

A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel

By

Pastor Galen L. Doughty
Southside Christian Church

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INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the *Book of Ezekiel*. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Ezekiel's prophecy. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our Life Group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of *Ezekiel*. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

In the commentary there are occasional references to the original Hebrew words Ezekiel used in a particular passage. Those Hebrew words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Hebrew. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES IN THE TIMELINE OF EZEKIEL:

- *King Jehoiachim of Judah becomes a Babylonian vassal, 605.*
- *Jehoiachim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar; he sends troops to raid and punish Jehoiachim, 602.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar deports some Jews to Babylon from Jerusalem including a young man named Daniel, 602.*
- *Jehoiachim dies and is replaced by his son Jehoiachin; he reigns three months, 598.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem after a siege and deports Jehoiachin, his mother, and many of the leading citizens of Jerusalem, including the young priest Ezekiel; he puts Jehoiachin in prison upon arrival in Babylon, 597.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar installs King Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah, son of Josiah as King of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah, 597.*
- *Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invade Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem, January 588.*
- *The Babylonians breach the walls of Jerusalem, July 18, 586; Zedekiah flees the city in the night and heads toward Jericho where he is captured and taken to Riblah in Syria, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters. There his sons are killed before him, his eyes put out and he is taken to Babylon in chains where he dies, July 586.*
- *Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard comes to Jerusalem with orders to burn the city to the ground. This he does, taking all the sacred objects of the temple to Babylon as booty. He burns the temple and tears down Jerusalem's walls. He also*

deports much of the elders and leading officials of the city who are left alive, executing some at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters, August 586.

- *Nebuzaradan returns to Jerusalem and takes another small group of Jews captive to Babylon, 582.*
- *Evil-Merodach, King of Babylon, frees Jehoiachin from prison and gives him a place at the king's table, 561.*
- *Babylon falls to Cyrus the Great of Persia, October 539.*
- *Cyrus decrees that the Jews of Babylon are free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord, 538.*
- *The second temple is completed and dedicated, March 12, 516, 70 years and 7 months after it was destroyed.*

KINGS OF JUDAH & THEIR REIGNS DURING EZEKIEL'S LIFETIME:

Josiah (640-609)

Jehoahaz (609 – 3 months)

Jehoiachim (609-598)

Jehoiachin (598-597 – 3 months)

Zedekiah (597-586)

Fall of Jerusalem and Judah – July –August 586

OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL:

(Note: This outline is modified from the outline in the NIV Study Bible.)

I. Prophecies of Judgment against Israel – Chapters 1-24

- A. Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision and Call: *1:1-3:27*
- B. Symbolic Acts Portraying the Siege of Jerusalem: *4:1-5:17*
- C. Prophecies Explaining Divine Judgment: *6:1-7:27*
- D. Vision of the Corrupted Temple: *8:1-11:25*
- E. Symbolic Acts Portraying Jerusalem's Exile: *12:1-28*
- F. Prophecies Explaining Divine Judgment: *13:1-24:27*

II. Prophecies of Judgment Against the Nations – Chapters 24-32

- A. Against Ammon: *25:1-7*
- B. Against Moab: *25:8-11*
- C. Against Edom: *25:12-14*
- D. Against Philistia: *25:15-17*
- E. Against Tyre: *26:1-28:19*
- F. Against Sidon: *28:20-24*
- G. A Note of Promise for Israel: *28:25-26*
- H. Against Egypt: *29:1-32:32*

III. Prophecies of Consolation for Israel – Chapters 33-48

- A. The Watchman: *33:1-20*
- B. Jerusalem's Fall Reported and Explained: *33:21-33*
- C. The Lord as the Good Shepherd: *34:1-31*
- D. Prophecies Against Edom: *35:1-15*
- E. Consolation for the Mountains of Israel: *36:1-15*

F. Summary of Ezekiel's Theology: 36:16-38

G. Vision of National Restoration (Valley of the Dry Bones): 37:1-14

H. The Final Battle with Gog and Magog: 38:1-39:29

I. The Vision of the Renewed Temple and Worship: 40:1-48:35

A NOTE ABOUT CHRONOLOGY:

You may note that some Bibles have a slightly different chronology for the reigns of the last kings of Judah and the date of the fall of Jerusalem. I follow many scholars who date the fall of Jerusalem as 586BC. Other scholars date the city's fall as 587. The discrepancy comes in the dates for the reigns of the kings plus trying to synchronize those dates with extra-Biblical sources like the court records of the Babylonian kings. There is also some debate about the differences between a king's reign as defined by the years of his life and a king's reign as the actual time he ruled from the throne of David, including time as the regent of his father who was still living. The discrepancies are small and are of no major theological significance, however, your Bible may be slightly different than the chronology used in this commentary and I wanted to clarify the differences.

THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

1:1-3 - These verses are the introduction to Ezekiel and give us the date of the beginning of his prophetic career. Ezekiel began his ministry when he was thirty years old, in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, which would have been 592BC. Ezekiel, along with his wife, was part of the exiles taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597. See *2 Kings 24*. Nebuchadnezzar's first exile of the Jews was the most important exile because most of Judah's leadership along with her king were taken to Babylon. Many priests were taken and Ezekiel was one of those priests. Ezekiel was 25 when he was taken captive which meant he had entered into his priestly apprenticeship but was not yet a full priest with regular duties in the temple. He would be learning all that was necessary to fulfill his priestly calling. Thus he exhibits throughout his prophecy a thorough knowledge of the temple and its rituals. His thirtieth year would have been the time when he became a full priest and took up his duties in the temple in Jerusalem. Instead God calls him as his prophet in a foreign land. He is the son of Buzi a priest who is otherwise unknown. Ezekiel therefore was of the tribe of Levi and a descendant of Aaron and his sons.

Ezekiel was on the banks of the Kebar River when the Word of the Lord came to him. He had been an exile for five years. The Kebar River is probably a reference to what was called the Great Canal, *nari kabari* in Babylonian. Many Jewish exiles lived nearby in a village called Tel-Abib. Ezekiel, using the Hebrew calendar and his age, gives the date of his first prophecy as the fifth day of the fourth month of his thirtieth year. The NLT transposes the Hebrew calendar into our calendar using Babylonian records along with the biblical data and dates his first prophecy as July 31, 593. Ezekiel's entire mission was to prophesy to the exiles in Babylon. There is no evidence that he ever went home to Jerusalem. His career is coterminous with Jeremiah's. Whereas Jeremiah prophesied to the people of Jerusalem, Ezekiel preached solely to the people in Babylon who lived in exile.

The first part of the book from *chapters 1-24* are prophecies given to the exiles before the fall of Jerusalem and warn the people that God's judgment is coming and not to think they will be going home soon. In this Ezekiel is similar to Jeremiah in that he is attacking the official

theology of the kings and priests that many of the exiles still believed even though they were now in Babylon. *Chapters 25-32* are prophecies against the nations similar to *Jeremiah 46-51* and *Isaiah 13-27*. It is impossible to tell when Ezekiel was given these prophecies. However, they do mark a division within Ezekiel's book between the two major phases of Ezekiel's ministry. *Chapters 33-39* are written to the surviving exiles after Jerusalem's fall in which Ezekiel tries to build up the Jews living in Babylon and help them remember they are still the people of God. This section contains the famous prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones stating that God would bring a united Israel back to the land and renew his people. The last section, *chapters 40-48*, was written sometime later than *chapters 33-39*. *33:21* was written in the 12th year of the exile which would have been 585. *40:1* was written in the 25th year of the exile which would have been 572. Since this is the latest part of Ezekiel's prophecy his career spanned from 592 to 572, some twenty years, all in Babylon.

Ezekiel says he was on the banks of the Kebar River when the heavens opened and he saw visions of God. His whole prophecy can be described as visions and his style is very different from the other prophets. He begins however with his call and the vision of God in the sky above him, seated upon his throne with the cherubim around him. The key to understanding Ezekiel is to note that he both hears from God and sees a vision of God in Babylon and not in Jerusalem or the Promiseland. God is therefore everywhere and can be worshipped everywhere, even by the exiles in captivity. They do not need a temple or to be in the land to know and worship God. Ezekiel's ministry helps lay the foundation for the Jews' faith for the centuries to come leading up to the birth of Jesus. He prepares the way for the Diaspora of the Jews and helps them redefine who they are as God's chosen people in the world.

1:4-9 - Ezekiel, standing by the Kebar Canal or River, looks up and sees a huge thunderstorm coming from the north. This would have been an extremely rare occurrence for late July in southern Iraq. The weather at that time of the year in the area around Babylon is almost always clear and very hot, usually 100 degrees plus, much like the American Southwest. To see a thunderstorm at that time of year coming from the north would have caused Ezekiel to wonder what was happening. Plus the more he observed the storm the more strange and amazing it became. God appeared to Job in a thunderstorm or tornado in *Job 38*. *Psalms 97* speaks of God surrounding himself with the clouds and thick darkness of the thunderstorm. Even more significant, when Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments *Deuteronomy 5* describes the mountain as ablaze with fire and God speaking out of the deep darkness that surrounded the mountain. God was giving Ezekiel a vision, a waking message in symbolic form of the glory of God.

The thunderstorm was unlike any Ezekiel had seen. There were flashes of lightning but the whole immense cloud was also surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the cloud glowed like molten metal. The closer the storm came the more detail Ezekiel could see. In the glowing center of the cloud he saw four living creatures. They looked human in form yet they had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight but they had the feet of a calf and they gleamed like polished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had hands like a man. All four of them had the faces and wings and their wings touched one another. The sculpted cherubim in Solomon's temple that guarded the Holy of Holies also had wings. See *2 Chronicles 3*. Many modern pictures depict them as having the faces of men but the bodies and feet of bulls. Each of the creatures Ezekiel saw went straight ahead rather than turning to move. Ezekiel's description is difficult to picture especially because of his description of the creatures as all moving straight

ahead and not turning when they moved. I believe he is saying they formed a circle with each creature on one side of the circle with their wings touching one another. The only other option is that they were aligned in a straight line with their wings touching but that does not appear to be what Ezekiel saw.

