man will observe and live through them” (cf. Lev 18:5 - the only occurrence of the phrase outside this prophecy). The combination of observance and life occurs in Ezekiel 18:9 and the phrase “laws of life” in 33:15. The laws are intended to bring life; but obedience to them makes man the beneficiary of their virtue (cf. Deut 6:24f). Deuteronomy 30:15-19 states forcefully that to follow the commandments is to choose life and blessing; not to follow them is to choose death and the curse. This phrase (here, verses 13 and 21) stresses God's initial good will toward Israel, to be replaced by retribution in the face of their disobedience (v. 25).

I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them - The plural includes festivals which are given in the Pentateuch (cf. Lev 23:24,39).

“It was undoubtedly an ancient Israelite institution of inactivity at intervals of seven days (Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; 34:21; Lev 19:3,30; 23:3; 26:2; Deut 5:12-15). It appears with the meaning of a confessional sign of the Yahweh covenant (Ex 31:12-17; 35:2f), together with circumcision, to go back to the exilic age. In the book of Ezekiel sabbaths are

mentioned again in the plural in 22:8,26; 23:38; 44:24; 45:17; 46:3, and in the singular in 46:1,4,12. Also here they are referred to as special gifts, which like a piece of legal proof, mark out Israel from the nations of the world as Yahweh's own and therefore a 'consecrated' (Ex 19:4-6; Deut 14:2) people" (Zimmerli 410).

"The purpose clause is a virtual citation of Exodus 31:13: observance of God's sabbaths (His, because He rested on that day (Ex 31:17, based on Gen 2:2f) is a token that He consecrated Israel to Him. 'It is an important sign for them that I gave them my rest day for their own rest—a manifest testimony to my consecrating them to me'" (Rashi).

"Note that when this purpose clause is repeated in verse 20 the last phrase is replaced by 'that I, YHWH, am their God'; consecration to YHWH and having Him as God are equivalent. Singling out the sabbath from all the laws attests to its significance as a distinguishing feature of YHWH's people. While the sabbath is mentioned in late oracles (22:8,26; 23:38) and its sanctification is a duty of the priesthood in the future state (44:24), its importance here seems greater, comparable only to that assigned to it in Jeremiah 17:19-27; Isaiah 56:2,4,6; Nehemiah 13:18...Yet the emphasis laid on the sabbath in this oracle is not inordinate when account is taken of the prominence given here to Israel's propensity to assimilate to the nations (especially verses 32ff). As a distinctively Israelite custom, the sabbath may well have become a touchstone of loyalty to YHWH from the time of the assimilatory reforms of Manasseh onward. On this ground the fitness of Jeremiah 17's estimate of the fateful importance of the sabbath for the late pre-exilic situation in Judah may be also defended" (Greenberg 366-367).

**<sup>13</sup>"But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. <sup>14</sup>But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out"**

They did not walk in My statutes - "During their sojourn in the wilderness, they worshipped the Golden Calf, left the manna until morning (Ex 16:20), tried God in Rephidim (Ex 17) and committed other acts of disobedience. 'My sabbaths they greatly profaned' - cf. Ex 16:27f and Num 15:32f. I acted for the sake of My namesake—God intended to annihilate the people because they worshipped the calf, and again because they mistrusted His abilities to deliver the Canaanites into their hands (Num 14). In both cases Moses dissuaded Him by appeals to His character, prominent among them being regard for the injury to His reputation that would result from Israel's destruction. But after the second episode God swore that the Exodus generation would not live to enter the promised land" (Taylor 190).

**<sup>15</sup>"And also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all**

lands, <sup>16</sup>because they rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they did not walk in them; they even profaned My sabbaths, for their heart continually went after their idols. <sup>17</sup>Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them, and I did not cause their annihilation in the wilderness.”

Yet My eye spared them rather than destroying them - The fact that God spared the people (v.17) has been interpreted as an expression of pity on the basis of Psalm 78:38, “but He, being merciful, forgave iniquity and would not destroy.” While there may be some small connection, it rather seems that in this oracle there is a concern for the authority (sanctification) of the divine name; *hus ‘al* here means no more than to spare, i.e., not to inflict destruction upon. (Ezekiel explicitly ascribes a tender sentiment to God only in 39:25, *rihem* “have compassion for.”)

<sup>18</sup>“And I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statues of your fathers, or keep their ordinances, or defile yourselves with their idols. <sup>19</sup>I am the Lord your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and observe them. <sup>20</sup>Arid sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.’”

“In verses 18-26, God gives a similar chance to the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness (as in verses 10-17), but the response is identical with that of their fathers. This time, although once again God refrains from pouring out His wrath, He does leave Israel with two unhappy legacies, namely the threat of dispersion from Canaan among foreign peoples (23-24), and the harmful ordinance of the offering of the firstborn (25-26). The latter presents an acute problem of interpretation. It seems to refer to the unlawful practice of ‘passing children through the fire to Molech’ a form of child-sacrifice so strongly and frequently condemned in the Old Testament that it may well have happened far more than the occasional times it is mentioned (e.g. 2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chron 28:3; cf. 2 Kgs 17:17; 23:10,13; Jer 7:31; 32:35). But this could never be described as an ordinance of God. It may be that the ordinance referred to is that of the offering of the first-born with its insistence that everything that opens the womb belongs to the Lord. This is modified by the law of redemption whereby a substitute or a ransom-price can be provided for first-born children (Ex 22:29; Num 18:15ff). But the occasional continuance of child sacrifice was probably due to a misinterpretation of this law, and so Ezekiel could imply that God had ultimately made it so. The alternative is to understand these verses in the manner of Romans 1:24, which is saying that the consequences of spiritual perversity is that God ‘gives men up’ to grosser sins” (Taylor 158-159).

<sup>21</sup>“But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. <sup>22</sup>But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out.”

But the children rebelled against Me - Threat of punishment and exile did not deter the desire to serve idols. Since nothing else worked, God gave them over to false statutes and perverted ordinances, making them subject to the rules of Molech worship, in which it was necessary to offer the first-born by fire. Not even the horror of this false religion made them turn (vv. 21-26).

**<sup>23</sup>“Also I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands, <sup>24</sup>because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes, and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. <sup>25</sup>And I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; <sup>26</sup>and I proclaimed them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their first-born to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the Lord.”**

I would scatter them among the nations - While they were still in the wilderness, God decreed that their descendants, after being settled in the Holy Land, would be exiled and dispersed among the nations. God did this because the people continued to have a false belief that they somehow *deserved* the promised land and that God would never forsake them—regardless of how unfaithful they became (cf. Deut 4:27ff; 28:64ff; Psa 106:26ff).

I also gave them statues that were not good - Because Israel consistently rejected God’s good, life-giving laws, God’s designed punishment was to replace them with “not-good” laws, by observing which one would gain not life but death (cf. 18:18; 36:31). These are then exemplified by child sacrifice, at once a murderous pagan practice and an abomination worthy of severest condemnation. By this “anti-gift” God only confirmed the people in *their choice* of laws countering God’s (vv. 18f); this choice led them inevitably to adopt the deadly laws of the pagans (cf. Deut 12:31) which illustrates the pagan mode of worship by the custom of burning children). The shocking idea that God misleads those who anger Him into sin, for which He then destroys them, already appeared in 14:9. It is essentially the same as God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart so that his ruin might be a lasting object lesson (Ex 9:16; 10:2); or the charge to Isaiah to “dull the people’s mind, stop its ears, and seal its eyes, lest, seeing with its eyes and hearing with its ears, it also grasps with its mind and repents and heals itself” (Isa 6: 9ff); or the complaint of Isaiah 63:17, “Why, YHWH, do you make us stray from your ways, and harden out hearts not to fear you?” (cf. also 1 Kgs 18:36b). See Psalm 81:11-12, “But my people did not listen to My voice; so I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices” (Psa 81).

I proclaimed them unclean because of their gifts - Greenberg translates this as “defiling them by their gifts” (361).

“The penalty of sin is further delusion and worse sin, the end of which is death. God had ordained that the firstborn, ‘all that openeth the womb,’ should be ‘sanctified’ to Him (Ex 13:2). So far as the children were concerned, this was a law which preserved them alive since nowhere does He command child-sacrifice. They rejected this law, and God allowed them to turn an act of ‘sanctification’ into an act of ‘pollution’ when they burnt their children to Molech” (Fisch 126).

Section #3: Apostasies in the Promised Land (vv. 27-32)

**<sup>27</sup>“Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me. <sup>28</sup>When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma, and there they poured out their libations. <sup>29</sup>Then I said to them, ‘What is the high place to which you go?’ So its name is called Bamah to this day.””**

“The crowning rebellion of Israel’s history was that when finally, in the mercy of God, they entered into the land of promise, they promptly took over the heathen Canaanite hill-top shrines as their own places of sacrifice, and offerings which should have proved acceptable to God were nothing less than an ‘irritation’ (28; EVV ‘provocation’) to Him” (Taylor 159).

Your fathers have blasphemed Me - In addition to their wickedness in Egypt and the wilderness, they continued their sinning even when they were in their own land. This blatant disregard for God and His laws was not overlooked. The verb “blaspheme” signifies, in a wider sense, committing a serious sin. The phrase, “the same blasphemes the LORD” (Num 15:30), is interpreted in the Talmud as idolatry” (*Kerithoth* 7b).

What is the high place to which you go? - i.e. Who permitted you the use of a “high place?” God had never allowed the use of high places for His worship. As one studies through 1 and 2 Kings, it is apparent that many of the kings of Judah and Israel were guilty of continuing this practice (and failing to learn from others, 2 Kgs 17:11). Hezekiah and Josiah finally removed the high places (2 Kgs 18:4; 23:13).

**<sup>30</sup>“Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ‘Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? <sup>31</sup>And when you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live,” declares the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you. <sup>32</sup>And what comes into your mind will not come about, when you say: ‘We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone.’”**

In reply to the inquiry of the elders of Israel, Ezekiel reviewed the nation's past. Now he applies the teaching to the future.

When you offer your gifts...you are defiling yourselves - "As an act of homage to the images you worship, the 'gifts' take the form of the sacrifices of their children ... Such 'pollution' creates a barrier between them and God which makes impossible the achievement of their desires, viz. enlightenment from Him on what the immediate future holds in store" (Fisch 127-128).

To this day - The word now carries to the present house of Israel who have been committing these idolatrous practices "to this day" (31). In particular, the elders who came to inquire of the Lord are addressed and told that there will be no word for them. The participation in, and encouragement of the people to, the idolatrous ways of the heathen will not be allowed to happen (32). God will intervene and with the same "mighty hand" and "out-stretched arm" that saved Israel at the Exodus. He will become "king" over them and lead them in judgment into another wilderness experience (cf. Hos 2:14f; 12:9). This will serve as a purging for Israel; the unclean will not return and those who want their idolatry can practice it, but in isolation from the faithful Israelites so as not to profane God's name any more (39).

#### Section #4: The Result of the Apostasies (vv. 33-49)

**<sup>33</sup>"As I live," declares the Lord God, "surely with a mighty hand and with an out-stretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. <sup>34</sup>And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; <sup>35</sup>and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face."**

I shall be king over you - "Yahweh's promise of the new exodus is given in verse 33 a majestic interpretation preface. That Yahweh acts 'with a strong hand and outstretched arm and wrath poured out,' which is repeated in verse 34, takes up, in the first two clauses of its hymnic three parts, the stereotyped statements of the credo account of the exodus. Not by accident the reference to the 'arm of Yahweh' also plays a considerable part in Deutero - Isaiah's great message of deliverance (40:11; 51:5,9; 52:10; 53:1). The phrase added in third position 'with wrath poured out' is a formulation deriving from Ezekiel's own usage (7:8; 9:8; 14:19; 20:8,13,21; 22:22; 30:15; 36:18; besides 21:36; 22:31), which leaves it ambiguous whether here, as with 'hand' and 'arm' which are used against the Egyptians, the wrath is also to be thought of as turned against the hostile powers who hold Israel prisoner, or whether, as the allusion to 20:8, 13,21 makes possible and what follows makes explicitly clear, it refers to God's wrath against sinners in the house of Israel itself (so also in the related formulation in Jer 21:5). The most surprising feature, however, is that there appears in this exodus terminology the prediction of Yahweh as king, which is only found in Ezekiel of Yahweh

here (the verb *melek* again 17:16 is a secular usage, the noun *melek* often of human kings). We cannot find in this a subtle polemic against the *melek* worship, which is referred to in the child sacrifice of verses 26,31 without the mention of the *melek* name. Rather we should consider whether the mention of the kinship of Yahweh has been occasioned by an association of the king found in 1 Samuel 8, where, in connection with the desire of Israel 'to be like the nations,' the kingship of Yahweh is announced (admittedly with a quite different problem of the calling of a human king). In Ezekiel 20 the concern is not with the proclamation of Yahweh's kingship, but with the proclamation of God's kingship through His acts in history" (Zimmerli 415).

**<sup>36</sup>“As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord God. <sup>37</sup>“And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; <sup>38</sup>and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord. <sup>39</sup>As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, ‘Go, serve everyone his idols; but later, you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols.’”**

I shall make you pass under the rod - “In separating the tithe of herd or flock, it was the practice to make the animals pass one by one under the rod and the tenth was separated and declared holy (cf. Lev 27:32). Similarly, the Judeans, before their deliverance from exile, will be scrutinized by their Shepherd; the wicked will perish and the righteous be saved” (Fisch 129).

Go, serve everyone his idols - “The verse has been understood in two ways. First, as addressed to the contemporary generation as distinguished from those who, spoken of in the preceding verses, were to share in future restoration. Since they refused to obey God, let them completely abandon themselves to the worship of their idols. Alternatively, it is interpreted as ironical advice: ‘go ye, serve every one his idols; but afterwards (I swear that) ye shall hearken unto Me and no more profane My holy nation with your (abominable) gifts (which you are now offering) and with your idols (which you are now worshipping).’ The latter is preferable” (Fisch 129-130).

This could be understood as irony as in Amos 4:4 and Jeremiah 44:25. Greenberg takes it as an incomplete conditional. “‘And afterward, if you do not listen to me...’ similar to Exodus 32:32: ‘But now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin...’ (supply ‘well and good’). ‘Here it is supposed that a threat is left unspoken, namely, ‘I will give you your due.’ With this and the preceding, medievals compared the ironic, threatening verse of Ecclesiastes 11:9. Some moderns understand ‘*m ynkm* (‘if you do not’) as an oath expression: ‘surely you will (obey me)’ and connect it with what follows; but the oath particles are ‘*m l*’ plus finite verb, not ‘*m yn* plus participle...The verse is undeniably difficult... but highly suggestive: ‘Each of you go worship his idols, since you will not listen to Me but insist on being like the Gentiles. Better that than desecrating My holy

Name with your (abominable) gifts. Better to forsake Me altogether and worship idols than pretend to follow My laws but in fact forsake My ways! (Kara, Joseph. Commentary in *Mikra 'ot Gedolot*) (Greenberg 374).

**<sup>40</sup>“For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,” declares the Lord God, “there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I shall accept them, and there I shall seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. <sup>41</sup>As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. <sup>42</sup>And you will know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers.”**

For My holy mountain - The contrast with “every high hill” (v. 28). indicates that Zion’s hill—the temple mount—is meant (as in Isa 27:13; 56:7; 65:11; 66:20; Joel 2:1; 4:17; Zeph 3:11; Zech 8:3; Dan 9:20) rather than the mountainous land of Israel in general (Isa 11:9; 57:13). That the site determines acceptable and unacceptable worship is underlined by the repeated *sam* “there” in both this verse and in the contrasting verse 28. Only in the book of Ezekiel do we find in the Lord using the expression “My holy mountain”, which is particularly evident in the book of Isaiah (11:9; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20) but which is also found in Psa 2:6 and Obad 16.)

**<sup>43</sup>“And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds, with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done. <sup>44</sup>Then you will know that I am the Lord when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord God.”**

For My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways - Their self-loathing will be deeper when they realize that the transformation of their fortunes is not due to their merits. They really deserved to perish because of their evil ways. If they have escaped that fate, it is for the reason that God is jealous for His good name. May they take the lesson to heart and refrain from doing anything which will cause His name to be profaned!

**<sup>45</sup>Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>46</sup>“Son of man, set your face toward Teman and speak out against the south and prophesy against the forest land of the Negev, <sup>47</sup>and say to the forest of the Negev, ‘Hear the word of the Lord: thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and it shall consume every green tree in you, as well as every dry tree; the blazing flame will not be quenched, and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. <sup>48</sup>And all flesh will see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.”’ <sup>49</sup>Then I said, “Ah Lord God! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not just speaking parables?’”**

“In the A.V. and R.V. verses 1-5 are attached to the preceding chapter, 21 beginning with verse 6 of the Hebrew” (Fisch 132).

Speak out against the south - “Ezekiel is commanded to address his words ‘towards the south’ (6). Although the word appears three times in this verse in AV and RV, the Hebrew uses three different words (*temana*, *doram* and *negeb*). Of these the first two are general poetic words to describe the southerly direction, whereas the third refers to a named geographical area, called in modern Israel the Negev, which lay to the south of the Judean hills. Today this is a waterless desert, except where agricultural settlements have irrigated it into a state of cultivation, but we know that in Old Testament times there was greater afforestation throughout Palestine, and so a reference to ‘the forest of the Negeb’ (RSV) does not have to be regarded as completely figurative. Ezekiel may have reinforced his words by facing southwards as he uttered his oracle, predicting that the Lord will cause a forest fire to sweep through the land from south to north. All will see it and know one will be able to avoid its heat (47; ‘all faces...shall be scorched by it’). Men will realize that it has been sent by the Lord as an act of judgment” (Taylor 160-161).

I am about to kindle a fire in you - Two literary images appear to be relevant in this section. That judgment is referred to under the metaphor of fire is often to be found in Ezekiel (5:4; 10:2,6f; 15:4-7; 16:41; 19:12,14; 21:37; 23:25,47; 24:10,12 and other passages; cf. the reference to ‘the fire of wrath’ 21:36; 22:21,31; 38:19). From the reference to the fire which consumes the vine (15:4-7) or the nobles ruler’s scepter (19:12,14) the way is not very far to the metaphor of the forest fire. This is already to be found in the prophetic preaching of Isaiah (9:17; 10:17ff, also Zech 11:1f). More directly Jeremiah 21:14, where the palaces of Jerusalem appear to be compared to a forest and there is mention of a fire which Yahweh kindles in them, may have influenced Ezekiel. God’s judgment of fire in the Old Testament lends a fitting background to His ultimate judgment by fire in the Last Day (cf. 2 Pet 3:5ff).

Is he not just speaking parables - Verse 49 presupposes that Ezekiel has spoken his oracle and has been ridiculed by his hearers as a ‘speaker of parables’ (RV) or, to retain the cognate form of the Hebrew, a “riddler of riddles.” Perhaps their view that Ezekiel’s earlier prophecies have remained unfulfilled, as well as some of his symbolic words have given the people this idea.

## LESSONS

1. History should serve to teach God’s people. God expects future generations to learn from and not repeat, the failings of earlier generations.
2. Each generation is given new opportunities. It is theirs to develop righteousness, regardless of what earlier generations might have done.
3. God’s patience should lead to repentance (cf. Rom 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“In this chapter the prophet repeats with solemn emphasis his solemn warning of the imminent invasion and fall of Jerusalem. At first he speaks in metaphors, then he passes on to the plain language. The scene of the forest in the South devoured by fire (i.e. 20: 45-49) is replaced by that of Jerusalem devastated by the sword. He proceeds to describe in vivid terms the drawn sword in the hand of the Babylonian king who would execute God’s judgment unsparingly. After the oracle on the devouring sword comes a description of Nebuchadnezzar standing at the crossroads and practicing divination to decide whether he should first attack Ammon or Jerusalem. The lot fell on the latter; but , Ammon, too, would eventually be destroyed by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar” (Fisch 132).

Not since chapters 4-7 and chapter 9 has the theme of judgment been presented with such force and thoroughness as it is in the following uninterrupted proclamation of doom. At least four oracles about the sword are intertwined in this passage:

1. The sword of the Lord unsheathed (20:45-21:7),
2. The song of the sword (21:8-17),
3. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar en route to Jerusalem (21:18-22) and
4. The sword of Chaldean conquest (21:28-32).

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and speak against the sanctuaries, and prophesy against the land of Israel; <sup>3</sup>and say to the land of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am against you; and I shall draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. <sup>4</sup>Because I shall cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword shall go forth from its sheath against all flesh from south to north. <sup>5</sup>Thus all flesh will know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath. It will not return to its sheath again.””**

Set your face toward Jerusalem - “The phraseology of verses 2-5 is designed to match that of 20:46-48. The south becomes first ‘Jerusalem,’ then ‘the sanctuaries,’ and finally ‘the land of Israel.’ The forest fire becomes a ‘sword,’ which will slay ‘both righteous and wicked’ (‘the green tree and the dry tree’), and ‘all flesh’ will recognize that it is the Lord who has done this (5). The theme of the sword of the Lord may be traced back to Joshua’s vision, on the banks of the river Jordan, of the commander of the army of the Lord with his drawn sword in His hand (Josh 5:13ff). There He was fighting for His people to enable them to enter the promised land in victory. In other passages, especially in the prophets, God wields His sword against Israel’s enemies

(Deut 32:41; Isa 31:8; 34:5-8; 66:16; Jer 25:31; 50:35ff; Zeph 2:12). The sword is thus His instrument of judgment and features prominently in apocalyptic battle-scenes in intertestamental writing. Ezekiel, however, is using it here of God's punishment upon Israel, though in other prophecies he implies that the sword of the Lord has been put into the hands of the king of Babylon so that God's judgment may be worked out through his armies upon the might of Pharaoh, king of Egypt (30:24; 32:11-15). In the collection of oracles that comprise this section, it seems as if the only unifying factor which has brought them together is the recurrence of this theme of the sword of the Lord (vv. 3-5,11-15,19, 20,28)" (Taylor 161).

Cut off from you the righteous and the wicked - This is the meaning of "every green tree and every dry tree" (20:47). The punishment of both the righteous with the wicked is not a contradiction to Ezekiel's teaching (cf. 18:20; or that in Gen18:23,25). It is well established in the Old Testament, as well as the New, that God makes no promises *in this life* to the faithful (cf. Rom 8:18-39).

**<sup>6</sup>"As for you, son of man, groan with breaking heart and bitter grief, groan in their sight. <sup>7</sup>And it will come about when they say to you, 'Why do you groan?' that you will say, 'Because of the news that is coming; and every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it comes and it will happen,' declares the Lord God."**

Groan with breaking heart - Whereas Jeremiah frequently expressed his personal feelings of suffering, Ezekiel's sufferings are wrapped up in the word of God. The Lord commands the prophet to groan. A question from those around him, which has its counterpart in 12:9; 24:19; 37:18 (cf. 20:49), makes it necessary for the prophet to give public explanation for his expression of grief. The act of groaning is set in line with the prophet's sign actions (cf.12:17-20).

"That this judgment is not simply an appointed fate, but an act of suffering, is made clear in the concluding sign - action, once again in a very harshly objective way. Yahweh commands the prophet to groan. The verb 'to groan' expressing, according to 24:17, an over-whelming experience of pain which precludes any outward expression. Such pain the prophet is commanded to show 'before their eyes' with 'breaking loins' and in 'bitter pain.' The loins, on which men fasten a sword for battle or a sackcloth for lamentations, are the center of physical strength (Job 40:16; Nah 2:2). When they are broken (Deut 33:11), seized with trembling (Nah 2:11; Isa 21:3), brought to tottering (29:7), then this strength has gone" (Zimmerli 425).

Behold, it comes and it will happen, declares the Lord God - "The most dangerous threat of the prophet's preaching lies in the message that in the fire and the sword it will not be simply who is wielding them, but God Himself who will kindle the fire and unsheathe the sword. This too will not be against any people at a distance, who may or may not have deserved such a fate, but against His own people with its land, its city and its sanctuary. In the prophet's groaning we hear that, in what is to happen, a truly

catastrophic event, even in God's estimate, will be accomplished upon His own people. All this seeks to establish that where God encounters his people their fate is hopeless, and they have not simply to fear a benevolent grandfatherly rebuke, but death itself. There can be no easy taking hold of 'life,' still existing in some untouched corner for the darling child of election. 'Life' is only conceivable where God's people despair of their own lives and give in to God's judgment, in fear of the sword which they cannot put back into its sheath. When they receive the message with which God Himself returns the sword to its sheath (see verse 35) it is because He will to speak out of His own free faithfulness about His peace" (Zimmerli 425).

**<sup>8</sup>Again the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>9</sup>“Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord,’ Say, A sword, a sword sharpened and also polished! <sup>10</sup>Sharpened to make a slaughter, polished to flash like lightning! Or shall we rejoice, the rod of My son despising every tree? <sup>11</sup>And it is given to be polished, that it may be handled; the sword is sharpened and polished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. <sup>12</sup>Cry out and wail, son of man; for it is against My people, it is against all the officials of Israel. They are delivered over to the sword with My people, therefore strike your thigh. <sup>13</sup>For there is a testing; and what if even the rod which despises will be no more?” declares the Lord God.**

“This sword is impartial. It not only chops down foreign kings, it bring under judgment the Davidic king. You remember that rods (or branches) stood for the scepters of the kings which in turn stood for the rulers themselves (see 19:11ff). This sword, this impartial sword of God's justice brings judgment on God's own rulers (here called God's son - see Psa 89:26-27). The Jew has no right to trust in the fact that Zedekiah is of the family line of David - it is not family connection that God is ultimately interested in, it is holiness. This royal line will fall, in keeping with the punitive elements in the covenant which God made with David (Psa 89:30ff; 38ff). The sword is impartial in two respects: 1) it will cut down even the rulers of Israel when they have become ungodly, and, 2) It will smite not only the people but the rulers, not only the rulers but the people. It knows no national or social distinctions” (McGuiggan 223-224).

Shall we rejoice - The second half of this verse is extremely difficult and most modern commentators resort to speculation. A. J. (*American-Jewish Translation of the Scriptures*) interprets this clause as parenthetical, expressing the thought of the Judeans that, far from being terrified at the sight of the sword, they should rather rejoice because it will not be used against them but against the other nations. Another explanation: is there cause for complacency that the sword is drawn only against Israel's enemies?

The rod of My son despising every tree - “At once comes the Divine retort destructive of such complacency. There can be no occasion here for self-satisfaction. The sharpened and flashing sword is destined for use only against Judea; it rejects any other people. There is nothing in the Hebrew to correspond with ‘against’ and the verb *ma’as* means ‘to reject’ as well as ‘to despise.’ The translation may according be: ‘(the sword) is the rod of My son, it rejecteth every (other) tree.’ The word ‘rod’ is commonly used

for God's chastisement (cf. Isa 10:24; 30:31; Lam 3:1), and the instrument of human punishment (cf. Prov 13:24). Since Jerusalem is compared to a forest (20:46), the nations are referred to as 'trees'" (Fisch 135).

It is given to be polished - "The Hebrew is literally 'and he gave it,' viz. God, who had drawn the sword from its sheath (v. 3), has handed it over to be furbished and then delivered into the hand of the executioner" (Fisch 135).

There is a testing - "The portrayal of the furbished sword serves as a test to see whether the people will take the warning to heart. Rashi's interpretation of the verse is preferable: '(My son) has been tried,' by other but less drastic punishments of God. 'What, then, (will become of him) if also the sword which rejecteth (the other nations should strike him)? He will cease to exist'" (Fisch 136).

**14"“You therefore, son of man, prophesy, and clap your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword for the slain. It is the sword for the great one slain, which surrounds them, <sup>15</sup>that their hearts may melt, and many fall at all their gates. I have given the glittering sword. Ah! It is made for striking like lightning, it is wrapped up in readiness for slaughter. <sup>16</sup>Show yourself sharp, go to the right; set yourself; go to the left, wherever your edge is appointed. <sup>17</sup>I shall also clap My hands together, and I shall appease My wrath; I, the Lord, have spoken.”**

Go to the left - "The verbs have the feminine form indicating that the 'sword' (a feminine noun in Hebrew), representing the king of Babylon, is addressed. He hesitated at the crossroads and cast lots whether to attack Judea on the right or Ammon on the left (verse 21). So he is urged to reach a decision in which direction he will advance" (Fisch 137).

**18And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>19</sup>“As for you, son of man, make two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come; both of them will go out of one land. And make a signpost; make it at the head of the way to the city. <sup>20</sup>You shall mark a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and to Judah into fortified Jerusalem.”**

Make two ways - "In a fresh encounter the command is given to the 'son of man' to mark out two roads. The verb, which is frequently (forty-one times) used in the book of Ezekiel (4:2; 21:27 the placing of battering ram; 4:4 imposition of guilt; 6:2; 13:17 and other passages, the turning of the face; 17:5 placing a tree; 19:5 a young lion and others), allows no completely clear definition of the action demanded of the prophet" (Zimmerli 442).

"The word which occurs most frequently in this section is the word 'appoint' (AV; 19,20, 22 twice). The Hebrew word is the more modest *sum* or *sim*, which simply means 'to put' or 'to place.' It does however suggest once again that Ezekiel is intended to

combine his message here with a symbolical performance of the advance of the Babylonian king along the road to Jerusalem, with suitable routes mapped out upon the ground. The first act is to mark out the road stemming from Babylon, or probably from the north, shaped like an inverted Y, with Jerusalem and Rabbath Ammon (suitably sign-posted) at the end of its two prongs. Then the various kinds of divination practiced by the king as he stood at the parting of the ways are re-enacted. The alternatives were an assault on the Amorite capital city (modern Ammon) or a siege of Jerusalem” (Taylor 163).

**<sup>21</sup>“For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the household idols, he looks at the liver. <sup>22</sup>Into his right hand came the divination, ‘Jerusalem,’ to set battering rams, to open the mouth for slaughter, to lift up the voice with a battle cry, to set up battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build a siege wall. <sup>23</sup>And it will be to them like a false divination in their eyes; they have sworn solemn oaths. But he brings iniquity to remembrance, that they may be seized.”**

The king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way...to use divination - “Three methods of divination are described. The first is shaking the ‘arrows,’ or *belomancy* (AV is misleading here). In this, arrows were marked with names of people or places, shaken up in a quiver, and was drawn out, as in drawing lots. The second is consultation of the ‘teraphim:’ these were small images of household or ancestral gods, the possession of which played an important part in matters of legal inheritance (cf. Gen 31:19ff). They were sometimes used idolatrously or for necromancy and were among the abominations removed by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:24). What they looked like or how they were consulted we do not know. But if they were figures of ancestors they would presumably be used as mediums for obtaining oracles from the departed. The third is *hepatoscopy*, examination of the ‘liver’ or entrails of a sacrificed victim. This was a common feature of Babylonian divination and it was carried over into ancient Rome as well. The interpretation of the markings on such organs was one of the skills in which Ancient Near Eastern soothsayers were instructed, as numbers of clay models unearthed by archaeologists appear to indicate (e.g. *The New Bible Dictionary*, figure 135, page 742)” (Taylor 163-164).

It will be to them like false divination - “Here is a tricky little verse. There are several possible renderings and a few more views of those renderings. Let me tell what I favor. I favor the view which is expressed in this way: ‘And this decision to come against Jerusalem will seem to the Judean false prophets to be a false divination contrary to Nebuchadnezzar’s best interests. These Judean false prophets have sworn oaths to the Judean people that everything would work out all right for them. But God (through the Babylonians) will bring their iniquity (their lying to the people etc.) to ‘remembrance.’ Another view which can be more simply stated (and is perhaps the best view) is that which can be expressed: ‘This decision to go against Jerusalem will seem to the Judeans to be a mistake for Nebuchadnezzar. The Judeans had sworn oaths to

Nebuchadnezzar and did not keep them so the Babylonians will bring this faithlessness to remembrance” (McGuiggan 226-227).

**24**“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sin appear—because you have come to remembrance, you will be seized with the hand. **25**And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end,’ **26**thus says the Lord God, ‘Remove the turban, and take off the crown; this will be no more the same. Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. **27**A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I shall make it. This also will be no more, until He comes whose right it is; and I shall give it to Him.’”

And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel - “Zedekiah is addressed typically, not as king, *melek*, but as prince, *nasi*, a word without Messianic overtones. The ‘mitre’ (RV; ‘diadem’ in AV) is the ‘turban’ (from a word meaning ‘to wind’ so RSV) worn by the high priest (Ex 28:4,37,39; 29:6; 39:28,31; Lev 8:9; 16:4). It is used only here as a symbol of royalty. There is no evidence that Zedekiah had added to his crimes by usurping priestly functions” (Taylor 164).

A ruin, a ruin, a ruin - “The triple repetition of a word is the strongest superlative the Hebrew language can give (cf. ‘Holy, holy, holy’ in Isa 6:3, or the formula of Jer 7:4). So Ezekiel spells out the ‘overthrow’ of the kingly line, and he concludes with a cryptic reference back to Genesis 49:10 with its distant prospect of the one who had always been expected and to whom the right of kingship genuinely belonged. When he eventually appears, the crown and diadem will be given to him, for he will be the culmination of everything to which the Davidic house and the Messianic kingship in Israel have always pointed” (Taylor 164,165).

“Here is a remarkable little piece. It speaks both of the end of the monarchy (that is, the actual exercise of Davidic authority) and the birth of hope! The people believed that people like Zedekiah were the ground of hope but the truth was that until people like Zedekiah were removed there could be no hope” (McGuiggan 227).

**28**“And you, son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God concerning the sons of Ammon and concerning their reproach,’ and say: ‘A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for the slaughter, to cause it to consume, that it may be like lightning- **29**while they see for you false visions, while they divine lies for you—to place you on the necks of the wicked who are slain, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end. **30**Return it to its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your origin, I shall judge you. **31**And I shall pour out My indignation on you; I shall blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and I shall give you into the hand of brutal men, skilled in destruction. **32**You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be in the midst of the land. You will not be remembered, for I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

“The prophet’s excitement, growing in verse 27, now rises higher; he seizes the sword again, but this time he turns against the Ammonites who might have thought that they would escape when Judah was invaded. The full force, however, of the prophet’s mood is spent, and as the sword is sheathed (verse 30) the prophecy ends with a prediction of ruin at once general and vague” (Fisch 141).

“The sword of God’s justice is now in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and it has come out of its sheath and it is to devour Israel. When that is viewed as done God orders that it be put back in the sheath - Ammon’s judgment is another time. He is careful to say that Ammon would be judged in ‘the land of thy birth’ (that is, in their own home-ground). This is an important thing to say for the nations had the impression that their gods were rare local deities who had no power beyond their own borders. Of course there were times when their armies were victorious and they bragged on the comparative power of their gods. It is true that not everyone believed this notion. Anyway, God is telling Ammon: ‘I am no local deity with limited power. Your survival at this point should not go to your head for I am coming back to get you right where you live.’ And back He came. In 581 Nebuchadnezzar attacked and devastated them. In the years following everyone beat Ammon. They did not die out immediately. The city existed on down into the Roman times. Judas Maccabees fought the Ammonites. The site of the city of Rabbah today is ruins! Nobody, not the Ammonites, the Romans or Mr. Ammon can hurt God’s people with impunity. Men skilled in destroying would take hold of them for Ammon was feathering her own nest with her wickedness and corruption and God would wipe her out of memory. See 25:10” (McGuiggan 229-230).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

This chapter falls into three sections. *The first* (1-16) deals with the sins of bloodshed, idolatry, adultery and oppression—crimes which have defiled the Holy City. Exile and dispersion are, therefore, inevitable. *The second* (17-22) compares God’s judgment to the refiner’s furnace. As the fire burns the dross from the ore, so does God’s punishment consume the wicked. *The third* section (23-31) accuses the whole population, from the highest to the lowest, of corruption and evil-doing. There is no one left to “stand in the breach.” There are no righteous to spare the city. The doom of Jerusalem is sealed. One should notice the repetition of the word “blood” or “bloodshed” (seven times in this chapter alone). Her judgment is clearly related to her being the “bloody city.”

“The one city in the world where sin should not have found a home was in Jerusalem. But we will hear over and over again that ‘IN’ Jerusalem they were sinning in such and such a way. It thrived there as if it were really at home” (McGuiggan 233).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then cause her to know all her abomina-**

tions. <sup>3</sup>And you shall say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “A city shedding blood in her midst, so that her time will come, and that makes idols, contrary to her interest, for defilement!”’

Will you judge the bloody city - “As in 20:4 and 23:36, the phrase ‘wilt thou judge’ means much more than simply acting as arbiter. It involves the prophet in the job which today is done partly by the prosecutor, and partly by the judge when he passes sentence on a man already pronounced guilty by a jury. So Ezekiel’s ‘judging’ consists of showing the guilty city of Jerusalem both the extent of her crimes and also the consequences that are about to be inflicted upon her. He is in a sense ‘justifying’ both the verdict and the punishment” (Taylor 167).

A city shedding blood...and that makes idols - “The combination of bloodshed and idolatry in verse 3 is a reminder that the worship of idols did involve bloodshed in the form of child sacrifice (‘making your sons to pass through fire to Molech’; cf. 16:21; 20:26,31; 23:37), but the accusation would also have covered judicial murder and oppression on the Naboth pattern (1 Kgs 21) as well as depriving citizens of their liberty and livelihood or committing any act of violence which incurred blood-guiltiness” (Taylor 167).

“The highest degree of ritual and moral impurity is contracted from idolatry. Hence the mention here of the defilement caused by the worship of idols. Instead of ‘unto thyself’, R.V. renders more literally: ‘against herself’ (the Hebrew has the third person feminine throughout); i.e. the idols which are worshipped are Jerusalem’s enemies, the cause of the coming downfall” (Fisch 143).

<sup>4</sup>“**You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mocking to all the lands. <sup>5</sup>Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you, you of ill repute, full of turmoil. <sup>6</sup>Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood.**”

Guilty by the blood...and defiled by your idols - While bloodshed determines guilt and punishment, idolatry corrupts the soul and contributes to the lack of a positive relationship with the Lord. The people had lost their moral base when they deserted the Lord.

I have made you a reproach - “The verb is in the prophetic perfect which views what is to be as though it has happened. God will make Jerusalem an object of mockery among the nations” (Fisch 143-144).

Will mock you - “Because the ‘name,’ i.e., the reputation of the city has made known its uncleanness to everyone, and because its greatness has become great disorder, and that means here social injustice, and because of the bloodshed in it (cf. Amos 3:9; Ezek

7:7 remains obscure), Yahweh prepares to make it a laughingstock and an object of scorn by its neighbors (thereto 16:57, also 25:3,6)” (Zimmerli 457).

**<sup>7</sup>“They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you. <sup>8</sup>You have despised My holy things and profaned My sabbaths. <sup>9</sup>Slanderous men have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood, and in you they have eaten at the mountain shrines. In your midst they have committed acts of lewdness.”**

They have treated father and mother lightly - The subject “they” does not refer to “the princes of Israel,” but the people of Judea generally. They were faithless to the Law which repeatedly commanded them to honor their parents and fair treatment of the stranger, orphan and widow.

Slanderous man...for the purpose of shedding blood - Lying and bearing false witness were in themselves forbidden by the Law (Lev 19:16); but their slanders which aimed at the death penalty upon innocent persons were doubly hideous. It demonstrated the complete lack of fairness or integrity in the basic moral makeup of the nation.