Isaiah in *Isaiah 6* saw the winged seraphim, the great angelic creatures surrounding the throne of God in heaven. Ezekiel's vision here is related to Isaiah's. The difference is Isaiah saw his vision of God in the temple in Jerusalem where God was thought to be enthroned upon the earth. Ezekiel saw the great angels that guard God's throne on the plains of Babylon above him in the sky! What was God doing there? It will be his prophetic task to help the exiles understand God was not limited to Jerusalem and the Promiseland. He did not even need a temple in which to be worshipped. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah in Jerusalem, was to help the Jews understand the official theology was bankrupt and that God was far greater than they imagined and was completely sovereign. Ezekiel was going to expand their vision and understanding of God.

1:10-14 - The four living creatures or cherubim or seraphim, Ezekiel never tells us exactly what they are, each have four faces. They have the face of a man that faces forward. On the right side was the face of a lion, on the left the face of an ox and in behind they had the face of an eagle. Each face has some symbolic meaning for Ezekiel but exactly what they are we cannot say with any certainty. Many Middle Eastern cultures represented the gods or heavenly beings as various animals including lions, bulls and eagles. These creatures were often displayed having wings as well. The meaning in Ezekiel's vision is that the cherubim, while having some human features, are far above humankind and are mysterious and amazing creatures that have immediate access to the presence and throne of God. They are as far above us as God is above them. They are however creatures, created beings and are not divine and coequal with God. They are his servants. John in *Revelation 4* describes four living creatures that surround God's throne in heaven. They are like a man, an ox, a lion and a flying eagle. In *Revelation* each creature is like one of the faces of the four creatures in *Ezekiel*. They are similar yet slightly different. Are they the same creatures? Probably, but it is unclear. The fact that John describes them as having similar characteristics as the four creatures in Ezekiel's vision says they are related. The truth is how does one describe a being for which we have no frame of reference? Plus both Ezekiel and John see these creatures in visions. Are the visions literal or filled with symbolic pictures? Someday in heaven we will see the cherubim face to face. Then we will know exactly what they look like.

The creatures have two pair of wings. One pair is spread out and touches the wings of the angel or creature next to it. The other pair of wings covers their bodies. Ezekiel doesn't say if the creatures had any kind of clothes or robes upon their bodies. Isaiah in his vision of the throne of God in *Isaiah 6* says that the cherubim he saw had six wings; with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they flew.

Ezekiel's most puzzling description is the direction of travel of the creatures. He said whenever they moved they always went straight ahead and never turned to the right or left. Wherever the spirit would go they would go. The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach*, which means wind or breath or spirit. Is *ruach* here the wind, or is it their spirits or God's Spirit? It makes the most sense to view it as God's Spirit, who is guiding them but the other two interpretations are also possible, especially since the creatures are in the midst of a great thunderstorm or windstorm. What does Ezekiel mean by they only went straight ahead? If they form a circle then the one in back would be going backwards when the one in front went straight ahead. Ezekiel's

description is confusing. Perhaps we simply need to understand that Ezekiel is trying to describe creatures whose appearance and movement is far beyond our comprehension. How else was he supposed to try and describe what he saw?

He goes on to describe their appearance which was like burning coals or torches, meaning they glowed with light. Bright fire moved back and forth among the creatures and lightning flashed out of their midst. When the creatures moved they moved like flashes of lightning, meaning they moved rapidly, faster than any earthly creature could move. This adds to the otherworldly picture of the four creatures Ezekiel saw. They are not of this world. They are supernatural.

1:15-18 - Ezekiel now adds another significant detail to his vision of the storm and the four creatures. There were wheels beside each creature on the ground. They sparkled like precious stones and each wheel looked alike. Each appeared to be a wheel intersecting a wheel and as they moved they would go in the direction the creatures faced. Their rims were high and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

One interpretation of the wheels is that they represent the mobility of God's Word that it was able to reach God's people anywhere, even in exile in Babylon. That seems as logical as any other possibility. If that is correct then God can not only speak to his people in Babylon his glory can be known by them in exile as well. He does not need a temple in Jerusalem to communicate with the Jews.

The eyes all around the rims represent the wisdom and knowledge of the creatures or of God. He sees everything, everywhere. The Lord is omniscient. John in *Revelation 4* describes the four living creatures he saw surrounding the throne of God as being full of eyes all around.

1:19-21 - When the living creatures moved with the cloud the wheels moved, no matter which way they went. And when the creatures rose from the ground the wheels went with them. They were not just for going about on the ground. Ezekiel says the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels so they went wherever the creatures went. Whether they stood still or moved, the wheels did the same. When he says the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels he is not saying the wheels were part of the creatures. They are separate yet they are tied to the four creatures and move at their command and whim.