**<sup>10</sup>“In you they have uncovered their fathers’ nakedness; in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual impurity. <sup>11</sup>And one has committed abomination with his neighbor’s wife, and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in you has humbled his sister, his father’s daughter. <sup>12</sup>In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me,” declares the Lord God.**

Uncovered their fathers’ nakedness - The reference is to incestuous marriage with a step-mother, prohibited in Leviticus 18:7f.

Humbled her...in her menstrual impurity - “They not only committed rape, but at a time when the widow’s condition rendered intercourse forbidden (cf. Lev 18:19; 20:18)” (Fisch 144-145).

You have forgotten Me - “Who ordained laws against the acts committed by the Judeans. The shocking picture of national depravity drawn by Ezekiel is confirmed by the other prophets (cf. Jer 5:7ff; 6:13; 7:5f; 22:3)” (Fisch 145).

“Thus it now becomes quite clear that we are dealing in the whole listing of laws that have been broken, not with several things, but ultimately with one thing: the turning away from the Lord, who gives to everything in life its order. Ezekiel loves to express this elsewhere (cf. ‘to be rebellious’ 20:8,13,21). In essence he stands exactly where Hosea stood in his list of offenses in Hosea 4:2, or Jeremiah with his list in 7:9. In both prophets more is meant than the summing up of individual offenses. They both, together now with Ezekiel as a third, want to accuse the people of disobedience against

an over-all will. They 'forget' God and thereby dishonor Him, who looks for obedience, not in any hidden 'spirituality,' but in the multiplicity of concrete situations in life. In the heightened accusation of sin, which goes far beyond Hosea 4:2 and Jeremiah 7:9, we can see the radical sharpening of the 'accusation' which Ezekiel makes" (Zimmerli 459).

**<sup>13</sup>"Behold, then, I smite My hand at your dishonest gain which you have acquired and at the bloodshed which is among you. <sup>14</sup>Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken and shall act. <sup>15</sup>And I shall scatter you among the nations, and I shall disperse you through the lands, and I shall consume your uncleanness from you. <sup>16</sup>And you will profane yourself in the sight of the nations, and you will know that I am the Lord."**

"Verses 13-16 makes three important points. First, the Lord will punish those whose prime purposes are dishonest gain and shedding of blood. Economic and moral factors affect God's relationship to man. The Lord will not support a nation whose god is gain and whose only moral law is license. The second implication is even more compelling: 'Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you?' The answer of experience is: No. Righteousness alone is the source of national strength; apart from it, social order is debilitated by sin and courage is diluted by immorality and duplicity. Finally, the Almighty makes clear that He cannot and will not be neutral under these circumstances, but will punish the culprits and destroy their 'filthiness.' His name will be profaned among the nations, yet even in the face of this unfortunate result He will send them into exile. Ordinarily Ezekiel explains much of God's action on the supposition that the Almighty wishes at all costs to avoid profanation of His name; that is, misunderstanding of His Person and purpose" (Howie 52-53).

Behold, then - "The 'therefore' (i.e. 'then' NAS) gives the reason for the judgment. Judgment does not follow because God gets worked up into some uncontrolled fit of anger. ...There is no alternative but to deal with sin...Why do I play with sin and blame God when the world comes falling in around me and I find myself suffocating in the muck? I watched a little girl feed her pet boa constrictor. The snake was not very long (perhaps 30 inches). She had it in an aquarium and she put a mouse in there (these snakes live on living prey). The mouse was very nervous about the whole thing. The snake lay on one side of the aquarium with its tongue flicking out every so often. The mouse nervously and with rapid movement surveyed the new place. It approached the snake and checked it out from a distance and then left. Back it came some moments later and did the same thing. It was not happy at all about its companion—the snake watched 'all knowing' time was on his side. Soon the mouse grew less nervous and more self-centered, it began to wash itself and look around with less nervousness, satisfying its curiosity, I suppose. The snake began to move. Ever so slowly. The mouse ran right up to it, sniffed at the head of the snake and walked off. The snake began to tower itself in the aquarium and go through all kinds of motions while the mouse watched from a distance. The snake moved closer still engaged in its own antics (obviously uninterested in the mouse?). The mouse adjusted itself to the presence and

the movement of the snake and pretty soon the snake towered above the mouse as the mouse busied itself with a bit of head rubbing and foot washing. The snake towered down about eight inches above the mouse's head, slowly lowered itself and then...so quickly that the motion startled me, it grabbed the mouse by the head as it also wound itself around its victim. I thought of the mouse's early nervousness; its becoming accustomed to the company; the patience of the serpent; the naivete of the mouse; the coming of the serpent; the speed of the actual entrapment; the serpent's ability to do what I did not think he could do and the utter doom of the victim. Do I need to tell you I thought of you and me and the Devil? Why do I play with sin? Why do you dabble in sin?" (McGuigan 236-238).

**<sup>17</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>18</sup>“Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem.’”**

The word of the Lord came to me - “The figure of the refining of precious metal is frequently employed by Old Testament writers (cf. Isa 1:22,25; 48:10; Jer 6:27-30; 9:7; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2-4), but whereas the purpose is usually to produce the refined product, Ezekiel here uses the figure to show that Israel is nothing but worthless dross. For this reason they are to be gathered together again and put into the furnace to endure the burning heat of God's judgment. No good will come out of this except that they will know that it is the Lord's fury which is being poured out upon them (22). On the basis of verse 20, which includes silver among all the constituent elements of the ore that is put into the furnace, RSV inserts ‘silver’ in verse 18 at the beginning of the list of metals, presuming that it had accidentally slipped to the end of the sentence. This seems a quite unnecessary intrusion into the text where the writer is being significantly silent. Verse 20 describes the actual process on which the metaphor is based, but verse 18 seems to be saying that the whole operation is in fact a waste of effort. Israel has no silver in her: she is utterly worthless, all dross. If anything it is better to regard ‘silver’ in verse 18 as a gloss” (Taylor 168).

The dross of silver - “The Hebrew construction is difficult and is literally ‘dross silver they were.’ The two nouns may be construed as in apposition and interpreted as ‘dross of silver.’ Alternatively, *sige*, the noun in the construct state, is to be understood, ‘dross, dross of silver’; or the meaning is: they who are now dross were once pure silver” (Fisch 146).

**<sup>20</sup>“As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I shall gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I shall lay you there and melt you. <sup>21</sup>And I shall gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. <sup>22</sup>As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the Lord, have poured out My wrath on you.”**

“Israel had been able to speak of the miracle of its election as those who had been brought out of the iron (smelting) furnace of Egypt (Deut 4:20; 1 Kgs 8:51; Jer 11: 4). In such a deliverance it had become accepted. The message of the prophet Ezekiel is cutting in its harshness. Because of its sins, Israel in his days had become useless dross, for which the fire of the furnace was once again in the proper place. Over its history there stood God’s ‘NO!’ This ‘No’ did not take place at some fringe point. In Jerusalem, the chosen city, God had gathered His people together in order to light the fire of judgment under it there. The prophet could not speak of a miscarriage of God’s history. God willed that this also should be taken as a part of the historical events in which he made He made Himself truly known to the world. The loss of His own reputation in which God could now find in His people only dross and no silver becomes quite unmistakable (as in Ezek 15). God’s face here becomes terrifying when He reveals Himself as the God who is holy in His judgment” (Zimmerli 464).

**<sup>23</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>24</sup>“Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation. <sup>25</sup>There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.’”**

You are a land that is not cleansed - The Bible often speaks of the land being defiled by the iniquities of its inhabitants (cf. 36:17f; Num 35:34; Deut 21:23). The Jews made no effort to purify their land.

They have made many widows - Jeremiah 15:8.

**<sup>26</sup>“Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. <sup>27</sup>Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. <sup>28</sup>And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ when the Lord has not spoken.”**

In this section God clearly identifies every part of the society: **the priests** (vs. 26), **the princes** (vs. 27), **the prophets** (vs. 28) and finally **the people** (vs. 29). None are without guilt. Individual responsibility (which was emphasized in chapter 19) is again seen here. Regardless of what the religious leaders are doing (the priests and prophets) or the political leaders (the princes), God expects the people to remain faithful.

They have made no distinction between the holy and the profane - “This was a duty specifically imposed upon the priests (cf. Lev 10:10f). Various limitations were placed

on the use of what came within the category of 'holy,' and it was necessary for the people to know them and so avoid the sin of "trespass" (Fisch 148).

"The clear distinction between the spheres holy-profane, clean-unclean, which no man can manipulate, becomes ignored. The great program of Ezekiel 40-48 then shows how in the coming age of salvation these distinctions will be set up afresh and guaranteed. In this connection 44:23 also sets out the new obligation of the priesthood to give true torah (Hag 2:10ff) and to teach 'knowledge.' A particularly important case of disregard for the distinction between holy and profane according to the laws of the age is found in the disregard for the law of the sabbath. Abayyeh in *b Sabbat* 119b, by citing the present text, explains the destruction of Jerusalem by breach of the law of the sabbath. In all this the ultimate end is not the breaking of laws, but that Yahweh Himself is driven into the sphere of the profane and robbed of His holiness. Among the older prophets it is above all Hosea who condemns the priests of his day for misuse of their obligations to give true instruction (Hos 4:6)" (Zimmerli 468-469).

Her princes within her - "The word for 'prince' (*nasi*) is different from that used in verse 27, where the word is *sarim*, 'nobles.' The former refers to members of the royal house; the latter is used for leaders or chiefs of the people" (Taylor 169).

**<sup>29</sup>"The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. <sup>30</sup>And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. <sup>31</sup>Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord God.**

The people of the land - "The people of the land (29) follow the patterns of behaviour set by their leaders. The *'an ha'ares* were the common people; not obviously the poorest of the peasantry, but all those who possessed full citizen rights. They were thus able to find some people less privileged than themselves whom they could traumatize" (Taylor 169).

I searched for a man...but I found no one - "The corruption has affected all classes of the population and left no even one capable of averting the disaster which approaches. There is no real conflict between this passage and 14:14. There the goodness of the individual is thought of as counterbalancing the wickedness of the many; here, the individual who 'makes up the fence' inspires the many with his own goodness" (Fisch 149).

"With this degree of universal corruption, God looks in vain for just one man who will try to interpose himself to stop that national ruin. But there was no one with the moral courage to stem the tide: the leaders were ungodly and those who should have been godly had compromised their position. Presumably Jeremiah was an exception to

Ezekiel's general condemnation, but he had no kingly status and few listened to his words. Any nation which lacks godly leadership, as Israel did at the time, must surely be on the way out. Cf. Isaiah 59:16; 63:5, where by contrast the continuing absence of 'a man to intervene' leads the Lord to gain the victory with His own right hand. For Ezekiel, however, this state of affairs was but the prelude to the imminent and final act of judgment on the citizens of Jerusalem, when their own way would be recompensed upon their own heads (31). For the thought of a man who will stand in the breach, cf. 13:5. Some see this phrase as a contradiction of Ezekiel's view, expressed in 14:12-23, that not even the presence of three righteous men in a city will be sufficient to save it from destruction. But there is no sense in this chapter that the man to stand in the breach will save the city simply by being there: he is needed to warn the people of the coming judgment, to lead a resistance movement against the incoming tide of iniquity, to influence the people authoritatively in the direction of repentance. The issue here is quite different from that dealt with in chapter 14" (Taylor 169-170).

"In this passage we have a scarce man. The passage carries a bold figure. There is a breach in the wall of Jerusalem and God is heading for it, to enter the city and utterly destroy it. As he approaches it He is hoping that someone will stand in the breach and say to Him: 'You will do it, but you will do it over my dead body!' But no one cared enough. See Jeremiah 5:1 for a similar thought. It is not literally true that there was not a single righteous man in the nation at that time - of course there was. There was Jeremiah, Baruch and others who came to Jeremiah's aid. This is simply a powerful way of saying righteousness had died in the nation (It makes it very clear that God did not restrict Himself to this literal, non-figurative speech. He did use figurative language, that is, language He did not intend to be understood literally)" (McGuiggan 242).

I have poured out My indignation - Many commentators follow Holscher and Hemtrich in seeing this third oracle as a later composition, interpreting verse 31 not as a prophetic perfect but as an actual past tense looking back to the fall of Jerusalem. Cross-reference is regularly made to Zephaniah 3:1-4, but the date and authorship of those verses are also matters of question and the precise relationship between the two passages is not altogether clear. It could well be that the oracle was written up after the event and therefore reflected this in its language, but it is equally permissible to see the verbs as prophetic perfects designed to stress the imminence and absolute finality of the judgment that was about to fall" (Taylor 166-167).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"The prophet portrays in vivid allegory the history of the two kingdoms centered respectively in Samaria and Jerusalem. They are compared to two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who were unfaithful to their husbands and sought association with strange men. Similarly, the nation of Israel from its inception in Egypt abandoned the service of God and worshipped the idols of its neighbors. Samaria contracted political alliances with foreign Powers against the counsel of God's prophets, and the result was moral degradation and national downfall. The younger sister, Oholibah, the kingdom of Judah,

learned no lesson from that fate and followed the same path. Jerusalem will therefore share the doom of Samaria and drink to the full the cup from which she had drunk” (Fisch 149).

The outline for the chapter is as follows:

1. Introduction to the two sisters (1-4).
2. Oholah (5-10).
3. Oholibah (11-21).
4. The fate of Oholibah (22-35).
5. God’s judgment (36-49).

**<sup>1</sup>The word of the Lord came to me again saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; <sup>3</sup>and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed, and there their virgin bosom was handled. <sup>4</sup>And their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.”**

Daughters of one mother - “Samaria and Jerusalem both had their origins in the nation of Israel (cf. 16:46; Jer 3:7)” (Fisch 149).

“The introductory details of the allegory must not be over-pressed. The sisters represent cities and their inhabitants, rather than tribes. In any case Judah and Ephraim were not even brothers, for Ephraim was one of the two sons of Joseph and was therefore Judah’s nephew. The points being made are simply that the two cities have a close affinity from the distant past, that their origins were in Egypt, and that the beginning of their subsequent conduct can be traced back to Egyptian prehistory” (Taylor 168).

They played the harlot - They were well practiced in the “wild life”—being free and having many lovers (foreign nations as allies).

They became Mine - “Here is a great wonder, ‘and they became mine!’ Despite their wicked ways and heart the Lord graciously accepts them. Here is the Hosea story in parable. Who would have bothered with them? Who but the God who was later manifested in Jesus Christ. What a heart. What a love. What a God!” (McGuigan 250).

“The covenant relationship between God and Israel is often symbolized as marriage (cf. Hos 2:21f)” (Fisch 150).

Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah - “The names, Oholah and Oholibah derive from the Hebrew *‘ohel*, meaning a ‘tent.’ It could be a reference to a tented place of worship, but it is not clear whether this is Israel’s tabernacle in the wilderness or a pagan shrine. The name of Esau’s wife, Oholibamah (Gen 36:2), or ‘tent of the high

place' suggests the latter, as do the tents of the gods described in the Ugaritic texts. On the other hand, Oholah could mean 'her tent' and Oholibah almost certainly means 'my tent (is) in her,' which suggests Yahweh's sponsorship of Jerusalem. But again the details must not be pressed too far. It is enough that the names had a cultic flavour" (Taylor 171).

"The Jewish commentators explain the name given to Samaria as 'her tent,' i.e. her 'tent' for worship is her own and not God's, since in Samaria they worshipped the calves introduced by Jeroboam; and the name given to Jerusalem denotes 'My tent is in her,' i.e. in her midst is God's sanctuary. Modern exegetes do not accept this sharp distinction and question whether the 'i' in Oholibah denotes 'my,' comparing the name of Oholibamah, the wife of Esau (Gen 36:2). They prefer the meaning, 'she who has a tent' and 'a tent in her.' The two sisters are alike in possessing a shrine (tent)" (Fisch 150).

**<sup>5</sup>"And Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, her neighbors, <sup>6</sup>who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. <sup>7</sup>And she bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom were the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself. <sup>8</sup>And she did not forsake her harlotries from the time of Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her."**

She lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians - The depravity of Samaria is shown by Oholah's initiative in offering herself to her Assyrian lovers. Hosea too had made insinuations of this sort: "They have gone up to Assyria, a wild ass wandering alone; Ephraim has hired lovers" (Hos 8:9 cf. 5:13; 7:11; 12:1). The historicity of this charge is borne out by a good deal of evidence. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III illustrates Jehu prostrating himself before the Assyrian king (the date would be about 840 B.C., at the beginning of Jehu's reign) and offering gifts, possibly with a view to buying support against Hazael of Damascus (see *Documents from Old Testament Times* edited by D. Winston Thomas, 1958, page 48f and plate 3). Adad-Nirari III (c. 812-782 B.C.), in an inscription found at Nimrod, also claimed to have received tribute from 'the territory of Omrr,' and there is no reason to doubt the truth of (DOTT, pages 50-52). 2 Kings also describes the paying of tribute by Israel to Assyria in the reigns of Menahem (c. 745-738 B.C.) and Hoshea (c. 732-724 B.C.); see 2 Kings 15:19ff; 17:3.

Who were clothed in purple - The Israelites found the more sophisticated civilizations very attractive—with their elaborate clothing to the impressive militaries. The kind of life that the Lord had provided was not as attractive as "the ways of the world." This reminds us of the warning of John not to "love the world or the things of the world" (1 Jn 2:15ff). When one fails to look beyond the physical into the spiritual, and fails to see things the way God sees them, he is doomed for failure.

**<sup>9</sup>“Therefore, I gave her into the hands of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. <sup>10</sup>They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, but they slew her with the sword. Thus she became a byword among women, and they executed judgments on her.”**

I gave her into the hands of her lovers...after whom she lusted - “The husband endured for as long as was right for Him to do so and then He punished her. The punishment was interesting - He gave her up to the ones she lusted after. George Bernard Shaw once said there were two terrible times in each one’s life, the time when you do not get what you want and the other is the time when you get what you want! Psalm 106:15 says it better: ‘And he gave them their request but sent leanness unto their soul.’ How did He send leanness into their soul? ‘He gave them their request!,’ that is how. Oh I pray to God both for you and me that we get what He requests. The one who knew life and living best of all by far said: Not my will but thine be done” (McGuiggan 250).

She became a byword among women - Literally “a name to women;” the fate of this harlot at the hand of her lover should serve as a warning example to other women. In plain language, what happened to Samaria should have been a deterrent to Jerusalem. What Israel expected from these alliances was very different from what she received. She was taken, used, and then abused and exposed to public ridicule.

**<sup>11</sup>“Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister. <sup>12</sup>She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. <sup>13</sup>And I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way.”**

She was more corrupt in her lust than she - Though Judea saw what happened to Samaria as the result of her reliance on foreign powers and disloyalty to God, she adopted the same policy, and even intensified it (cf. Jer 3:8,11). Perhaps she thought she was more beautiful and desirable and thus would not receive the same fate. Ahaz attempted to make an alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs.16:8) and was strongly condemned by Isaiah (7:7-9).

**<sup>14</sup>“So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, <sup>15</sup>girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth. <sup>16</sup>And when she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.”**

She saw men portrayed on the wall - “At present, an oriental woman of good position would never see strange men save in pictures; and though Hebrew women had more freedom, Ezekiel compares Judah’s desire for closer acquaintance with Babylon to a wanton girl’s desire for a world from which she would naturally be secluded. Not satisfied with Assyrians as a ‘lover,’ Judea also lusted after Babylon” (Fisch 152).

The land of their birth - "Unlike Israel who was attracted by foreign customs, the Babylonians strictly conformed to their own national dress" (Fisch 153).

And when she saw them - "The sight of the martial Chaldeans at once aroused an ardent desire to be allied with them. Another rendering is: 'and she doted upon them after the sight of her eyes'" (Fisch 153).

"Therein lies the first extra in Oholibah's sin, that she was roused to such desire by the colored pictures of men that she summoned the subjects of the pictures by messengers in order to share her bed with them and to commit adultery with them and become unclean" (Zimmerli 487).

**<sup>17</sup>"And the Babylonians came to her to the bed of love, and they defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them. <sup>18</sup>And she uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister. <sup>19</sup>Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup>And she lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses. <sup>21</sup>Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth."**

I became disgusted with her - "Such degrading national behaviour had the same consequence as with Samaria. God decided to withdraw His protection and leave her to her fate, as a husband does with a faithless wife. Jeremiah uses the same phrase in 6:8. 'God is interwoven with Israel, as it were, but sin will wrench Him away from the people - a striking metaphor expressing God's love on the one hand, and the powerful effect of sin on the other' (*Soncino Bible*, Jeremiah, p. 45)" (Fisch 153).

**<sup>22</sup>"Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord God, 'Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: <sup>23</sup>the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.'"**

Thus says the Lord God - This is the beginning of *four judgment oracles*, all beginning with this phrase.

Pekod and Shoa and Koa - "These are now identified with Pukudu, Sutu and Kutu, races inhabiting the land east of the Tigris and bordering on Elam or Persia" (Fisch 154).

"Pekod was a powerful Chaldean tribe dwelling near the mouth of the river Tigris. The other two tribes have not been clearly identified" (Carley 157).

**24“And they will come against you with weapons, chariots, and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I shall commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs. 25And I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath. They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire.”**

I will set my jealousy against you - “The description of God as ‘jealous’ in such a connection means that He rates out retribution for the offenses against Him (cf. the *Soncino Chumash* on Num 25:11)” (Fisch 155).

“In their wrath Yahweh’s jealousy (5:13; 16:38,42) will be let loose upon Oholibah. The laws for the conduct of war in Deuteronomy 20 show that Israel, in its wars, was conscious of being under the authority of its God, and thereby a certain law of humanity. Thus there is almost completely lacking in Israel’s law any punishment involving mutilation. But things were different in the surrounding nations. The Assyrian illustrations of war show quite freely flaying, impaling, blinding, and physical mutilation which was the order of the day for prisoners (*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, ed., J. B. Pritchard, 1954, pages 368,373). Oholibah will be delivered up to this grim practice of Babylonian victory for mutilation and killing of her children. The punishment of cutting off the nose and ears is attested in Egypt in connection with the punishment of a plot against Rameses III (Turin Papyrus), and among the Hittites as a punishment for a negligent temple servant (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pages 215, 207)” (Zimmerli, 488-489).

“The allegory of the two sisters, which is directed particularly to Oholibah (Judah-Jerusalem), once again has the intention of striking at the heart of an inbuilt election faith of the chosen people. Remorselessly all its pride, its consciousness of being God’s people ‘from Egypt’ (Hos 13:4), is destroyed. Whereas Ezekiel 16 had given some space to a description of the exaltation of God’s people by Him and His rich gifts to them, here this is completely suppressed. From the first recognizable impulses of love onwards, the girls Oholah and Oholibah became corrupted. There is no noble, innocent love, not even at the beginning of the history of God’s people. Beyond this Oholibah, the rest of the people which was spared in the first judgment, had not taken the least warning from the exemplary fate of her sister, but had gone still further along her paths.

“We can again hear in this a passage in which the prophet had to alarm the community which had become complacent in its holy election - tradition. In the confession of faith of the Old Testament people of God, the name ‘Egypt’ plays an important role. It awakened in Israel recollections of its great encounter with God and His call made in His own presence. This very word, noble in its basis, but leading to pious complacency, is taken up in the prophetic preaching in all its sharpness and made relevant for the present and the decisions which were currently facing the remnant of Judah. What is Egypt today? For the Jerusalem of the prophet’s time it was no longer the place to which men had

said goodbye in obedience to God's guidance, but had become a great temptation, the place of the most impious immorality and sin of God's people with powers other than God's own sovereign power. Isaiah had spoken of trust in military aid of Egypt and of treaties with it as something done behind Yahweh's back (Isa 30:1-5; 31:1-3). In the later prophecy of Ezekiel, which presupposed this earlier prophetic preaching, all of this is taken up in the condemnatory metaphor of 'immorality' and 'immoral desire.' The city is remorselessly faced with its crime in which it has, from the very beginning, repeatedly given its love to what has a reputation on earth because it is resplendent with weapons and appears to be youthful and vital.

"By such denial of true love for the One to whom the community really belongs (verse 4), which then leads to the fickle oscillating from one to another and to becoming ensnared in the vagaries of world history, the community of God comes to grief. In judgment the whole horror of the one to whom they have sold themselves will come upon them. God needs no angel from heaven; He judges men through that which they have chosen for themselves in their own godless love" (Zimmerli 489-490).

**<sup>26</sup>"They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. <sup>27</sup>Thus I shall make your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore."**

This completes the first oracle begun in verse 22.

"The first oracle (22-27) depicts Oholibah under the judgment of her foreign lovers, who have been summoned together by God to surround her in battle-array, like an army besieging a city. They comprise Babylonians and Chaldeans, they were not separate peoples, and special mention is made of what were probably marginal tribes on the eastern borders of the Babylonian empire, Pekod, Shoa and Koa. These are normally identified, though not without some uncertainty, with Puqudu, Sutu and Qutu, Aramaean tribes to the east of the river Tigris which are known from a number of Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions" (Taylor 173-174).

**<sup>28</sup>"For thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated. <sup>29</sup>And they will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries. <sup>30</sup>These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols. <sup>31</sup>You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand."**

This is the *second oracle* (28-31), beginning with the phrase "For thus says the Lord God.."

You have walked in the way of your sister - “He emphasizes that his judgment is severe to this degree, in part, because she had refused to pay attention to the misconduct of her sister and her punishment (vv. 30ff). She wanted to follow in her sister’s ways and so she must drink her sister’s cup (v. 32) which is a violent one indeed (vv. 33-34). And then He makes the real charge, the one which you and I ought to take especially to heart. Her crime was that: ‘Thou has forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back...’” (McGuiggan 251-252).

**<sup>32</sup>“Thus says the Lord God, ‘You will drink your sister’s cup, which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; it contains much. <sup>33</sup>You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. <sup>34</sup>And you will drink it and drain it. Then you will gnaw its fragments and tear your breasts; for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord God. <sup>35</sup>“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.’”**

These are the *last two oracles* (verses 32-34,35).

You have forgotten Me and cast me behind your back - “If a partner found his wife completely satisfying, he would never run around on her. If the wife found her husband completely satisfying, she would never commit adultery against him. It is that simple. Adultery takes place because one does not find the other fully satisfying. (That is not to say there is something wrong in the innocent party to all this - no, the fault may altogether lie on the part of the guilty one. I am simply saying that the guilty one, for one reason or another (and not necessarily a good one), finds his partner lacking. Israel did not find God completely satisfying so they went in search of someone who could supply their wants. This is the real crime in spiritual whoredom. God is fine for some things, but He cannot ‘hack it’ in some other areas. He is fine, the Jews thought (much of the time) when it comes to the stained glass church buildings, to religion and ‘stuff like that.’ But when it comes to matters of everyday living, when it comes to war and politics, survival and prosperity, He cannot match the job. Now, anyone who adopts this attitude toward God as a settled conviction is in the process of committing spiritual whoredom. It does not make any difference what area we are dealing with, be it, finances, health, domestic or marital problem, business, religious, emotional or any other area. If I draw the settled conviction that God cannot handle my problem I have the conviction that led these Jews into foreign alliances and idolatry. I do not have to bow down to literal idols to be guilty of their crime. Putting God behind my back believing that He is incapable of supplying all my needs is the basis of the crime for which they were judged. And make no mistake, if one partner will not do, there is no guarantee that two will do any better” (McGuiggan 252).

**<sup>36</sup>Moreover, the Lord said to me, “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. <sup>37</sup>For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with**

**their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food. <sup>38</sup>Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths.”**

Will you judge Oholah and Oholibah - “This final section (36-49) recapitulates and enlarges on much that has gone before. Having described their history separately, Ezekiel now classes them together and comments on the similarities of their sins and their punishment. Once again, to ‘judge’ (36) means to ‘declare’ and make known. The offenses specified are religious (37-39) as well as political (40-44). Among the former are idolatrous associations, which are branded as ‘adultery’; child-sacrifice, which brings ‘blood upon their hands’ (37); defilement of God’s temple by entering it with the guilt of child-sacrifice still upon them; and the profanation of sabbaths (38)” (Taylor 175-176).

<sup>39</sup>**“For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house. <sup>40</sup>Furthermore, they have even sent for men who came from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came—for whom you bathed, painted your eyes, and decorated yourselves with ornaments; <sup>41</sup>and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it, on which you had set My incense and My oil.”**

Painted your eyes - “The verb *kachal* occurs only here. The powdered antimony (*puch* in Hebrew) which was employed for the purpose is called *kold* by the Arabs and the word appears in the English noun ‘alcohol.’ The effect was to enlarge the eye and add luster to it (cf. 2 Kgs 9:30; Jer 4:30)” (Fisch 158).

<sup>42</sup>**“And the sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads. <sup>43</sup>Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, ‘Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus?’”**

Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus - “Rashi interprets: I thought that now that she is worn out by her harlotry, her immoralities would come to an end, but she has remained the same. The general sense is that the people were not sated with their imported idolatries but persisted with them” (Fisch 159).

<sup>44</sup>**“But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women. <sup>45</sup>But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.”**

Righteous men will judge them - “The ‘righteous men’ can hardly be the lovers of verses 22-24, even though the nations will eventually be the instruments of God’s judgment. It must mean that those who judge the two sisters will judge them righteously. The stress is on the way the judging will be done, not on who will do the judging. The punishment

will be the penalty for all adulteresses and shedders of blood: death by stoning, to which is added destruction of their property with fire (cf. Lev 20:10; Deut 21:21). The similarity of this penalty with the state of siege of a city bombarded with sling-stones and incendiary missiles can hardly have been coincidence. The shame of the guilty person's end under Mosaic law will be exactly matched by the fate of Samaria and Jerusalem" (Taylor 176).

**<sup>46</sup>“For thus says the Lord God, ‘Bring up a company against them, and give them over to terror and plunder. <sup>47</sup>And the company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire. <sup>48</sup>Thus I shall make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done. <sup>49</sup>And your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord God.’”**

Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror - “The prophet is commanded to impress upon the people that God will bring against them a group of peoples who will make them the object of horror and spoliation” (Fisch 159).

Thus you will know that I am the Lord God - This recurring phrase in Ezekiel provides a powerful ending to this section. Why did Israel not know her God? Why did it take such drastic measures from God in order to teach them about Him? Indeed, salvation for those in the new covenant is dependent upon knowing God (Jn 17:3). Jesus, as the Logos, has revealed the Father to us (Jn 1:14-18). Those of the New Covenant are to “know the Lord” (Jer 31:31-34).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

“The chapter is prefaced by a memorable date, the tenth of the tenth month (Tebeth). This day, on which Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem was appointed as a fast (Zech 8:19) and still remains in the Jewish calendar. After Ezekiel had written down the day of the week and the exact date on which the prophecy came to him that the city was being invested, he forthwith illustrated the siege by a parable. He returns to the figure of the caldron which the remnant in Jerusalem once used for their illusory hopes. A rusted pot with flesh is set on the fire. All the contents are consumed. The empty pot is set on the fire again so that rust and metal alike may be melted. The parable represents the siege: the pot is Jerusalem, the flesh is the inhabitants, and the rust is the wickedness of the people. The latter part of the chapter deals with the death of Ezekiel's wife which took place on the evening of that day. The prophet was not to observe the customary rites of mourning. The import of the attitude he was to adopt towards them was that in the national catastrophe the people would be too bewildered and overwhelmed to feel personal bereavement” (Fisch 160-161).

“With these verses we come to the climax of all that Ezekiel has been trying to say in the previous twelve chapters. His main purpose, as we have noted, has been to justify the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. We call this collection of oracles ‘Objections to Judgment,’ and we have seen arguments raised and demolished one by one and accusations made against both the past and the present conduct of the people of Jerusalem. There is hardly anything more that can be said. The hour has come. Judgment is about to fall” (Taylor 176-177).

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.”**

Write the name of the day - The date is 587 B.C. and the “ninth year” refers to the reign of Zedekiah (cf. 2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 52:4). This date became a day of fasting for the exiles (Zech 8:19). At this time Ezekiel is 700 miles away, but he knows, by inspiration, the exact day.

**<sup>3</sup>“And speak a parable to the rebellious house, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Put on the pot, put it on, and also pour water in it; <sup>4</sup>Put in it the pieces, every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones. <sup>5</sup>Take the choicest of the flock, and also pile wood under the pot. Make it boil vigorously. Also see the bones in it.”’**

Speak a parable...put on the pot - “The imagery of the caldron, previously used by the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their deceptive hopes (11:3), is now to be given its true interpretation by the prophet in the light of current events. Setting the caldron on the stove and pouring water into it, the first stage in the process of cooking, represents the siege of Jerusalem which is the preliminary to conquest” (Fisch 161).

“The word for ‘cauldron’ (Hebrew *sir*) normally refers to any large wide-mouthed pottery utensil used for washing or cookery, though in this instance we find in verse 11 that it is made of copper” (Taylor 178).

**<sup>6</sup>“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe to the bloody city, to the pot in which there is rust and whose rust has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making a choice. <sup>7</sup>For her blood is in her midst; she placed it on the bare rock; she did not pour it on the ground to cover it with dust. <sup>8</sup>That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance, I have put her blood on the bare rock, that it may not be covered.’”**

To the pot in which there is rust - “‘Filt’ is a more exact rendering of the Hebrew *chel’ah* than R.V. ‘rust.’ Here it denotes the bloodstains of the innocent who were murdered in Jerusalem” (Fisch 162).

“The Hebrew *hel’a* (‘scum,’ AV; ‘rust,’ RSV, RV) occurs only here in the Old Testament. It may be related to a root meaning ‘disease’ or even ‘filthiness,’ but its meaning must be drawn primarily from its context” (Taylor 179).

I have put her blood on the bare rock - “Verse 8 gives the statement a surprising twist with reference to God—He Himself has therefore seen to it that the blood was not covered over and thereby the call for His avenging action silenced. He Himself was concerned that He should be provoked by the blood so that His anger should flare up and seek vengeance—a striking counterpart to the divine remembrance of His own mercy in the rainbow (Gen 9:12-17). The threatening application of this idea, according to which in the guilt mirrored by man’s uncovered blood Yahweh Himself is already at work in punishment (kindling His anger), recalls 3:30 and 14:9” (Zimmerli 500-501).

<sup>9</sup>“**Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the bloody city! I also shall make the pile great. <sup>10</sup>Heap on the wood, kindle the fire, boil the flesh well, and mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned. <sup>11</sup>Then set it empty on its coals, so that it may be hot, and its bronze may glow, and its filthiness may be melted in it, its rust consumed.”**”

“The second oracle (9-14) deals with this question in a different way. In verse 5, the logs were piled under the cauldron to boil the contents of the stew; now the Lord intends to kindle a fire which will eventually melt the cauldron itself. To this end the contents are first disposed of (following RSV, ‘boil well the flesh, and empty out the broth,’ 10), the bones of the meat are burnt, and then the empty pot is stood on the burning coals so that it may become red-hot and all its filth and rust be melted away” (Taylor 179).

<sup>12</sup>“**She has wearied Me with toil, yet her great rust has not gone from her; let her rust be in the fire! <sup>13</sup>In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I would have cleansed you, yet you are not clean, you will not be cleansed from your filthiness again, until I have spent My wrath on you. <sup>14</sup>I, the Lord, have spoken; it is coming and I shall act. I shall not relent, and I shall not pity, and I shall not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I shall judge you,” declares the Lord God.**”

So deep is the rust that even the fire will not consume it. The NIV is clearer than the ASV. The city has undergone much and is weary with the toil that has been expended on her (v. 13) and yet she is not freed from her scum. The Lord has subjected her to purging fire, but it has resulted in no good effect on her yet. He will continue with that purging fire and it will be the fire that will finally cleanse her (v. 13).

I shall not relent - “The Lord insists in verse 14 that although this is difficult for Him, He will not change His mind on the matter, He will not spare, He will carry out this painful purging. For this and nothing less is needed” (McGuiggan 260).

**<sup>15</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>16</sup>“Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. <sup>17</sup>Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache, and do not eat the bread of men.”**

I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes - “In these verses we catch a glimpse of the inner Ezekiel which rarely appears through his apparently harsh and unyielding exterior. His austerity and rigid self-discipline, his passion for truth and for the honor of God’s holy name, very nearly conceal the tender heart that lies within. While not wishing to romanticize Ezekiel in any way, it is worth commenting that often a man is seen for what he really is only when he is seen in conjunction with his wife. Whereas in the other forty-seven chapters we are impressed, if not overawed, by Ezekiel’s personality, in this chapter at the heart of the book which bears his name we meet him and find him attractive with human emotions like our own. This is borne out by the phrase he uses to describe his wife: ‘the desire of his eyes, the one in whom his eyes delight.’ Skinner writes: ‘That phrase alone reveals that there was a fountain of tears sealed up within the breast of this stern preacher’ (*The Book of Ezekiel*, p. 210). His refusal to mourn openly was no act of personal choice but a symbolical demand made upon him by God, which only accentuated for him the bitterness of his loss. E. L. Allen (*Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 6) comments that men who are called by God often have to pay a heavy price for their concern with human needs and their identification with God’s purpose. ‘They are called again and again to surrender their private lives to the requirements of their public responsibility.’ For Ezekiel there would surely have been the added burden of being misunderstood and criticized for his show of heartlessness. Behind the laconic phrase in verse 18, ‘And on the next morning I did as I was commanded’ (RSV), there must have been long hours of sleeplessness and spiritual anguish” (Taylor 180-181).

“We find here once again one of the rare passages in Ezekiel in which his personal experience is caught up in his prophetic message. It is therefore relevant to recall once again the limitations about what we can learn from this of the prophet’s biography. The expression must certainly not lead us to sentimental considerations. Lamentations 2:4 and Hosea 9:16 show that phrase of this kind for a close relative were in general use. Besides this we have in the background here the particular message which was intended. In its reference to the temple, which is then more fully elaborated in verse 21, this expression from Ezekiel, the priest, is quite properly in place with regard to the prophet’s message. R. Johanan is so far right in regard to the sequence of statements in 24:16 when he says: ‘When a man’s first wife dies, it is as though the temple had been destroyed in his days’ (*b Sanhedrin* 22a)” (Zimmerli 505).

“The manner of his wife’s death, which was apparently forecast the morning that it happened is described as ‘with a stroke’ (AV, RV). This does not demand a sudden death; it could be ‘plague’ or ‘pestilence,’ or anything that strikes a person down. It would not therefore be impossible that Ezekiel’s wife was already ill, and this would

make more sense of Ezekiel's speaking to the people in the morning to tell them of what would happen and to warn them that he had been commanded not to mourn (18). Alternatively, we can understand the death as quite without warning (from the point of view of physical symptoms), except in so far as God's prediction of it had come to Ezekiel earlier in the day, and the opening phrase of verse 18 could be taken as meaning, 'I was about my normal business of speaking to the people in the morning, and in the evening without warning my wife died.' It is very difficult to imagine Ezekiel telling all and sundry that his wife was about to die the same day, when she was at work around the house, to all appearances hale and hearty. No doubt, she would have had something to say! It is far more conceivable to suppose that, although he was forewarned, he kept the message to himself until he should have to use the sad occasion for yet another symbolical action" (Taylor 181).

**<sup>18</sup>So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded. <sup>19</sup>And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?" <sup>20</sup>Then I said to them, "The word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>21</sup>'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword.'"**

In the morning - "The phrase occurs twice, and the interpretation of the verse depends upon whether the words indicate the same point of time or not. One view is, 'On one morning he tells the people what he had learnt; the evening his wife dies; next morning no customary signs of grief are shown by the bereaved husband.' Or, 'I spoke to the people in the morning, my wife having died the previous evening, and on the same morning carried out the instructions given to me by God" (Fisch 165).

Will you not tell us what these things...means for us - "When Ezekiel deliberately refrained from the customary mourning procedures, it is to his credit and to that of his fellow-exiles that they immediately suspected that it had some special significance. Their visit to his home the morning after the news of his wife's death had flashed around the settlement had probably been to offer sympathy and to give support. Instead they found themselves asking for a word from God. It was no new message, but because of the occasion which prompted it, it spoke with greater force than ever before. God was about to profane, by destroying it, His holy temple. Just as Ezekiel's dearest one had been taken away from him by a single stroke, so the nation was to lose its dearest object, its proud boast, the desire of its soul. The people of Jerusalem would lose their children by enemy action as well. And the message was : 'you shall do as I have done' (22). Howie understands this as a condemnation of the people's incredible lack of grief or sense of repentance over the tragedies which threatened them. His lack of grief pointed up the wrongness of their lack of concern. The context, however, demands that the withholding of grief should follow the catastrophe. Ezekiel had not wept, and Israel would not weep either: because in both cases the tragedy was too deep and stunning for

any expression of grief to prove adequate. As Cook puts it: 'Mourning will be out of place in the presence of a disaster so completes'" (Taylor 182-183).

"When the people saw him acting so contrary to custom and what would have seemed clearly to be the dictates of love of wife, they knew there was prophetic significance in the matter. So they ask him what it was all about (v. 19). God, he told them, was about to destroy their sanctuary and their kinfolk were to die in the process (21). He was calling on them to do as Ezekiel did. At least I understand that he is calling on them to do it. Perhaps Taylor and others are right when they say that the point is that they would act this way for the tragedy would be too great for expression. It seems to me (and of course I could be wrong) that what he is calling for them to do is to accept the judgment as the will of God which was necessitated by the iniquity of the nation. Accept it as my will, he seems to be saying" (McGuiggan 262).

The word of the Lord came to me - "He prefaces his message with the assurance that he was obeying God's command in what he did, and they rightly thought that his sudden loss and consequent behavior had a symbolic significance for the nation" (Fisch 165-166).

**<sup>22</sup>"And you will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache, and you will not eat the bread of men. <sup>23</sup>And your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn, and you will not weep; but you will rot away in your iniquities, and you will groan to one another. <sup>24</sup>Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord God."**

Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you - "The prophet repeats the exact words which God had communicated to him; hence the mention of himself in the third person" (Fisch 166).

**<sup>25</sup>"As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes, and their heart's delight, their sons and their daughters, <sup>26</sup>that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears? <sup>27</sup>On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be dumb no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord."**

I take from them their stronghold - "These terms describe the Temple. It had been their 'stronghold,' upon which they had relied for immunity, and 'the joy of their glory,' the magnificent edifice which had been their pride. Whether 'the desire of their eyes' is an epithet for the Temple is uncertain. Though the Hebrew accentuation is against it. Kimchi regards the whole verse up to 'their sons,' etc. as descriptive of the Temple, and 'their sons and their daughters' as a separate clause governed by 'when I take'" (Fisch 167).

“The chapter ends with a further word that looks forward to the second main phase of Ezekiel’s ministry after chapter 33. It deals with the impact that the destruction of Jerusalem will have upon the prophet himself; note the emphatic ‘and you, son of man,’ which opens the paragraph. As far as Ezekiel was concerned this disaster would prove a turning-point in his life’s work. His message would be vindicated and for the first time he would have ready hearers. More particularly, the ritual dumbness, which was imposed upon him at the time of his call, would be taken from his mouth, and he would be able to speak freely (cf. 3:26; 33:22). The sentence construction of the passage is slightly confused and it gives the impression of the writer’s mind running faster than his pen. As it stands, it looks as if the phrase ‘in that day’ of verse 26 is intended to refer to the same day as verse 25, but clearly the fall of the city and the relaying of the news by a fugitive to Ezekiel could not have happened on the same day, unless it is supposed that Ezekiel was at that time in Palestine and less than a day’s journey from Jerusalem. It is better to assume that the writer, writing from the standpoint of knowing what was to come, rolled the event and the recounting of the event into one episode. In support of this it is worth mentioning that the word ‘fugitive’ (26, RSV) is really ‘the fugitive,’ as if the writer already knew about what was coming in 33:21. So he is saying: ‘when this event happens and the news reaches your ears, then your mouth shall be opened and you will be dumb no longer.’ This release from the restriction imposed upon him will in itself be a portent and the people will recognize the hand of the Lord in it all (27). Then at last Ezekiel will be free. His prophecies of doom will no longer need to be uttered. He will be able to act as shepherd and a watchman to his people. He will be free to work constructively towards the building up of a new city, a new Israel” (Taylor 183-184).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

“With the preceding chapter Ezekiel’s denunciation of Israel’s sins and prophecy of Jerusalem’s doom come to an end. Before he reverts to the theme of Judea’s future, her restoration and spiritual regeneration, he proclaims the downfall of the heathen nations in the next eight chapters. The nations singled out for condemnation are Israel’s neighbors, seven in number. The nearest are Ammon, Moab, Edom and the Philistines; those farther away are Tyre, Zidon and Egypt (for similar denunciations, cf. Isa 13-27; Jer 46-51). The sins of these nations, on account of which they are doomed, are twofold: not only did they take no warning from Israel’s calamity, also, their presence was a constant physical and spiritual danger to Israel’s restoration and thereby a frustration of the Divine plan for humanity in the moral sphere” (Fisch 168).

“Although the Old Testament prophets addressed their messages primarily to their own people, or to a part at least of God’s covenant city, it was characteristic of them to survey the other nations of the world in order to demonstrate the Lord’s sovereignty over the heathen as well as over Israel. This is the pattern in Isaiah (13-23), in Jeremiah (46-51) and also in Amos (1-2). The purpose of this kind of writing is twofold. First, it arises out of a belief in monotheism, and is intended to show the outworkings of monotheism. If Yahweh is the God of the whole earth, he clearly has something to say about the history and destiny of nations other than Israel. Secondly, the future prospects of Israel,

whether they are thought of in terms of a day of judgment or Davidic Messianism or a new covenant, must be matched by judgment on peoples who have often flagrantly disregarded the laws by which all mankind are to be judged. Such national sins as aggression, arrogance, atrocities and the breaking of covenants, to name but a few, deserve God's wrath, whether committed by Jewish or Gentile powers.

"There is probably some significance in the fact that in this collection of oracles, the number of nations dealt with is seven (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt). The same number appears in Amos, though some would regard one or two of his oracles as later additions. But bearing in mind that Ezekiel's oracles were delivered at different terms and were obviously collected and inserted at this stage of the book and in the present order for some purpose, it is not unlikely that whoever was responsible for this piece of editorial work was conscious of the 'seven' factor in his compilation. A further sign of editorial planning is the geographical pattern of the oracles, beginning with Ammon to the north-east of Jerusalem, swinging southwards through Moab to Edom in the south-east, then round to Philistia in the west, and finally going farther afield in a northerly direction to Tyre and Sidon, before ending up with the distant major power, Egypt, in the south. Inevitably, the omission of Babylon provokes comment, and this is variously explained. Cooke sees Babylon as standing apart from the other nations, inasmuch as it was the instrument of God's punishment upon Israel. Skinner goes further and regards the Babylonian invaders as being the instruments of judgment upon all the nations mentioned here, as well as on Israel.

"One further observation needs to be made....Ezekiel...has inserted these oracles between chapters 24 and 33 in order to heighten the dramatic tension of waiting for the news of the fall of Jerusalem to burst upon the doubting exiles. At the same time this section marks a clear hiatus between Ezekiel's ministry and the message before 587 B.C. and his quite different treatment of the exiles once the disaster had vindicated his words and created the atmosphere of stunned repentance, in which he could begin to restore the nation's confidence in the good purposes of God" (Taylor 184-186).

The second major division of the prophecy is the natural outgrowth of the expansive vision which opened the ministry of Ezekiel and of the great theme which underlies his writing. God—who can no longer be identified with Palestine alone, who can be met in the Mesopotamian mudflats in a summer storm, who can withdraw from Jerusalem to go where he will—is a God who by His very nature relates Himself to all nations.

"These oracles serve to establish two concepts very clearly: *first*, all mankind is morally and spiritually responsible to Almighty God; *second* no nation will escape the responsibility to obey the common laws of humanity. Neither imperial greatness (Tyre and Egypt) nor insignificant powerlessness (Ammon, Edom and the like) could mean that judgment would be withheld" (Howie 57-58).

"These eight chapters have two great lessons to teach us. (1) If God will not tolerate ungodliness and insolence in His own people, He will certainly not tolerate it in others.

(2) God is no local deity whose power is limited to the land of Palestine. He can reach out and judge nations wherever they live for He is Lord of all. The chapters are well summed up by 1 Peter 4:17,18 which tells us God will bring the saved through, but if it is tough on the saved, where do the impenitent stand? If the righteous are scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (McGuiggan 265).

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face toward the sons of Ammon, and prophesy against them,**

“Most commentators remark on the colorless prose of these four oracles and this is true in comparison with the poetic splendor of the oracles of Tyre and Egypt. It does not follow from this, however, that they are secondary material. As with Amos’ oracles (Amos 1:3-2:3), they were written in a stereotyped form, and they follow the ‘because ...therefore...’ pattern of the invective oracle (cf. 26:2; 34:8-10; 36:2, etc.) which appears to be peculiar to Ezekiel. They have many phrases also which are typical of Ezekiel’s style, such as ‘profaning my sanctuary,’ ‘stretching out my hand,’ ‘executing judgments,’ and of course the ever-present ‘you shall know that I am the Lord’” (Taylor 186).

Set your face toward the sons of Ammon - “This people, dwelling on the other side of the Jordan north-east of Jerusalem, were racially connected with Israel (cf. Gen 19:38). Though the Israelites had respected their territory when journeying to Canaan (Deut 2:19, 37), they bore animosity and waged several wars against them. After the Israelite tribes on the east of the Jordan had been carried away by the Assyrians, the Ammonites seized their land (Jer 49:1). On the fall of Jerusalem they instigated the treacherous murder of Gedaliah, appointed governor by the Babylonian king (Jer 40: 14), and obstructed Judea’s restoration in the time of Nehemiah (Neh 4:1). Still later they are found aiding the Syrians in the Maccabean war (cf.1 Maccabees 5:6)” (Fisch 168).

“The Ammonites had frequently been in conflict with the Israelites from the time of the Judges onwards (cf. Jud 10:11; 1 Sam 11; 2 Sam 10, etc.). They had benefitted themselves at the expense of the northern kingdom around 722 B.C. (cf. Jer 49:1) and they had also joined more recently in troubling Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:2). After the fall of Jerusalem, their king Baalis appears to have encouraged Ishmael in the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer 40:14). Their crime in this oracle was that of gloating at Judah’s misfortune (3,6 ‘land of Israel’ meaning the territory of Judah, not the old northern kingdom), and their punishment would be to be overrun by nomadic desert tribesmen (‘men of the east,’ 4 AV) who would use the capital city, Rabbah, as a place of grazing their camels (‘pasture,’ RSV, rather than ‘stable,’ AV, RV)” (Taylor 186-187).

**<sup>3</sup>and say to the sons of Ammon, ‘Hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God, “Because you said, ‘Aha!’ against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into exile, <sup>4</sup>therefore, behold, I am going to give you to the sons of the east for a possession, and they will set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they will eat your fruit and drink your milk.”**

I am going to give you to the sons of the east - "The nomad tribes of the Arabian desert. Josephus (*Antiquities X*, ix. 7) records that five years after his campaign against Judea, Nebuchadnezzar successfully warred against the Ammonites and Moabites. In their weakened state they could not resist the plundering Bedouins. But since the prophet speaks of the attackers settling in the towns of Ammon, a later and more serious invasion is intended. Kimchi explains the phrase as referring to the peoples of Persia and Media whose territory was situated north-east of Ammon" (Fisch 169).

**<sup>5</sup>"And I shall make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the sons of Ammon a resting place for flocks. Thus you will know that I am the Lord." <sup>6</sup>For thus says the Lord God, "Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel, <sup>7</sup>therefore, behold, I have stretched out My hand against you, and I shall give you for spoil to the nations. And I shall cut you off from the peoples and make you perish from the lands; I shall destroy you. Thus you will know that I am the Lord."**

Because you have clapped your hands - "The second oracle (6-7) has the same form and deals with the same offence as the first, for clapping the hands and stamping the feet was obviously 'a gesture of malicious delight' (Davidson). The punishment, however, is more specific: the Ammonites will become a prey to foreign people and will be completely destroyed as a nation. How the final phrase of verse 7 fits in with this is not easy to see. It may be that a knowledge of the Lord will be experienced only in the calamity of final destruction. May compares the promises of restoration 'after' destruction that are found in Jeremiah (48:47; 49:6,39) and thinks that this hints at pagans eventually worshipping Yahweh as the true God" (Taylor 187).

**<sup>8</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "Because Moab and Seir say, 'Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations,' <sup>9</sup>therefore, behold, I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of its cities, of its cities which are on its frontiers, the glory of the land, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiri-athaim, <sup>10</sup>and I will give it for a possession, along with the sons of Ammon, to the sons of the east, that the sons of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations. <sup>11</sup>Thus I will execute judgments on Moab, and they will know that I am the Lord."**

Because Moab and Seir say - "Like Ammon a kindred people to Israel; their country was situated east of the Dead Sea. There was constant strife between the two nations, and Moab joined in the attack upon Judah by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 24:2). 'Seir' stands for 'Edom.' They are mentioned together probably because they were allies in support of Babylon. A specific denunciation of Edom follows in verse 12" (Fisch 170).

"The hostility between Moab and Israel dates back to Balak and Moses (Num 22-24). As a nation they were closely associated with their Ammonite neighbors (cf. Gen 19:30-38), but they were a more settled people and had a well-developed culture. Their crime is contempt for Judah and rejection of her claims to be a peculiar people with a uniquely

powerful God. Presumably her defeat in battle was regarded as adequate justification for this view, but it was none the less culpable. Moab would share the Ammonite fate. Her 'flank' (9, RSV; literally 'shoulder') would be exposed to attack through the destruction of her strongly fortified cities. Three of these are named and their exact position can be seen on a good Bible atlas. Oracles against Moab occur in the writings of other prophets also (cf. Isa 15-16; Jer 48; Amos 2:1-3; Zeph 2:8-11). It is worth noting that not long after this both Ammon and Moab were overrun by Nabatean tribesmen and ceased to have any independent existence as nations" (Taylor 187).

I am going to deprive the flank of Moab of its cities - "God will expose Moab to attack by invaders who will penetrate the fortified cities on the frontiers and overrun the whole country. The three towns named were the fortresses upon which Moab relied for security. Bethjeshimoth was situated in the south of the Plains of Moab, to the north-east of the Dead Sea. It is mentioned in Numbers 33:49 and Joshua 12:3; 13:20. Baal-meon is more fully named Beth-baal-meon in Joshua 13:17. It is located by the Dead Sea a few miles inland, with Kiriathaim to its south. Both Baal-meon and Kiriathaim occur in Mesha's inscription on the Moabite Stone" (Fisch 170).

**<sup>12</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them," <sup>13</sup>therefore, thus says the Lord God, "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it. And I will lay it waste; from Tenam even to Dedan they will fall by the sword. <sup>14</sup>"And I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel. Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; thus they will know My vengeance," declares the Lord God.**

"Israel and Edom had a longstanding feud, traceable back in ancient tradition to their two ancestors (Gen 25:23). From time to time this hatred erupted violently, as it did at the fall of Jerusalem, when the Edomites took advantage of Judah's plight in a way that earned them undying and bitter animosity of the kind reflected in Psalm 137:7-9; Obadiah 1-21 and Malachi 1:3-5 (for other oracles, see Isa 34:5-7; Jer 49:7-22; Lam 4:21f; Ezek 35; Amos 1:11f). What the Edomites actually did we cannot say for sure, but they certainly sided with Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem and after the exile there is evidence of Edomite occupation of southern Judah (See W. F. Albright, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, LXXXII, 1941, pp. 11-15. Cf. also 1 Esdras 4:50). Their crime of acting 'revengefully' is expressed by Ezekiel in the strongest terms (12), and their punishment is in the same style. Israel is to be the agent for this vengeance (14, 'by the hand of my people Israel'), and it is interesting to note that although Edom proper was also overrun by Nabateans, the ancestors of the modern Arabs, Edomite survivors were later subdued first by Judas Maccabaeus and then by John Hyrcanus, who incorporated them into the Jewish race by compulsory circumcision. Ezekiel, however, does not predict that they will ever 'know that I am the Lord' (Taylor 187-188).

<sup>15</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with scorn of soul to destroy with everlasting enmity,”  
<sup>16</sup>therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, even cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.  
<sup>17</sup>And I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the Lord when I lay My vengeance on them.””

“These inhabitants of the southern part of the coastal strip of Palestine were also inveterate foes of Israel during her early history, but they had no ties of kinship and were originally Mediterranean ‘sea peoples’ from the Aegean. David finally broke their military ascendancy but they continued to cause occasional trouble during the monarchy, though we have no record other than this oracle of their hostility at the time of Jerusalem’s fall. The ‘Cherethites,’ who were regularly linked with them, may well be etymologically the same as the Cretans, as LXX translates. David employed them in his standing army of mercenaries, and it is likely that ‘the Pelethites’ who shared this duty with them were Philistines under a slightly different name. The punishment pronounced on them for their vengeful wrongs done against Jerusalem (doubtless they too sided with Babylon) is expressed in the form of a play on words: ‘I will cut off (*hikratti*) the Cherethites (*‘et k<sup>e</sup>retim*).’ After Maccabean times, the Philistines completely vanished from sight as a people and only the names of their cities remained” (Taylor 188).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“This and the following two chapters deal with the fate of Tyre. The Divine communication was made to the prophet in the year, and probably in the very month, of the fall of Jerusalem. Tyre represents Phoenicia which bordered on the Land of Israel, and at one time her territory extended as far as Kadesh in Galilee and Carmel. It is worthy of note that, though friendly relations always existed between Phoenicia and Israel, the prophet portrays her destruction in more threatening colours and in greater detail than with any other nations. In proclaiming Tyre’s downfall, he could not have been motivated by his personal or the national feeling of revenge. Tyre had, in fact, forfeited her right of existence by her excessive commercialism. Her lust for material gain knew no bounds, and their wealth produced in the population a sense of pride and arrogance which resulted in a complete disregard for human suffering. The demoralization of Tyre was strikingly evidenced by her malicious joy over the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly by her exultant boasting: ‘Aha, she is broken...I shall be filled with her that is laid waste (verse 2).’ After a siege of thirteen years (as recorded in Josephus, *Antiquities* X, xi. i), Nebuchadnezzar subdued Tyre and so made way for its disappearance from the scene of history” (Fisch 172).

“Tyre was a center of extensive commerce from the days of David and Solomon, when it became the seat of Phoenician power. The city, built on an island connected to the mainland only by a causeway, was almost impregnable from land attack. Widespread Assyrian conquest, which swept everything before it, did not overwhelm this city. Even

the Egyptian dominance by Pharaoh Hophra, who forced its surrender (588 B.C.) without capture, was short-lived. After his successful destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar turned his full might against the island stronghold. After thirteen years of siege (585-573 B.C.) the city still stood proud in solitary strength and was given favorable terms by the frustrated Chaldean hosts...It remained for Alexander the Great to conquer this city by combined attack from land and sea” (Howie 59).

**<sup>1</sup>Now it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,’**

It came about in the eleventh year - of the reign of Zedekiah, the year in which Jerusalem was captured. Since the month is not stated, it is probable that the reference is to the fifth month in which the fate of Jerusalem was sealed. This is the year 586 B.C.

**<sup>3</sup>therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. <sup>4</sup>And they will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. <sup>5</sup>She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord God, ‘and she will become spoil for the nations. <sup>6</sup>Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the Lord.’”**

I am against you, O Tyre - “She left no literature, statues, monuments, or anything else of permanent value. She is known as the pandered to the vices of the ancient nations. She was the world’s ‘Sears Catalogue.’ If you wanted it she could get it, if she did not already have it. If there was a war going on, she was nearby ready to barter with the winners for the captives. She was influential beyond her size because of her wealth and connections— she pleased everyone. Everyone but God...under Alexander she made the mistake of refusing to give him the rights to worship her gods and he, after a lot of work, brought her to her knees. The story is often told of Alexander’s using the rubble of the mainland to build the causeway out to the island while his ships taken from Byblos and Sidon kept the Tyrians busy on the water” (McGuiggan 268-269).

“To say that Ezekiel in these oracles turns from the nations round about Judah to more distant powers like Tyre and Sidon and Egypt is perfectly true, but it must be said with caution. It is all too easy to forget the small scale of the geography of the Holy Land. For instance, all the territories referred to in chapter 25 can be seen with the naked eye from Jerusalem. Tyre’s distance is only comparative, for it is a mere 35 miles as the crow flies from the Sea of Galilee and only 100 miles from Jerusalem. For those whose business was trade it was no more than a few days’ camel-ride away.

“Tyre’s pre-eminence in world trade was due to her natural situation, with two excellent harbours, one on the mainland where a portion of the city was built and the other on the

off-shore island which gave the city its name (Tyre, *sor* = rock). The two were connected by a causeway, built in the tenth century B.C. by Hiram I, and this effectively doubled the trading potential of the city. At the same time, when danger threatened, it made it possible to retreat into the island stronghold which thus became both treasure-chest, ware-house and impregnable fortress for the Tyrians. As a commercial centre, Tyre was famous for her glassware and for her dyed materials, using the purple dye made from the local murex shell-fish. Inevitably she was a prey at which foreign powers looked greedily and she had to pay a heavy tribute to Assyria as the price for commercial freedom. Her continuing prosperity would have encouraged a sense of complacency within herself and of jealousy from her less privileged neighbors and these attitudes are fully reflected in Ezekiel's oracles.

"There are five major sub-divisions of these chapters, each beginning with 'the word of the Lord came to me' (26:1; 27:1; 28:1,11,20)" (Taylor, 189).

**<sup>7</sup>For thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great army. <sup>8</sup>He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a mound against you, and raise up a large shield against you. <sup>9</sup>And the blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. <sup>10</sup>Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. <sup>11</sup>With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. <sup>12</sup>Also they will be a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. <sup>13</sup>So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. <sup>14</sup>And I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the Lord have spoken," declares the Lord God.**

I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon - This spelling of the name by Ezekiel, which is also found in the Book of Jeremiah, is nearer the Babylonian Nabu-kudurri-usur, meaning "Nebo protect (my) labor."

King of kings - Who had dominion over many vassal kings (cf. Dan 2:37; Ezra 7:12).

He will slay your daughters on the mainland - "The Babylonian military operation against Tyre is described in chronological order. The first to suffer were the cities on the mainland. Then came the attack on the island-city by means of 'forts' or movable towers, mounds and bucklers, the last being probably large shields which gave cover to the besiegers. Finally the batter rams came into operation (verse 9)" (Fisch 174).

You will be built no more - “Tyre was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and, as foretold by Ezekiel, was never rebuilt. The city now called Tyre, which was captured by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E., is another city with the same name, built on the mainland opposite the old Tyre (Kimchi)” (Fisch 176).

**<sup>15</sup>Thus says the Lord God to Tyre, “Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst?”**

**<sup>16</sup>Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones, remove their robes, and strip off their embroidered garments. They will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble every moment, and be appalled at you. <sup>17</sup>And they will take up a lamentation over you and say to you, ‘How you have**

**perished, O inhabited one, from the seas, O renowned city, which was mighty on the sea, she and her inhabitants, who imposed her terror on all her inhabitants!**

**<sup>18</sup>Now the coastlands will tremble on the day of your fall; yes, the coastlands which are by the sea will be terrified at your passing. <sup>19</sup>For thus says the Lord God, ‘When I shall make you a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I shall bring up the deep over you, and the great waters will cover you, <sup>20</sup>then I shall bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I shall make you dwell in the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places, with those who go down to the pit, so that you will not be inhabited; but I shall set glory in the land of the living. <sup>21</sup>I shall bring terrors on you, and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again,’” declares the Lord God.**

Shake at the sound of your fall - “Tyre had become a sign of impregnability among the nations. When all else changed, Tyre remained majestically aloof in her island retreat. News of her fall will have devastating effect upon peoples everywhere, even as the fall of France in 1940 had a crushing and almost disastrous effect upon the modern Western world. Princes of the sea—that is, leaders of the sea people—shall be afraid and shall go into mourning at the terrible news that Tyre is destroyed” (Howie 60).

“Isaiah 23:8 calls her a ‘bestower of crowns.’ Because of her financial power and her connections in all the courts of the lands she undoubtedly was able to manipulate the nations. Her fall would be a shock to all those little kingdoms which had seen her at work” (McGuiggan 269).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

“In this chapter Ezekiel pictures Tyre as a magnificent ship constructed from the best material, furnished with the choicest equipment and manned by the most skillful sailors. He then describes in graphic imagery and in a remarkably detailed style the various types of merchandise which made up the ship’s cargo. Sailing proudly on the high seas, it was overtaken by a tempest and suffered shipwreck. Everything on board was lost.

The disaster caused intense consternation among the neighbouring cities; and seamen, merchants and kings uttered lamentation over the catastrophe” (Fisch 178).

“This chapter consists of two separate compositions: a long poem in the *qina* metre (3b-9, 25b-36), and a prose catalogue which is inserted in the middle of the poem (10-25a). The poem is an extended allegory about the good ship Tyre, superbly fitted out and expertly crewed, but so laden with merchandise that in heavy seas she sinks to the bottom of the ocean. Thereupon all the sailing peoples of the Mediterranean gather on the shore to bewail her loss” (Taylor 192).

**<sup>1</sup>Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre; <sup>3</sup>and say to Tyre, who dwells at the entrance to the sea, merchant of the peoples to many coastlands, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “<sup>0</sup>Tyre, you have said, ‘I am perfect in beauty.’ <sup>4</sup>Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty. <sup>5</sup>They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir; they have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.”**

And you, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre - “There follows a description of the glory and beauty of Tyre. This is not the description of a person, not even a king. It is the description of a kingdom and when the prince is finally mentioned he is only mentioned as the embodiment of the kingdom. The phrase (v. 3), ‘I am perfect in beauty’ speaks of the excellence of the kingdom as a kingdom. The description takes on the picture of a well built ship (4ff). That ship is manned by all kinds of people from different places (8ff). Renowned people were glad to be identified with her so esteemed was she. The goods she carried and the people she traded with are all listed (12-25). For her size, she was the most glorious and influential kingdom of that time” (McGuiggan 270).

“‘And you’ this may be contrasted with 26:16f where it is stated that ‘all the princes of the sea’ will ‘take up a lamentation for thee.’ Ezekiel, too, is called upon to utter a dirge. ‘Take up’ is literally ‘raise.’ This verb is always used in connection with a lamentation because it was uttered in a loud voice” (Fisch 178).

Who dwells at the entrance to the sea - “The Hebrew has the plural ‘entries,’ signifying the two sections of the harbor which were known respectively as ‘the Sidonian’ and ‘the Egyptian,’ the former facing the town of Sidon to the north-east of the island” (Fisch 178-179).

0 Tyre, you have said, I am perfect in beauty - “There is no hint in the poem that this is the reason for her downfall, as is explicitly stated in the following chapter (28:2-8), but the poem is so subtly constructed that the point would be recognizable to any but the dullest reader” (Taylor 192).

**<sup>6</sup>“Of oaks from Bashan they have made your oars; with ivory they have inlaid your deck of boxwood from the coastlands of Cyprus. <sup>7</sup>Your sail was of fine embroidered linen from Egypt so that it became your distinguishing mark; your awning was blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah. <sup>8</sup>The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers; your wise men, O Tyre, were aboard; they were your pilots. <sup>9</sup>The elders of Gebal and her wise men were with you repairing your seams; all the ships of the sea and their sailors were with you in order to deal in your merchandise.”**

From the coastlands of Elishah - “Elishah was a son of Javan who became the founder of a people (Gen 10:4). Italy, Sicily and Greece have been suggested for their territory. ‘Dido’s other name, Elissa, would suggest Carthage or perhaps more generally the North African coastland. Racial and commercial ties between Carthage and Tyre were close’ (Lofthouse)” (Fisch 180).

The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers - “Sidon seems to have been at that time a vassal of Tyre. It ‘lay to the north of Tyre, about half-way between it and Beirut, and was probably the oldest Phoenician town, Tyre being a colony. Sidon is the firstborn of Canaan (Gen 10:15), and is called Great Sidon in Joshua 19:28...at a later time Tyre eclipsed her mother in power and wealth’” (Davidson).

“Arvad is named as a son of Canaan in Genesis 10:18. Arvad is an island town founded by Sidonian fugitives, north of Tripoli, now ‘Ruwad’ (Lofthouse). Its inhabitants were renowned for their ships” (Fisch 180).

**<sup>10</sup>“Persia and Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung shield and helmet in you; they set forth your splendor. <sup>11</sup>The sons of Arvad and your army were on your walls, all around, and the Gammadim were in your towers. They hung their shields on your walls, all around; they perfected your beauty.”**

Persia and Lud and Put were in your army - “Persia is mentioned here for the first time in the Bible. Attracted by the might and wealth of Tyre, her mercenaries came from distant lands, such as Persia, Lud and Put. Though Lud and Put occur together here and in 20:5, they are of different descent. Lud is Semitic and Put Handtic (cf. Gen 10:6, 22). Some identify Lud with the Lydians of western Asia Minor; others suggest the ‘Lubdi,’ a people inhabiting the land between the Upper Tigris and the Euphrates. Put is the Egyptian ‘punt’ on the western coast of the Red Sea” (Fisch 181).

**<sup>12</sup>“Tarshish was your customer because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they paid for your wares. <sup>13</sup>Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were your traders; with the lives of men and vessels of bronze they paid for your merchandise. <sup>14</sup>Those from Beth-togramah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares. <sup>15</sup>The sons of Dedan were your traders. Many coastlands were your market; ivory tusks and ebony they brought as your payment. <sup>16</sup>Arman was your customer because of the abundance of your goods; they**

paid for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and rubies. <sup>17</sup>Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traders; with the wheat of Minnith, cakes, honey, oil, and balm they paid for your merchandise. <sup>18</sup>Damascus was your customer because of the abundance of your goods, because of the abundance of all kinds of wealth, because of the wine of Helbon and white wool.”

Javan, Tubal and Meshech, they were your traders - “Names of three sons of Japheth (Gen 10:2). Javan is the Hebrew term for the Ionians, the Greeks of Asia Minor. Tubal and Meshech are usually identified with the Tibareni and Maschi who lived south-east and south respectively of the Black Sea. These peoples supplied Tyre with slaves and copper” (Fisch 182).

Those from Beth-togarmah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares - “This was the name of one of the sons of Gomer (Gen 10:3), and is supposed to denote Armenia which Herodotus mentions as famed for its horses and mules. In 38:6 Togarmah is described as situated in the extreme north” (Fisch 182).

<sup>19</sup>“**Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal; wrought iron, cassia, and sweet cane were among your merchandise. <sup>20</sup>Dedan traded with you in saddle-cloths for riding. <sup>21</sup>Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were your customers for lambs, rams, and goats; for these they were your customers. <sup>22</sup>The traders of Sheba and Ramaah, they traded with you; they paid for your wares with the best of all kinds of spices, and with all kinds of precious stones, and gold. <sup>23</sup>Haran, Cameh, Eden, the traders of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad traded with you. <sup>24</sup>They traded with you in choice garments, in clothes of blue and embroidered work, and in carpets of many colors, and tightly wound cords, which were among you merchandise. <sup>25</sup>The ships of Tarshish were the carriers for your merchandise. And you were filled and were very glorious In the heart of the seas.”**

Haran, Canneh, Eden, the traders of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad traded with you - “Haran is an ancient and well-known city in Mesopotamia. On account of its geographical position, being situated on the route from Babylon to Syria, it was an important commercial centre. It was from Haran that Abraham migrated to Canaan (Gen 12: 4). ‘Cameh’ some identify it with ‘Calneh’ in Genesis 10:10, otherwise called ‘Calno’ (Isa 10:9), a city in Babylon. ‘Eden’ (cf. 2 Kgs 19:12; Isa 37:12; Amos 1:5). On Assyrian inscriptions it is called Bit-Adini, situated on either side of the Euphrates, due south of Haran. The peoples of Haran, Cameh and Eden, who traded also with Sheba, brought their wars to Phoenicia. ‘Asshur’ this name normally indicates Assyria, which is inappropriate in this connection since that people had long been on the decline. Some identify it with Sura on the Euphrates, or with a town situated on the west side of the Tigris, now the ruined site of Halat Serkat” (Fisch 184,185).

You were filled and were very glorious in the heart of the seas - “In the very place where Tyre was thought to be supreme, ‘in the midst of the seas’ (cf. v. 4), she was over-taken by disaster. The powerful ‘east wind’ (cf. Psa 48:7) broke her up and she foundered,

taking with her all her crew and her armies and her merchandise (is it significant that this comes first in the list?). The 'countryside' (28, RSV; literally the 'open spaces'; AV 'suburbs'), which had supplied many of those on board will be shattered at the sound of the sailors crying out for help and all the shipping world gathers to lament the loss of such a stately craft. For the signs of mourning in verses 30-31, see 7:17f" (Taylor 194-195).

**26**“Your rowers have brought you into great waters; the east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas. **27**Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise, your sailors, and your pilots, your repairers of seams, your dealers in merchandise, and all your man of war who are in you, with all your company that is in your midst, will fall into the heart of the seas on the day of your overthrow. **28**At the sound of the cry of your pilots the pasture lands will shake. **29**And all who handle the oar, the sailors, and all the pilots of the sea will come down from their ships; they will stand on the land, **30**And they will make their voice heard over you and will cry bitterly. They will cast dust on their heads, they will wallow in ashes. **31**Also they will make themselves bald for you and gird themselves with sackcloth; and they will weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning. **32**Moreover, in their wailing they will take up a lamentation for you and lament over you: ‘Who is like Tyre, like her who is silent in the midst of the sea? **33**When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you enriched the kings of earth. **34**Now that you are broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your company have fallen in the midst of you. **35**All the inhabitants of the coastlands are appalled at you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in countenance. **36**The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you have become terrified, and you will be no more.’”

Moreover, in their wailing they will take up a lamentation for you - “This is the unusual case of a lamentation within a lamentation, for the whole chapter was so described in 27:2. It begins, in vivid contrast to verse 3,

who-is like-Tyre destroyed  
in-the-midst-of the-seas?

“Ironically, the achievements of Tyre are recounted in terms of the benefits which her trading had brought to the kings of the earth: no reference is made to the vast wealth which she had amassed for herself—surely a deliberate touch on Ezekiel’s part” (Taylor 195).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“This is the conclusion of the three chapters directed against Tyre. Here the guilt and punishment of Tyre are laid at the door of ‘the prince of Tyre’ who is regarded as the

embodiment of the people. The root cause of Tyre's collapse was her abundance of wealth. In her vast material resources, which she attributed exclusively to her genius, she found her only purpose in life. Spiritual values had no place in the minds of her population; self-glorification and self-sufficiency reigned supreme. Such arrogance and demoralization must lead to destruction. In a lament of striking imaginative power, Ezekiel describes the fall of Tyre and her expulsion from the Garden of Eden, repeating his message that the multitude of her sins produced the fire which would eventually consume her. In conclusion he turns to Zidon, which lay about twenty miles north of Tyre, and pronounces her doom. With the destruction of Israel's immediate neighbors, who were to him 'a pricking brier and a piercing thorn,' his national existence will be resumed. By the execution of judgment upon the heathen nations for their iniquities and fulfillment of His promises to restore Israel to his ancient glory, God's holy name will be sanctified throughout the world" (Fisch 188).

"In this poem metaphor is abandoned and the 'prince' of Tyre (Hebrew *nagid* 'ruler'), Ithobal II, is vigorously attacked for his claims to deity. This does not mean to say that Tyre necessarily held to a belief in divine kingship, for the attack is not so much a personal criticism of the ruler as a verbal onslaught on the state. Tyre regarded herself as all-powerful, superhuman and virtually eternal; she was possessed of wealth and wisdom above all other cities, and this led on to the incredible arrogance for which Tyre was notorious. The oracle begins with the claim of the prince of Tyre that 'I am a god.' This claim, which is the ground of his condensation, is repeated sporadically throughout the oracle (2b,6,9). Yet the prince is not a god, but a man (2,9). His claims to wisdom, which are not denied (3-5), have caused his heart, most unwisely, to be lifted up. So he will end up by meeting death at the hands of foreigners in a manner totally out of keeping with his grandiose claim. 'For I have spoken,' says the Lord God; and God always has the final word" (Taylor 195-196).

**<sup>1</sup>The word of the Lord came again to me saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Because your heart is lifted up and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, in the heart of the seas;' yet you are a man and not God, although you make your heart like the heart of God — "**

You have said, I am a god - "In these verses we have the basic crime of Tyre. She became self-sufficient and arrogant. She began to think that her prosperity was due to her wisdom (why, even Daniel was slow compared with her!). She began to think of herself as Godlike (2-6). I do not think we are supposed to understand that the king of Tyre or any other associate with Tyre actually said to themselves: 'I am God! And I sit in the seat of God.' Their worship precludes that possibility. No, it was more subtle than that — Tyre began to act as if all this prosperity was her own doing. She replaced God with herself. Now, that brings it nearer to home. Who among us would profess to be God? The very thought is ridiculous. But are we not capable of conning ourselves into thinking that the reason for our success is our eloquence? Wisdom? Exegetical ability? Are we not very capable of worshiping the creature rather than the Creator? Being wooed by

the gifts rather than the Giver? Here was Tyre's crime! Self-exaltation" (McGuiggan 270-271).

"He regarded his realm, cut off from the land by the sea, as a Divine abode. The beauty and splendour of the place, its richness and renown, possibly also its isolation, make it something not of the earth" (Fisch 189).

You make your heart like the heart of God - "Ehrlich regards 'heart' here, as often elsewhere, the seat of intellect; so the meaning is, 'though thou didst hold thine understanding to be as the understanding of God.'" (Fisch 189).

**<sup>3</sup>"Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is a match for you."**

This sarcastic reference to being "wiser than Daniel" shows the foolishness of the prince of Tyre. Compared to the great Daniel the leader of Tyre (Ithobal II, 574-564) is nothing. Daniel was mentioned earlier for his righteousness (14:14,20). It is also significant to note that the great prophets of God were known and recognized *in their own time*. Therefore, anything that Daniel might write would be *immediately* accepted by the people of God. Modern critics suggest that the Bible books were made a part of the canon of scripture centuries after the author lived and that these books were "voted" into the canon. There is no evidence to suggest this. Instead, the Bible indicates (in passages like this and many others) that when a recognized prophet of God wrote, his writing was instantly and immediately accepted as being from God (cf. Exodus 24:4ff).