1:22-28 - Over the living creatures above their heads Ezekiel sees an expanse. The word in Hebrew can be translated a firmament and is the same word used in *Genesis 1* to describe the dome of the sky God created to separate the earth and sea from the heavens. The firmament or expanse that Ezekiel sees here is not the same as the sky that we see on earth. It is related to the creatures and the great storm in which they move. That means that it is supernatural in nature and comes with the creatures.

Their wings are stretched out toward one another and touch each other under this expanse or dome. Ezekiel hears the sound of their wings that is different from the thunder of the storm. When the creatures move it sounds like the roar of rushing waters, a great waterfall or of the noise and shout of a great army. Ezekiel says it sounds like the voice of the Almighty, in Hebrew *Shaddai*. When the creatures stop moving they lower their wings and the noise stops.

When they stop a voice came from above the expanse or dome as the creatures lowered their wings. Above the expanse Ezekiel saw a throne that looked like it was made from sapphire or lapis lazuli, meaning it was a deep bright blue, which would have been a royal color and

stone. Upon the throne Ezekiel sees the figure of a man, but above the waist he cannot see any detail only that of a form that glows like white-hot metal. Even from the waist down the figure glows like fire with a brilliant light surrounding him. His appearance was bright like a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day. In other words his brilliance stood out from the rest of the storm and the creatures. They were bright but he was brighter still. When John in *Revelation 1* sees the risen, glorified Jesus he appears in a similar way. The Lord Jesus is so bright he glows like molten metal.

Ezekiel concludes that he was seeing the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Ezekiel is careful to say he saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord and not the Lord himself. The word for likeness however is the same word as is used in *Genesis 1* for human beings. We are made in the likeness of God. We are like him and resemble him. After the fall of humankind that likeness remains but is marred by sin. Ezekiel's point here is not that his vision is marred by sin but that what he saw was a likeness of God's glory revealed to him on earth. It is not the exact glory of God in heaven but it is as much as God can reveal to his prophet while he is on earth. Out of that likeness Ezekiel hears the voice of one speaking. As the voice continues in Ezekiel's call in chapter 2 there is no doubt it is the voice of the Lord himself.

The whole picture of the storm, the creatures, the expanse, the throne of God above the expanse and the brilliant figure that sits upon the throne, all point to God revealing his glory to his prophet in such a way that he can at least experience it through his senses. Ezekiel sees and hears God, not in a perfect way but in a likeness that leaves no doubt in his mind that the Lord is calling him and speaking to him. God condescends to reveal himself to his prophet because he has a mission for him to complete to his people. That vision of God would sustain Ezekiel through all the many difficulties of his task. It is often true of us today. We have a profound experience of the presence of God and it sustains us through the trials and difficulties of life.

Ezekiel sees the glory of God. Glory can mean his light, radiance, presence, holiness, beauty, majesty; all these words describe God's glory and the honor of his being. Ezekiel sees the glory of God in Babylon not in Jerusalem and the temple but in a pagan land, 900-1000 miles away from Jerusalem. The cherubim move wherever God goes! This is different from Isaiah's vision in *Isaiah 6*.

Chapter 2:

2:1-8 - God speaks to Ezekiel and tells him to stand up on his feet. He had been face down on the ground after he had seen God's glory. The Lord addresses him as "*Son of Man.*" That title God will use throughout Ezekiel's prophecy for him. It is different from the heavenly figure of *Daniel 7* and simply means a man, a human being, like C.S. Lewis' title for the children in the *Narnia Chronicles*; Son of Adam and Daughter of Eve. Ezekiel is a fallen, sinful human being that Yahweh Almighty is choosing to be his spokesperson and prophesy to his rebellious people.

The Spirit comes into Ezekiel and raises him to his feet. God has now endowed his prophet with his Spirit so he can hear God speak and have the power to say what God gives him to say. Ezekiel hears God address him and call him to go and be a prophet to the Israelites.

God tells Ezekiel he is sending him to the Israelites, a rebellious nation who has rebelled against the Lord and has been in revolt up to this very day. God tells him they are obstinate and stubborn. The parallel word "*revolt*" used in *verse 3* means a mutiny against a legally established vassal relationship. It was used in the Middle East to describe treaties and make covenants between a lesser and greater nation or king. Jehoiachim and Zedekiah both "*revolted*" against Nebuchadnezzar. Israel had revolted against the Lord! She agreed to be God's servant and then

actively rebelled against her rightful Lord and God and sinned by refusing to keep God's covenant he made with them. Only a stubborn people would do this. Literally the words for stubborn and obstinate mean stiff of face and firm of heart. God says tell them, "*This is what the Sovereign Lord says.*" Whether they listen or don't they will know a prophet of the Lord has spoken to them.

For his part Ezekiel is not to be afraid of them or their words. God tells Ezekiel whether briars and thorns are all around you or you live among scorpions do not be afraid, especially of what they say. They are a rebellious house. Five times in Ezekiel's call God tells him Israel is a rebellious house and people.

Twice God tells Ezekiel to speak God's Word to them whether they listen or fail to listen. Then he tells Ezekiel to listen to God and do not rebel like Israel against the Lord. Open your mouth and eat what I give you. There follows a vision of the scroll of God that he gives Ezekiel to eat. This is a symbol of his Word. Eating the scroll is a picture of Ezekiel obeying the Lord and telling the people what God said no matter what. That is his job as a prophet.

God allows Ezekiel to see his glory, fills him with his Spirit and then commissions him to be his prophet to the rebellious house of Israel. Notice he uses Israel and not Judah here. The exiles were all from Judah, but they may not have all been from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Plus God has still not forgotten all twelve of the tribes of Israel he called to be his own. Ezekiel's words will be to the whole house of Israel and not just to the exiles of the southern kingdom. Whether in reality there were members of the northern tribes among the exiles or it is simply symbolic Ezekiel is to speak to all of Israel. God knows where all his people live!

2:9-10 - Ezekiel sees a hand stretched out to him and in it is a scroll. Presumably the hand is the hand of the Lord although it could be one of the cherubim. The hand unrolls the scroll and it is written on both sides with words of lament, mourning and woe. The message Ezekiel is given to speak to the exiles will not be pleasant for them to hear; it will be bad news. That is why God told him say it whether they listen or don't. Judgment against sin is never pleasant to hear. It hurts to have our sins exposed. It causes us grief and regret but it is necessary in order for us to repent and be healed and restored. God knew this. Israel did not want to hear it, yet it was Ezekiel's message that helped them repent and make sense of their exile so that they could be restored and ready to return home when the time came for their restoration.

Chapter 3:

3:1-9 - Ezekiel's call to be God's prophet to Israel continues. He is told to eat the scroll that was in God's hand. Ezekiel does. It fills him up and he says it tasted like honey in his mouth. In *Jeremiah 15:16* Jeremiah says he ate God's words when they came to him, meaning he took them in, and they were a delight to him. John in *Revelation 10* was given a little scroll to eat that was sweet to the taste but bitter in his stomach. Ezekiel is given the scroll to eat and it tastes sweet in his mouth. The sweetness of the scroll is most likely a symbol of the joy that comes from being a prophet and receiving God's Word to speak. But like John in *Revelation* and Jeremiah one may have joy that God is speaking to you but there is often no joy in the message one must speak. God had already shown Ezekiel that the message he was given to speak to Israel was one of lament, mourning and woe. Jeremiah tells us the terrible personal consequences he suffered for being faithful to speak God's Word especially when it was an unrelenting message of judgment for Judah's sin. Ezekiel will suffer the same thing.

God tells Ezekiel to go to the house of Israel and not other nations of difficult speech. *Chapters 25-32 of Ezekiel* are prophecies against the nations but Ezekiel's call is to Israel. Jeremiah was to speak to Judah but also to the nations and God specifically said he was a prophet to the nations. God tells Ezekiel something totally different. He is to go to Israel, a people that speak the same language he does. God then says if I had sent you to the nations that speak a foreign tongue surely they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is unwilling to listen because their hearts are hard and they are stubborn. God says he will make Ezekiel as unyielding as they are. His forehead will be as hard as stone. Ezekiel is not to be afraid of them because they are a rebellious house.

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

3:10-15 - God sends Ezekiel to his people who are in exile and tells him to speak all the words God gives him. Tell them the Sovereign Lord says and then give them God's message whether they listen or don't. Some modern scholars try and say Ezekiel prophesied to Jerusalem and not the exiles based on higher critical literary studies of the words Ezekiel uses. The problem is they ignore the plain evidence of the text and of history. Those interpretations are to be rejected. Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles in Babylon at the same time Jeremiah was prophesying to the Jews still living in Jerusalem.

After God gave Ezekiel his call the Spirit lifted him up and brought him to the town of Tel Abib near the Kebar River or Canal where many of the exiles lived. When that happened he heard the rumbling sound of the wings of the great cherubim and the moving of the wheels beneath them. It was the sound the glory of the Lord made when it moved. Ezekiel adds a word of praise, "*May the glory of the Lord be praised in his dwelling place!*" One could take that to mean wherever the Lord is there is his glory. Or one could see it as referring to heaven where the Lord's glory dwells permanently.

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

3:16-21 - At the end of a week God speaks to Ezekiel. He tells him about the burden and the responsibility of being God's prophet. God has made Ezekiel a watchman for Israel. A watchman kept watch on the city walls at night when everyone else was asleep. If he saw an enemy coming he sounded the alarm and the city's troops would man the walls to defend the city. If he failed in his duty to watch and warn the city it could be overtaken by an enemy and the watchman would

be responsible. In the same way God has made Ezekiel responsible to warn the wicked and the righteous of their sin.

He says if a wicked person persists in their sin whether Ezekiel warns them or not they will die for their sins. But if Ezekiel failed to speak God's Word of warning to them God will hold Ezekiel responsible for the wicked person's death. If he warns them and they do not repent then the wicked man will bear his own sins. Similarly if a righteous person does evil, he or she will die for their own sin but if Ezekiel fails to warn them in order to help them turn back from sin then God will hold Ezekiel responsible for that righteous person's death. God gave Ezekiel the task of speaking his Word to the people and he will hold his prophet accountable for his task. How people respond to Ezekiel's preaching is not Ezekiel's responsibility. God will hold each person who hears Ezekiel accountable for how they respond to his message. What God needs from his prophet is faithfulness to his calling and task. Ezekiel has no power to make people respond to God's Word in a positive or negative way. That is out of his control. Each person is responsible to God's Word as they hear it. If they sin they will be held accountable for their sin whether they hear God's warning to repent or not.