**<sup>4</sup>"By your wisdom and understanding you have acquired riches for yourself, and have acquired gold and silver for your treasuries. <sup>5</sup>By your great wisdom, by your trade you have increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches — "**

Tyre had regarded herself as superior to all nations. Her pride equaled that of Edom who was condemned by the prophet Obadiah.

**<sup>6</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Because you have made your heart like the heart of God, <sup>7</sup>Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you, the most ruthless of the nations. And they will draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. <sup>8</sup>They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die the death of those who are slain in the heart of the seas. <sup>9</sup>'Will you still say, "I am a god," in the presence of your slayer, although you are a man and not God, in the hands of those who wound you? <sup>10</sup>'You will die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers, for I have spoken!' declares the Lord God!"**

Tyre had thought of herself as eternal and indestructible. How easily and quickly will God bring about her end! Such arrogance will always lead to destruction (cf. Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:6).

**<sup>11</sup>Again the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>12</sup>“Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup>You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the ruby, the topaz, and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. <sup>14</sup>You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. <sup>15</sup>You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you.”**

You had the seal of perfection - “A phrase of doubtful meanings. The noun *tochnith* (most accurate) appears to be akin to *tochen* and *mathkoneth*, ‘measurement.’ If translated, ‘thou wert one who sealet measurement,’ the sense is: he was perfect in physical form” (Fisch 191).

You were Eden, the garden of God - “These verses abound in allusions to Genesis 2-3 and Paradise story. The connecting link is doubtless in the sin of pride which both Adam and Tyre were guilty of, but it is not always clear what picture is in Ezekiel’s mind. Eden is both ‘the garden of God’ (13) and ‘the holy mountain of God’ (14,16), a concept not found in Genesis. The ‘king’ (not the unusual word, *melek*, which Ezekiel avoids for the kings of Israel) is pictured as an epitome of the perfect primeval Man, or Adam, but he is dressed up in precious stones reminiscent of the high priest’s breastplate (Ex 28:17-20)” (Taylor 196).

You were the anointed cherub who covers - “This rendering (i.e. ‘thou wast the far-covering cherub’) which is based on Rashi, takes the word *minshach* to mean ‘far-extending.’ The king of Tyre is compared to a ‘cherub’ because the cherubim in the Tabernacle and in Solomon’s Temple spread their wings over the ark, symbolizing protection. Similarly, the king is described as the protector of ‘the garden of God,’ Tyre” (Fisch 192).

**<sup>16</sup>“By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. <sup>17</sup>Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you. <sup>18</sup>By the multitude of your iniquities, in the righteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries. Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you; it has consumed you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you. <sup>19</sup>All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrified, and you will be no more.”**

You profaned your sanctuaries - "The allusion is obscure. Rashi explains the Hebrew *mikdashecha* ('thy sanctuaries') as 'thy holiness'; while Kimchi, quoting Amos 7:13, 'the king's sanctuary,' gives it in both passages the meaning of 'palaces.' This, however, is doubtful. The term has possibly to be connected with the 'garden of God' and 'the holy mountain of God' which had been used in the description of Tyre. She once deserved to be called, 'thy holy places' over which the prince bore sway; but through moral debasement that title can no longer be applied and the city will be destroyed" (Fisch 193).

I have brought fire from the midst of you, it has consumed you " In addition to the punishment of being cast out of Eden and thrown down upon the earth as a public spectacle (17), it is said that fire (the flaming sword?) comes out from within her and burns her to ashes (18). The seeds of a nation's destruction are usually to be found within herself. And the comment of those who see is once again, 'you have come to a dreadful end' (cf. 36:21; 27:36)" (Taylor 197).

**<sup>20</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>21</sup>"Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, prophesy against her, <sup>22</sup>and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I shall be glorified in your midst. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I execute judgments in her, and I shall manifest My holiness in her. <sup>23</sup>For I shall send pestilence to her and blood to her streets, and the wounded will fall in her midst by the sword upon her on every side; then they will know that I am the Lord. <sup>24</sup>And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I am the Lord God."**

"Sidon lay on the Mediterranean coast 25 miles (40 km) north of Tyre. It had once been more prominent than Tyre and after the siege of the latter it came to prominence again. Involvement in the conspiracy against Babylon in 594-593 B.C., as well as the common association of Tyre and Sidon in other prophetic writings, may be the reason for the addition here, producing prophecies against a total of seven foreign nations. No reason is given for the judgment against the city" (Carley 193).

**<sup>25</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. <sup>26</sup>And they will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God."**

"This seem to be a summary remark on all the nations that went before. Israel will one day see the end of these nations and she will know that the only reason she survived was because God was with her. It was not her brilliance or her military might; it was not her goodness or spirituality. Her strength was her God. Not even her strong grip on her God, but her God's strong grip on her!" (McGuiggan 271-272).

“Finally, in a forward look beyond the exile to the days of the return, Ezekiel foretells the gathering together of the dispersed exiles and their dwelling in safety in their own land once again. This act of God will be His way of manifesting His holiness in and through His people before the nations of the world. The holy people are the channel through whom the Holy God reveals Himself. There is no mention of judgments upon Israel: that is presumably thought of as a thing of the past. The nations against whom these oracles have been uttered will be judged, and Israel will dwell securely in simple, agricultural prosperity” (Taylor 197-198).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

“After Tyre comes the prophecy against Egypt extending over four chapters, 29-32. Though this first prophecy against Egypt, in the tenth year and tenth month, is dated about seven months earlier than that against Tyre, the latter is placed first in the Book because its fulfillment preceded the Egyptian defeat. The second prophecy against Egypt is dated twenty-seven years from the accession to the throne by Nebuchadnezzar. The following two prophecies are dated the eleventh year, the year of the destruction of Jerusalem, and two in the twelfth year. The oracle against Egypt is exceedingly fierce and elaborate because of her importance as a world Power and her influence upon Israel which was particularly evil. Egypt’s sin was twofold. Her arrogance was notorious and her role in the history of Israel was that of a deceiver. As a great Power, she succeeded in subjugating Israel politically and imposing upon him an alliance which proved to be, in the prophet’s own words, ‘a broken reed,’ and a calamity in his foreign relations. The alliance was constantly denounced by the prophets not only as a political delusion, but also a factor in weakening Israel’s reliance upon God. This ‘reed’ must therefore be destroyed forever. In conclusion the prophet raises a dirge over the doomed Pharaoh, and in graphic language pictures his descent to the nether-world where he joins the company of other fallen tyrants” (Fisch 195).

“It seems strange that a twelfth of Ezekiel’s book should be devoted to an exposé of this one heathen power, just as it seems strange to find a section as large as this one (chapters 25-32) dealing exclusively with non-Jewish affairs. The reason, however, is not hard to find. We have already had cause to note the geographical finitude of Judah in relation to the Middle East of the time and no commentary of the life and future prospects of her people would be complete without reference to the mighty neighbors who jostled for power around her. Judah’s very existence was bound up with the foreign politics of nations like Assyria and Babylon, Egypt and Persia. They determined whether the little Hebrew kingdom was allowed to retain her independence, like a little Switzerland or whether she should become a political satellite or a military staging-post or an international bargaining-point. They could no more be ignored than can the United States and Soviet Russia in the policies of a state in Europe or South-east Asia today.

“What Ezekiel was in pains to point out, however, was that the final say in Israel’s destiny was not theirs but God’s—and God was Israel’s God! More than that, He said that even the destiny of the great powers, such as Egypt, was in the hands of Israel’s God. Yahweh controlled everything. The situation was in fact the very reverse of what appeared to be the case. The secular historian saw Israel dwarfed into insignificance by mighty neighbors; the religious commentator, the prophet, saw the great powers held firmly in the hand of little Israel’s mighty God. The lesson for the Christian minority is not difficult to draw” (Taylor 198,199).

**<sup>1</sup>In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt.”**

In the tenth year - of the reign of Zedekiah, about seven months before the fall of Jerusalem, 586 B.C. There were several prophecies by Ezekiel against Egypt delivered at various times later than the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah. They are grouped together in one series, though the first of them is dated before that concerning Tyre in chapter 26.

Set your face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt - Hophra (cf. Jeremiah 44:30) was the fourth king of the twenty-sixth dynasty who reigned from 589-570 B.C.

**<sup>3</sup>“Speak and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, ‘My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it.’ <sup>4</sup>And I shall put hooks in your jaws, and I shall make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales. And I shall bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, and all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales. <sup>5</sup>And I shall abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers; you will fall on the open field; you will not be brought together or gathered. I have given you for food to the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the sky.”**

The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers - “This is the crocodile. The river Nile which overflowed its banks periodically and brought fertility to the land, was a source of Egypt’s prosperity and pride. The arrogant Pharaoh personified his country as did the prince of Tyre” (Fisch 196).

“Pharaoh is likened to a ‘great dragon’ (Hebrew *tannin*, ‘sea-monster’), a word which represents both the crocodile, with which the Nile was infested, and also the chaos-monster of Semitic mythology. It appears in several passages in the Old Testament, identified either as ‘the serpent,’ or as ‘Leviathan’ or ‘Rahab’ (e.g. Job 9:13; 26:11-13; Psa 89:10; Isa 27:1; 51:9; Amos 9:3), but it was never allowed to be regarded as a real and effective opponent of Yahweh as it was with the warring divinities of Canaanite religion. Indeed Genesis 1:21 specifically mentions the *tanninim* as being part of God’s creation, thus killing decisively the myth of their rival pre-existence. The language of mythology was frequently imported into Hebrew poetry, however, and it was a particular-

ly apt simile for the age-old enemy, Egypt, whose sun-god Re, claimed to be self-begotten ('I have made myself,' RSV margin). For its arrogance the monster would be caught with hooks, dragged out of the river and left high and dry to rot in the wilderness like carrion. With it would go 'the fish of your streams' (4), i.e. the people or the mercenaries or the allies of Egypt (cf. the 'helpers of Rahab' in Job 9:13)" (Taylor 199-200).

I myself have made it - Like the prince of Tyre, Pharaoh thought of himself as more than human, the creator of the strength and productivity of Egypt. The exalted position which his country occupied in the world at that time was due—in his own estimation—to his exceptional powers.

**<sup>6</sup>"Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the Lord, because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>When they took hold of you with the hand, you broke and tore all their hands; and when they leaned on you, you broke and made all their loins quake. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I shall bring upon you a sword, and I shall cut off from you man and beast. <sup>9a</sup>And the land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste. Then they will know that I am the Lord."**

They have been only a staff made or reed to the house of Israel - A second appropriate metaphor for Egypt, "the land of reeds", is now used. Egypt is a broken reed that fails all who trust in her. Rabshakeh's words to Hezekiah (cf. Isa 36:6; 2 Kgs 18:21) suggest that the description was almost proverbial. It does not take many instances to establish a reputation for unreliability.

When they leaned on you, you broke - "This is a clear reference to the half-hearted response of Pharaoh Hophra to Zedekiah's appeal for help (cf. Jer 37:7). Little is known of this action except that it produced only a temporary lull in the siege of Jerusalem, but we can presume that it was little more than a token foray on the Egyptian's part. It may be argued that Ezekiel's repeated threatenings against Egypt in these four chapters are all attributable to this one act of faithlessness, but the limited evidence hardly justifies such a conclusion, and we are probably more correct to see in these chapters the climax of Egyptian hostility of which this one known act was simply a recent example" (Taylor 199).

Therefore, thus says the Lord God - "As the effect of Egypt's arrogance. The imagery is now translated into plain language" (Fisch 197).

**<sup>9b</sup>"Because you said, 'The Nile is mine, and I have made it,' <sup>10</sup>therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia. <sup>11</sup>A man's foot will not pass through it, and the foot of a beast will not pass through it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years. <sup>12</sup>So I shall make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated lands. And her cities, in the midst of**

**cities that are laid waste, will be desolate forty years; and I shall scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands.”**

The Nile is mine and I have made it - “Verse 9b brings out yet another ground for Yahweh’s declaration, ‘I am against you’ (3,10 cf. 28:22). Egypt, whose prosperity was dependent on the irrigation of the river Nile, was actually claiming to be its owner and originator” (Taylor 200).

It will not be inhabited for forty years - “Cf. 4:6 where the desolation of Judea is predicted for a similar period. The recovery of Egypt was foretold by other prophets (cf. Isa 19:24; Jer 46:26). The Midrash states that famine was decreed for Egypt in the time of Joseph to last forty-two years; but with the coming of Jacob to the country, after two years, it ended prematurely. Now the Egyptians would have to suffer the balance of forty years” (Fisch 198).

**<sup>13</sup>For thus says the Lord God, “At the end of forty years I shall gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered. <sup>14</sup>And I shall turn the fortunes of Egypt and shall make them return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin; and there they will be a lowly kingdom. <sup>15</sup>It will be the lowest of the kingdoms; and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I shall make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. <sup>16</sup>And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.”**

There they will be a lowly kingdom - “This would be limited to a return to the land of ‘Pathros’ (14), i.e. Upper Egypt, where they would continue as a weakened and ‘a lowly kingdom,’ never again to lord it over others. In term of literal fulfillment these threats never became reality: Egypt never endured an exile as Judah did. But her subsequent history has consisted of repeated conquest and humiliation. She has never been anything more than a ‘lowly kingdom’ and it is unlikely that she will ever again enjoy the glory that once was hers” (Taylor 200).

**<sup>17</sup>Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>18</sup>“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I shall give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth, and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army. <sup>20</sup>I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed, because they acted for Me,” declares the Lord God.**

Now in the twenty-seventh year - “The Jewish commentators, relying upon Sedar Olam, explain this of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. He came to the throne in 605 B.C.E. which yields the date 587. Modern authorities, on the other hand, relate the number to that

given in verse 1, 'the tenth year' (586), and accordingly date this section 570. It was 'written after Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen years' siege of Tyre had come to an end, and inserted among the prophecies relating to Egypt already collected. Nebuchadnezzar had served a great service for God against Tyre, for which neither he nor his army had received wages. God will recompense him for his service against Tyre by giving him the land of Egypt" (Fisch 199-200).

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre - "This oracle is the latest in the whole of the book, being dated on New Year's Day in 571 B.C. Although much later than any of the other oracles against Egypt, it is inserted at this point because it links the punishment of Egypt with the raising of the siege of Tyre, an event which took place in c. 574 B.C. It is therefore, put as near to the group of oracles against Tyre as the context will allow. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre had lasted for thirteen years, and by the end of that time 'every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare,' a graphic description of the chafing of the helmets and the carrying of burdens for the siege-works. We do not know whether Tyre was captured by the Babylonian force or not, though a few years later Babylonian officials were in residence in the city and Babylonian suzerainty was acknowledged. All that Ezekiel tells us is that the rewards of the siege were not commensurate with the effort involved. There was insufficient booty to pay off the army (perhaps the treasure had been evacuated by sea), and so Nebuchadnezzar was to divert his attention to the more lucrative prey, Egypt. This is seen as a gift to him from God, inasmuch as his efforts against Tyre had been at the behest of Yahweh and so he was entitled to his reward ('they worked for me,' 20). In point of fact the Babylonian expeditionary force did not attack Egypt until after the date of this oracle (c. 568-567) and we have no contemporary records of its measure of success, because the Babylonian inscriptions recording the campaign have been damaged. Ahmose II (Amasis), who had supplanted Pharaoh Hophra in 571 B.C., had to come to terms with the invaders, so we may presume that Nebuchadnezzar won the tribute to pay his armies as Ezekiel had prophesied. Jeremiah also foretold Nebuchadnezzar's campaign (cf. Jer 43:8-13; 46:1-25)" (Taylor 200-201).

Every head was made bald and every shoulder rubbed bare - "The Babylonian besiegers of Tyre had their heads made bald and the skin of their shoulders chafed by carrying loads of stone and timber in the campaign against the town. A vivid description of the laborious work involved in the long siege of Tyre" (Fisch 200).

**<sup>21</sup>"On that day I shall make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and I shall open your mouth in their midst. Then they will know that I am the Lord."**

On that day - "The reference is to Cyrus and the return from the Babylonian exile, and the phrase 'that day' denotes 'at that time'" (Kimchi).

Rashi understands it as alluding to the prediction of Egypt's restoration at the end of forty years (v. 13). That restoration will coincide with the dawn of Israel's release from captivity. Probably 'horn' is to be interpreted as the symbol of power and prosperity and

Ezekiel predicts in general terms that in the future Israel will be restored to her former glory.

I shall make a horn sprout for the house of Israel - "The 'horn' of verse 21 seems, contextually, to be no other than Nebuchadnezzar himself for it is in the day when Nebuchadnezzar is humiliating Egypt that this promise is to be fulfilled. Perhaps we are being told that as the Babylonian had worked for God against Tyre (20) that he would not work for Israel against her enemy Egypt. You will note that it is they (the Egyptians) who will know that Jehovah is Lord (21)" (McGuiggan 272-273).

"The chapter ends with a sentence addressed to Ezekiel, predicting that in the day of Egypt's humiliation ('on that day') a 'horn' would spring forth for the house of Israel. This may be a Messianic statement (cf. Psa 132:17), but the language does not demand it and it may be a general reference to Israel's future restoration. For 'horn' as a symbol of strength, see 1 Samuel 2:1; 1 Kings 22:11; Jeremiah 48:25" (Taylor 201).

## CHAPTER THIRTY

"Egypt, a world Power and center of pagan worship, is to lose both attributes. Her collapse will be a blow to heathendom in general and a demonstration of the Sovereignty of the true God. All her allies and dependent States will share her fate. Nebuchadnezzar is to be used as the agent for the execution of the Divine decree against her, and the destruction of population and land will be extensive and thorough" (Fisch 201).

"This, the only undated oracle of the collection against Egypt, is probably to be dated shortly after January 587 B.C., the date given in 29:1. The oracle that follows it (30:20-26) is only three months later. There is nothing, however, in these verses to indicate their date, except the reference in verse 10 to Nebuchadnezzar as the agent of Egypt's doom" (Taylor 202).

**<sup>1</sup>The word of the Lord came again to me saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Wail, alas for the day! <sup>3</sup>For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. <sup>4</sup>And a sword will come upon Egypt, and anguish will be in Ethiopia, when the slain fall in Egypt, they take away her wealth, and her foundations are torn down. <sup>5</sup>Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya, and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword."**

The day of the Lord is near - "The 'day of the Lord,' which has previously been announced only in relation to Israel (cf. 7:2-12), is now proclaimed as being the day when judgment by the sword will fall upon Egypt. Cf. also the 'sword' prophecy of 21:1-17. The passage needs to be compared with other 'day of the Lord' teaching in Isaiah 2:12-17; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:7,14-18. On this great day, when judg-

ment will come upon the Gentiles (as well as upon unfaithful Israel, contrary to much popular expectation), Egypt's allies will share her punishment too" (Taylor 202).

**<sup>6</sup>Thus says the Lord, "Indeed, those who support Egypt will fall, and the pride of her power will come down; from Migdol to Syene they will fall within her by the sword," declares the Lord God. <sup>7</sup>"And they will be desolate in the midst of the desolated lands; and her cities will be in the midst of the devastated cities. <sup>8</sup>And they will know that I am the Lord, when I set a fire in Egypt and all her helpers are broken. <sup>9</sup>On that day messengers will go forth from Me in ships to frighten secure Ethiopia; and anguish will be on them as on the day of Egypt; for, behold, it comes!"**

On that day messengers will go forth from Me - "Defined at the end of the verse as 'the day of Egypt,' the time of her downfall. Lofthouse comments: 'God speaks as if He had come in person into Egypt, like another and more terrible Nebuchadnezzar'; but this is an incorrect interpretation of the phrase 'from before Me.' The Jewish commentators rightly explain it as 'on My mission,' more exactly 'at My will, on My orders'" (Fisch 203).

**<sup>10</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "I will also make the multitude of Egypt cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. <sup>11</sup>He and his people with him, the most ruthless of the nations, will be brought in to destroy the land; and they will draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land with the slain. <sup>12</sup>Moreover, I will make the Nile canals dry and sell the land into the hands of evil men. And I will make the land desolate, and all that is in it, by the hand of strangers; I, the Lord, have spoken."**

I will also make the multitude of Egypt cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar - "There is not a lot known about the last 30 years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule so we do not have much extra-biblical material to go on to fill the gaps in our knowledge about this whole period. Jeremiah 44:30 explicitly mentions Hophra and his end. (He died during rebellion among his own officers and army. His leading man, Ahmose took over from him when Ahmose had been sent to regain stability for Hophra.) The prophet Jeremiah also prophesied (chapters 42-43) of the coming fall of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar" (McGuiggan 273).

**<sup>13</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "I will also destroy the idols and make the images cease from Memphis. And there will no longer be a prince in the land of Egypt; and I will put fear in the land of Egypt. <sup>14</sup>And I will make Pathros desolate, set a fire in Zoan, and execute judgments on Thebes. <sup>15</sup>And I will pour out My wrath on Sin, the stronghold of Egypt; I will also cut off the multitude of Thebes. <sup>16</sup>And I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin will writhe in anguish, Thebes will be breached, and Memphis will have distresses daily. <sup>17</sup>The young men of On and of Pi-beseth will fall by the sword, and the women will go into captivity. <sup>18</sup>And in Tehaphnehes the day will be dark when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt. Then the pride of her power will cease in her; a cloud will cover her, and her daughters will go into**

**captivity. <sup>19</sup>Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt, and they will know that I am the Lord.”**

“Finally, in a grand display of geographical knowledge, the complete devastation of the land of Egypt is expressed by means of a welter of place-names. This was a favourite mode of Hebrew expression (cf. Isa 10:27-32; Mic 1:10-15; Zeph 2:4)...The place-names deserve comment. ‘Noph’ (12,16; AV, RV) is the classical Memphis (RSV), modern Mit Rahneh. It used to be the capital of Lower Egypt and remained an important center until the conquest by Alexander the Great. There was a colony of Jews living there in Jeremiah’s time (cf. Jer 44:1). ‘Pathros’ (14) is the region of Upper Egypt extending southwards to Aswan. ‘Zoan’ (14) was an important city in the eastern region of the Nile delta; its classical name was Tanis. It has been variously identified with Avaris, the northern capital of the Hyksos dynasty, and with Raamses, the store-city (Ex 1:11), but with no certainty. ‘No’ (14,15,16; AV, RV) is the classical Thebes (RSV), modern Karnak and Luxor; it was the capital of all Egypt for much of Egypt’s history, and was the cultic center for the sun-god, Amon. Nahum calls it No-Amon (Nah 3:8). ‘Sin’ (15,16; AR, RV) is Pelusim (RSV), modern Tel Farama, on the Mediterranean coast not far from Port Said, and a strategic defense post against invasion. ‘Aven’ or ‘On’ (17) is the classical Heliopolis, the city of the sun-god and one of the oldest cities in Egypt. Joseph’s father-in-law, Potiphara, was high priest there (Gen 41:45). Jeremiah calls it Beth-Shemesh, ‘the house of the sun’ (Jer 43:13). Its pointing as Aven (Hebrew *awen*), meaning ‘wickedness,’ may well have been a punning commentary on the religion it stood for. ‘Pi-beseth’ (17) is the modern Basta, north-east of Cairo. ‘Tehaphnehes’ (18), or Tahpanhes, is the Greek Daphnai, modern Tel Defenneh, ten miles west of Gantara on the Suez Canal. It is famous as the frontier-city to which Jeremiah was taken after the assassination of Gedeliah (Jer 43:7; cf. 44:1)” (Taylor 203-204).

**<sup>20</sup>And it came about in the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>21</sup>“Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and, behold, it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage, that it may be strong to hold the sword. <sup>22</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong and the broken; and I will make the sword fall from his hand. <sup>23</sup>And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands. <sup>24</sup>For I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, so that he will groan before him with the groanings of a wounded man. <sup>25</sup>Thus I will strengthen the arm of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh will fall. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. <sup>26</sup>When I scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands, then they will know that I am the Lord.”**

It came about in the eleventh year - Of the reign of Zedekiah, about four months before the fall of Jerusalem.

I have broken the arm of Pharaoh - “The date of this oracle is April 587 B.C., but the allusion is to the event of the previous year when Pharaoh Hophra’s army, sent to Jerusalem in response to Zedekiah’s plea, was repulsed by the Babylonian troops who were besieging the city (cf. Jer 37:1-10). This defeat is described as a breaking of Pharaoh’s arm (21), and Ezekiel adds that the damage will not be repaired: there will be no bandaging of the broken limb so that it can wield a sword again. Instead God will break both Pharaoh’s arms and completely debilitate him, and will strengthen Nebuchadnezzar and give him His sword so that he can be the agent of His judgment upon the Egyptians (25). By the time Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, after the siege of Tyre was ended, Hophra had been killed in civil war. He had conducted a disastrous campaign in Libya, which brought on a major revolt from a rival faction under Ahmose, who was eventually responsible for putting him to death. We are not to interpret an oracle like this one of Ezekiel in too personal terms, but it clearly fits in admirably with Hophra’s fate” (Taylor 204).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

“The eclipse of Assyria is held up to Egypt as an example of Divine Punishment for self-exaltation and arrogance. Mighty Assyria, the powerful conqueror of many nations, had vanished in ruins from the stage of history. A similar fate will befall Egypt, the mistress of many peoples. Only at the beginning and the end of the chapter is Pharaoh, the representative of Egypt, explicitly mentioned; the middle section deals with the eminence and subsequent decline of Assyria as the prototype of Egypt’s doom” (Fisch 207).

“This chapter has a clear unity, indicated both by its subject-matter, the allegory of the cedar tree and its fall, and by the introductory and closing phrases in verses 2a and 18d. It is in three sections: the poem of the magnificent tree to which Pharaoh is likened (2-9), and two prose oracles describing its downfall at the hand of foreigners (10-14) and its descent into Sheol (15-18). The date given in verse 1 is a further two months on from that of the previous oracle (30:20) and is June 587 B.C.” (Taylor 205).

“What follows is a parallel between Assyria and Egypt (Taylor follows the RSV and denies that ‘Assyria’ should be in the text. His reasoning is weak.) God in essence says to Egypt—do you remember Assyria? She was a great cedar, strong, prominent and the envy of the rest (3-9). I brought her down. Assyria bragged on her greatness (10ff) but the Lord destroyed her and brought her down to the place of the dead. The nations were shaken by the fall of such a huge tree (15-17). Now, he says, that is what I did to the mighty Assyria, and it is what I will do to you (18)” (McGuiggan 273-274).

**<sup>1</sup>And it came about in the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude, ‘Whom are you like in your greatness?**

**<sup>3</sup>Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches and forest**

shade, and very high; and its top was among the clouds. <sup>4</sup>The waters made it grow, the deep made it high. With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place, and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.”

Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon - “The use of a cedar of Lebanon as an allegory for the might nation is no new thing. Ezekiel used the same idea in 17:1-10, 22-24, and other echoes of the language of this chapter may be found in 19:10-14; 26:19-21; 28:11-19. Isaiah’s description of the descent of the king of Babylon into Sheol has distinct similarities (Isa 14:4-21), and Daniel’s description of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream uses much the same imagery (Dan 4:1-12,19-27). Some of the language is even carried over into the New Testament, as in the parable of the mustard seed (Mt 13:31f). The reference to ‘Assyria’ (3, AV, RV) is clearly a mistake, because that nation has no place in an allegory addressed to Pharaoh. RSV amends the text from Hebrew *assur*, ‘Assyria,’ to *asw<sup>e</sup>ka*, ‘I will liken you,’ a change of only one consonant; but there is much to be said for interpreting the Hebrew word as a variant form of *t<sup>e</sup> assur*, an evergreen tree correctly identified by Zohary as the cypress (*Cupressus Sempervirens*). In this case it is used in apposition to the word for ‘cedar,’ and we would translate ‘Behold a cypress, a cedar in Lebanon, with fair branches and woody shade.’ Its roots are nourished by an abundance of water (4), in language reminiscent both of the watering of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:10-14) and, more directly, of the network of streams which irrigate Egypt from the river Nile. The wide spread of her branches provides shelter for birds and animals, symbolizing the nations of the world who at various times enjoy Egypt’s patronage” (Taylor 205-206).

“As the cedar is taller than any other tree in Lebanon, so was Assyria the mightiest people in his time. Most moderns extend *ashshur* (Assyria) into *t<sup>e</sup>ashshur*, the tree mentioned in Isaiah 41:19, translated ‘larch.’ Thereby they eliminate all reference to Assyria and explain the whole chapter as addressed directly to Pharaoh. Ehrlich, on the other hand, defends the integrity of M.T. and accepts the Jewish interpretation which is here followed” (Fisch 208).

<sup>5</sup>“Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field and its boughs became many and its branches long because of many waters as it spread them out. <sup>6</sup>All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs, and under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth, and all great nations lived under its shade. <sup>7</sup>So it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its roots extended to many waters. <sup>8</sup>The cedars in God’s garden could not match it; the cypresses could not compare with its boughs, and the plane trees could not match its branches. No tree in God’s garden could compare with it in its beauty. <sup>9</sup>I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches, and all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it.”

“The flattering language of verses 7-9 must not be taken too literally, unless it is intended to reflect the adulation which a Pharaoh like Hophra received from his satellites, Zedekiah included. Its effect, however, is to heighten the sense of downfall when

eventually this takes place, as with the similarly extravagant description of the good ship Tyre (27:3-9). Nothing whatsoever could compare with it in beauty, not even the finest trees in Eden, 'the garden of God.' Here is another echo of the Genesis narrative (Gen 2:8f), which appeared also in the lamentation on the king of Tyre (28:12-19), and it further illustrates Ezekiel's willingness to draw on the symbolism of the past, a symbolism which his readers or hearers were presumably expected to understand" (Taylor 206).

**<sup>10</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Because it is high in stature, and it has set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness, <sup>11</sup>therefore, I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations; he will thoroughly deal with it. According to its wickedness I have driven it away. <sup>12</sup>And alien tyrants of the nations have cut it down and left it; on the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land. And all the peoples of the earth have gone down from its shade and left it. <sup>13</sup>On its ruin all the birds of the heavens will dwell. And all the beasts of the field will be on its fallen branches <sup>14</sup>in order that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature, nor set their top among the clouds, nor their well-watered mighty ones stand erect in their height. For they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath, among the sons of men, with those who go down to the pit."**

"This oracle gives the reasons for the cedar's downfall (10), describes its ruin (11,12) and adds the intention that motivated God in effecting such a catastrophe (14). The all-too-familiar pattern of pride preceding downfall comes out in verse 10 (cf. Tyre, 28:2; Babel, Gen 11:4), and this is described as 'wickedness' (11), a positive wrongdoing which incurs guilt, not simply a human failing to which all are excusably prone. The result is that God cast it out, just as He expelled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. So, deprived of God's favor and protection, the cedar is a prey to 'the most terrible of the nations' (12; cf. 28:7; 30:11; 32:12) and is cut down and scattered all over the land. The birds and beasts which once sheltered under its branches will prey on its remains (13), and the event will prove an object-lesson to all other nations not to aspire to such heights, because nations are human and human beings have no end but that which is common to all, the nether parts of the earth and the pit (14). Death is the great equalizer and the surest antidote to an excess of ambition. Even the Egyptians of this world, who have success-stories despite their godlessness, need to be taught the lesson that may be hidden in verse 19 that 'I (Yahweh) made it beautiful.' The prosperity of the wicked is, in the last analysis, all due to the mercy and goodness of God" (Taylor 206-207).

Cut it down...and left it - "In Hebrew the verb is the same as 'to leave him' at the end of the verse and may be similarly translated. The fallen cedar is left abandoned as something useless" (Fisch 210).

**<sup>15</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers. And its many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it. <sup>16</sup>I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall when I made it go down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the well-watered trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, were comforted in the earth beneath. <sup>17</sup>They also went down with it to Sheol to those who were slain by the sword; and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the nations. <sup>18</sup>To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his multitude!” declares the Lord God.”**

“The concluding oracle deals with the reactions of her contemporaries to Egypt’s demise. As with the sinking of the Tyrian merchant-ship, there is general consternation that a nation so mighty could be so humbled. What chance had lesser nations like themselves? The world of nature will mourn for her: the ‘deep’ (Hebrew *t<sup>e</sup>hom*) grieves and the ‘many waters’ are stopped; Lebanon is clothed in mourning and the trees wither away as in a drought (15). The nations, too, shake with the reverberation of its fall; all the noblest kingdoms, typified by the phrase, ‘the trees of Eden’ (16), take comfort from the realization that just as they have flourished and died, so the great cedar-tree of Egypt has come to a similar end. The picture of trees going down to Sheol is a strange one” (Taylor 207).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

“This chapter, which concludes the section dealing with the judgment upon the nations, is dated about one year and a half after the fall of Jerusalem. Israel could now see how vain it had been to trust in Egypt, and the prophetic warnings against an alliance with that country had received complete vindication. This realization lends power and credibility to Ezekiel’s prediction of Egypt’s destruction. Babylon is to be used as the Divine instrument for the execution of judgment upon her. Her calamity will strike terror into the hearts of many people who will raise lamentations over her doom. The prophet himself utters a dirge over her tragic end in Sheol where she finds other nations which suffered a similar fate. This chapter is described by Davidson as ‘one of the most weird passages in literature’” (Fisch 213).

“The last two oracles against Egypt, which comprise this chapter, are both in the ‘twelfth year,’ i.e. 586/5 B.C., a short time after the news of the fall of Jerusalem had reached the exiles (cf. 33:21). This may account for the bitterness of the prophet’s tones: Egypt had failed Jerusalem in her hour of need. This argument must not, however, be over-pressed, because Ezekiel has already given up hope of any support from ‘the broken reed’ which is Egypt (cf. 29:6ff; Isa 14 and earlier examples from Ezek, as in chapter 19)” (Taylor 207-208).

**<sup>1</sup>And it came about in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him, ‘You compared yourself to a young lion of the nations, yet you are like the monster in the seas; and you burst forth in your rivers, and muddied the waters with your feet, and fouled their rivers.’” <sup>3</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “Now I will spread My net over you with a company of many peoples, and they shall lift you up in My net. <sup>4</sup>And I will leave you on the land; I will cast you on the open field. And I will cause all the birds of the heavens to dwell on you, and I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with you. <sup>5</sup>And I will lay your flesh on the mountains, and fill the valleys with your refuse. <sup>6</sup>I will also make the land drink the discharge of your blood, as far as the mountains, and the ravines shall be full of you. <sup>7</sup>And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. <sup>8</sup>All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land, declares the Lord God. <sup>9</sup>I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into lands which you have not known. <sup>10</sup>Arid I will make many peoples appalled at you, and their kings shall be horribly afraid of you when I brandish My sword before them; and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, on the day of your fall.”**

You are like the monster in the sea - “Ezekiel’s point is that Pharaoh is not the lion-like creature that he fancied himself to be, but a tannin, a ‘dragon.’ The word is the same as is used in 29:3, and again shares the double inference of the Egyptian crocodile and the mythological chaos-monster, Tiamat, which was slain by the god Marduk after being captured in a net (*Enuma elis*, IV, line 95). Neither simile is intended to be flattering. Like a crocodile, the king of Egypt wallows in the muddy waters of the Nile, making them even muddier by his movements, and like Tiamat, he is going to be ensnared and hauled out on to dry ground, where his carcass will be a prey for the scavengers of the earth and sky. The whole land will be drenched with his blood (6), and the heavenly luminaries will cease to give their light (7,8). Such phrases suggest the accompaniments of the day of the Lord, as in Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:30f; 3:15; Amos 8:9. But it is also worth noting that they echo the language of the plagues of Egypt (Ex 7:20-24; 10:21-23), as if to imply that Pharaoh’s final hour of judgment will follow a pattern similar to God’s earlier confrontation with Him through Moses” (Taylor 208-209).

“Egyptian ambition made her think of herself as a lion roaming proudly among the nations and inspiring them with the terror, whereas she was in fact like a crocodile (cf. 29:3) whose domain is limited to the waters. Egypt dreamt of far-flung conquests; but she should have restricted herself to her own land” (Fisch 213).

**<sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord God, “The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. <sup>12</sup>By the swords of the mighty ones I will cause your multitude to fall; all of them are tyrants of the nations, and they shall devastate the pride of Egypt, and all**

its multitude shall be destroyed. <sup>13</sup>I will also destroy all its cattle from beside many waters; and the foot of man shall not muddy them anymore, and the hoofs of beasts shall not muddy them. <sup>14</sup>Then I will make their waters settle, and will cause their rivers to run like oil, declares the Lord God. <sup>15</sup>When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, and the land is destitute of that which filled it, when I smite all those who live in it, then they shall know that I am the Lord. <sup>16</sup>This is a lamentation and they shall chant it. The daughters of the nations shall chant it. Over Egypt and over all her multitude they shall chant it,” declares the Lord God.

“This is Egypt the failure. People will shake their heads and lament over her that had so much potential and yet came up with so little (16). The Babylonians with her allies would bring to nought the ‘the pride of Egypt’ (12)” (McGuiggan 274).

<sup>17</sup>And it came about in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>18</sup>“Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations, to the nether world, with those who go down to the pit; <sup>19</sup>Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down and make your bed with the uncircumcised. <sup>20</sup>They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword; She is given over to the sword; they have drawn her and all her multitude away. <sup>21</sup>The strong among the mighty ones shall speak of him and his helpers from the midst of Sheol, ‘They have gone down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.’”

“As a dirge over the nations of antiquity nothing could be more striking than this passage. In the last 150 years all the great Powers in Ezekiel’s world, except one, had been successively flung down. No such disasters had ever been crowded into a similar period. Babylon herself, though Ezekiel seems not to have expected this, is shortly to fall with a like crash. These sixteen verses are the death-song of the world in which Israel had grown up; in the new world, which was to take its place, the nation of Israel was to be replaced by the church of Judaism (Lofthouse)” (Fisch 217).

“The collection of oracles against Egypt concludes with this remarkable description of Pharaoh in the underworld and of the shadowy nations of the world which he sees lying there, suffering the same humiliation as himself. The language is highly poetical and the details must not be taken too literally. This is not the chapter to turn to if one wishes to understand the Bible’s teaching about the after-life. It does, however, illustrate something of the concept of death which was common to Near Eastern thought and from which the Old Testament was constantly striving to break free. Sheol, the place of the departed, was thought of as a vast burial-chamber to which every grave was somehow, conceptually, if not spatially, linked. As Pedersen puts it: ‘Sheol is the entirety into which all graves merged... Where there is grave, there is Sheol, and where there is Sheol, there is grave’ (*Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 1-11, 1926, p. 462). Within this shadowy abode individuals continue to maintain some sort of existence, though by reason of the poetical nature of the passages describing Sheol it is impossible to produce any consistent picture of what this existence was thought to be like. To some it was all

silence and darkness (Job 10:20f; Psa 115:17), to others there was conversation and limited activity (cf. Isa 14:10). Ezekiel paints a picture of compartments in Sheol, where nations lie together in graves gathered around their king or national representatives. Different status-levels are recognized and warriors who have had a proper burial seem to enjoy a position of greater honor than their less fortunate neighbors (27). But again this must not be pressed: Job says there are no distinctions in Sheol (Job 3:17-19). Clearly Israel had no hard and fast doctrine of Sheol. What the Old Testament writers did achieve was to make Sheol less and less a place beyond the realms of God's concern and authority. God had power over Sheol and He could even, in the case of His choicest servants, by-pass Sheol and translate men like Enoch and Elijah into His immediate presence. This also seem to be the hope of the psalmist in Psalms 49:15 and 73:24. For most, however, the righteous included, Sheol was the common lot, until later prospects of resurrection brought a brighter hope for those who were acceptable to God by reason of their faith, integrity and obedience to His will" (Taylor 210-211).

**<sup>22</sup>“Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are round about her. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, <sup>23</sup>whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the pit, and her company is round about her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living. <sup>24</sup>Elam is there and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth, who instilled their terror in the land of the living, and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the pit. <sup>25</sup>They have made a bed for her among the slain with all her multitude. Her graves are around it, they are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword (although their terror was instilled in the land of the living), and they bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit; they were put in the midst of the slain. <sup>26</sup>Meshech, Tubal and all their multitude are there; their graves surround them. All of them were slain by the sword uncircumcised, though they instilled their terror in the land of the living. <sup>27</sup>Nor do they lie beside the fallen heroes of the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and whose swords were laid under their heads; but the punishment for their iniquity rested on their bones, though the terror of these heroes was once in the land of the living. <sup>28</sup>But in the midst of the uncircumcised you will be broken and lie with those slain by the sword. <sup>29</sup>There also is Edom, its kings, and all its princes, who for all their might are laid with those slain by the sword; they will lie with the uncircumcised, and with those who go down to the pit. <sup>30</sup>There also are the chiefs of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who in spite of the terror resulting from their might, in shame went down with the slain. So they lay down uncircumcised with those slain by the sword, and bore their disgrace with those who go down to the pit.”**

“Ehrlich agrees with Kimchi in interpreting the phrase of the Babylonian satellite kings. The prophet is then deliberately vague because he was living in Babylon” (Fisch 220).

**<sup>31</sup>“These Pharaoh will see, and he will be comforted for all his multitude slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his army,” declares the Lord God. <sup>32</sup>“Though I**

**instilled a terror of him in the land of the living, yet he will be made to lie down among the uncircumcised along with those slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude,” declares the Lord God.**

As the adage goes, “misery loves company.” Here Pharaoh is glad to see that others have suffered the same fate as he has.

“In these eight chapters it must have been noticed that every nation but Babylon has been singled out for mention. We must suppose that this was a deliberate silence: a direct onslaught on one’s captors would be too glaring a provocation. But Ezekiel’s hearers and readers must have drawn the obvious conclusion that, if these countries were due for the judgment of God, Babylon could not herself escape. There was comfort here for the exiles as well. God’s faithful among the exiles would surely know that God would, eventually, bring about his judgment against Babylon. Besides, they may have remembered the prophecies of Habakkuk, who foresaw the future destruction of Babylon” (Taylor 212).

### **CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE**

“With this chapter a new phase opens in Ezekiel’s career. After announcing the doom of the heathen peoples, he reverts to the destiny of his own nation. But he no longer warns and threatens, because his predictions have become a tragic reality. He is now charged with the task of preparing the remnant of Israel for the coming restoration. As the root cause of Israel’s calamity was sin, the prophet dwells again at length on its consequences, the responsibility which accompanies free will and the power of repentance. He opens the chapter by defining his role as that of a watchman in wartime whose duty is to warn his people of the approaching enemy, and concludes it with the assurance that, since his earlier prophecies had been fulfilled, his words will not now be disregarded” (Fisch 221).

“After the long hiatus of chapters 25-32, following closely on the death of Ezekiel’s wife with its symbolic parallel in the tragic fall of Jerusalem, one would have expected this new section to begin with the episode of 33:21-22. For some reason, however, Ezekiel keeps us in suspense a little longer while he repeats two statements dealing with human responsibility, both of which have already appeared in a slightly different guise. The first of these, 33:1-9, concerns the prophet’s responsibility to warn his people of approaching danger, and is to be compared with 3:16-21. The second is about the hearer’s responsibility to make an individual act of repentance in order that they may live and not die, and has close similarities with 18:21-29. The fact that these two themes introduce this chapter indicates that we are dealing here with a new phase in Ezekiel’s ministry, for which these links with his former ministry represent a kind of recommissioning. During the period covered by the first twenty-four chapters of his book, his main concern was with Jerusalem as it was and as it had been. From chapter 33 onwards, he is mainly interested in what it will be. As he prepares himself for this new phase in his life’s work, God reminds him once again of his awful responsibility as a watchman, a lonely figure

who is committed to the task of standing apart from his fellow-men in order that he can keep a constant vigil and warn his people of dangers that lie ahead. At the same time, his hearers are held responsible for acting in accordance with the watchman's warnings. They are neither to trust in their own righteousness nor to despair and with a fatalistic shrug of the shoulder to give in to their unhappy circumstances. Nor are they to take the easy way out by blaming all their misfortunes on the injustice of God. Every man has his chance and every man must act according to God's word to him. These are Ezekiel's terms of reference, and only when they have been clearly enunciated does the news break upon the waiting exiles that the city has fallen and Ezekiel's word has been proven true" (Taylor 213-214).

"Where now was Jehovah since his city was destroyed? Remember that the Jews regarded God as dwelling in Jerusalem. He could not dwell in a ruined city, and the very fact of its ruin showed that he had deserted it, whether because of weakness or anger no one knew. Since the city was destroyed and gods share the fate of their worshipers, Jehovah must be weak. So Ezekiel must emphasize, almost to the exclusion of everything else, God's eternal, omnipotent power" (Fisch, 222).

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, speak to the sons of your people, and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman; <sup>3</sup>and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, <sup>4</sup>then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. <sup>5</sup>He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. <sup>6</sup>But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.'"**

He is taken away in his iniquity - "Though he was worthy of death on account of sins, nevertheless the watchman who failed in his duty is held guilty by God of that man's violent end" (Fisch 222).

**<sup>7</sup>"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth, and give them warning from Me. <sup>8</sup>When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. <sup>9</sup>But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your life."**

"These verses are addressed to the prophet. He is about to enter into a new phase of his ministry. He is now known as a true prophet (i.e., when word filters through that the city has indeed fallen) but that does not mean he will be listened to by people whose

hearts have radically changed. He will still have to speak some scalding words” (McGuiggan 279).

**<sup>10</sup>“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying,’ ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?’”**

Thus you have spoken - Kimchi renders: “rightly do ye say,” giving then the meaning it has in Numbers 27:7 and elsewhere. Your despondency is justified only as long as you cleave to your sins.

How then can we survive - “They now realized that their evil ways were the cause of their calamities, but they had not yet grasped the sublime doctrine that sincere repentance can expunge the punishment of sin” (Fisch 223).

“For the first time since the book opened, we are shown here that the exiles are conscious of their own sin (10). This does not appear in AV (‘if our transgressions and our sins be upon us how should we then live?’), but the better rendering, ‘truly our transgressions and our sins are upon us’ (RV mg.), suggests both a deep conviction of sin and an overwhelming feeling of despair. Earlier expressions of guilt laid the blame on other shoulders (cf. 18:2), but now at last Ezekiel’s insistent teaching has taken effect. The prophet’s immediate reaction is not, however, to rub their noses in their sins, but to proclaim God’s forgiveness for those who will repent. He has no delight in judgment but He longs for men to repent (11; cf. 2 Pet 3:9), and this cardinal feature of Ezekiel’s theology needs to be written underneath every oracle of judgment which his book contains. The prophet’s proclamation of judgment is with the ultimate purpose of repentance and salvation (cf. 18:21; 33:5b; Jer 1:10), though Jonah’s struggle with himself suggests that this idea often went against the grain (Jonah 4:1ff). On the same basis of man’s freedom to repent, however, comes the corollary that the righteous man too needs to repent when he falls into sin: he may not trust in his former righteousness to save him (12-13). Verse 13 does not mean to say that the godly man forfeits his salvation by committing sin: it has nothing to do with the early church’s fear of post-baptismal sin or with more recent issues of ‘once saved, always saved.’ It simply states in reverse the principle of individual responsibility. Repentance is incumbent upon all men; unwillingness to repent is a denial of the true spirit of faith in God’s mercy. The evangelical doctrine of assurance should always be balanced by the cautionary word ‘let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall’ (1 Cor 10:12). For the meaning of the phrase, ‘the statues of life’ (15), see 20:11,13 (cf. Lev 18:5). To be genuine, repentance has to show itself in a quality of life which is marked by obedience to God’s laws” (Taylor 215).

**<sup>11</sup>“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’ <sup>12</sup>And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, ‘The righteousness of a righteous**

**man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.”**

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked - “Cf. 18:23. Unlike man who punishes his enemy for the sake of revenge, God’s purpose in chastening the wicked is to move them to penitence and so escape the full consequences of their guilt” (Fisch 223).

And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens... - Once the people confessed sin, Ezekiel’s message was not to rebuke and chastize, but to call them to repentance. He needed to remind them to bring forth the fruits of repentance. So is it with preachers and teachers today. We must not continue to “beat people down”—making them feel that there is never any hope for forgiveness even though they have repented.

**<sup>13</sup>“When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. <sup>14</sup>But when I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, <sup>15</sup>if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he will surely live; he shall not die. <sup>16</sup>None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he will surely live.”**

The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him - “At first sight the verse seem to assert that a man’s past is not taken into account by God who judges him by his moral state at a particular moment. Davidson correctly interprets the passage as follows: ‘His (Ezekiel’s) purpose is to teach the general truth that the past of one’s life does not of necessity determine the future either in itself or in the judgment of God. This, next to the assurance of God’s gracious will regarding men (v. 11), was the truth most needed to comfort the people and awaken them out of the stupor which lay on them into a moral life and activity again” (Fisch 223).

“Here he reminds these complaining and self-piteous people of the principles upon which this treatment of the individual worked. He has already made this clear (see chapter 18); but people do not always listen well under pressure. Now the judgment has been wrought and perhaps they will listen better. Despite Taylor’s disclaimer, this section does teach that the righteous man is told that if he turns from his righteousness to living sinfully, he will be rejected by God (v. 12). The reverse (thank God!) is also true, if a wicked man turns from living a life of sinfulness to the Lord, he is assured of forgiveness...verse 20 is a plain repudiation of the whining spirit that seems to be present in the people—they will be judged, and they will be judged individually (‘every one after his ways’)” (McGuiggan 280).

**<sup>17</sup>“Yet your fellow citizens say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right,’ when it is their own way that is not right. <sup>18</sup>When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it. <sup>19</sup>But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live by them. <sup>20</sup>Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”**

The way of the Lord is not right - “As with the similar words in 18:25-30, the complaint of the people that ‘the way of the Lord is not equal’ (AV, RV) or ‘just’ (RSV) uses an unusual metaphor taken from weighing in scales. The verb means literally ‘is not adjusted to the right standard,’ which is the action of a dishonest salesman. The boot, however, is on the other foot. It is the people who are untrue, and God will judge them one by one and show that they are found wanting (20). Their guilt is individual and personal, as well as national and corporate” (Taylor 215-216).

**<sup>21</sup>Now it came about in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month that the refugees from Jerusalem came to me, saying, “The city has been taken.” <sup>22</sup>Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me in the evening, before the refugees came. And He opened my mouth at the time they came to me in the morning; so my mouth was opened, and I was no longer speechless.**

“At long last the blow fell and the news reached the exiles that Jerusalem had fallen. Although this came with the force of a tragedy to the exiles, Ezekiel himself was fully prepared to receive it. He, of course, had been given prophetic foreknowledge of the event (cf. 24:2), but he had also been in an ecstatic state the previous evening and his ritual dumbness had been somehow relieved. According to 24:27, this release from his divinely imposed silence was an indication that the day of the tragic news was about to dawn. It meant that he was now able to speak publicly and freely of all things that had been brewing up inside him. When he did speak, his first remarks consisted of messages about the people who were left in the land of Judah (23-29) and about his fellow-exiles (30-33)” (Taylor 216).

It came about in the twelfth year of our exile - “i.e. the captivity of Jehoiachin (1:2) which began in 597 B.C.E. Apparently there was an interval of eighteen months before the news of the disaster reached Ezekiel in Babylon. Modern commentators consider this far too long and alter ‘twelfth’ to ‘eleventh,’ which is the reading of some Hebrew mss. and ancient versions. Metsudath David offers an explanation which overcomes the difficulty without altering the M.T. The city fell in the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (cf. Jer 39:2), i.e. Tammuz 586 B.C.E. But the Hebrew new year begins in Tishri, which is not the first but the seventh of the months. There is thus a dual system of reckoning: one which regards the year as a series of months beginning with Nisan in the spring, the other regarding the year as a period beginning in the autumn on the first day of the seventh month. Accordingly, the interval between the fourth month in the eleventh year (586) and the tenth month in the twelfth year (585) is only about six months” (Fisch 225).

He opened my mouth at the time they came to me - “The silence imposed upon Ezekiel (cf. 3:26f) was removed by the arrival of the fugitives, as predicted in 24:26f. The corroboration of the prophet’s predictions established his authority as a messenger of God among the exiles, and he was now given permission to ‘open his mouth’ in a new series of exhortations to prepare them for the coming restoration” (Fisch 225).

**<sup>23</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>24</sup>“Son of man, they who live in these waste places in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given as a possession.’ <sup>25</sup>Therefore, say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “You eat meat with the blood in it, lift up your eyes to your idols as you shed blood. Should you then possess the land? <sup>26</sup>You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor’s wife. Should you then possess the land?””**

Abraham was only one, yet he possessed the land - “It looks as if those who survived the ravages made by the Babylonian forces, and whom Jeremiah described as ‘the poorest of the land’ who were left to be ‘vinedressers and ploughmen’ (Jer 52:16), were quietly annexing unclaimed properties and regarding themselves as the inheritors of the promises given to their forefathers. This was no new thing, for those who were spared the exile in 597 B.C. had made similar claims (cf. 11:15). Then they had claimed that those in exile, having gone far from the Lord, were no longer entitled to the privileges of land-ownership in Judah; now, they were making the incredibly facile plea that if one man, Abraham, had inherited the land of Canaan, a fortiori they who numbered a few thousands had a far greater right. The passage illustrates with remarkable aptness the overwhelming arrogance of the minority who wake up one morning and find themselves in the majority. Moreover, like so many minorities, they live in the past and endeavour to draw on ancient precedents to buttress insubstantial claim for the present. Our Lord had to answer similar claims from the Jews of His time (Jn 8:33-40), as did John the Baptist before Him (Lk 3:8). Ezekiel’s answer was the bitter accusation that morally and religiously they had not a leg to stand on (25-26). Their sins were the very same sins as had brought destruction upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem (22:6-12; cf. 18:10-13). Therefore their chances of escaping scot-free were nil” (Taylor 216-217).

“The background for these verses is found in Jeremiah 40-41 and 2 Kings 25:25-26. Ishmael, who was an officer of royal blood, got to himself a number of followers and slew Gedaliah who had been made governor by Nebuzaradan. His intention was clearly to set himself up as ‘the man’ in Judea and he took as hostage a number of Jews including the daughters of the king which were left. He, or people like him, were making the claim that the land would be inherited by them. Abraham was only one and he ended up getting the land. It might appear to be a difficult thing for these people to manage but if one could do it, then they who ‘are many’ would be able to manage it” (McGuiggan 281-282).

<sup>27</sup>“Thus you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “As I live, surely those who are in the waste places will fall by the sword, and whoever is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves will die of pestilence. <sup>28</sup>And I shall make the land a desolation and a waste, and the pride of her power will cease; and the mountains of Israel will be desolate, so that no one will pass through. <sup>29</sup>Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I make the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations which they have committed.””

“What right, asks Ezekiel, have men who commit such crimes to ‘possess the land’ (26)? Instead there will come the sword, wild beasts and pestilence, the traditional vehicles of judgment (27), and the land will be made completely desolate” (Taylor 217).

<sup>30</sup>“But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come, now, and hear what the message is which comes forth from the Lord.’ <sup>31</sup>And they come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people, and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. <sup>32</sup>And behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well as an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not practice them. <sup>33</sup>So when it comes to pass—as surely it will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.”

“The issue under discussion in the previous section (23-29) was the identity of true Israel, as between the cream of the land who were in exile and the people of the land who remained in Judah. Jeremiah dealt with the same conflict in his vision of the two baskets of figs, and he was shown that the Lord’s choice was to be found among the exiles, the good figs, and not among Zedekiah and the remnant in Jerusalem (Jer 24). Ezekiel clearly sided with Jeremiah’s verdict” (Taylor 217-218).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

“As a prerequisite to Israel’s recovery and regeneration, the former corrupt and selfish leaders must be replaced by conscientious and noble rulers. Hence the prophet’s first message in his programme of reconstruction is devoted to Israel’s past and future governor. God Himself will intervene on behalf of His flock. He will gather them from among the nations and bring them back to their homeland. A scion of the house of David, a just and ideal ruler, will reign over them; then they will enjoy prosperity, security and peace. With this chapter, Jeremiah 23:1-8 may be compared” (Fisch 228).

“It is not unusual, either in the Old Testament or in other writings from the Ancient Near East, to find rulers designated as shepherds (cf. Isa 44:28; Jer 2:8; 10:21; 23:1-6; 25:34-38; Mic 5:4,5; Zech 11:4-17). Moses and David are given this description (Isa 63:11;

Psa 78:70f.) and it is not without significance that both these men received their call to leadership while they were actually serving as shepherds of a flock. The word 'shepherd' suggests leadership and caring, and it was therefore an appropriate metaphor to use for hereditary monarchs who might otherwise think only in terms of lording it over their people. Israelite history shows how rarely this ideal of responsible leadership was achieved, and Ezekiel was particularly conscious of the failures of the most recent kings before the exile (cf. 19:1-14; 21:25). He therefore precedes his promise of good leadership to come with a searing attack on the greed and selfishness of the leaders of the past. They had exploited the people as if the flock belonged to them, the shepherds. But the people were the Lord's flock ('My sheep,' 6) and the kings ruled them by the Lord's appointment ('My Shepherds,' 8). Therefore the shepherds would be punished and the sheep, scattered by exile, would be rescued and returned to their own pastures and cared for by God as their good Shepherd. He would judge them righteously and would appoint His servant, David, as His vice-regent and prince (24), and all would have peace and harmony, blessing and prosperity. The passage is illustrative of a high ideal of kingship in the Old Testament and of the place of Yahweh as the true melek-king of Israel from whom the kingship of the house of David was derived. It is also worth noting that the close connection between the king and the shepherd-motif justifies us in seeing a certain kingly quality in such well-known passages as Psalm 23 (where the rod in verse 4 is the same word as a royal sceptre) and John 10" (Taylor 219).

**<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? <sup>3</sup>You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.'"**

"The three accusations leveled against the kings of Israel are, *first*, that they cruelly exploited the people who were under their care, fleecing them and fattening themselves at their expense (2,3); *secondly*, that they showed none of the pastoral qualities that were required of them in caring for the weak and defenseless members of the community (4); and *thirdly*, that instead of keeping the flock together in safety they allowed them to be 'scattered' over all the earth (the word occurs three times in verses 5 and 6, and is a favorite word of Ezekiel to describe the dispersion of the exiles). This meant that they were an easy prey for wild beasts, representing here the hostile nations of the world. They were in that most pathetic of all states, at least to the eastern mind: they were as sheep without a shepherd (cf. 1 Kgs 22:17; Mt 9:36)" (Taylor 220).

"In the next few verses we learn what the work of a real shepherd is by listening to the things God censures Israel's leaders for not doing. Leaders of the people are to be leaders in service to the people. The whole idea of Biblical leadership is that those who are placed in authority are put there that they might serve. Shepherds are supposed to: 1) Feed the sheep; 2) Strengthen the diseased; 3) Heal the sick; 4) Bind up the broken; 5) Bring back what had been driven away; 6) Seek what has wandered off. When a people choose themselves leaders (following the description which God has given for

leaders) they choose to submit to their advice, wisdom, guidance, judgment and so forth. The people promise to abide by the decisions of the leaders whether or not the decisions are made in the realm that is pleasant or unpleasant. The people choose to do this. There is no setting up of one's self in the system of God. The priests did not choose themselves and neither do the shepherds of the Church today. The world may have dictators who lord it over the people but it is not to be in the Church of God. The people choose, under God, the men they will submit to" (McGuiggan 290).

You slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock - "The only concern of the rulers was to increase their possessions by extortionate demands and acts of injustice. Even after having pandered to their greed, they gave no thought to the needs of the masses" (Fisch 229).

**<sup>4</sup>"Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. <sup>5</sup>And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. <sup>6</sup>My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek for them."**

Those who are sickly...diseased...broken...scattered...lost - "The last word is better translated 'strayed.' All these terms have the feminine form, since they apply to classes of sheep which need extra care from a shepherd. They correspond to the poor, oppressed, widows, orphans, etc. among the population" (Fisch 229).

Notice the five-fold condemnation of the shepherds, found in the words "*you have not...*"

1. You have not strengthened the sickly,
2. You have not healed the diseased,
3. You have not bound up the broken,
4. You have not brought back the scattered and
5. You have not sought for the lost.

This is then followed by one very powerful description of what they *have* done:

"You have dominated them...with force and with severity."

By considering these five points there is much that can be learned about the work of elders, the shepherds of the Lord's church today. 1) Elders (pastors/bishops) have the responsibility of strengthening those who are spiritually sick. 2) Those who are

diseased with sin need the healing teachings of the elder. 3) Those who are broken and discouraged (because of sin or otherwise) need to bound up and encouraged by the elders. 4) Those who have left the body of Christ need to lovingly and gently be led back to the safety and the Lord's church. 5) Those who are lost need to be zealously sought after, recognizing the urgency of the situation (a shepherd knows that every minute counts when a sheep is discovered lost).

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: <sup>8</sup>“As I live,” declares the Lord God, “surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; <sup>9</sup>therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: <sup>10</sup>“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be food for them.’”**

“Because of all this (see vv. 1-3), God declares that He is against the shepherds, even though they ruled by His dispensation. Having failed in their responsibilities, they would not be allowed to rule any more; the flock would be taken out of their care and they would be deposed from office. This is a rather milder verdict than appeared in Jeremiah 23:2, where punishment was threatened to the shepherds. Ezekiel does not at this stage prophesy the punishment of the rulers, but only the rescue of the people from their voracious grasp. In point of fact, the exile had already removed many Israelites from the jurisdiction of their national rulers, but the phrase in verse 10b seems to imply that the yoke of kingly rule (Gedaliah perhaps?) was to be taken away even from those who were left in the land of Judah” (Taylor 220).

My shepherds did not search for My flock - “Since the people of Israel is ‘My sheep,’ the rulers are described as ‘My shepherds,’ implying that these shepherds are answerable to God (cf. verse 10)” (Fisch 230).

**<sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. <sup>12</sup>As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. <sup>13</sup>And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.”**

I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out - “A flock of sheep must be looked after by someone, and here God represents Himself as taking on the role of Shepherd to His people. His job will be to find the straying, to rescue the lost, and to feed and tend the whole flock, giving particular attention to the weak and ailing members. The picture of the shepherd searching out the wanderer, in verse 12, is a remarkable fore-

shadowing of the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:4ff), which our Lord doubtless based on this passage in Ezekiel. It illustrates as clearly as anything can do the tender, loving qualities of the God of the Old Testament, and strikes a death-blow at those who try to drive a wedge between Yahweh, God of Israel, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is it the only passage that speaks of the tender shepherd (cf. Psa 78:52f; 79:13; 80:1; Isa 40:11; 49:9f; Jer 31:10)" (Taylor 220-221).

**<sup>14</sup>"I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God. <sup>16</sup>"I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment."**

The fat and the strong I will destroy - "RSV emends the Hebrew, which has 'the fat and the strong I will destroy' (RV), to read 'the fat and the strong I will watch over.' This follows the LXX, Syriac and the Latin Versions and is commended by many commentators as being 'more appropriate to the Shepherd' (Cooke). But the fact remains that all but two mss. have the harsher reading and it fits in much better both with the phrase that immediately follows ('I will feed them in justice,' or 'as is fitting') and with the tenor of verses 17-22, where the fat and the strong ones of the flock oppress the weak and are condemned for doing so. Keil is therefore probably right to conclude that 'the destruction of these oppressors shows that the loving care of the Lord is associated with righteousness' (Keil)" (Taylor 221).

"The ancient versions read *eshmor* (I will guard) for *ashmid*, and most moderns emend accordingly. But, as Lofthouse remarks, 'The thought is now passing from the shepherds to the sheep; of the latter those who have misused their strength are to be punished like the former. God does not act like other shepherds nor like the kings who favour the strong and rich'" (Fisch 232).

**<sup>17</sup>"And as for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. <sup>18</sup>Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? <sup>19</sup>And as for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet, and they must drink what you foul with your feet!"**

I will judge between one sheep and another - "So far Ezekiel has pronounced God's judgment only upon the bad shepherds, i.e. the kingly rulers. The good Shepherd now turns judge and deals with the bad sheep within the flock, i.e. the oppressive nobles or the bullying merchant-classes. A confusion of interpretation has arisen here because of the inclusion of the 'rams' and the 'he-goats' in verse 17. Comparison with Matthew 25:31-33 has led some to impose the New Testament pattern of a separation between

sheep and goats upon this figure in Ezekiel. But the distinction is between the fat and strong, and the weak and helpless (20). The flock in biblical times, as today in the Middle East, regularly consisted of a mixture of sheep and goats, and the Hebrew word seh in 17,20,22 (translated equally misleadingly as 'cattle,' AV and 'sheep,' RSV) simply meant a member of the flock, whether a sheep or a goat. Ezekiel is saying that the powerful and prosperous citizens, who had been greedily taking for themselves all the good things of the land and denying the benefits of them to their fellows, were going to be judged by the Shepherd. The flock will in fact be purified, not only of its bad leadership but also of its bad members. The language of this metaphor sets Ezekiel fairly and squarely in the prophetic tradition of Amos, for whom social justice and freedom from oppression of the poor by the rich were the two main planks of his message. It would be interesting to know whether Ezekiel had any specific examples of oppression in mind as he uttered these words. The shoddy treatment of the Hebrew slaves during the siege of Jerusalem was certainly an apt example of the truth of his allegations (Jer 34:8-11)" (Taylor 221-222).

Is it too slight a thing for you that you... - "The rams and the he-goats, i.e. the ruling classes, are addressed. The charge against them is twofold: not only did they appropriate the best for themselves, but they spoiled what was left over which could have been of benefit to the rest" (Fisch 232).

**<sup>20</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, "Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup>Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad, <sup>22</sup>therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. <sup>23</sup>Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken."**

I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David - "And who will the Lord exercise His shepherding activity through? The text calls him 'David.' Historically and grammatically 'David' can only yield 'David.' Historically and grammatically 'Elijah' can only yield 'Elijah.' In this passage 'David' does not mean 'David' and in Malachi 4:5 'Elijah' did not mean 'Elijah' (see Matt 17:11f). Many millenarians, admit that 'David' here stands for the Messiah (Jesus); but it does not say Jesus. A sensible man will concede, in light of 37:22, 24 and 25 that 'David' cannot be taken literally or else Israel will be ruled eternally by only 'one' king, the old time David. That would exclude Jesus! Should we understand 'David' here to mean Jesus Christ? That is a very persuasive position. Still, we may not be supposed to do that; perhaps we are supposed to take the whole picture together as one of the coming prosperity without taking any of the elements in the picture as having something like allegorical force. Paint the picture which would bring a smile to the pious Jew's face, and what would have? The Jews back in their land, united and secure under David with their temple system flourishing and God dwelling with them. I prefer this view rather than the allegorical type view, but I think it is an open

question. That the whole thing is Messianic I think is beyond reasonable doubt. John 10 would surely be a good comment on this whole section— would you not think so! See again Ezekiel 37:24,25 and then see 1 Peter 2:25 with Hebrews 13:20-21. See also Micah 5:2ff and Zechariah 11" (McGuiggan 292-293).

"Every new paragraph of this chapter opens out the analogy still further. If the chapter is taken as a whole it will appear full of inconsistencies, but if each section is taken separately it will be obvious that new ideas are being added all along. These verses seem to abandon the concept of God as the one good Shepherd, as He plans to install His own chosen nominee to act as shepherd of His people. The context is the consummation of the present age and the opening of the new age. The scattered flock have been gathered to their own land in an eschatological act of deliverance, not without its element of judgment. United and purified, they now enter upon the supernatural golden age of peace and prosperity. Over them is set the Messianic figure who is variously described as 'my servant, prince' and 'David.' Who is this person? He is not, as some would believe, the historical David resurrected, nor is he a human king of the Davidic line, for we are dealing with a superhuman figure who will reign for ever (cf. 37:25). He is the servant of the Lord, represented as an idealized David: for David was the man whom God chose and in whom He delighted; the king who triumphed against all his foes and who extended his kingdom in all directions; the margin of Judah under whose genius the whole nation was for a time united. These features of the Messianic leader's person and kingdom are more significant to Ezekiel than the physical succession of the line of David's kings. He saw no future for kings of that sort over Israel. They were condemned, and Zedekiah's fate only served to seal that condemnation. So this new Messianic figure is described not as king, but as 'prince' (*nasi*), and in that capacity he will be the righteous ruler of the saved community of Israel. (The use by Ezekiel of the term *nasi* (literally 'one lifted up') was not meant to indicate a great difference of function from that of the *melek*; it is attributable mainly to his desire to avoid the association of the latter word with the Judean monarchy. There may however be a subtle hint of a distinction in the use of 'among them' instead of 'over them' in verse 24). Christians can see the fulfillment of this expectation in the character of Christ's future. Messianic rule of which the present Christian era is a mere foreshadowing, but the Davidic lineage of Jesus relates to the Old Testament prophecies other than those of Ezekiel (e.g. Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5)" (Taylor 222-223).

**<sup>25</sup>"And I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land, so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. <sup>26</sup>And I will make them and places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. <sup>27</sup>Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit, and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslave them."**

“The new age is to be marked by a new covenant which will banish wild animals from the land and ensure safety, fertility and productivity for those who dwell in it. The absence of wild animals does not quite give the same picture as is found in Isaiah 11:6-9, because for Ezekiel the security of the inhabitants is based on the removal of danger, as in Leviticus 26:6, whereas for Isaiah there was a real harmony between traditional enemies (cf. Hos 2:18). The abundant fertility of the land, however, is paralleled in other golden-age prophecies, such as Hosea 2:22; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13f; Zechariah 8:12, all of which see God’s future blessings in terms of agricultural prosperity.

“Relationships are frequently described in terms of covenant, and the phrase ‘covenant of peace’ (25; cf. 37:26; Isa 54:10) means simply ‘a covenant that works.’ The word ‘peace’ is used to describe the harmony that exists when covenant obligations are being fulfilled and the relationship is sound. It is not a negative concept, implying absence of conflict or worry or noise, as we use it, but a thoroughly positive state in which all is functioning well. The area of safety promised to God’s people includes both the ‘wilderness,’ the uncultivated pastureland, and the ‘woods,’ the scrubland which was usually a place of some danger by reason of wild beasts. But it was centered on Mount Zion (‘my hill,’ 26), as in most prophecies about the Messianic age” (Taylor 223-224).

“The land will be one of superabundance since all the crops would be blessed by God. It would be a land where free men dwelled because God will have ‘broken the bars of their yoke’ (v. 27). That is, He would have delivered them from their oppressor. The land will become famous for its produce (v. 29) whereas before it had been known as a devourer of its nations (36:13,30). All of these blessings would play their part in letting Israel know that God was with them. Now, what are we to say about this restoration to Palestine? Is this to be fulfilled literally? Did the prophets understand this way? Well, whether or not the prophet understood it that way is of no consequence for the prophets said a lot they did not understand (see, for example 1 Pet 1:10ff). It could be understood literally without any problem, it would seem. Well, let me tell you why I do not think it is to be understood literally. I believe this whole section of the book is one piece and if this section is to be understood literally I would feel compelled to understand the rest literally. I cannot do that with 40-48 and so I am constrained to understand this section as simply a picture of future glory under the Messiah painted in the colors of the people to whom it was addressed” (McGuiggan 294).

**<sup>28</sup>“And they will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.**

**<sup>29</sup>And I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victim of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. <sup>30</sup>Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God. <sup>31</sup>“As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord God.**

You are men and I am your God - "When Israel acknowledges God, then He treats him as a human being and not as an animal, although he is designated 'sheep.' So the verse is explained by some Jewish commentators. Kimchi's interpretation is: only if one follows the teachings of the Torah does he deserve the description of 'man.' This way of explaining the words hardly suits the context. An alternative is: 'Ye are My flock, nay, ye are more, ye are Adam (so the Hebrew), My special creation of old' (Barnes)" (Fisch 234).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

"After denouncing the evil shepherds of the past and promising ideal rulership as the first step along the path of restoration, Ezekiel proceeds to the next obstruction which must be removed if a restored Israel is to prosper. All the nations which oppressed Israel and retarded his progress must vanish from the stage of history. Edom, in particular, the arch-enemy of Israel, had forfeited his right to national existence, and his fall is an essential preliminary to Israel's final redemption and the universal recognition of God's Sovereignty. The prophet Obadiah proclaimed the same message with striking emphasis: 'And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S' (Obad 21)" (Fisch 235).

"Having introduced the idea that Israel would return to her land, the Lord turns in an oracle against Edom to rebuke an inveterate enemy of Israel's who lusted after the land of Israel (35:10). Edom, and more than Edom, wanted Israel's land (36:2,5 and Psa 83:41-42) and God rebukes them for their wanting; there was the reproach they were heaping on God.

"Notice that in 35:10 they claim they will possess the land 'even though Jehovah was there.' Note again in 36:20 that the reproach of the nations is that Israel was dragged from their land despite the fact that they 'are the people of Jehovah.' The land being conquered or taken by foreigners was a reproach against Jehovah as far as the foreigners were concerned, for clearly, the god who could not keep his people in their land could not be powerful enough. God's bringing the people back into the land (as He did, for example, under the decree of Cyrus) would make it clear that had He wanted to He could have kept them in there in the first place.

"So in chapter 35 God rebukes Edom for their insolence and for their lusting after Israel's land. Then in chapter 36 he assures the land (yes, the land!) that it will be blessed by superabundant production and her own people coming to live on her. He will remove those enemies who wished to have her (5ff) and he will multiply the land with crops and citizens of Israel (8-15) so that the land would lose its name as being one that is jinxed (13).

"He closes the chapter by addressing the people. He reminds them that they were sent out of the land because of their iniquity (16-21) but that they would be brought back (22-38) but not because of their goodness (22ff). He assures them that He would work with

them and give the kind of heart that they needed to dwell in such a place as He was going to give them (25ff)” (McGuiggan 299).

“The Edomites received a brief reference in the oracles against the nations (25:12-14), and the question is inevitably raised why a whole chapter is devoted to them at this particular stage in the development of the book, when the restoration of Israel is the overriding theme. The easy answer is to regard it as interpolated, but that will not bear examination because the oracle has close links with chapter 36, both in the invective style of its prophecies (‘because...therefore’) and in the contrasting addresses to the mountains of Edom and Israel (35:3; 36:9). The probable answer is that the Edomites are known to have betrayed their relationship with Israel by plundering their land at the moment when Jerusalem was on the point of collapse, and that this action would account for the virulence of the prophecy as well as its position just after the news of the fall of Jerusalem. Also, if a preliminary to Israel’s restoration was to be the removal of her hostile neighbors (the ‘wild beasts’ of the land, of 34:25?), then again the prophecy of the desolation of Edom is well placed here. The word ‘Edom,’ of course, never occurs in this chapter: it is always ‘Mount Seir.’ This refers to the mountainous region east of the Arabah, the rift-valley running south from, the Dead Sea, in the heart of which is to be found the rose-red city of Petra (biblical Sela). The colour of the porphyritic stone was almost certainly the origin of the name Edom (Hebrew for ‘red’), though one traditional explanation was associated with Esau’s appearance at birth (Gen 25:25). In this mountainous area lived the Edomites, the descendants of Jacob’s twin brother, and they maintained a constant hostility towards their Israelite kinsmen (the ‘perpetual hatred’ of verse 5). In all fairness it must be added that the fault was not entirely all on one side. (For a biblical survey of their relationship, see Gen 25:22ff; 27:1-41; Num 20:14-21; 2 Sam 8:13f; 2 Kgs 8:20f; 14:7; Psa 137:7; Isa 34; Jer 49:7-22; Lam 4:21f; Amos 1:11f; Obad; Mal 1:2-5)” (Taylor 224-225).

**<sup>1</sup>Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, <sup>3</sup>and say to it, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. <sup>4</sup>I will lay waste your cities, and you will become a desolation. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”’**

Set your face against Mount Seir - “Edom loved everything Israel hated; she was for everything that Israel was against; she supported all of Israel’s foes and was a foe to all of Israel’s friends. When every other enemy had sated themselves against Israel, Edom was still biting and devouring like a jackal or wild dog (v. 5); she had a perpetual enmity. ‘Mount Seir’ said to the ancient Jews what ‘Nazi’ says to the recent Jews. God was ‘against her’ however, and that must come like a crack of doom in her ears” (McGuiggan 301).

The inhabitants of Mount Seir are accused on three accounts:

1. Because of their perpetual hatred and for their attack on the children of Israel 'in the time of their calamity' (5).
2. Because of their aspirations to territorial aggrandizement, which may well have led them to barter their support for Nebuchadnezzar for the promise of parts of Judah and Israel (10).
3. Because of their arrogant boasts and cruel gloating over the downfall of Jerusalem (12-15).

"The particular heinousness of these offenses is expressed in verses 10, 12 and 13. In reply, Ezekiel states that Edom's claims to land were invalid because Judah and Israel were God's territory ('the Lord was there,' 10), and unauthorized peoples possessed it at their peril (cf. the fate of the Assyrian colonists of the northern territory in 2 Kgs 17:24-28). And the arrogant insults hurled at the people of Judah were tantamount to blasphemies against the Lord, which He had heard. In each case the judgment pronounced by God was in the form of retribution. The *lex talionis* is invoked to bring slaughter in return for the bloodshed. Edom has caused; hatred for hatred, and desolation for desolation" (Taylor 225-226).

**<sup>5</sup>"Because you have had everlasting enmity and have delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end, <sup>6</sup>therefore, as I live," declares the Lord God, "I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you. <sup>7</sup>And I will make Mount Sier a waste and desolation, and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and returns. <sup>8</sup>And I will fill its mountains with its slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain by the sword will fall. <sup>9</sup>I will make you an everlasting desolation, and your cities will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the Lord."**

At the time of their calamity - "The Edomites aided the Babylonians in their campaign which destroyed the Judean State (Obadiah 10ff)" (Fisch 235).

This "must refer to the events of 587 B.C., and not to some supposed later destruction of Jerusalem by the Edomites hinted at in Nehemiah 1:3, as some contenders for a late date have maintained" (Taylor 226).

At the time of the punishment of the end - "The iniquity which completed their full measure of guilt and brought about their punishment. The phrase occurred in 21:30" (Fisch 236).

"The parallel phrase, 'at the time of their final punishment' (RSV is preferable to AV here), indicates that the judgment of 587 was the culmination of Jerusalem's sufferings,

as Isaiah 40:2 also makes clear. On the incident alluded to here, compare Obadiah 10-14" (Taylor 226).

Your cities will not be inhabited - "In contrast to Egypt whose refugees will return to their land (29:14), Edom is to remain desolate forever. The kethib (i.e. the Hebrew as it is written according to tradition) represents a reading which signifies 'shall not be re-inhabited'" (Fisch 236).