Also, note that God tells Ezekiel that a righteous person who sins will die. His righteous deeds will not be remembered by God because he sinned and his sin now separates him from God. God must hold us accountable for our sin. This phrase in 3:20 explodes the myth that if my good outweighs my bad God will accept me into heaven. That is not correct. One sin undoes a lifetime of righteous living because sin is rebellion against God. God desires righteous living from us because he is holy and perfect. Any sin stains our relationship with him. God wants us to repent and turn from our sin so that he may forgive us. If we arrogantly assume that our good outweighs our bad we are only fooling ourselves and all that awaits us is God's judgment because we foolishly assumed we could come to him on the basis of our own good deeds.

3:22-27 - God spoke to Ezekiel about his responsibility as a prophet and then told him to go outside and stand on the plain near his home. He does and once again sees the glory of the Lord as he did near the Kebar River. Ezekiel falls face down on the ground in response. The Spirit of God raises him to his feet. Ezekiel says he came into him again. Does he mean the Spirit left Ezekiel after he had gone home and waited for the seven days? I don't think so. I think he simply means the Spirit filled him and got him on his feet once again. God's Spirit had indwelt his prophet and like us there are times even though the Spirit lives in us as believers that he fills us in ways we have not experienced before. I think that is what was happening to Ezekiel here.

The Spirit instructs Ezekiel to go back inside his home and shut himself inside his house. Then he warns him that people will come and tie him up with ropes and bind him so that he cannot go out among the people. God is warning him that the people will become afraid of Ezekiel and tie him up because he is acting strangely and they will be concerned he is not in his right mind. Who would report him to the authorities or the town elders? It could have been his wife!

Further God tells Ezekiel he will cause Ezekiel's tongue to stick to the roof of his mouth so that he will not be able to speak. God's prophet will not even be able to rebuke the people which God has told him to do! God says he will speak again to Ezekiel and when he does he is to say, *"This is what the Sovereign Lord says."* If people are going to listen to Ezekiel they will listen; if they are not ready to listen they will not. Ezekiel's job is to say what God gives him to say when he gives him to say it!

God's instructions to his prophet and his actions toward him isolate Ezekiel and make people concerned for him and suspicious of him. It is likely that many would have thought Ezekiel mentally unbalanced. He shuts himself in his house, he won't talk. When he does talk he goes on about seeing the glory of the Lord. What are people to think? When God gives him his new instructions in *chapter 4* the people's opinion of Ezekiel probably got worse!

Chapter 4:

4:1-3 - God tells Ezekiel while he is still tied up in his house to draw the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet. Then build model siege works against it and build a ramp up to it. Set up army camps around the clay tablet of Jerusalem and put up little battering rams against it. God tells him to take an iron pan and put it between Ezekiel and his clay tablet of Jerusalem, then turn and face the pan and the city. He is to lay siege to the clay city. The iron pan could symbolize several things. It could mean God has put up an iron barrier between him and Jerusalem so that the people cannot get to him. He will not listen to their prayers and they will not be able to resist. The other possibility is that the iron barrier represents Nebuchadnezzar and his army and the clay tablet of Jerusalem will not be able to stand against the iron pan of Babylon. The most likely meaning is that both things are true and the symbolic action had double meaning for the Jews who see it.

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah and other prophets, is told by God to not only speak God's Word to his people but to portray his Word in symbolic, prophetic actions. God's Word could be spoken and it could be demonstrated or acted out in some dramatic way. God's instructions were not easy for Ezekiel to carry out, but he had seen the glory of the Lord and the Lord had called him to be a prophet to the exiles. Ezekiel would faithfully try and carry out God's instructions to him. He draws Jerusalem on the clay and builds a little model siege against his clay city. God is going to show his people and his prophet the weight of their sin. The burden of that revelation is going to fall on God's prophet. Even though many probably thought Ezekiel touched in his mind they would not be able to miss the meaning of what he was doing. They might have thought Ezekiel crazy but the message was received.

4:4-8 - Ezekiel is told to lie on his left side before the model of the siege of Jerusalem he has made. He is to *"put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself."* Exactly how Ezekiel is to place the sin of Israel upon himself is unclear. Was he to put the iron pan on his side as he lay toward his model city? I don't think so because I don't believe the pan is a symbol of Israel and Judah's sin. I think lying on his side in front of the clay picture of Jerusalem while being tied up inside his house was the way he was to bear the people's sin. Lying there for 390 days on his left side is meant to show he is bearing Israel's sin. Switching sides and lying on his right side for 40 days is bearing Judah's. Taken together Ezekiel lies on his side inside his home isolated from his people, laying siege to his model Jerusalem for over fourteen months! This would not have helped people's opinion of Ezekiel, including his wife! They must have thought him crazy.