**<sup>10</sup>"Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two lands will be mine, and we will possess them,' although the Lord was there, <sup>11</sup>therefore, as I live," declares the Lord God, "I will deal with you according to your anger and according to your envy which you showed because of your hatred against them; so I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. <sup>12</sup>Then you will know that I, the Lord, have heard all your revilings which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel saying, 'They are laid desolate; they are given to us for food.' <sup>13</sup>"And you have spoken arrogantly against Me and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard." <sup>14</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. <sup>15</sup>As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the Lord."**

These two lands will be mine...although the Lord was there - "Not only did Edom have a hand in the overthrow of Israel, but also claimed the right to take possession of his territory. The 'two nations' are the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah... Though God had ejected His people from the land and His Divine Presence departed from it (11:23), yet He was still there in the sense that the land was His and He alone had the right to dispose of it" (Fisch 236).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

"This chapter is the sequel to the preceding ; and as Ezekiel had been commanded to prophesy 'against mount Seir' (35:2), he is now commanded to prophesy 'unto the mountains of Israel.' His theme is Israel's future, which he began in chapter 33. Israel's restoration will be twofold, material and spiritual. Delivered from foreign domination, the Land of Israel will undergo a transformation. The desolate hills and valleys will once more be fertile, yielding abundant fruit to their rightful owner, and the forsaken cities will again be inhabited by Israelites as numerous as the sheep formerly brought to Jerusalem on the pilgrim festivals. In addition to material prosperity, Israel, after his purification in the furnace of exile, will be attentive to the law of God, and a new spirit will prevail in his midst. God's holy name, profaned among the heathens, will be reasserted and His Kingship reestablished. 'The chapter is the brightest in the whole Book' (Lofthouse)" (Fisch 238).

“Ezekiel’s promises of restoration for Israel began in chapter 34 with the prospect of new leadership in the person of the Lord as the good Shepherd and the Davidic Messiah as His nominee. The future hope is now taken up again with the prospect, first, of a new land and then finally of a renewed people to dwell in it. The order of leader, land and people is an interesting indication both of the recognition of the importance of national leadership in Israel, and also of the inseparable relationship between a people and the physical contours of the land where they dwelt. The first point we readily recognize today, but the second is much less easy for us to appreciate. It does not necessarily imply a belief in localized deities, though the Old Testament did have a high regard for the locations of sanctuaries where God appeared to their forefathers, e.g. El Bethel, the God of Bethel (Gen 31:13; 35:7). But it is to be set alongside such facts as the place of Canaan, the promised land, in the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, and the selection of Jerusalem or Mount Zion as the place where the Lord was thought particularly to dwell and where His worship was to be carried on. To those who feel that this is altogether too materialistic a concept of God and too constricting for the God of the whole earth, the enlightened Israelite would probably answer that it is no more unreasonable than that the God of all time should declare one day in seven as His own and that the God of all nature should claim a tenth of its produce for Himself. Authority over the whole is witnessed to by the surrender of the part. So the Hebrews regarded the actual land where they lived, the mountains, the valleys, the plains and the rivers, as a kind of God’s acre in the world, and its welfare was intimately bound up with the welfare of God’s people who lived in it. Just as this applied in chapter 35 to Mount Seir, and by implication to its inhabitants, so now God addresses the mountains of Israel (1-15), and this leads on to oracles concerning the people of Israel (16-38).

“The structure of the chapter is as follows: (a) The oracle addressed to the mountains of Israel has two parts to it. Verses 1-7 promise that the nations round about Israel, and Edom in particular, will suffer reproach for the way they have treated Israel. Verses 8-15 speak more positively of the prospect of fruitfulness for the mountains of Israel and repopulation of the land by the homecoming exiles. (b) The second main section consists of an introductory flashback over Israel’s past, showing that it was concern for His holy name which prompted the Lord to punish His people (16-21), and this is followed by three oracles dealing with the new blessings which the people are to receive and enjoy (22-32,33-36,37,38)” (Taylor 227-228).

**<sup>1</sup>“And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>2</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “Because the enemy has spoken against you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The everlasting heights have become our possession,’ <sup>3</sup>therefore, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “For good cause they have made you desolate and crushed you from every side, that you should become a possession of the rest of the nations, and you have been taken up in the talk and the whispering of the people.’”**

The everlasting heights have become our possession - “The occasion for this fiery harangue was the exultant claim of Judah’s enemies that ‘the ancient heights have

become our possession' (2, RSV). The use of the word *bamot* (literally 'high places'; so AV, RV) is anomalous as a description of the highlands of Judah because of its idolatrous associations. But the word could bear a neutral interpretation and so there is no need to follow LXX and emend to *semamot* 'desolations' (cf. Deut 32:13; Amos 4:13). The adjective 'ancient' (literally 'of eternity') underlines the belief that the land was Judah's by reason of primeval promises, and so makes the enemy's claims all the more infuriating to Ezekiel. They were challenging not simply Judah's territorial boundaries, but the Lord's longstanding promises, and that was the next thing to blasphemy. It was this which aroused His 'hot jealousy' (5, RSV) and 'jealous wrath' (6, RSV), the ardour that burns within the man who is deeply wounded by another's words or actions. It led God to swear with a very strong oath ('with an uplifted hand', 7; cf. 20:5) that the contempt which the heathen nations had heaped upon Judah would instead return upon their own heads" (Taylor 228-229).

**<sup>4</sup>Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the forsaken cities, which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about, <sup>5</sup>therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey."**

In the fire of My jealousy I have spoken - Davidson defines the word as "injured self-consciousness;" it is the reaction of God's sense of Himself against the injurious conduct of Edom and the nations in relation to Him or that which is His (cf. "My land").

To drive it out for a prey - "Their whole purpose was to deprive Israel of his homeland and to render him defenseless against his enemies. This is the interpretation given by most Jewish commentators, but... the meaning may be: "that its open country should be for spoil" (Fisch 239).

**<sup>6</sup>Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.' <sup>7</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God, 'I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults. <sup>8</sup>But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come. <sup>9</sup>For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be cultivated and sown. <sup>10</sup>And I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. <sup>11</sup>And I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at first. Thus you will know that I am the Lord."**

But you, O mountains of Israel - “The contrast - with what has gone before is marked by the emphatic introductory words, ‘But you.’ The promises of being fertile and densely populated are the very opposite of the fate held out for the mountains of Edom (35:3,7, 15). And the benefits of the land’s fruitfulness will be enjoyed by the exiles, ‘for they will soon come’ (8, RSV). (NOTE: the AV rendering, ‘for they are at hand to come,’ takes the subject, not as Israel, but as the blessings which have been promised. This is perfectly possible, but the context seems to favor the RSV translation). No contradiction is to be seen here with Ezekiel’s statement, expressed in 4:6, that the punishment of the house of Judah would last for forty years. Now that Jerusalem’s punishment has been fulfilled, Ezekiel see nothing but the imminent fulfillment of the promise of restoration, in a kind of prophetic foreshortening of the immediate future. This is because God is ‘for you’ (9), i.e. on Israel’s side, in contrast with His attitude to Israel in former times (6:2, 3b) and with His attitude to the nations round about (26:3; 28:22; 29:3; 35:3). And for this reason, He is going to repopulate the mountains of Israel with ‘all the house of Israel,’ presumably with both Israel and Judah, and the ruined cities will be rebuilt and reinhabited, and the wastelands will once again be cultivated and bring forth produce. As so often, when God acts in blessing, He does ‘more good to you than ever before’ (11)” (Taylor 229).

**<sup>12</sup>“Yes, I will cause men—My people Israel—to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children.”**

**<sup>13</sup>“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Because they say to you, “You are a devourer of men and have bereaved your nation of children, <sup>14</sup>therefore, you will no longer devour men, and no longer bereave your nations of children,”’ declares the Lord God.**

**<sup>15</sup>“And I will not let you hear the insults from the nations anymore, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer, nor will you cause your nation to stumble any longer,” declares the Lord God.”**

You are a devourer of men and have bereaved your nation of children - “The hostile neighbors alleged that the Land of Israel destroyed its inhabitants. The Canaanites, the original population, had perished, and now the Israelites were undergoing a similar fate. Cf. Numbers 13:32 where the spies reported of Canaan it ‘is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof” (Fisch 241).

“Some commentators think in terms of causing famine through drought (Davidson, May), or death through famine and wild beasts (Cooke), or the decimation of the people through war and invasion (Stalker). Skinner, less specifically, refers to Numbers 13:32, where the spies reported that the land was a ‘land that devours its inhabitants,’ and concludes that ‘the land, in mysterious sympathy with the mind of Jehovah, had seemed to be animated by a hostile disposition towards its inhabitants...Its inhospitable character was known among the heathen...But in the glorious future all this will be changed (Skinner, pp. 332f)” (Taylor 230).

**<sup>16</sup>Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>17</sup>“Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds;**

**their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. <sup>18</sup>Therefore, I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. <sup>19</sup>Also I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. <sup>20</sup>When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.' <sup>21</sup>But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went."**

"Verses 16-19 speak again of the reason for the Israelite expulsion. God spends a lot of time seeking to justify His ways to sinful man, does He not?! What condescension! She was so wicked He could not let her get by with it, she had to be judged. But the foreigners did not think this way. When Israel was scattered among them they looked at Israel and derided Jehovah as a weakling who would not take care of His own. Verse 20 speaks of the reproach that Israel was to Him. You will notice that He explains in what way they were a reproach to Him. It was not that they practiced their wickedness in the foreign lands (although that is true, they did); He says they profaned His holy name 'in that' (there is the explanation) 'men said of them, these are the people of Jehovah, and are gone forth out of their land.' Would a father permit his child to go through such agony if he could do something about it? Of course not. Therefore, the God of Israel must have been incapable of keeping them from their agonies. It is an old argument and it is still around today. Hume, Macki and Flew have all made use of it in modern times. The problem did not lie with God! See Isaiah 50:1ff; 59:1ff for God's response to such a notion" (McGuiggan 303-304).

There way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity - "Metaphorically Israel is compared with a wife and God to a husband. Therefore in the times of unfaithfulness to Him, Israel is spoken of as having the state of 'a woman in her impurity.' She is temporarily avoided by her husband, becoming reunited with him after purification. Similarly, Israel's banishment from the soil was due to moral impurity, but restoration to his homeland will follow upon purification (Kimchi)" (Fisch 242).

I had concern for holy name - "Not for Israel who had incurred punishment; but the Divine name, as it were, had suffered indignity without cause" (Fisch 242).

"The doctrine expressed in the phrase 'I had concern for my holy name' (21, RSV), represents the utmost humiliation for the sinner. There is no consideration for him, no respect for his feelings, no love for him as a human being. He stands condemned because of his sins, and he forfeits all claim on God. He is simply a pawn on the chessboard of the world, in which God's prime concern is that all men and nations may know that He is the Lord. To put it like this in all its starkness may seem harsh and a contradiction of Christianity, but it is an aspect of the truth of God as revealed in the Old Testament. It is the aspect which is basic to Paul's statement in Romans 5:8, 'While we were yet sinners...' We had no claim on God, we were His enemies, we were helpless

to do anything to save ourselves: but God acted in salvation. In so doing He showed His love to us, and to all the world. But the humiliation of Ezekiel's doctrine is needed first, in order that we may appreciate the amazing grace of Romans 5" (Taylor 230-231).

**<sup>22</sup>"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. <sup>23</sup>And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord,' declares the Lord God," when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."**

It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act - "Israel's coming salvation is not determined by his merits, but by the necessity to reassert the name of God which, through its association with His people, had been profaned among the nations" (Fisch 242).

"In this chapter we are at the heart of Ezekiel's salvation theology. He tells us not only what God will do but why He is acting in this way. As we have seen, the two focal points of God's purposes are His own name and the nations of the world, and these two are related. He wants His name to be great, so that the nations may regard Him not as an ineffective tribal god, but as the Lord of the whole earth. And Israel is to be the channel through which this vindication is going to be achieved ('through you,' 23). It must have been very difficult for Israel to accept this role, and the only hint that some in Israel were able to accept it is to be found in the so-called Servant Songs of Isaiah 40-55, where Israel as the Servant of the Lord fulfills His mission among the Gentiles through suffering (this does not of course exhaust the interpretation of these songs /viz. Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13; 53:12), for they have strong Messianic overtones, but this is an element which must not be overlooked in the desire to see them solely as prefigurings of Christ). The church also finds it a difficult role to accept, but in an age when God's power is all too often discredited by reason of His people's failures, the church needs to be prepared to be treated harshly for the sake of God's greater glory in the world" (Taylor 231).

**<sup>24</sup>"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. <sup>28</sup>And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."**

In the case of the exiles, however, God is now going to vindicate His glory, not through their sufferings, but through their restoration. In a series of prophetic statements, Ezekiel describes what God will do. First comes the sheer physical act of returning the exiles

to their native land (24). That is followed by a number of moral and spiritual changes, for which a variety of images is used. Sprinkling with “clean water” (25) means more, for instance, than just forgiveness of sins. Its symbolism is derived from ritual washings with water which were intended to remove ceremonial defilement (cf. Ex 30:17-21; Lev 14:52; Num 19:17-19) and this is applied to the people’s cleansing from the defilement of idolatry (“from all your idols I will cleanse you,” 25)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you - “The terms ‘heart’ and ‘spirit’ (26) also need careful understanding. They are not so much parts of man’s make-up as aspects of his total personality. The ‘heart’ includes the mind and the will, as well as the emotions; it is in fact the seat of the personality the inmost nature of man. The ‘spirit’ is the impulse which drives the man and regulates his desires, his thoughts and his conduct. Both of these will be replaced and renewed: the heart that is stubborn, rebellious and insensitive (‘a heart of stone’) by one that is soft, impressionable and responsive (‘a heart of flesh’), and the spirit of disobedience by the Spirit of God. It goes without saying that there is nothing in the Hebrew word ‘flesh’ which suggests the corrupting tendency of the Greek *sarx*, as used in the New Testament and particularly by the apostle Paul in Romans 8. The result of this psychological transplant will be that Israel will experience a real ‘change of heart’ and will become, by God’s gracious initiative, the kind of people that they have in the past so signally failed to be. The implanting of God’s Spirit within them will transform their motives and empower them to live according to God’s ‘statutes’ and ‘judgments’ (27). Jeremiah, in the similar passage in his prophecy on which Ezekiel’s appears to be based (Jer 31:31-34), makes no reference to the gift of the Spirit but his reference to putting ‘my law within them’ and writing it ‘upon their hearts’ clearly produces the same results. The inducement with the Spirit was a sign of the Messianic age (cf. Isa 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Joel 2:28f.), and Ezekiel was aware of this and mentioned it on later occasions (37:14; 39:29). For him therefore the restoration of Israel was the beginning of the last days, the age of the Messiah. In keeping with the idea, therefore, the covenant relationship between God and Israel would be renewed (‘you shall be my people, and I will be your God,’ 28), and in addition to cleansing from the uncleanness of the past there would be the Canaan-like prospect of a superabundance of natural prosperity (29)” (Taylor 231-232).

I do not agree with Taylor’s understanding of “a new spirit.” I do not think that it refers to the promised spirit of Acts 2:38 which was part of the fulfillment of Joel 2:28. Rather the ‘new spirit’ means inclined towards spiritual things. God’s spirit is one that is inclined towards that which is in accordance with His law. God’s Spirit is His ways. Life in the spirit is like: 1) Morality - verse 27 (walk in statutes). 2) Security - verse 28 (both physical and spiritual). 3) Purity - verse 29 (deliverance from uncleanness 1 Jn 1:7). 4) Material abundance - verse 30. 5) Godly sorrow and repentance - verses 31-32 (Rom 12: 13). 6) Future blessings - verses 33-36.

<sup>29</sup>“Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. <sup>30</sup>And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and produce of the field, that you may not receive again the disgrace of

famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup>Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. <sup>32</sup>I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord God, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”

I am not doing this for your sake - “These concluding verses (i.e. 31-32) seem distinctly off-key, after the list of benefits that have gone before, but they represent an essential link with the theological premise on which the blessings of the new age are given. Underlying everything is Ezekiel’s view that the actions of God were not intended to benefit His people, but to set forth His glory in the world. Israel’s reaction will be that she will be shamed by God’s goodness into a state of repentance and self-loathing (cf. 20:43), and will therefore acknowledge God in a way that she had failed to before” (Taylor 233).

<sup>33</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup>And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passed by. <sup>35</sup>And they will say, ‘This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate, and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.’ <sup>36</sup>Then the nations that are left round about will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it.”

Ruined cities are fortified and inhabited - “It is worth noting (v. 35) that this Israel is going to dwell in fortified cities. This stresses security! However, in 38:11, we find Gog coming against a people who dwelled, not in fortified cities, but in unwalled villages with neither bars nor gates. How is that? It is not hard to understand when you are not stuck with an iron-clad literalism. Both of them stress security. The one picture stresses security by speaking of walls and fortifications and in the other picture they are so secure that they do not bother with such things” (McGuiggan 305)

<sup>37</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. <sup>38</sup>Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them - “Over and over again the Lord told the prophet he would not listen to the kind of requests the people were bringing to him: ‘I will not be inquired of by you!’ he would say. Now we hear of Him willing to be asked for blessing and prosperity (v. 27). Where lies the difference? The difference lies in the kind of people who are asking and the kind of things for which they are asking. James 4:1ff has something to say about a situation like that—does he not?!” (McGuiggan 305).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

“The prophecy of Israel’s regeneration is illustrated in the most graphic manner by a vision concerning the rebirth of the nation. The prophet finds himself in a valley full of scattered dry bones. Under the vivifying effect of the spirit of God the bones knit together and are covered with sinews, flesh and skin. Ultimately the breath of life is infused into them and they stand up a great host. No more inspiring message could have been communicated to the despairing exiles to revive their national will to live. In the second half of the chapter (vv. 15-28) Ezekiel by a symbolic act predicts the reunion of the two Kingdom which will be ruled by one king of the house of David. The purified and restored Israel will never again be uprooted from their soil, but ‘they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children’s children, for ever; and David My servant shall be their prince for ever (v. 25)’” (Fisch 246).

“The familiarity of this most well-known chapter of all in Ezekiel can easily blind readers to its real meaning. The vision of the valley of dry bones has been taken by some as teaching an Old Testament doctrine of bodily resurrection, and by others it has been seen simply as an analogy for spiritual regeneration. The symbol of the two sticks has been used both to advance and to refute the theories of the British Israelites (see Ellison, pp. 131ff). But the key to understanding this chapter aright is to see it in its context. Ezekiel has been promising his people a change in their fortunes: new leadership, a restored land, rebuilt cities, and many of the features of the Messianic era. It is not surprising that he was met with skepticism: the fall of Jerusalem had meant the breakup of their faith and it was not going to be restored as easily as that. They looked at the shattered remains of their people in exile and they could only say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. Can these bones live?’ The answer appeared to be unmistakably ‘No.’ Ezekiel, however, believed that it could happen. If God’s purpose was to restore Israel, He would do it by however great a miracle. Both the vision and the oracle of the two sticks convey this message. In the case of the first (1-14), the nation was shown that God’s Spirit had the power to turn what looked like a host of skeletons into an effective army of men, a picture of Israel restored to life again and filled with the Spirit. In the second (15-28), Ezekiel shows that the old division between Israel and Judah will pass away: the new nation will unite the remnants of both peoples in one land under one king, and without their traditional animosity” (Taylor 234).

**<sup>1</sup>The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.**

Points from verse one:

1. There had been a tremendous slaughter—the valley was “full of bones.”
2. No one cared enough to bury the dead—so why should God?

3. God will not continue to tolerate sin—He will eventually bring judgment.

“The bones represent the Israelites in exile. They have been there for more than ten years now, and what glimmerings of hope they had when first they arrived have now been altogether extinguished. Their hope was lost: as bones, they were very dry.

“The vision is a fair reflection of the despondency with which Ezekiel was faced, though it must be admitted that his earlier prophesying had, in part at any rate, contributed to the people’s despair. Now, however, when the prophet prophesied, the bones clicked into place and became living beings: Israel came alive. In the vision this happened in two stages. In the first, Ezekiel is told to ‘prophesy to these bones’ and to command them to ‘hear the word of the Lord.’ This results in only a partial restoration: scattered skeletons are transformed into individual corpses, but they are still just as dead. At the second stage, Ezekiel has to ‘prophesy to the wind’ (the word is *ruah*, ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’) and appeal to it to come and ‘breathe upon these slain, that they may live’ (9). This time the corpses come alive and stand on their feet, and the miracle is complete.

“What is the significance of the two stages? The difference between them is surely to be found in the direction of Ezekiel’s prophesying; first to the bones, telling them to hear, and secondly to the spirit, invoking its inspiration. The first must have seemed to Ezekiel very much like his professional occupation, exhorting lifeless people to listen to God’s word. The effect was limited: true, something remarkable happened, but the hearers were still dead men. The second action was tantamount to praying, as Ezekiel besought the Spirit of God to effect the miracle of recreation, to breathe into man’s nostrils the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). This time the effect was devastating. What preaching by itself failed to achieve, prayer made a reality.

“The stress in this section, however, is not so much on the means as on the fact of the revival of these bones. This is made clear in the explanatory verses at the end of the vision (11-14), where the two stages of the vision are ignored. Instead a new metaphor is invoked, that of resurrection of the dead from their place of burial. There is a real inconsistency here, because the bones of the earlier vision were unburied. But this only proves that the metaphors are there to reinforce the fact of what God is planning to do, namely to effect the revival of His dispirited people, Israel. The figures of speech do not have validity in their own right. This passage does not therefore teach a doctrine of resurrection from the dead, either general, national or individual. Nor does it even imply a belief in resurrection on the part of Ezekiel or his hearers. All that can be said of it is that Ezekiel uses the language of resurrection to illustrate the promise of Israel’s return to a new life in her own land from the deathlike existence of the Babylonian exile. Some would doubt whether Ezekiel was even aware of the possibility of a physical resurrection, as described in Daniel 12:2, and they would trace the origin of his metaphor either to the cultic enactment of the myth of the dying and rising god, or, within the Bible, to the Yahwistic narrative of the creation of man in Genesis. This may be overstating the case because, as Skinner has observed, ‘that God by a miracle could restore the dead to life

no devout Israelite ever doubted...’ and he goes on to cite 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4:33ff; 13:21, as instances of this rare miraculous occurrence. But there is no evidence that Ezekiel either believed in or taught or showed knowledge of a doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. For Jewish and Christian commentators to read this back into chapter 37 is to attribute to Ezekiel interests that were not his and to miss the essential point of his message. When Tertullian, for instance...tried to refute the Gnostics, who held that Ezekiel 37 referred only to the restoration of Israel, and not to personal resurrection, it is probable that for once the heretics were in the right” (Taylor 234-236).

He brought me out...and set me down in the middle of the valley - “The ‘valley’ is the same word as the ‘plain’ in 3:22 (Hebrew *biq’a*), and probably the same location is intended. Where Ezekiel saw his vision of the majesty of God, he also saw the desolation of the exiles, their bones bleached white by the desert sun, like the sight of a battlefield some months after the event. The vision may have been prompted by the actual memory of seeing the Israelite dead strewn outside Jerusalem or scattered along the desert road that led Ezekiel and his companions into exile” (Taylor 236-237).

**<sup>3</sup>And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, Thou knowest.” <sup>4</sup>Again He said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’ <sup>5</sup>“Thus says the Lord God to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. <sup>6</sup>And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.’”**

Son of man, can these bones live? - “The way in which the question is couched, ‘can these bones live?’, coupled with the description of them as ‘very dry’ (i.e. dead long since), indicates that the obvious answer is ‘No.’ However, the fact that the question comes from God, the God who kills and makes alive (Deut 32:39), is enough to make Ezekiel guarded about his answer. He had the knowledge not to deny God’s ability, but he lacked the faith to believe in it. Martin-Achard concludes that ‘the prophet’s words bear witness to the fact that in the age of Ezekiel the possibility of resurrection of the dead was not entertained in Israel; several centuries later, the attitude of Martha, the sister of Lazarus, will be very different (Jn 11:23ff)’” (Taylor 237).

I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life - “Part of the artistry of this chapter is the skillful use of the Hebrew word *ruah*. This appears in three different translations: as ‘Spirit’ in verses 1 and 14, as ‘breath’ in verses 5,6,8,9 and 10, and as ‘wind’ or ‘winds’ in verse 9. But in reality it is the same word every time, and no English translation can do justice to its variety of meaning. The Greek word *pneuma* shares the flexibility of the Hebrew, and the LXX was able to use it consistently in this passage. It is the same word that lies behind the double meaning of wind and Spirit in John 3:8. At its root *ruah* denotes the sense of ‘air in motion,’ i.e. wind or breath. This can extend from a gentle breeze to a stormy wind, or from a breath that is breathed to a raging passion. It comes to man both man’s spirit, or disposition, and also emotional qualities like vigor,

courage, impatience and ecstasy. It covers not only man's vital breath, given to him at birth and leaving his body in his dying gasp, but also the Spirit of God who imparts that breath. Such is the rich variety of the word used here by Ezekiel" (Taylor 237).

**<sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I was commanded and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup>And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'" <sup>10</sup>So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.**

I prophesied as I was commanded - "In response to God's command Ezekiel spoke the word of God. The Hebrews thought of God's word as a creative agent working through His prophets. The word was more than a sound disturbing the tranquility of the air; it carried with it the full power of the speaker. So God's creative word recreated life where death had been. As the prophet spoke, the Spirit ('breath') of God possessed dry bones, making them into a mighty army (verses 7-10). Life is meaningless existence until it is given meaning by the indwelling Spirit of God" (Howie 73-74).

Bone to its bone - Representing a complete, thorough restoration and not a lame, crippled nation.

But there was no breath in them - At this point there is nothing but an extensive army of fleshly cadavers. Perhaps at this point Ezekiel may have recognized a parallel with his own preaching. While remarkable things happened, the hearers were still dead men. So also was it with other great prophets of God who preached great messages, but those messages fell of deaf ears (e.g. Isa, cf. 6:10ff). So today men of God may be called upon to preach to a "dead church." But those sermons are preached believing in the power of God's Word, knowing that His Word can bring life to those who are dead.

Come from the four winds, O breath - "The 'four winds' represent the four comers of the earth (cf. 7:2). Notice that, throughout this vision, Ezekiel has acted under orders and has even described his own implicit obedience to God's commands (7,10). In so doing he emphasizes that this work of revival is God's work from start to finish. If man plays any part in it himself, it is only in obedience to God's direction. The same can be said of man's contribution to any spiritual revival" (Taylor 238).

**<sup>11</sup>Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophecy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your**

graves, My people. <sup>14</sup>And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord.'"

These bones are the whole house of Israel - "A clear cut explanation then follows. The nation is dead, like very dry bones. They are scattered at this time all over the Babylonian kingdom as these dry bones are scattered all over the valley. This was a picture of their national captivity and their hopelessness in it. But thanks be to God that their God was not a captive. Israel's hope was Israel's God!" (McGuiggan 313).

The interpretation of the vision. These dried bones are a representation of the entire people of Israel, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, destroyed and desolate, bereft of vitality.

Our hope has perished - "Of ever again being a living nation. The words, with the addition of the negative, were made the theme of Imber's *Hatikvah*, the Jewish national anthem" (Fisch 248-249).

#### LESSONS:

1. God will punish.
2. God is longsuffering.
3. One who appears dead (spiritually) can be raised by God

<sup>15</sup>The word of the Lord came again to me saying, <sup>16</sup>and you, "Son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.' <sup>17</sup>Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in our hand. <sup>18</sup>And when the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?' <sup>19</sup>say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.' <sup>20</sup>And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. <sup>21</sup>And say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; <sup>22</sup>and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup>And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which

**they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.”**

“Once again the prophet speaks his word with the aid of a symbolical action (cf. 4:1; 5:1). He is told by the Lord to take two sticks (literally ‘pieces of wood’) and to mark them with the words, ‘for Judah’ and ‘for Joseph.’ These represent the two kingdoms of former days, before Samaria fell to the Assyrians under Sargon II (722-721 B.C.) and Israel, the northern kingdom, lost her identity. He is to take one of them in his right hand, concealing one end of it in his clenched fist. Then he is to take the other stick and join it to the first one, end to end. His clenched fist will thus grasp the place where the two sticks met, and it will appear as if he is holding one long stick in the middle. Understood in this way, it is not necessary to postulate any kind of miracle in the symbolic act. The meaning of the action is that in the restored Israel, the old divisions of north and south will be abolished and the nation will be united in God’s hand. The interpretation of this, however, raises a number of controversial issues. If the inhabitants of Israel/Samaria were scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire, is there any prospect of their descendants being literally brought back, with the exiles from Judah, into the promised land? Or are we to understand ‘Israel’ as consisting simply of those men of northern tribal origin who had associated themselves with Judah from time to time? Do we allegorize it all and see it simply as a picture of the church, the new Israel, united in the future kingdom of God? The problem becomes particularly acute, when the reader approaches this passage with the question foremost in his mind: ‘Has this prophecy been fulfilled?’ The fulfillment of prophecy is a question which must always take second place after the issue of correct exegesis has been settled. What, then, does Ezekiel say?

“The explanation given in 21-28 is futuristic. It describes the ideal, Messianic kingdom of the last days. The children of Israel will be gathered from among the nations where they have been dispersed (21); they will be resettled in their own land; they will be one kingdom, under one Davidic king (22,24); they will no longer practice idolatry, but they will be purified from all their defilement (23). They will live a life of obedience to the Lord and will enjoy an everlasting covenant with Him (24,26). The Lord will establish His sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore, and the heathen will know that ‘I the Lord do sanctify Israel’ (26-28). Now all this is the language of the golden age to which Israel looked forward as the culmination of her national religious existence. Any question of ‘fulfillment’ has to be related to the whole picture that is given and not to isolated features of it. The answer of the New Testament to this future hope of Israel is that it has come about, but has not been fulfilled” (Taylor 239-240).

I disagree with Taylor’s understanding of the fulfillment of the prophecy. The hope of the reunion the nation is found in Isaiah 11:13; Jeremiah 3:18 and Hosea 1:11 but none present it as dramatically as does Ezekiel. We know this was fulfilled because all the tribes did come home. Luke 2 mentions ‘asher’ and 2 Chronicles 16:1-6; 30:11,18 also mention other tribes from the North. Ezra 8:35 says “all Israel” which would mean ALL Israel.

For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim - “This is the name given to the northern kingdom of Israel, or ‘Ephraim.’ The term ‘Israel’ was used freely to describe the southern kingdom of Judah once the north had been overrun by the Assyrians, and so its use here would have been ambiguous. The writing on the sticks is reminiscent of Moses’ similar act in Numbers 17:2ff. Compare also the oracle of the two staffs named Grace and Union (Zech 11:7ff), which is based on this passage in Ezekiel” (Taylor 240).

“The Northern Kingdom was named after Ephraim because its first king was Jeroboam, a descendant of that tribe” (Fisch 250).

The Mormons feel that this section is talking about the Bible and the Book of Mormon. There are several reasons why this cannot be the case:

1. A “stick” is not a “scroll.” The Hebrew word for stick is *etz* and for scroll it is *sepher*.
2. The Bible never interchanges the words “stick” and “scroll.”
3. Ezekiel was told what to write on the sticks, and it was not “The Bible” on one and “The Book of Mormon” on the other.
4. Are we to presume that Ezekiel is the author of the Bible and the Book of Mormon? If we follow their line of thinking that is technically what they would have to say.
5. The context of this passage is about Israel and Judah (verses 20-22).

**<sup>24</sup>“And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. <sup>25</sup>And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever. <sup>26</sup>And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiple them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. <sup>27</sup>My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. <sup>28</sup>And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”**

The children of Israel will be gathered from among the nations where they have been scattered. When they are gathered the following will take place:

1. They will be resettled in the land (v. 22a),
2. They will have one king and one kingdom (v. 22b),

3. They will no longer worship idols (v. 23a),
4. They will be a holy people (v. 23b) and
5. They will be an obedient people (v. 24).

The guarantee of peace is that God will be in the midst (v. 28), but this will happen (along with God's everlasting covenant) only when these other five points take place.

My servant David will be king over them - "David' is described as 'my servant,' a clear Messianic title, as well as 'king' and 'prince for ever' (25). We have already noted that Ezekiel avoided describing any of his Hebrew contemporaries as king (*melek*), but reserved that title for the Davidic leader of the future (cf. on 7:27; 12:10). The quality of permanence attaching to this future reign and expressed in the repeated phrase 'for ever, for evermore' (25,26,28), is a strong indication that Ezekiel is here thinking not so much of a line of Davidic kings, as he had known them in the past, but of a supernatural kingly being in whom would be concentrated all the qualities of wisdom! Inducement with the Spirit, righteousness and peace that were expected of God's anointed ruler" (Taylor 240-241).

They will all have one shepherd - "While 'king' signifies a political ruler, 'shepherd' denotes a spiritual leader. The Messiah will combine both offices (Malbim)" (Fisch 251).

They shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant - "Though Abraham and Isaac were also promised the land, only Jacob is mentioned in this connection because he was the ancestor of Israel alone, whereas the other two patriarchs were also the ancestors of Ishmael and Esau respectively, who were not included in the promise" (Fisch 251-252).

And will set My in their midst forever - "'My sanctuary' in the midst of the restored people is a pledge, not of protection, but of Yahweh's election of His people. He is in covenant with them once again and dwells in their midst. This in itself will bear witness to the nations around that the catastrophe of Jerusalem has been reversed and that the people of Israel are once more Yahweh's people. The word 'to sanctify' (28) means 'to set apart as sacred,' i.e. 'For God's own use and glory', and it is frequently used in parallel with words meaning 'to choose.' The restoration of the Temple is thus far more than simply a matter of repairing war-damage. It is God's way of demonstrating that He is not dead and that Israel are still His people. So the chapter concludes on a note which will readily lead on to the vision of chapters 40-48" (Taylor 241).

My dwelling-place also will be with them - "The Divine Presence will abide in the midst of Israel for ever, and the reciprocal relationship between God and His people will be firmly established. In the opinion of Kimchi, the preposition 'over,' instead of the usual 'among them,' signifies that the presence of God would inspire them with awe. He cites the

Hebrew idiom: 'fear shall be 'over them', or 'upon them.' And R.V. render: 'with them'" (Fisch 252).

All of this can take place only when the nation is whole and this finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Church where the two nations will be brought together under the reign of Christ. Here are some elements from this kingdom that are supported in the New Testament:

1. "I will set my sanctuary in their midst" (v. 26) (1 Cor 3:16-17).
2. "My dwelling place will be with them" (Jn 1:14).
3. "I will be their God and they will be my people" (2 Cor 6:16). This phase alone occurs 174 times in the Bible.
4. "The kingdom will be forever" (Mt 28:20; 1 Thess 4:17). Five times Ezekiel uses the Hebrew word *olam* which means "forever" ( v. 25, two times; v. 26, two times; v. 28, one time) which indicates that God is really trying to emphasize the eternal nature of this.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

"This chapter and the next deal with the abortive attack of Gog upon Israel. The preceding chapter closed with the assurance that Israel would be restored finally to the land of his fathers which would become the permanent abode of the Divine Presence. This restoration, however, would not pass unchallenged. Formidable armies from the extreme north under the leadership of God would invade Israel after his return. But the invasion by Gog and his confederates, which had been predicted by former prophets (cf. verse 17; 39:8), would end in utter destruction of their forces. No specific date for the coming invasion by Gog is given. The character of the two chapters is apocalyptic and relates to the indefinite future, the advent of the Messiah, indicated by the phrase 'the end of days.' After the victory peace and security will be established in Israel for ever, the Sovereignty of God reasserted and His holy name sanctified throughout the world" (Fisch 253).

"These chapters (i.e. 38:1-39:29) can be isolated from their context in much the same way as can the prophecies against the nations in chapters 25-32. They appear to interrupt the sequence of chapters 33-37 and 40-48, which give us a picture of renewed leadership for Israel, a restored land and a reborn people, leading on to the concluding vision of the design and organization of the temple worship of this new community. How does an apocalyptic oracle of this order fit into such a pattern?

"It may be that, as 40-48 clearly hang together and are dated late ('in the twenty-fifth year of our exile,' 40:1), this compels Ezekiel to place them at the end of the whole book, and that this chronological consideration has outweighed the logical one; for one might

well argue that a final overthrow of the powers of darkness should come after the dawning of the new age and not before it. The oracles against Gog are a suitable conclusion to chapters 1-39.

“This section consists of seven oracles, each introduced with the formula, ‘Thus says the Lord God’ (38:3-9,10-13,14-16,17-23; 39:1-16,17-24,25-29). They describe how Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, will invade from the north with his hordes to despoil the land of Judah and to destroy the people who are peaceably resettled in their land once again. But the Lord will vindicate His holiness by massacring the invaders, so that their bodies are scattered on the mountains of Israel to be a prey for wild beasts, and their remains will take seven months to bury in the valley of Hamongog. Their weapons also will provide the people of Israel with firewood for seven years to come.

“Now the idea of a huge eschatological battle between the forces of evil, or the north, and the faithful people of God was no new one. Ezekiel was aware that he spoke of a fulfillment of events which earlier spokesmen had prophesied (38:17; 39:8), and his words echoed the language of others, especially Jeremiah (Jer 4:5-6:26 cf. Joel 2:20). He was in fact representing the last days in terms of the ‘day of the Lord’ imagery which dominated the future for prophets like Joel (Joel 2:28-32), Amos (Amos 5:18-20) and Zephaniah (Zeph 1:14-18), and which appears strongly in parts of Isaiah (Isa 29:5-8; 66:15ff) and Zechariah (Zech 12:1-9; 14:1-15). This is a totally different picture from the ‘golden age’ motif, in terms of which the return from exile to the promised land had been couched. How possible it is to reconcile the two approaches into a consistent chronological scheme must be left to others to judge, on the basis of the efforts of those who have tried. The important thing to note is that Ezekiel was apparently able to use both forms of imagery without a sense of contradiction, though he does not give any clear guidance as to how they may be balanced against each other.

“A further word of caution must be spoken about the interpretation of these two chapters. The language is the language of apocalyptic: it is largely symbolical and at times deliberately shadowy and even cryptic. But though the details are vague, the main thrust is clearly and boldly expressed. Interpretation therefore needs to correspond to contents, and attempts to read too much into the incidentals of the prophecy betray the ingenuity of the speculator rather than the sobriety of the exegete” (Taylor 241-243).

“So far we have heard of the people being blessed under the Messiah. We heard that they were going to get ‘David’ back; that they were going to be restored to their homeland; they were promised national dignity in a national resurrection; and, into the bargain, they were to be a united nation again. All good news. But you can hear some gloomy one reply: ‘Well, so what? We had David once, and we had a land flowing with milk and honey too. We even had national dignity and unity. But look what happened. Along came the nations from the Egyptians to the Philistines, from the Assyrians to the Babylonians and they took all we had away. How can we be sure this will not happen again?’ It is a request for assurance: a plea for real security and the Lord who gave them the other assurances will give them this one also.

“How will He assure them that they have nothing to worry about with regard to their enemies of the future? How can he assure them that under the Messiah everything is stable and that they are unbeatable? He might say it just that way: ‘Under the Messiah you are unbeatable.’ On the other hand, the same reasons that lead Him to say they were going to have David back might lead Him to speak in other than direct statements.