God tells Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days to symbolize the sins of the house of Israel. 390 is approximately the number of years from Ezekiel in exile back to the year that Jeroboam I built the two calf shrines in Bethel and Dan and led Israel into idolatry. God does not forget!!! Jeroboam's actions were the seed of Israel's idolatry. Both *Kings* and the prophets trace Israel's problems back to Jeroboam's unfaithfulness to God because not only did he build the shrines and lead the people to abandon worship at the Lord's temple, he also appointed non-Levitical priests to lead the people in worshipping Yahweh along with the idols he had made. He

introduced an idolatrous syncretistic religion in Israel and false priests to lead and teach the people. From the beginning the north kingdom Israel was never fully faithful to Yahweh because of Jeroboam's sin. That is what Ezekiel is "*bearing*" while lying on his left side.

After Ezekiel bore Israel's sin on his left side he was to turn over on his right side and stay there for 40 days. The 40 days represented the sins of Judah. Ezekiel is to lie on his right side and prophesy against Jerusalem for those 40 days, one day for each year of Judah's sin. 40 years back from 592 the year Ezekiel began his prophetic career in exile would be 632. 632 was the ninth year of King Josiah's reign. He would have been 17 years old. This would have been 9 years before the Book of the Law was found in the temple. Josiah had already ordered the temple to be restored before then but the thorough reform of Judah's faith and the destruction of the high places did not take place till the 18th year of his reign and following which was 623. The point is Josiah inherited an idolatrous kingdom from Amon his father and Manasseh his grandfather. He tried to reform it and partially succeeded. But all of Josiah's reforms are abandoned by his sons and grandsons that followed him. Judah by Ezekiel's day had returned to her idolatrous ways. She also needed to see and bear her sins. Ezekiel's actions were designed to help the exiles understand this.

Why did God tell Ezekiel only 40 years for Judah's sin? Why not go all the way back to King Solomon's time 400 years before? I think there are two reasons. First, Judah had at least some good and faithful kings who worshipped and served the Lord as David did. It would not have been just and fair to label the entire 400 years of Judah's history as idolatrous unlike Israel's. Second, Ezekiel is speaking to the exiles in Babylon. Almost all of them were alive when Josiah was king. They knew the condition of Judah when Josiah took the throne. They had experienced his reforms and they had also experienced the nation's return to idolatry and apostasy. This was their living history unlike the history of the north kingdom which none of them had experienced even though they knew it.

God says he will tie up Ezekiel with ropes so that he cannot turn from one side to the other until he has finished all the days of his siege of Jerusalem. This may be symbolic because in the very next passage he instructs Ezekiel concerning what he is to eat during this time. It would be impossible to cook anything if he is tied up and could not move. I think God is telling his prophet that he will not be released from this symbolic siege until he is finished with it. God will compel Ezekiel to lie on his side every day until the sins of Israel and Judah are demonstrated to God's people in exile. It is the burden of being a prophet. Even today preaching God's Word to God's people comes with a price.

4:9-17 - God instructs Ezekiel what to eat as he is shut up in his home during his symbolic siege of Jerusalem. He is not to eat normal food but special bread for which God gives him the recipe. He is to take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in a storage jar, meaning a pottery jar, and make bread from them. Wheat and barley were the two main grains grown in Israel and the Near East. Beans and lentils were legumes that are high in protein. Millet and spelt are two other grains that are lesser in quality than wheat and barley. Spelt was a form of rye and was often called the poor man's wheat. Taken together the six ingredients God tells Ezekiel to use would have produced bread that had high protein and nutritional content. Ezekiel very easily could have survived on bread from God's recipe and would have emerged from his siege in reasonable health.

He is to measure out twenty shekels of food which is about 8 ounces or a cup of the grains to eat every day at set times. God does not tell him the times so presumably that was up to

Ezekiel to decide. He is allowed a sixth of a hin or 2/3 of a quart of water to drink each day which was also to be drunk at set times. I would guess he was to drink the water at the same time as he was to eat the bread he baked. Ezekiel does not tell us when he ate but I would guess it was morning and evening. God's rations are not huge and Ezekiel almost certainly would have lost weight and been thin when he emerged from his home, but he would have survived. Many in Jerusalem would not.

God tells him to eat the bread like he would a barley cake, which means the bread he was baking was probably something like cornbread for us. It didn't look like the normal flat bread of the Middle East. It was too dense. He was to bake it each day using human excrement for fuel, which was unclean and so the bread Ezekiel ate would have also been unclean. God adds that in this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where he will drive them. They will eat the food of foreign lands. Even Ezekiel's everyday routine was designed to be a prophetic message by God!

When God tells Ezekiel to cook his special bread using human waste as fuel the apprentice priest finally protests! He has never eaten anything unclean nor defiled himself with it. He begs God to change his mind. It is interesting to note that Ezekiel's protest is similar to Peter's protest in *Acts 10* when he sees the vision of the great sheet from heaven. Peter is told to eat because God has made all things clean meaning the Gentiles. Ezekiel gets a reprieve and is allowed to use cow dung for his cooking fires which presumably would have been kosher though there is not a specific law in the Torah that speaks to its use or non-use for cooking. The context however leads one to believe it would have been clean to use cow dung.