“He speaks of their future assurance under the Messiah in the terms of a battle which Israel wins. He will describe an enemy army from the four points of the compass relative to Palestine. They will be a huge army; larger than any army that has ever been seen on earth. That army will come against Israel who will be dwelling ‘securely’ in unwalled villages. God destroys that army without Israel having to fire a shot. Thus He says (in essence): ‘If that army cannot beat you, you know no one can.’

“Now it is true that there are many who wish to understand this section to speak of a yet future war which will take place involving the Russians and the Israelites. I do not have the time to set forth their arguments and to attempt a refutation but I have dealt with it in *The Kingdom of God and the Planet Earth*. Whatever else is true, one can hardly hold that this army is a modern one for their transportation and weaponry are hardly modern. You will notice that they ride horses (38:4,15) and their weapons consist of arrows, bows, swords, spears, bucklers shields and so forth (38:4; 29:3). These weapons are described consistently for they are used to make fires for Israel so that Israel does not have to cut down trees for seven years (39:9-10).

“I have read two scholars from the same school explain this. One took the weaponry as described in figurative terms (that is, terms which God did not mean us to understand literally) - up to date armaments are intended, he said. The other who was inclined to agree with him yet said that ‘perhaps (and this is what he said) the energy crisis would lead the Russians and their allies to go to these kinds of weapons.’ It would seem that no matter how we go, we can still get a future war out of this, can we not?

“If it should be responded that there is nothing wrong with figurizing when we are led to believe we should I would have to say I agree. The real issue is the extent of figurizing and the reasons for figurizing. If one figurizes to makes ones’ view more palatable to the modern mind, that is hardly a good reason. I have already told you what I think so you will do with it what you are led to” (McGuiggan 319-320).

Part of the difficulty of this section can be attributed to works such as the Scofield Reference Bible which says: “As that the primary reference is to the Northern (European) powers headed up by Russia, all agree. The reference to Meshech and Tubal (Moscow and Tobolsk) is a clear mark of identification.” The fact is, all are far from agreeing that such is the case. And, with the recent demise of Russia and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many commentators are abandoning this view. If the truth be told, it was never there in the first place. This section serves as a way to re-establish confidence in the Lord. He will fight for His people rather than withdraw from them (as

He did in 586 B.C. - chapter 11). As in the days of Canaan, God will once again “fight for Israel.”

**<sup>1</sup>And the word of the Lord came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, <sup>3</sup>and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. <sup>4</sup>And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords; <sup>5</sup>Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet; <sup>6</sup>Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples with you.”’”**

Thus says the Lord God - This is the first of seven oracles which begin with this phrase (38:3-9, 10-13, 14-16, 17-23; 39:1-16, 17-24, 25-29).

Gog of the land of Magog - “The identity of Gog is obscured, and probably he is to be understood not so much as a particular person but rather as an apocalyptic figure. Magog is the designation of the country of Gog. Magog, Meshech and Tubal are mentioned in Genesis 10:2 among the sons of Japheth. In Rabbinic literature, Gog and Magog (the latter as an individual) are frequently referred to as the leaders of a hostile army against Israel before the coming of the Messiah. The Midrash Tanchuma (*Korach*, end) interprets Gog u-Magog to mean the assembly of enemy nations, pointing out that the numerical value of the two Hebrew words is seventy, the supposed number of peoples in the ancient world. The Palestinian Talmud (*Megillah* 71b) identifies Magog with Gothia, the land of the Goths (the reading in the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Yoma* 10a is ‘Kandia,’ perhaps Crete). Josephus (*Antiquities* I, vi. 1) associates the Magogites with the Scythians, the ancestors of the Gothians who inhabited the region of the Caucasus mountains” (Fisch 253).

“‘Gog’ has been variously identified with Gyges, king of Lydia, who is galled Gugu in the records of Ashurbanipal, and with the place-name, Gagaia, referred to in the tel el-Amarna letters as a land of barbarians. From Ras Shamra writings there has been found a gog, Gaga, and this identification too has been suggested (*Enuma Elish*, III: line 2). Others have seen in Gog a historical figure like Alexander the Great. The most likely suggestion is the first, but the origin of the name is less significant than what it symbolizes, namely the personified head of the forces of evil which are intent on destroying the people of God. The name ‘Magog’ is unknown in the Old Testament apart from the single reference in Genesis 10:2 (= 1 Chron 1:5), where he is a son of Japheth and the founder of a nation. In Revelation 20:8 Magog is a person associated with Gog, but in Ezekiel the word is almost certainly meant to represent the country where Gog lived (so RV, RSV). Gog’s description as ‘chief prince of Meshech and Tubal’ is an attempt to make sense of some awkward Hebrew. If a place-name ‘Rosh’ could be vouched for, RV’s ‘prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal’ would be the best translation, but in the absence of any satisfactory identification and in view of the frequent coupling of

Meshech and Tubal (Gen 10:2; 1 Chron 1:5; Ezek 27:13; 32:26), we must suppose that *rosh* (= 'head,' 'chief') to be in apposition to, or even a gloss on, the word 'prince.' The tribes mentioned are the Moschoi and Tibarenoi (Ass. Tabal and Musku)" (Taylor 244).

"It seems to me that the Bible is consistent in its use of that army. In Ezekiel the people are informed that they will rise above their Babylonian oppressor and gain peace and prosperity. To assure them of the security of that blessedness he describes the defeat of an incredibly huge army. In Revelation the saints are told they will rise above their Roman oppressor to gain triumph and peace. To assure them of the security of that blessedness John describes an incredibly huge army (wearing the very name that Ezekiel mentioned) which is defeated without the saints firing a shot" (McGuiggan 324).

See Revelation 20:8.

Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them - "Gog comes out of the north whence so many terrors had threatened the land of Palestine. From the north invaders had come with stunning and deadly regularity. The names 'Meshech' and 'Tubal,' which also appear in Genesis 10, can be identified with two cities in southern Asia Minor. Persia was the horizon of the ancient world looking toward Asia; Cush is to be identified with Ethiopia.; and Put is located on the North African shoreline where Libya is today. Gomer means Cimmerians, while Beth-togormah was a location on the Black Sea in the north. All these places are listed in the Genesis table of nations and represent the ends of the earth as Ezekiel knew the earth. These will all be gathered together with Gog from the land of Magog. It goes without saying that the names of these ancient places do not contain any references to modern nations and states. Gog and his allied host will descend upon the restored land of Israel, which is living securely in peace (vv. 7-8). The advance of this great multitude from the ends of the earth will be so tremendous that it can be most accurately likened to a storm covering the landscape (v. 9). So the scene is set and the characters are on stage" (Howie 75-76).

Gomer with all its troops - "The eldest son of Japheth (Gen 10:2). Some scholars identify Gomer with the Cimmerians the Greek name for the Armenians. The Targum renders: 'Garmamia.' In the Talmudic passages cites on verse 2 the reading is 'Germania,' which has been identified with Kerman in south Persia" (Fisch 254).

**<sup>7</sup>"Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. <sup>8</sup>After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. <sup>9</sup>And you will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you."**

After many days you will be summoned - “The attack by Gog will take place in the distant future when Israel had been restored and for a time had enjoyed peace and security. Kimchi was apparently aware of the story told in the Koran (*Sura* 18) that Alexander the Great built a wall around Gog and Magog to shut them off from the rest of the world; and he understands the clause to mean that, after having been excluded from the outside world, Gog will make a reappearance upon the stage of history” (Fisch 254).

“In the latter years’ is equivalent to ‘latter days’ (v. 16). It means ‘later’ and carries with it the idea of God’s appointment. It is not true that the phrase means the period of time just prior to the final coming of the Lord. See Genesis 49:1 and Numbers 24:14 (and other places) to see this. For a discussion of the phrase ‘the latter days’ see my few remarks on it in my *Daniel*. Former days and former prophets go together and latter days and latter prophets go together. See this especially in Zechariah who speaks of the former days as the days before Jerusalem fell in 586. The latter days begin from that point. Of course, this is only one use of the phrase” (McGuiggan 325).

It appears as if God is intentionally leading these troops to Israel.

You will come into the land that is restored from the sword - “The gravity of Gog’s crime will lie in the fact that his attack was directed against a land which had been desolated and whose people have been redeemed from the countries of their dispersion” (Fisch 254).

They are living securely, all of them - The fact that God’s people dwell in security is emphasized (38:8,11,14).

**<sup>10</sup>Thus says the Lord God, “It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil plan, <sup>11</sup>and you will say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates, <sup>12</sup>to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world. <sup>13</sup>Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?’”**

“This brief oracle (10-13) pictures the invasion as being as Gog’s own initiative and his diabolical plot is contrasted with the idyllic peace and security of the Israelites, who do not even have city-walls to protect them (cf. Zech 2:4) and who are therefore an easy prey for their depredations” (Taylor 245).

Unwalled villages - Gog’s strategy is to attack the areas that are not defended. That shows the barbaric nature of the enemy. They want to kill and plunder the unprotected.

In 36:35 Ezekiel talked about fortified (walled) cities. This passage has an apocalyptic flavor similar to Zechariah 2:4-5.

Who live at the center of the world - “Literally ‘in the navel of the earth’; the phrase occurs again in Judges 9:37. The Land of Israel was considered to be geographically the centre of the world as the navel is in the centre of the body (cf. 5:5). This is mentioned to stress the viciousness of Gog’s plan. He dwelt in the far north, a great distance from the Land of Israel; so the people of the latter could have had no aggressive designs upon him” (Fisch 255).

With all its villages - “The phrase, ‘the young lions thereof’ (13, AV, RV), could be re-pointed to read ‘its villages’ (RSV, following LXX, Syr.), but neither reading is without its problems” (Taylor 245).

Other greedy nations want to join in. Israel looks as if it will be easy prey.

**<sup>14</sup>“Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “On that day when my people Israel are living securely, will you not know it? <sup>15</sup>And you will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and mighty army; <sup>16</sup>and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It will come about in the last days that I shall bring you against My land, in order that the nations may know Me when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”**

I shall bring you against My land - “Whereas the previous oracle regards Gog as fully responsible for planning the operation, these verses show that God is bringing him against Israel. There is no inconsistency here: ‘a divine purpose overrules while it makes use of, the base human motive’ (Cooke). The same paradox marks Isaiah’s teaching on the Assyrian invasion (Isa 10:5-19) and Habakkuk’s attitude to the Chaldean menace (Hab 1:5-11). It does not mean that Gog is a luckless pawn in the hand of an all-powerful but immoral God. Gog freely acts according to the evil dictates of his lust for conquest and easy spoil, but behind everything in the universe (and especially as it relates to God’s people) there is the controlling hand of God, who orders all things with a view to the ultimate vindication of His honour among the nations. What Gog imagines to be a victory for himself, the Lord turns into an opportunity for His glory (16; ‘I shall be sanctified,’ i.e., I shall be recognized to be holy and to be the true God)” (Taylor 246).

“The Lord proclaims that He will bring Gog against the land. The decision has not been made by Gog but by the Lord, who has Himself brought on this crisis. The reason for God’s action is the same one that runs through most of the book. By the defeat of Gog, the Lord says, ‘I vindicate my holiness before their eyes” (Howie 76).

“How can it be just that God should Himself lead the barbarians to a crime for which He destroys them? To the Hebrews, God is the ultimate cause of all things; if the savage

comes, God must have brought him; if he is destroyed, God must have planned to destroy him' (Lofthouse). Though the purpose of Gog's campaign is said to be lust for destruction and spoil, it is an act designed in God's wisdom to bring mankind to the realization that He is King of the universe" (Fisch 256-257).

**<sup>17</sup>Thus says the Lord God, "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them? <sup>18</sup>And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord God, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. <sup>19</sup>And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. <sup>20</sup>And the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground. <sup>21</sup>And I shall call for a sword against him on all My mountains," declares the Lord God. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. <sup>22</sup>And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone. <sup>23</sup>And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the Lord."**

"The defense of helpless Israel is here undertaken directly by God. He will become incensed at the unprovoked invasion by the hordes from the north and He will bring all kinds of natural disasters upon them. All these are described in the future tense, because not only is the passage predictive of what is to come in the last days, but Ezekiel is also aware that what he is saying amounts to a fulfillment of the prophecies of the past (17). Not that Gog had ever been specifically mentioned by earlier prophets, but their predictions of danger from the north were to be fulfilled in him. The weapons which will be used against Gog are earthquakes (19 f; cf. Isa 24:18-20; Joel 3:16; Hag 2:6f), the sword (21, AV), pestilence and bloodshed (22; cf. 5:17; 28:23), and torrential rains, hailstones, fire and brimstone (22; cf. Gen 19:24; Psa 11:6; Isa 30:30; 34:9). All of these, except the sword, are non-human agents frequently associated with God's judgments, and this is partly why RSV follows LXX in emending 21 to 'I will summon every kind of terror against him.' But despite the difficult Hebrew, the AV rendering is fully consonant with passages such as 5:17; 6:3; 11:8; 12:14, etc., and it alone makes sense of the consequent 'every man's sword shall be against his brother,' as the demoralized heathen slay each other in their panic and add to the general destruction (cf. Jud 7:22; 1 Sam 14:20; Hag 2:22; Zech 14:13)" (Taylor 246-247).

"Verse 19 speaks of earthquake of unbelievable magnitude (v. 20). Verse 21 speaks of conflict within the armies of Gog and verse 22 tells of torrential rain, hail and volcanic activity (fire and brimstone). The weapons of Gog will be useless (39:3) and many of them will fall in the mountains (39:4) and God will send fire on the homeland while Gog is dying in Israel (39:6). The victory will be God's, not Gog's. And the route of the army

is so complete that Israel is able to use their weapons for fuel for seven years. This not only stresses the totality of the victory but it stresses the size of the army which carried such an abundance of weapons. This enables Israel to save her forests (39:10)...I need hardly stress that all these elements of judgment are used in Judgment on the enemies of God in former judgments. I mean, in the war against Philistines God used earthquakes, against Sisera there were floods, against Egypt there was hail (against the Amorites there were meteorites), against Sodom there was fire and brimstone" (McGuigan 326-327).

And in My zeal - Many other translations translate this as "My jealousy."

"This translation (my jealousy) of the term *kin'ah* in connection with God is inadequate and misleading. The proper meaning of the word is 'vindication.' When man outrages His moral law, He is roused to action with purpose of vindicating it" (Fisch 257).

They will know that I am the Lord - "The demonstration of God's omnipotence and His deliverance of Israel will bring about universal recognition of His Sovereignty" (Fisch 258).

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

"The prophet proceeds to give a more detailed and vivid account of the disaster which is to befall Gog's armies. So vast will be the multitudes of the enemy that the wood from his weapons will serve the Israelites as fuel for seven years, and it will take them seven months to bury his dead. Birds and beasts are to enjoy a great feast, devouring the flesh of the mighty and drinking the blood of the princes. After reiterating the wholesome effect which the annihilation of Gog's followers will have upon Israel and upon mankind in general, Ezekiel declares in a final, triumphant oracle that the restoration of Israel, confirmed by the destruction of his enemies, will be complete and his regeneration lasting, 'for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel'" (Fisch 258-259).

**<sup>1</sup>"And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; <sup>2</sup>and I shall turn around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. <sup>3</sup>And I shall strike your bow from your left hand, and dash down your arrows from your right hand. <sup>4</sup>You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops, and the peoples who are with you; I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. <sup>5</sup>You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord God. <sup>6</sup>"And I shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the Lord."**

Prophesy against Gog - "The overthrow of Gog and his forces is here retold in different language and in fuller detail. This is typical of Hebrew poetry and of the kind of semi-

poetical writing which is used in these oracles. It is fond of repetition and delights to revert to previous statements and enlarge on them, even though the result is to destroy all sense of consecutive arrangement. Failure to appreciate this has led many western commentators to find doublets, contradictions and inconsistencies, and so to assume multiple authorship where this is quite unnecessary. The first two verses repeat 38:3,4, but instead of the phrase 'put hooks into your jaws,' a new word is used in 39:2 which AV wrongly conjectures to mean to 'leave but the sixth part of thee.' Although the root of this verb has a relation with the Hebrew for 'six,' the Versions are probably right to translate it to 'lead on,' 'drive forward' (RSV). The picture is of God leading His enemies forth in order to disarm and destroy them (3-5), and ultimate indignity for them will be that their bodies will be left unburied for the wild animals to devour (4). The oracle goes on to describe how the spoilers will be spoiled, their weapons providing firewood for the Israelites for seven years to come (9-10), and how the remains of Gog's army will be buried in the valley of 'Harnon-gog' (i.e. 'the multitude of Gog') to the east of the Dead Sea, and so just outside Israelite territory. This cleaning-up operation will take seven months, so great will have been the slaughter; and at the end of that time a permanent commission will be set up to search for any unburied remains, to make sure that no cause of pollution is left remaining in the land (14-15). The repeated reference to the number 'seven' is a reminder that we are here dealing with apocalyptic symbolism, and that therefore literal fulfillment of these details is not to be sought. The purpose behind this massacre is described in terms of (a) the fulfillment of God's prophetic word ('I have spoken,' 5,8); (b) the desire to vindicate God's holy name, which the sufferings and punishment of Israel had done so much to discredit (7); and (c) the illumination of the heathen ('the nations shall know that I am the Lord,' 7), though Ezekiel does not go so far as to see their eventual salvation through this knowledge, as other prophets did" (Taylor 247-248).

I shall send fire upon Magog - "Not only will the invaders be slain in the Land of Israel, but the countries from which they came will also suffer at God's hand" (Fisch 259).

**<sup>7</sup>"And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. <sup>8</sup>Behold, it is coming and it shall be done," declares the Lord God. "That is the day of which I have spoken."**

I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore - "The dispersion of Israel and his subsequent sufferings led to the profanation of God's holy name, because they were interpreted by heathen nations as due to His inability to protect His people.

The nations will know that I am the Lord - "That the Divine Presence abides in the midst of Israel will then become evident to those nations who had placed so false a construction upon His people's exile" (Fisch 260).

**<sup>9</sup>"Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out, and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs**

and spears and for seven years they will make fires of them. <sup>10</sup> And they will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them, and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,” declares the Lord God.

Those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out - “The inhabitants of the Land of Israel, who hitherto had not left their homes to meet Gog in battle, will now come out to gather the wooden parts of the weapons for fuel. It is to be noted that in the state of security assured by God, the weapons themselves serve no useful purpose and are not gathered and stored for a future war” (Fisch 260).

<sup>11</sup>“And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off the passers-by. So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog. <sup>12</sup>For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. <sup>13</sup>Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on that day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord God. <sup>14</sup>“And they will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface of the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. <sup>15</sup>And as those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man’s bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. <sup>16</sup>And even the name of the city will be Hamonah. So they will cleanse the land.”

And even the name of the city will be Hamonah - “A city shall also be built in commemoration of Gog’s overthrow; naturally the city must be supposedly situated near the valley of Hamon-gog, because its name Hamonah (multitude), if the city were situated elsewhere, would not of itself suggest any connection with Gog” (Davidson).

So they will cleanse the land - “This concluding clause provides the reason for the great care taken to remove the corpses and name the city after the vast burial-place. The city would help to cleanse the land, because it would serve as a reminder to keep away from the defiled area” (Fisch 262).

The purposes for the massacre:

1. To fulfill God’s prophetic word (5,8),
2. To vindicate God’s holy name (7,13) and
3. To teach the heathens about the one true God (6-7).

<sup>17</sup>“And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, ‘Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, “Assemble and come, gather from every side

**to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. <sup>18</sup>You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. <sup>19</sup>So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. <sup>20</sup>And you will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war,” declares the Lord God.**

My sacrifice - Here the enemy is portrayed as a sacrificial meal, prepared by God, for the carrion/flesh eaters. They will gorge themselves because there is so much to eat!

“Once again the prophet reverts to an earlier statement for his theme, and 39:4 lies behind this grisly imagery of the Lord inviting birds and wild beast to a huge sacrificial meal to feast upon the flesh and blood of the fallen warriors. Seen in this way, the inconsistency of the burial of the remains followed by their being eaten up, no longer exists. The idea of the Lord’s sacrifice has its origin in Isaiah 34:6f; Jeremiah 46:10; Zephaniah 1:7-9 and Ezekiel’s language is followed through in Revelation 19:17-21. It is a graphic, though gruesome, picture; but the squeamish need to be reminded that atrocious acts have to be expressed in corresponding imagery, just as the blessings of God’s righteous reign are symbolized by the language of the golden age. Judgment is a horrifying thing, and the more devastating its description is, the more men will fear it” (Taylor 248).

**<sup>21</sup>“And I shall set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. <sup>22</sup>And the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward. <sup>23</sup>And the nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. <sup>24</sup>According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.”**

“Ezekiel was certainly never guilty of calling a spade anything but a spade. However, as Skinner comments, ‘we turn with relief from these images of carnage and death to the moral purpose which they conceal’ (21-24). Here the full purpose of God’s action is expressed, which has hitherto only been hinted at. First and foremost, it will help Israel to know that the Lord is still their God and that the apparent rejection which their expulsion from their homeland indicated was not a permanent thing (22). Secondly, the nations of the world will learn from these events that Israel’s punishment was God’s intention, and not a sign of His weakness, and that the exile was a righteous God’s demonstration of His righteousness for all the world to see (23-24): a holy God punishes iniquity in His own people as well as in others. Thus, the Lord would set forth His glory among the nations, for Israel’s experiences were to be a demonstration of the character

of Israel's God (21), and the scandal of 36:20 would be silenced for ever" (Taylor 248-249).

**<sup>25</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. <sup>26</sup>And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. <sup>27</sup>When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. <sup>28</sup>Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. <sup>29</sup>And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God.**

"The reference to the Exile in verse 23 leads Ezekiel back in this final oracle to his present situation. Some would say that these verses have no place in the Gog apocalypse, and it is quite true that their style and content are no longer eschatological. But they appear to be a deliberate attempt to round off the Gog oracles and to relate their message to the immediate needs of the post 587 B.C. generation of exiles. Nothing new is added to what Ezekiel has said on previous occasions, but as a summary of his teaching they represent a convenient conclusion to chapters 1-39, before the vision of the new temple is added in chapter 40" (Taylor 249).

I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob - "Is a frequent phrase, almost a technical term, for the restoration of blessing upon a person or nation (cf. 16:53; 29:14; Job 42: 10; Psa 14:7; 85:1; 126: 1; Amos 9:14, etc.). It is put here in context of God's mercy to both Israel and Judah ('the whole house of Israel') and of His concern for His 'holy name'" (Taylor 249).

"This verse (25) stresses the mercy of God shown upon a nation which did not deserve it. Someone has said that grace is God giving us what we do not deserve and that mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. He who taught 'blessed are the merciful' preached what He practiced" (McGuiggan 328).

They shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery - Settled securely in his land and enjoying in abundance God's blessing, Israel will feel deeply ashamed of his evil past. The context strikes the note of permanent national fidelity and happiness.

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God - "God's dealings with Israel will bring home to the nations that He reveals Himself in history no less than in Nature, and there is a Divine plan in human affairs which gradually unfolds itself in time" (Fisch 264).

"The oracle concludes by promising a complete reversal of the exile. The exiles will be gathered into their own land; not one of them will be left among the nations (the fact that

many preferred to stay in Babylon after Cyrus's edict is immaterial); and, greatest of all, 'I will not hide my face any more from them,' a promise of blessing and favour in perpetuity. Finally, 36:26 is reiterated with the powerful statement, put in the prophetic perfect tense, that 'I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel' (RV). To put this in the future (as RSV) weakens the dramatic force of this assertion. True, God had not yet done this in reality; but it was such an assured word that it could be spoken by Ezekiel as if it were an accomplished fact" (Taylor 249-250).

## CHAPTERS FORTY THROUGH FORTY-EIGHT

"These last nine chapters of Ezekiel, although written some years later than the rest of the book, except for 29:17-21, are an integral part of the prophet's teaching and balance certain features found in chapters 1-39. It is particularly appropriate that the book should end, as it began, with a vision. Chapters 1-3 introduced to Ezekiel the vision of God visiting His people in exile; chapters 40-48 present Ezekiel with the vision of God returning to dwell in the midst of His people, now restored and re-established in their own land. These chapters also have links with the vision of the profanation of Temple and the departure of the glory of the Lord from Jerusalem (8:1-11:25), for they picture the rebuilt temple to which the glory of the Lord returns (43:5). They are therefore to be thought of not as a completely independent composition, only loosely tacked on to the end of the main body of Ezekiel's work, but as a real climax to his thought as it has been maturing through twenty years of prayer, meditation and ministry.

"In his vision, Ezekiel is transported to a high mountain near to the holy city (Mount Zion is probably intended) and there he meets an angelic figure who conducts him round the temple area, measuring everything with a builder's measuring rod. He begins with a close study of one of the gateways to the outer court (40:6-16) before entering the outer court to see the chambers which faced inwards on to the pavement around its outer wall. After looking at the two other gateways to the outer court (40:20-27), he is led to the gateway which leads from the outer court into the inner court, where only the priests are allowed to go, and once again there are three of these, on the north, east and south sides respectively (40:28-37). The temple itself stands on the western side, so there is no gateway there, either to the inner or to the outer court. A brief reference to the special sacrificial equipment and the room reserved for the sacrificing priests (40:38-47) prepares the way for a detailed description of the holy place (40:48-41:26), after which the prophet is led outside for a final survey of the temple area (42:1-20). Then, in vision, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord re-entering the temple and he is instructed what he must do with the information he has been given (43:1-12); the rest of the chapter is devoted to the measurements of the altar of sacrifice and to how the altar is to be used (43:13-27). Chapter 44 deals with various regulations relating to the ordering of the temple, in particular to the Levites and the Zadokite priests who will minister there, and this is followed by a description of the allocation of the land around the temple, with specific allotments for the temple officials and for the prince (45:1-17). Further regulations regarding feasts, offerings and sacrifices follow (45:18-46:24), but chapter 47

introduces a new subject, namely the flow of water from the sanctuary which pours down in the direction of the Arabah, bringing life and fertility to the barren areas of the Dead Sea valley (47:1-12). The vision concludes with a description of the boundaries of the land, and the allocation of various portions to the twelve tribes of Israel (47:13-48:35).

“The chief problem in these chapters is that of interpretation. *Four main views* have been held. The first may be called the **literal prophetic interpretation**. According to this, we have here the blueprint of a temple which Ezekiel intended should be built when the exiles returned to Jerusalem: it is in fact a building specification. In defense of this theory it must be said that as Ezekiel was confidently expecting a literal return from exile? It would not be surprising for him, as a priestly as well as a prophetic figure, to outline the shape of the new temple that would surely need to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. The wording of 43:10f (in the Hebrew, though not in LXX; see commentary below) encourages those who adopt this view. On the other hand, as Hengstenberg comments, ‘this opinion forgets that we have here to do not with an architect, but with a prophet—with one whose department is not the hands, but the heart.’ If this were an architect’s specification we should have expected much more detail about materials to be used, and even though many measurements are given, the ground plan leaves dozens of details to the imagination of any prospective builder, as those who have tried to reconstruct Ezekiel’s temple have found to their cost. Moreover, this whole vision (40-48) must be taken as a unity and there are elements which are so impracticable that a completely literal interpretation of the vision must be ruled out (e.g. the setting of the temple on a very high mountain, 40:2; the impossible source and course of the river of life, 47:1-12; the unreality of the boundaries of the tribes which could never be worked out geographically in hilly Israel).

“The second interpretation is the **symbolic Christian** one, favored by many older commentators. They held that this vision had its fulfillment symbolically in the Christian church. Now there is truth in this view, and it is given impetus by the use made of Ezekiel’s language in the book of Revelation, where the picture of the new Jerusalem is based largely on Ezekiel’s pattern. But is overstating the case to refer to Ezekiel’s vision directly to a Christian ‘fulfillment,’ without seeing that it has a real context for the readers of his own day, and this original context must be the prime concern of the Old Testament exegete.

“A variant of this, which is arrived at through similar hermeneutical principles, is the **dispensationalist view**. This is known most popularly through the *Scofield Reference Bible* which entitles Ezekiel 40-48, ‘Israel in the Land during the Kingdom-age.’ The approach is literal and futurist. It refers to the last days, when it is supposed that all the prophecies regarding the glorious future of Israel are to be literally fulfilled in a new dispensation. If it follows from this that Old Testament festivals, blood sacrifices, priesthood and worship at a temple are to be reintroduced, after the New Testament revelation of Christ and His finished, fulfilling work, it shows how completely this view misinterprets the significance of Christ’s salvation and how it casts doubt on the consistency of God’s dealing with mankind. But its fault is basically in regarding Ezekiel 40-48 as

prophecy and insisting on a literal fulfillment of it, if not in the past then in the future (The whole dispensationalist view is given a searching scrutiny in O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 1945).

“The fourth view is to regard these chapters, not as prophecy, but as **apocalyptic**, and to interpret them according to the canons of this style of Hebrew writing. Its features are symbolism, numerical symmetry, and futurism. We have already noted how 38,39 were couched in this style, and 40-48 although very different in content, lean in the same direction. This was Ezekiel’s pattern for the Messianic age that was to come. It lay in the future, and yet it grew out of the present. It was expressed in tangible terms and yet these were merely the forms in which the general principles of God’s activity were enshrined. The vision of the temple was in fact a kind of incarnation of all that God stood for and all that He required and all that He could do for His people in the age that was about to dawn. On this view, which of all the interpretations seems to take the most realistic view of the literary character of the material with which we are dealing, the message of Ezekiel in these chapters may be summarized as follows:

1. “The perfection of God’s plan for His restored people, symbolically expressed in the immaculate symmetry of the temple building;
2. “The centrality of worship in the new age, its importance being expressed in the scrupulous concern for details in the observance of its rites;
3. “The abiding presence of the Lord in the midst of His people;
4. “The blessings that will flow from God’s presence to the barren places of the earth (the river of life);
5. “The orderly allocation of duties and privileges to all God’s people, as shown both in the temple duties and in the appointment of the land (a theme taken up in Rev 7:4-8).

“These are of course only the main themes which Ezekiel seems to be expressing in this apocalyptic sequence. There is much more which can be adduced through detailed exposition. But if the vision is interpreted on these lines, and not as prophecy in the conventional sense, readers will be spared the necessity of trying to look for some fulfillment of the words in past or future history” (Taylor 250-254).

## **CHAPTER FORTY**

### **40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile.**

“Viz. the captivity of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E. when Ezekiel had been exiled to Babylon. The date is, accordingly, 572 (in the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the

month). As already stated in 1:1, the vision concerning the departure of the Merkabah came to Ezekiel in the thirtieth year of the last Jubilee celebrated in the Land of Israel before the Babylonian exile, which was the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. Since the vision of this chapter is dated twenty-five years after his captivity, it must have occurred in a Jubilee year. This fact makes the dating of this verse, otherwise very difficult to explain, quite clear. While the Hebrew New Year begins on the first of Tishri, the Jubilee year was inaugurated on the tenth of that month (Lev 25:9f). The beginning of the Jubilee year, which is also the Day of Atonement when the enslaved regain their freedom and sinners have their transgressions pardoned, was thus a most appropriate day for the vision which portrayed the redemption of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple (Kimchi)" (Fisch 265-266).

#### **40:17 Then he brought me into the outer court.**

"The prophet, who had hitherto been in the gateway, was then led from there into the outer court, known in Talmudic literature as 'the court of women.' It is called 'outer court' because beyond it, but closer to the Temple, was another court, 'Chambers,' The thirty chambers, built on stone pavements, were situated inside against the surrounding wall, ten on each of the three sides north, east and south, (cf. 41:12). They were for the use of worshippers (cf. Jer 35:2,4)" (Fisch 271).

## **CHAPTER FORTY-ONE**

41:1-4 "Like Solomon's Temple, Ezekiel's has three parts: the porch or vestibule, the nave and the most holy place (Hebrew *debir*, from a root meaning 'back,' rear). Ezekiel is conducted into the nave, which as a priest he is entitled to enter, but he stops short at the entrance to the inner sanctuary where only the guide goes in (cf. Lev 16; Heb 9:7). Notice how the breadth of the entrance-way to each room narrows from 14 cubits (40:48) to 10 cubits (41:2) to 6 cubits for the way in to the most holy place (41:3, RSV). The increased narrowness symbolizes increasing sanctity" (Taylor 260).

## **CHAPTER FORTY-TWO**

#### **42:16 Five hundred reeds.**

"Two views are held about the dimensions of the total area of the Temple buildings on the outside. Rashi understands 'reeds' in this and the following verses as being each six cubits long (cf. 40:5). On this hypothesis, the Temple buildings measured three thousand cubits on each side. He quotes in support a passage from the liturgy of the Second Day of Tabernacles which is based on the same interpretation. Praying for the restoration of the Temple, the liturgist (Kalir) states that the future Temple would be thirty-six times the size of the old Temple. The old was only five hundred cubits square, whereas the future Temple would measure three thousand cubits square. Kimchi, on the other hand, basing himself probably on 45:2, holds that the total measurement of the Temple

buildings was five hundred 'cubits' on each side. But he does not indicate how he explains the term 'reeds' instead of 'cubits' in this connection. Perhaps he renders the text: 'he measured ... five hundred (cubits) with the reeds, the standard measure of six cubits,' as distinctly stated in the clause that follows. Kimchi's explanation, which allows only a square of five hundred cubits for the Temple area, is accounted for by the measurements given in the text to the various structures. For instance, on the east side, from north to south: fifty cubits the northern outer gate house, one hundred between the outer and inner courts, fifty the northern inner gate-house, one hundred the inner court, fifty the southern inner gate-house, one hundred the outer court on the south, and fifty the southern outer gate-house - making a total of five hundred cubits" (Fisch 291-292).

"There is real disagreement in a number of passages as to which text ought to be followed. In many passages (such as 42:16) the Masoretic text has 'reeds' (rods) while the Septuagint (LXX) has 'cubits.' If you stay with the MT (as Fairbairn, Lightfoot, Baxter, Ferguson and many others do), the temple becomes too big for the land of Judea. Taylor, Archer, Davies and most premillenarians go for the cubit. We will be working on the cubit view though I am not sure that that is correct" (McGuiggan 343).

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

"It was nineteen years since Ezekiel had seen the vision of the glory of the Lord leaving His temple (10:18-22; 11:22-24). Now he sees His return, to occupy and to consecrate this new building to be His holy sanctuary. His appearance was the same as it had been before by the river Chebar (yet another link which this closing vision has with Ezekiel's earlier work) and it prompted the same response of awe and adoration. The angelic guide is still with Ezekiel and will continue to explain and instruct him in the law of the temple, but at this point there is a special word from the Lord out of the temple, which is virtually a statement of consecration" (Taylor 264).

"In the concluding section, chapters 40-48, Ezekiel draws a design of the Temple, the sacrificial worship, the people and the land in the new era which follows the overthrow of Gog. In a vision, the prophet finds himself transported to a very high mountain in Jerusalem where he beholds the Temple in the process of being rebuilt. An angel who measures the outer and inner courts, the buildings of the Temple and their annexes acts as his guide and interpreter. The prophet witnesses the return of the Divine Presence in the Merkabah which he saw at the beginning of his career (1) and when he foretold the destruction of the city (9), and he is instructed to furnish the people with a complete plan of the Temple and its services. He is told the regulations which are to govern the sacrifices, the qualifications of the priests and their duties and privileges, the responsibilities and prerogatives of the prince, and the apportionment of the land to the tribes of Israel.

"These closing chapters present almost insuperable difficulties. They contain discrepancies, contradictions with Pentateuchal laws, and term which do not occur elsewhere. Reference will be made to them in the commentary as they occur in the text. The Rabbis

of the Talmud (*Menachoth* 45a) remarked that only the prophet Elijah, who will herald the ultimate redemption will elucidate these chapters. They added the observation that had it not been for Rabbi Chanina ben Hezekiah, who explained several of these difficulties, the Book of Ezekiel would have been excluded from Scriptural canon” (Fisch 265).

### **43:3 Like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city.**

“The vision in which God manifested His entry into the restored Temple was that of the Merkabah which Ezekiel had seen on two previous occasions: in the first vision of his prophetic career by the river Chebar (1), and in the vision of the destruction of the city (8-11). Although the prophet had taken no part in the destruction of Jerusalem, he attributes the destruction to himself because he had prophesied it (*Targum*). Commenting on this verse, the Rabbis remarked that the word ‘vision’ is repeated nine times (where the plural occurs it is counted as two), and it intimates that, except for Moses who was privileged to see a vision clearly, all other prophets, including Ezekiel, were allowed to behold it only after it had undergone a process of nine-fold obscuration. In allusion to this rabbinic teaching, the liturgist of the second day of Tabernacles wrote, ‘They shall behold the Divine glory on His throne in visions through nine shining visions,’ i.e. unobscured” (Fisch 293).

### **43:5 The spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court.**

“Hitherto the prophet was led from one place to another by the accompanying angel; but now that he beheld the Merkabah, he was transported by the ‘spirit’ as in his first vision of it (cf. 2:2; 8:3)” (Fisch 293-294).

### **43:6 I heard one speaking unto me from the house.**

“The form of the verb *middabber* is reflexive, denoting ‘speaking to oneself.’ This construction is used for communicating the word of God to man to euphemize the direct relationship between man and God. Cf. Numbers 7:89 where the same form occurs in the transmission of the Divine word to Moses” (Fisch 294).

### **43:7 The place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet.**

“In contrast to the former Temple which was only God’s ‘footstool,’ His throne being in heaven (Isa 60:13; Psa 132:7; Lam 2:1; 1 Chron 28:2), the new Temple will become in a complete sense the abode of the Divine Presence, indicated by the combination of ‘throne’ and ‘soles of My feet’” (Fisch 294).

“The words here are an echo of Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8:12-13,27. The most holy place of the temple is regarded as the Lord’s throne-room (cf. Jer 3:17; 17:12), and as His footstool (cf. Psa 99:5; 132:7), though strangely enough this idea does not seem to contradict the view that in reality the Lord dwells in heaven. The temple is simply His

earthly habitation. The defilement which had previously taken place there had been by 'harlotry,' i.e. idolatry and sacred prostitution (2 Kgs 23:7), and (apparently) by the practice of burying kings within the sacred precincts. We know from the books of Kings that fourteen kings of Judah were buried 'in the city of David; i.e. where the temple and royal palace were, and it appears as if the fault lay in the lack of any clear line of demarcation between what was sacred (the temple proper) and what was profane (that palace and any tombs associated with it). This separateness was Ezekiel's great plea, as we have already observed. Verse 8 refers either to the palace buildings, which had been within the temple complex, or to the construction of royal burial-places close by. In Solomon's Temple there had been no walled-off outer court separating the Temple from the unconsecrated ground outside. Ezekiel's vision rectified this" (Taylor 265-266).

43:10 - "This temple is structured so that there is complete separation between God and his servants (vv. 7,8,12). Separation stressed the holiness of that which is separated (see 42:20 and Rev 11:1-2). The people are here being called to holiness the like of which they had not been practicing. The very structure of the temple was calling them to that. That is why the prophet was going into so many details with regard to the measurements of the temple.

"Verses 10ff are very instructive. Read them carefully and see that the prophet is to show the people the blueprint of the temple 'that they may be ashamed' (verse 10). What does that mean? How could the blueprint of a building make them ashamed? He urges them to 'measure the pattern.' What for? That they may be ashamed. The details of the temple are to teach them a lesson concerning their ungodliness. This whole temple is a lesson about the wickedness of Israel. They had not been really holy and this temple and its regulations were a call to holiness.

"So holy is this temple that the whole top of the mountain belongs to the temple. The city itself is down the mountain and away from the temple (45:1-6, especially 6). Is this to be understood literally? The temple is not to be in Jerusalem at all but outside it! But this would run conflict with what the other prophets said about Jerusalem being the center of rule (e.g. Isa 2:3; 24:33)" (McGuigan 348-349).

"If the phrase, 'that they may be ashamed of their iniquities,' is original and not, as some think, an addition, it echoes 16:61-63. These verses are, however, confused, as the LXX variations indicate, and it is not clear whether the command to show the plan of the temple to the house of Israel was to shame them by its demonstration of the standards of the Lord's holiness or to encourage them to obey it by building accordingly. The 'law of the temple' (Hebrew *tora*) is its 'pattern' of holiness. LXX translates with *diagraphe*, 'delineation,' 'outline,' but this may reflect a Hebrew reading *sura*, 'form'" (Taylor 266).

### **43:19 Who are of the offspring of Zadok.**

"Zadok, the first High Priest in king Solomon's Temple, was a descendant of Phinehas who was rewarded with the covenant of an 'everlasting priesthood' (Num 25:13). Only

his descendants would be found worthy to minister in the Temple of the future (see on 40:46)” (Fisch 299).

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

“Ezekiel is now instructed in the order of service in the restored Temple (44-46). Only the priests and Levites who had preserved their religious integrity and moral purity would be deemed worthy to act as its ministers. Their maintenance would be a charge on the nation in the form of various dues, since they will receive no portion of the land” (Fisch 301).

44:1-3 “The temple is the center of everything. It is the throne of God and His dwelling place. That being so there are certain things about it which must be rigidly observed. The worship carried out in there must be kept to the letter.

“The first thing the prophet learns is that the gate by which the Lord entered is to be kept shut (verse 2). For anyone else to come through it would be to put it to a lower use, it would be to profane it. We see this principle at work in regard to the utensils of the tabernacle. If a metal pot was used for sacrifice, it was to be scoured. If an earthen vessel was used it was to be broken (see Lev 6:28). We see the same thing in the practice of breaking vessels at reunions and solemn occasions” (McGuiggan 355).

44:3 As for the prince ‘nasi’. “The rank of the future ruler will not be melek (king) but nasi, as it was said, ‘David My servant shall be their prince forever’ (37:25) (Kimchi)” (Fisch 302).

44:10-14 “Instead of the foreigners, Levites are to act as temple ministers and gate-keepers. Their duties are described (11) as:

- (a) “Oversight of the temple gates, as part janitor and part policemen to control the crowds.
- (b) “Service in the temple, involving such tasks as slaying the animals brought in for sacrifice and assisting in the kitchens (46:24).
- (c) “Ministering to the people and helping them in their ritual duties.

“They therefore, ‘stand before’ the people (11, AV), while the priests stand before the Lord (15). This was a down-grading of their position, brought about because of their idolatrous behaviour in the years before Josiah’s reforms in the previous century (10, 12), for these were menial tasks. Nevertheless, they were tasks which had to be done and the ordinary people were not permitted to do them, so we must beware of denigrating the duties of the Levites in Ezekiel’s temple” (Taylor 271).

44:15-27 “Only the sons of Zadok were allowed to minister in the sanctuary as priests. They were ultimately descended from Aaron, according to the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:50-53, but Zadok was a priest in David’s time alongside Abiathar (2 Sam 8:17; 15:24ff) and he superseded him as chief priest by successfully backing Solomon as David’s successor (1 Kgs 1:8, etc.). The nomination of the Zadokite line in Ezekiel is thus a clear restriction of priestly privilege and must have earned the hostility of priest of other lines. However, the Zadokite line maintained its superiority throughout the period of the second Temple and retained the high priesthood until 171 B.C., when Antiochus IV transferred it to Menelaus, a Benjaminite. It is interesting to note that the Qumran covenantors looked forward to the restoration of the Zadokite line in Jerusalem” (Taylor 271-272).

44:20-27 “A series of other regulations governing the behavior of the priests covers the cutting of the hair (20), the drinking of wine (21) and marriage (22). In each case the purpose is to ‘teach my people the difference between the holy and the common’ (23, RSV). The priests were by their lives to be examples of separateness; their ritual holiness was intended to promote ethical holiness among the people they were called to serve. The regulations are reminiscent of Nazirite vows (Num 6:1-21), which were also scrupulous about defilement through contact with a dead person (25-27). Similar regulations for priests may be found in Leviticus 21:1-9. In keeping with their duty to be examples of holiness to the people, the priests also had certain duties of a judicial character and as guardians for the proper observance of festivals and sabbaths (24)” (Taylor 272).

## **CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE**

“After being instructed in the plan of the Temple and its consecration, the ministering priests and regulations concerning their vestments, personal conduct and functions, Ezekiel receives a command about the division of the Land of Israel among the tribes. In Jerusalem territory is to be allocated to the priests, Levites and the Nasi, as well as a section for the lay Israelites. Having assigned to the Nasi an estate ample for his maintenance, the prophet in God’s name exhorts him and his successors to practice strict justice, placing upon them the responsibility to see that righteousness prevails in the land and accurate standards of weights, measures and coinage are used. The Nasi is to receive the prescribed dues from the people and it is his obligation to provide what is necessary for the upkeep of the sacrificial service” (Fisch 310).

## **CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN**

“In a final vision Ezekiel is shown the abundance of blessing which the new Temple will bring to the people of Israel. Standing in front of the Sanctuary, he beholds a stream issuing from its threshold, gradually growing into a river, fertilizing the surrounding land, producing fruit and leaves which possess supernatural powers of healing, and sweetening the salt water of the Dead Sea into which it flows. He then draws a plan of the

frontiers of the country and describes the boundaries of the portions to be allotted as an everlasting possession to the twelve tribes” (Fisch 323).

47:1-2 “It seems to me that a man will literalize all this only when he has sold himself to literalizing. Get the picture. Ezekiel is brought to the door of the temple (the holy place in particular) and out of that door comes a stream of water. It flows into the inner court area, and south of the altar. The prophet is then taken out of the inner court by way of the north gate into the outer court. He is now taken to the outer gate, the eastern outer gate and he sees the water coming out of that gate at the southern side of that gate. (From there it ran down toward the Dead Sea.)

“In Zechariah 14:8 we hear of not one river but two (14:8) and they flow not just east but east and west. Joel 3:18 speaks of one river which waters the valley of Shittim which is on the eastern bank of the Jordan (and is certainly not the Dead Sea). That is not even Israelite territory in Ezekiel.

“This is not intended to be understood literally. Each of the prophets in his own way tells of the coming blessedness of the people when the goodness of the Lord pours forth from His throne (43:6-7). The river is a symbol of God’s goodness being offered to the needy. It may also involve the cleansing power of God (see Zech 13:1 and Joel 3:18). It might in addition symbolize the giving of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 4 and 7:37-39). Compare this with the picture of Revelation 22:1 ff.

“The picture is built on (it appears to me) the garden of Eden with its rivers and the tree of life. We are hearing here of God’s goodness like a river flowing out from His throne to bless mankind. See Psalm 46:4” (McGuiggan 358-359).

“The picture of the river flowing from under the threshold of the temple and fertilizing the barren areas of the Dead Sea valley is a clear instance of symbolism, expressive of the blessings which will flow from God’s presence in His sanctuary to other parts of the land. To attempt to take this literally, as some have done, is to miss completely the point which is being made. So we need not pause over the traditions that suggest that Mount Zion, on which the temple was built, concealed beneath its rocky exterior ‘an inexhaustible supply of water and underground reservoirs’ (so the letter of Aristeas). No amount of water-diving will confirm Ezekiel 47. The fact that this represents an idealization of God’s abundant blessings is confirmed by passages such as Psalms 46:4; 65:9; Isaiah 33:20f. Blessing, fertility and water are almost interchangeable ideas in the Old Testament. The commentator is, however, justified in looking for parallels to and antecedents for this kind of symbolism, and most turn to the creation narrative in Genesis 2. The former paradise which was watered by the four-streamed river (Gen 2:10) is here paralleled by the new creation which also has its river and its trees (7). If we add to this the fact which has already been observed (on 28:1-19) that Ezekiel seems to have known of a paradise tradition linked to a ‘holy mountain of God’ (28:14,16) as well as a ‘garden of God, ‘the parallel to our present passage is almost complete.

“The river grows in volume as it descends eastwards through the mountains towards the Dead Sea and before long it becomes too deep to wade through. The sheer physical impossibility of this (for not tributaries are mentioned that would swell the stream: indeed they would nullify the symbolic message that this all comes from the one true source), while it may worry us, holds no inconsistency for the writer. For this is accepted apocalyptic imagery: what it says and what that means are more important than the logic of the way it is expressed” (Taylor 278-279).

47:13-14 “The instructions here are specific. The land he is about to divide is the land they will dwell in forever (37:25). It is the land that God swore to give unto their fathers and in which their fathers did indeed dwell. We must pay attention to the fact that the boundaries given here are the same boundaries given in Numbers 34.

“Here is the reason why this is so interesting. You see premillennialists insist that the land promise was never fulfilled to Abraham’s seed; neither as to duration or area. They tell us that Israel did not get all the land promised to them as an inheritance (see Gen 15:18ff). They also tell us that they never inherited it as an ‘everlasting possession’ (Gen 17:8). That being the case, they tell us, it must await future fulfillment. That future fulfillment, they tell us, is in the Millennium.

“Now, here is my point - Israel possessed and dwelled in all the land mentioned in Numbers 34 (be sure to see Josh 21:43-45; 23:14-16) but the millennialist says that was not enough; that was not the fulfillment of the land promise. What will they do with the property mentioned here in Ezekiel 47? That is the land they already possessed and dwelled in back in the days of Israel. If it did not fulfill the land promise back then how could it in Ezekiel 47 during the alleged Millennium?

“And furthermore, with regard to the duration—if the land promised was to be an eternal possession then Israel must dwell eternally on this earth, in Canaan, where their fathers dwelled. For Abraham was promised Canaan and not anything on a new earth.

“In any case, the land promise was fulfilled. Please do yourself the service of reading the two passages cited above from Joshua. I will guarantee that you will have no difficulty in determining that Israel got all the land they were promised for an inheritance and that they dwelled in it and possessed it. That is explicitly what the two texts say at least four times!

“But what of the Genesis 15:18ff passage? Did Israel divide that land up? Did they dwell in it and possess it? No! But why stop at Genesis 15, why not go on to Exodus 23:28-31? That passage speaks of land being given to the Jews all the way to the Red Sea. Premillennialists do not say anything about that section of land having to be divided in some future fulfillment? Why not?

“And what of the Genesis passage? It is not hard to explain. This land was indeed to be ‘given’ to Israel, and it was. But it was only a certain piece of that large tract of land that

was to be given to Israel as their permanent inheritance. I know that that is right for several reasons. If that whole rectangular piece of land from the Wadi el Arish across to the desert east of the Jordan, from Kadesh Barnea to the river Euphrates, across to the Mediterranean sea—if that huge piece was all the land of Israel’s inheritance, then Moses entered the promised inheritance despite the repeated word of God that he would not.

“Read for yourself Numbers 20:10-12; 27:12-14. Now, here is the question. Did Moses ever enter into the promised inheritance land? If that huge section mentioned in Genesis 15:18ff and Exodus 23:28ff was the promised inheritance Moses stood in it as he looked across Jordan. Be sure to take the time to read Deuteronomy 2:23-27, especially 27. There is no doubt that the promised inheritance lay across Jordan and the very fact that Ezekiel restricts the restored people to that underlines the statement as true. Why, even when he spoke to Sihon (Deut 2:26-29) he spoke of Israel’s land as being beyond the Jordan. Read it for yourself.

“And the two and half tribes who got possessions on the eastern bank of Jordan had to get special permission to do so. See Deuteronomy 3:12-23 for the material on that. What have I said? I have said:

1. “Whatever the promised inheritance was, Israel got it (Josh 21 and 23).
2. “All the land mentioned in Genesis 15 and Exodus 23 was given to Israel.
3. “Only the land beyond the Jordan to the west was the original promised inheritance.
4. “This is the only land which Ezekiel gives to Israel in the alleged Millennium.
5. “If that land is to be an eternal inheritance, then Israel is destined to be on this earth for eternity” (McGuiggan 360-362).

## **CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT**

“The boundaries of the land being determined, the prophet deals finally with its division among the tribes. The whole territory west of the Jordan is to be divided into twelve parallel portions running from east to west, each tribe receiving an equal share in the following order from north to south: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun and Gad. Between the territories of Judah and Benjamin is situated ‘the holy portion of the land,’ i.e. Jerusalem, comprising the Temple area, the domains of the priest, Levites and the Nasi, as well as a city for lay-Israelites. It is noteworthy that the tribes descended from the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah, are placed at the extreme ends, farthest from the Sanctuary” (Fisch 329).

48:1-7 - “The pattern which the allocation of the land follows is that, because the central sacred portion is well to the south, seven tribes have land to the north of it and the remaining five have land to the south. The northern tribes (beginning from the north) are Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah. Of these it is worth noting that the three which are farthest from the sanctuary are tribes descended from sons of Jacob’s concubines, Dan and Naphtali having been born to Rachel’s maid Bilhah, and Asher to Leah’s maid Zilpah (Gen 30:5-13). The fourth son by concubinage, Gad is the farthest away from the sanctuary among the southern group of tribes (27). Judah had pride of place immediately to the north of the central portion, as being the inheritor of the Messianic promise through the blessing of Jacob (Gen 49:8-12), and he supersedes Reuben, the first-born, who is in the next position away on the north side. The other two Places are held by the two grandsons of Rachel, the children of Joseph” (Taylor 282-283).

48:35 - “Ezekiel’s closing words gave to the city its new name ‘Yahweh Shammah, the Lord is there’ (35). This was a grand finale to his book and to his ministry. In his twenty-five years of exile and in the forty-eight chapters of his book, Ezekiel had seen the Lord withdraw from His temple because of the sins that were being committed there, he had met with Him by the waters of Babylon in the vision of the chariot-throne, he had promised the exiles that there would be a new covenant when God would be with His people as their God for ever, he had seen in symbolic vision the temple and the Israel of the future. Now at last the Lord would be there, with His people, for ever. For Ezekiel, the climax had been reached: but it was still only a vision. John, the exile in Patmos, who saw Ezekiel’s words fulfilled in the coming of Christ as Emmanuel, God with us, also looked forward to the day when a great voice would be heard from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people’ (Rev 21:3). The glory of heaven is the ultimate fulfillment of it all. It is to that great conclusion that all Ezekiel’s readers should be led” (Taylor 285).

“The Jerusalem of the future will receive a new name, symbolizing the permanence of Divine Presence in the new city. Ezekiel saw in a vision the departure of God’s glory from the former Temple and city (10:18); he also beheld the return to the new Temple (43). He now concludes with the assurance that the Divine glory will never again depart from the Temple and the new Jerusalem (see on 44:2)” (Fisch 336).

“What will the last section say to us? It will stress two major points:

1. “The truth which is now being trampled underfoot by the heathen will be vindicated.
2. “In connection with all the blessings mentioned in 34-39 there will be a holiness demanded of Israel that they have not before known.

“You can just hear some gloomy Israelite who has listened to the wonderful promises Ezekiel has outlined; of David’s return, of a restored land, of national dignity and unity, of

assurance against all the enemies—we can hear such a one ask: ‘Oh, yeah, what is the catch?’ Holiness is demanded” (McGuiggan 331).

“Literally understood, chapters 34-48 would urge us to believe:

1. “That the nation of Israel is to be restored under the hand of God into the land of Palestine.
2. “That the nation of Israel will be ruled over by one - and only one - king (37:22-24) - David.
3. “That the nation of Israel will dwell in the land ‘in which their fathers dwelled’ (37:25). That is, on this earth (and not on a new earth). And that they will dwell here for eternity (37:25).
4. “That a temple will be built on this old earth (and not on a new earth) in which God will dwell for eternity (37:26-27; 43:7).
5. “That the land promise (Gen 15:18-21; 17:18), as understood by the pre-millenarians will not be fulfilled in the millennium, since the boundaries given in 47:13-23 do not include all the land mentioned in Genesis 15:18-21 or in Exodus 23:28-31.
6. “That the Levitical priesthood is to be restored forever (43:19; 44:15 with Lev 16:34) with the Zadokites officiating.
7. “That animal sacrifices ‘for sin’ and ‘to make atonement’ (43:19,20,21,22, 25,26; 44:27,27; 45:17, etc. etc.) are to be eternally restored.
8. “That circumcision is to be restored as essential to communion with God in worship (44:9)” (McGuiggan 332).

“Bear in mind that the literalists (I am not intending this ‘literalists’ designation to be Keri-sige) will have two sacrificial systems (Christ’s and Judaism’s) functioning at the same time. They will have two priesthoods (Christ’s and Aaron’s) functioning at the same time. Is that possible? Why, if that were true the first century Jew could simply have replied that the one did not necessarily exclude the other! The believing Jew could have tried to practice both at the same time. What would have been the answer to him? Would we have told him: ‘The practicing of both is confined to the millennium?’ Is that what the New Testament writers answered? I thought they made it a matter of law or grace! They did not make it a dispensational matter” (McGuiggan 333-334).

“The usual is, that is, the rule is—whenever you can understand it literally, do so! However, God so often speaks non-literally that we should not be shocked out of our minds if we come across the non-literal. Let me give you just a few examples of what I

mean then you will feel better about the proposition: God often uses speech which could be interpreted literally but which He does not intend to be literally understood.

1. “In Malachi 4:5 God speaks of the coming of Elijah. That could easily be understood literally but God was speaking of John when he said Elijah.
2. “In Hosea 7:16; 8:13 and 9:3 God says the northern kingdom would go into Egyptian captivity. That could easily have been literally interpreted but God meant Assyrian captivity when He said Egyptian.
3. “In Micah 5 God speaks of Jesus delivering His people from the Assyrian oppressor. That could easily be literally understood (though it would require a miracle—no big deal for God!). But God did not mean the Assyrian, he meant whoever was the enemy of his people at that time. He used the Assyrians to typify such enemies.
4. “In Ezekiel 16:53-59 God says Samaria and Sodom are going to be restored to their place of kingdom and prosperity. Jude 7 says Sodom will never rise again.
5. “In Isaiah 19:18-25 God says Egypt and Assyria will be his people and his leading converts. Israel, he says there, will be number three with those two. This could be literally fulfilled (though it would require a miracle with regard to Assyria) but even the literalists do not believe it will. God was wanting to tell Israel that he would adequately handle the two enemies of Israel. He does it by saying that one day they will fully acknowledge Him as Lord. He pictures them both as fully converted to Him - so they must hold Him to be the true Lord. In literal fact, God did establish Himself as their Lord - but not as described here” (McGuiggan 337-338).

“Now then, let us suppose that I have convinced you that people such as myself are correct in saying that Ezekiel 34-48 is not to be understood literally - what are we to do with the section? There are two basic views:

1. “Understand it all as a sort of allegory in which David = Jesus; Temple = Church; Priests = Christians; Sacrifices = good deeds, etc., etc.
2. “Understand it simply as a picture of glory for the Jew under the Messiah without descending to details and making those details allegorical.

“I presently think this second view is correct. I believe that Ezekiel is now telling the beaten Jew that the day was coming when they would enjoy prosperity and glory under the Lord and that he described it in terms with which they were altogether familiar” (McGuiggan 340).

Why Ezekiel never intended that these chapters be taken literally:

1. It is clear that he is using figurative or symbolic language.
2. He makes no mention of an earthly High Priest.
3. To make a literal construction of chapter 48 results in placing the temple outside of the city.
4. There are outright contradictions of the law codes found in the Pentateuch.
5. The restored exiles never attempted to build such a temple.

Three purposes of chapters 40-48:

1. To show the people that they will again dwell in the land.
2. To show that God has not forever forsaken His people but will return to dwell with them.
3. To underscore that true and acceptable worship must meet God's requirements (cf. 43:11).

Outline:

1. Temple 40-43.
2. Ritual 44-46.
3. River 47:1-12.
4. Redeemed people 47:13-48.

## **APPENDICES**

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROPHETS

Several times a year different religious groups set a date for the end of the world. Obviously they are all wrong and their attempts to name “the last hour” are amusing to most people. However, there are some people who become frustrated by this mishandling of scripture and conclude that it is impossible to understand certain portions of the Bible—specifically the prophets. But this has never been God’s intention. Paul said “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:3-4). God wants all of his children to understand His word. It is true that there are “some things *hard* to understand” (2 Pet 3:16), but that is not the same as *impossible* to understand. By the use of common sense and reason, in the form of several steps, a person can arrive at a proper understanding of God’s word—including the prophets.

The first step is to determine the type of writing a prophet is employing. There are basically two types of writing a person will discover within the prophets—prose and poetry.

Poetry is found throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. One Scholar has written that:

“The average American has little appreciation for poetry. Poetry seem a strange and confusing way to express things, as if it were designed to make ideas less, rather than more, intelligible. Our culture places little emphasis on poetry, except in popular music, which normally contains the sort of poor poetry called doggerel. In some present-day cultures, however, and in most ancient ones, poetry was a highly prized mode of expression.”

A correct understanding of Hebrew poetry can make passages within the prophets come alive with meaning. It can make the obscure obvious and the doubtful certain.

Perhaps the most interesting and beneficial feature of Hebrew poetry is the use of “parallelism.” This term refers to the practice of balancing one thought or phrase with a corresponding thought or phrase containing approximately the same number of words or at least a corresponding idea. There are three types of Hebrew parallelism found within the Old Testament and within the prophets.

*First* there is “synonymous parallelism.” The second, or subsequent line, repeats or re-enforces the sense of the first line. The two lines taken as a whole give the meaning of the prophet, but the second line is not adding anything new, as in Isaiah 44:22:

“I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud,  
And your sins like a heavy mist.”

The *second* is “antithetical parallelism.” The second, or subsequent, line contrasts the thought of the first, as in Hosea 7:14:

“And they do not cry to me from their heart,  
When they wail on their beds.”

*Finally*, there is “synthetic parallelism.” The second, or subsequent, line adds to the first line in any manner which provides further information, as in Obadiah 21:

“The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion  
to judge the mountains of Esau,  
And the kingdom will be the Lord’s.”

Poetry is easy to understand when an individual comprehends the use of parallelism and its limitations.

The *second* form of writing is prose, which is everything other than poetry. Prose is divided into two parts, literal and figurative. One should always understand a passage in a *literal* way unless there is some indication to interpret it in a *figurative* way. One author has rightly warned that:

“Though the prophets often express themselves symbolically, it is erroneous to regard their language as symbolical throughout. They did not, as some writers on prophecy supposed, construct a sort of symbolical alphabet to which they habitually resorted in the expression of their thought.”

A person will know that a passage is to be understood in a figurative way if any one of seven different criteria applies to it.

*First*, the sense of the context indicates it. In Zechariah 5:2 the prophet wrote, “And he said to me, ‘What do you see?’ And I answered, ‘I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits and its width is ten cubits.’” The context indicates that this is a symbolic picture and is not meant to be taken literally.

*Second*, when the literal meaning of a word or sentence involves an impossibility. God said to Jeremiah, “Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city, and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land” (1:18). Jeremiah was not literally turned into a “pillar of iron” or a “fortified city.”

*Third*, if the literal interpretation makes a contradiction. Compare “the righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart” (Isa 57:1) with “and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn 11:26).

*Fourth*, when the scriptures are made to demand that which would be wrong for a Christian to do. For instances, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall, and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you’” (Jer 25:27). But God also said, “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them” (Isa 5:11). God has never commanded His children to become drunk. This is figurative language.

*Fifth*, when it is said to be a figure. In Daniel chapter two when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream of the golden statue destroyed by the stone, Daniel’s reply was, “This was the dream; now we shall tell its interpretation before the king” (Dan 2:36).

*Sixth*, when it is said in mockery. In Isaiah 41 when God is talking about idols and how to determine if they are really God he says, “Declare the things that are going to come afterwards, that we may know that you are gods; indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together” (v. 23). God tells the idols that all they need to do to prove that they are God is just to *do something*—good or evil. But this is all said in mockery because there is only ONE God.

*Finally*, when common sense (based on inductive reasoning) demands a figure. Often times the ability to determine whether a passage is figurative or not comes down to common sense. Jeremiah wrote, “Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad” (Jer 51:7). Common sense tells us that an entire country is not a “golden cup” and that that country did not “intoxicate the whole earth.”

Once it has been determined that the text in question is using figurative language it is beneficial to ascertain what type of figure it is. Some figures which a person will discover within the prophets are:

1. Simile.
  - a. Definition - it is a figure of speech expressing likeness or comparison using the words “as” or “like.”
  - b. Note the following:
    - (1) Ezekiel 1:4.
    - (2) Isaiah 53:6.
2. Metaphor.
  - a. Definition - exactly the same as a simile, however it omits the words of comparison (i.e. “as” and “like”).

- b. Examples:
  - (1) Ezekiel 31:3.
  - (2) Ezekiel 34:6.
- 3. Allegory.
  - a. Definition - a figurative application of a story or a narrative, a figurative sentence or an entire discourse in which the principle subject is described by another subject resembling it in its properties and/or circumstances.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 16.
    - (2) Isaiah 3:13-26.
- 4. Metonymy.
  - a. Definition - a figure which exchanges the name of one thing for another because of some relationship between them. Normally it is between the nouns but not always.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 18:31 - house = descendants.
    - (2) Hosea 1:2 - land = people.
- 5. Synecdoche.
  - a. Definition - similar to metonymy with this major difference or limitation - a part is used for the whole or the whole is used for the part. It can be plural for singular, specific for general or vice versa.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 20:6 - honey = land full of good things.
    - (2) Ezekiel 25:4 - east = Persia, Media and other countries east of Jerusalem.

6. Irony/Sarcasm.
  - a. Definition - what is said is actually meant to express the opposite. It can be scornful, contempt or merely jesting.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 20:39.
    - (2) Ezekiel 28:3.
7. Hyperbole.
  - a. Definition - to exaggerate or overstate in order to produce an effect and/or an emphasis.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 27:28.
    - (2) Isaiah 14:13.
8. Anthropomorphism.
  - a. Definition - ascribing the parts of the human body to God.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 7:4.
    - (2) Ezekiel 8:18.
9. Parable.
  - a. Definition - an account in which something real in life is used as a means of presenting a spiritual or moral thought. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.
  - b. Examples:
    - (1) Ezekiel 17:1-10.
    - (2) Ezekiel 24:3-5.
10. Apostrophe.

- a. Definition is a digression from a discourse in which the writer or speaker turns aside from his immediate audience and addresses either an inanimate object, another person or persons.
- b. Examples:
  - (1) Ezekiel 6:3.
  - (2) Ezekiel 13:11.

The purpose in determining what kind of figure of speech a person has encountered within the prophets is to better help a person understand what God is trying to communicate to man. One author has written:

“The use of language involves an understanding of the use of words and their meaning. All words have meaning and convey thoughts. Proper use of words allows one to be understood; improper word usage leads to difficulties in communication. Nowhere has there been more difficulty in the use of words than in the area of figurative language. Sometimes ‘figurative language’ is spoken of as though it had no force or significance. One may say, ‘Oh, that’s just figurative,’ as if this would weaken the meaning or suggest it had no meaning at all. Such is not the case. In fact, figurative language is usually used to add force or significance to what is being discussed.”

Understanding the prophets is similar to playing a game. In order to play properly a person must know two things; what game is being played, and what the rules of that game are. Problems arise when a person does not know the rules of the game or tries to apply rules from another game to that game. In order to understand the prophets a person needs to know what type of writing the prophet is using, and “the rules” governing that type of figure of speech or poetry.

Once the type of writing has been determined, the second step is to “pay attention to the context.” Context has reference to the setting. The context may be only a few verses, or it may be an entire chapter, several chapters or even an entire book. When examining the context, a student should go from large to small. He or she should start out with the history of the book; then the theme; then the section, and finally the paragraph in question.

Both the major and minor prophets are firmly anchored in history. If a student is not aware of that history, then he or she takes a chance on misunderstanding the prophet and his message and those messages were directly related to what was going on in the world at that time. Jack P. Lewis has written:

“It is obvious that you could not understand the life of George Washington if you were not clear on whether he was a Revolutionary War or a Civil War figure. In like manner, you cannot understand the prophets until you make clear in your mind what period of Israel’s history and with what international relations they deal. The prophets should be thought of as dealing with current events of their day.”

For example, it is imperative to realize that Isaiah wrote his prophecies one hundred years *before* Judah was dragged off into Babylonian captivity, but both Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote *during* the captivity period—Jeremiah from Jerusalem and Ezekiel from Babylon.

Once the *historical context* has been determined, a person then needs to discover the *theme* of the book. A student can either look the theme up in a good commentary or try to resolve it on his own. If a person were to try the latter, he or she would need to read the book all the way through (or as much as possible) at one sitting, and...do this several times; all the while looking for recurring words, phrases or ideas. Then he or she needs to ask himself or herself the question, “Why did God record this?” With a little work, thought and practice, the theme can be grasped. For instance, in the book of Ezekiel it can be observed that the phrase “then you will know that I am the Lord” occurs sixty-four times, and the words “abomination” and “idol” occur forty-four and thirty-seven times respectively. Therefore, a workable theme might be, “The ‘son of man’ (ninety-two times) is commissioned by the Lord of Glory to preach and prophesy against the sins committed by the individual as well as the nations. The people are guilty of numerous ‘abominations’ (forty-four times) and ‘idol’ worship (thirty-seven times). Therefore, God is going to ‘bring’ upon them (fifty-two times) ‘blood’ (fifty times) and ‘a sword’ (eighty-four times). ‘Then you will know that I am the Lord’ (sixty-four times).” Once the theme of the book is understood half the battle is over, because everything within the book will relate to that theme and this enables the Bible student to have a guide to help him or her keep “on track” in the study of the prophets.

The third step in the area of context is to outline the book by sections or chapters. The purpose of this is to show the relationship between the sections and the progression of thought from one paragraph to the next. The significance of this point can be seen in the book of Amos. Amos’ theme is, “‘Thus says the Lord’ (forty-four times). ‘I know your transgressions (twelve times) are many,’ and ‘your sins (eight times) are great.’ ‘Therefore, prepare to meet your God.’” Because of the sins of the nations, God will not revoke its punishment. Israel and Judah have also rejected the word of the Lord. The *first chapter* of the book deals with the judgment of God upon the foreign nations; the *second chapter* deals with the judgment of God upon Judah and Israel. By outlining it and observing the relationship and progression of thought between the sections, a diligent student will come to the same conclusion that one commentator did when he wrote:

“In a series of concentric circles Amos denounced the sins of men against Jehovah. Beginning with a great encircling movement that included Da-

mascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Amon, and Moab; he identified the rebellion against God with those outside God's special covenant. Then, shrinking to a smaller circle, a similar rebellion was placed squarely upon the shoulders of Judah. One can almost hear the people of the northern kingdom, Israel, giving ready "Amen's" to Amos' preaching against their neighbors! Yes, there were many in Israel who probably still held grudges against Judah and so when Amos pointed out the sins of Judah they were in full agreement. Then after this announcement, Amos immediately thrust into the very heart of Israel the sword of the Spirit, the word of God's judgment against her! If it was true that the nations outside the covenant were accountable, if Judah, in the covenant was accountable, then it logically followed that Israel could not escape accountability."

A second advantage that can be acquired in outlining by sections is the realization that not all prophets (in fact, hardly any) follow a chronological order in their writings. The first section may deal with the present time, the second section with a future time, but then the third section may go back before the time of the first section. And then there are those passages where it is difficult to locate the exact time frame and to present the precise historical background for the material. A good example of this is the book of Jeremiah. One Old Testament scholar has said concerning Jeremiah that "so much of the material in the book is undated (undatable?) that it cannot be fitted into his life (i.e. Jeremiah's) story, except by a process of conjecture which most scholars are not willing to undertake and then those materials that are dated do not follow any chronological order at all."

Once a person knows the historical context, theme and outline, then he or she is ready to study individual paragraphs—thoughts—in the prophets. The more specific the outline the easier it is to detect the interrelationship between the paragraphs. To determine that interrelationship a student must ask himself or herself these questions:

1. What is the point of this paragraph or these exhortations?
2. What is the point of this sentence?
3. On the basis of what the author has said up to this point, why does he say this now?

The answer to those questions will allow the individual to understand the immediate context of that paragraph.

By examining the "type" of writing and "the context", a person will understand most of what the prophets wrote. However, by the very appellation "prophets" these books must contain prophecies and that is the very reason they are difficult to understand. Prophecy has been defined as . . .

. . . a miracle of knowledge, a declaration, or description, or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to discern or to calculate, and it is the highest evidence that can be given of supernatural communion with the Deity, and of the truth of a revelation from God.

Basically a prophet conveys God's will to Israel and Judah. A very small percentage of what the prophets wrote dealt with the future of Israel or Judah. But it is this "very small percentage" that gives people trouble. One author has written that:

"Many do not see the wholeness in the prophet's message. They ignore those parts dealing with past and present, and focus all their attention on the future elements still unrealized. The more distant the element on the prophet's prophetic horizon, the better. Lo, the prophet might have been talking about jet airplanes and such a prediction would only show how far ahead of his time the prophet was! This type of thinking is ludicrous but tragic, for it discloses confusion piled on confusion concerning the nature of the prophet's message. Prophecy does have a future aspect. But the prediction of God's doings was given to a particular historical people, to awaken and stir them. They might not grasp all the meaning of the message, but the message—with the disclosure of future things—was given to influence the present action. The future aspect of prophecy was not given to satisfy man's curiosity about the future. When interpreters force prophecy to function in this way, prophecy is being turned aside from its real purpose."

The interpretation of prophecy is relatively simple if one remembers a few steps. The *first step* is to see if the prophet himself gives the interpretation to his own prophesy. An example would be the "Valley of Dry Bones" in Ezekiel 37. Verses one and two say:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry."

So many people speculate about what this is referring to and all of that could be avoided if people merely looked down to verse eleven which says:

"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'"

This step cannot be over emphasized because of all the abuses of prophecy. If a student wants to know what God is talking about when he uses figurative language in giving a prophecy, then he or she should seek to learn if God gives the answer.

The *second step* would be to use the cross references found in a good study Bible on the passage in question. A person needs to use a little more care with this step, but often times prophets, as a whole, would use similar terminology and ideas to express the same concept. So this is a worthwhile step.

An excellent example of this is the phrase “the day of the LORD.” This phrase occurs approximately one hundred thirty-nine times within the prophets. The prophet Joel says in chapter two:

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations . . . And the Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”

If a student were to examine the cross references on these three verses, he or she would notice verses from almost all the prophets. By examining the context of those passages where “the day of the LORD” occurs, and the context of Joel, a person would arrive at the conclusion that “the day of the “LORD” is talking about God’s judgment on the foreign nations, on Israel or on Judah.

A *final step* would be to see if this prophecy is conditional. In the book of Jonah God commands the prophet to say, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4) and yet in verse ten God says, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.” Does this mean that God lied in verse four, or that He just changed His mind or is there some other reason? The answer to these questions can partly be found in Jeremiah 18:7-10 which says:

“At one moment I (God) might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.”

God caused the prophets to speak His prophecies in the hope of motivating the individual, or nation, to repent of their sins. One author has written that::

“God occasionally changes His predicted actions so that He remains consistent in His character. Since men sometimes change their behavior and

relationship to God, God changes His predicted actions toward them correspondingly, in order to remain consistent with His own character of love and righteousness.”

For far too long have the prophets been the sole domain of the extreme radicals and their erroneous interpretations. If the student will determine the “type” of writing, whether it is literal, poetic or figurative; if he will study the historical context, theme, context of the section and the context of the paragraph in question; if he or she will see if the writer of the prophetic book gave the interpretation himself; if the student will look up the cross references on the given passage and compare similar language and ideas: and if he or she will determine whether or not the prophecy was conditional—then that student can have confidence in his or her interpretation of the prophets and he or she will then “understand the prophets.”

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S NAME IN EZEKIEL**

After a student has achieved a familiarity with a particular book, he then may start the real study of that book. We must know the historical context, the structure of the book, the theme and what lessons God wants us to learn. But that is only one level of study. A different level is to look at the book as a WHOLE, noticing those key ideas and concepts which occur throughout.

One such idea in Ezekiel is the importance of God’s name. As our society becomes more computerized, the shift is from names and personalities to numbers and abilities. But in the old days a person was known by his name, not a number. That name represented *who* he was. It is that same way with God.

For Ezekiel the exile and the destruction were not a result of Babylon’s superior might, but a result of God’s concern for His name.

Read Ezekiel 20:9,14,22,39,44. God acted the way He did because He did not want His name to be profaned among the nations. Israel’s historical process is moved by the central consideration of God’s name.

The present crisis was the result of God’s name. Ezekiel did not consider the Babylonians as the real cause of the crisis. Rather, it was God who destroyed his own people for the sake of His name: “And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger” (43:8).

The return of the exiles was not for any merit on their part, but because of God’s concern for His name (36:20-23). God was concerned about His reputation among the people of Israel as well as the nations.

It was because of His name that God showed mercy to Israel in the past; it is now because of His name (which has been defiled by Israel to an intolerable extent) that God

punishes them and it is also because of His name that Israel (the people who bear His name) will be restored. "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob...I will be jealous for My holy name... When I bring them back from the peoples...I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of many nations (39:25,27). Read also 39:7,16.

What is more, the exiles will have assurance that they will remain in the promised land and not be dragged off into captivity, not because of what *they* might do but because that which will *cause* them to go off into captivity will not happen again because "the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name" (43:7).

In Ezekiel, Israel's history is regarded as the arena where God's name is to be recognized and honored because He is actively involved with the people of Israel. Though many of his prophecies deal with the gloomy picture of punishment and destruction, Ezekiel has a positive view of his people's destiny. Since its historical process is primarily moved by God's concern for His name, Israel is protected. Because the people's destiny does not rest on human deeds, but on God's name, their restoration from exile is guaranteed.

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**Ezekiel**  
**Review Sheet — Final Exam**

1. Review important dates.
2. Study especially notes and listings for chapters 1,3,8,18,37.
3. Review visuals from Ezekiel –
  - Construct siege against Jerusalem (show people that Jerusalem is going to fall to Babylonians).
  - Lay on side (390 days = captivity of Israel; 40 days = captivity of Judah).
  - Eat only small amount bread/little water (life during siege and captivity).
  - Packing bags (for captivity).
  - Digging through wall (to escape), etc.
4. Know key words/phrases and why they are key words/phrases.
5. Know the last several kings of Judah (in order).
  - Josiah
  - Jehoahaz
  - Jehoiakim
  - Jehoiachin
  - Zedekiah
6. Review all notes/syllabus material on Ezekiel 40-48.
7. Remember the five predominant themes of the book.
  - The holiness of God.
  - The sinfulness of Israel.
  - God will not allow sinfulness to continue; He will punish.
  - Individual responsibility.
  - God will restore.
8. Memory verses:

3:10-11	18:20	18:32
33:11	34:15-16	

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