God gives Ezekiel the reason he is to bake his special bread and eat it every day during his symbolic siege of Jerusalem. He is going to cut off the food supply of Jerusalem and the people will eat rationed food and drink rationed water in despair, because the food and water will be scarce. Famine will come to the city and they will waste away in the sight of each other because of their sin. The *Book of Jeremiah* confirms these conditions in Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege. In fact, the famine was so great people began to eat their dead in order to survive. Many perished in the city not in battle but from starvation!

Chapter 5:

5:1-4 - God tells Ezekiel to take a sharp sword and using it as a razor shave his head and beard. He is to cut off all the hair on his head when his symbolic siege of Jerusalem is finished. The Israelites in grief over someone close to them dying would often shave their heads in mourning. However, in the rules for priests in *Leviticus 21* they are told never to shave their heads or their beards or cut their bodies because they are holy to the Lord. Here God tells Ezekiel to violate those instructions. Shaving his head would have been seen as a sign that Ezekiel was grieving over someone's death and it would be seen as highly unusual because he was a priest and the priests were allowed to become unclean for only a close family relative. They could touch their relative's dead body but for no one else were they to become unclean. To our knowledge no one in Ezekiel's immediate family had died yet now he was shaving his head and beard and making himself unclean by God's command.

After he had shaved his head he was to take a third of his hair and burn it inside the city. Take a third of his hair and strike it with the sword all around the city and a third and scatter it to the wind. This was to be a symbol that God would pursue the people of Jerusalem with the sword. The language of this passage is difficult because it sounds as if Ezekiel is to go to Jerusalem and burn his hair or he is already in Jerusalem. This is one of those passages that cause

some scholars to believe he really prophesied in the city and not in Babylon. However, so much of Ezekiel is highly symbolic it is more probable that God is telling Ezekiel to use his clay drawing of Jerusalem that he has laid siege to for fourteen months to represent the city. It is also interesting to note that when a Nazarite fulfilled his vow before the Lord he was to shave off his hair and burn it along with the fellowship offering he brought as a sign his vow was fulfilled. I do not know if Ezekiel's actions here have anything to do with God vowing he will destroy Jerusalem and Ezekiel becomes his stand in but the connection is intriguing.

God tells Ezekiel to take a few strands of his hair and save them in a fold in his garment then take a few strands of the hair he saved and throw them into the fire and burn them up. Thus a fire will spread to the whole house of Israel. The few strands of hair Ezekiel saved probably represent the exiles, but some of them will also be killed along the way. Judgment is coming on Jerusalem and the house of Israel.

5:5-17 - God finally gives Ezekiel an explanation for all his symbolic actions. He is going to judge Jerusalem. He has set the city in the center of the nations around her to be a witness to God yet she has rebelled against the Lord and not followed God's Law. In fact she has rebelled against God's Law even more than the pagan nations around her. She has rejected God in her wickedness. Jerusalem has gone beyond the moral standards of even the pagan nations to which she was to be a witness! She is even more wicked and rebellious than they are!

God therefore is against the city and the people of Judah. God says because of her detestable idols he will do what he has never done nor will ever do again. In the midst of the city fathers will eat their children and children their fathers. Famine will come to Jerusalem that will be so great the people will become cannibals. Jeremiah reported this as well. God will punish the people of Jerusalem and scatter her survivors to the winds. He will withdraw his favor from her and have no pity on her. A third of her people will die of plague and famine; a third will fall by the sword and a third God will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword.

When all this has happened then God's anger towards Jerusalem for all her sins will subside and God will be avenged for all her wickedness and idolatry. Only then will the people know that the Lord has truly spoken through his prophets to them. He will make Jerusalem a ruin and reproach among the nations, an object of taunting and horror to all who see her and pass by her. God will fire his deadly arrows of famine at Jerusalem. He will shoot to destroy her. In fact he will cut off her food supply and even more famine will come. He will send famine and wild beasts against the city. Plague and sword will sweep through her. Famine, plague, sword or war are three of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse John sees in *Revelation 6*.

If Ezekiel began his symbolic siege the year in which he was called then it would have been 592. A year later in 591 he would have completed it. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem in December of 588. Ezekiel finishes his siege three years before Nebuchadnezzar begins his. The exiles under the influence of the official theology would have rejected Ezekiel's word and believed instead that they would soon go home and Jehoiachin would be released. Ezekiel had to completely smash the false official theology in order for the exiles to face the truth of their sin and the sin of all the Jews. His mission to the exiles was similar to Jeremiah's mission to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. Yet the exiles that lived in Tel Abib must have thought Ezekiel mad and touched in his mind. They almost certainly used that as an excuse to discount his words to them.

Chapter 6:

6:1-7 - God tells Ezekiel to speak against the mountains of Israel because they have been used as high places for the worship of pagan idols. He is to prophesy against the mountains, hills, ravines and valleys. There are various mountain ranges in the land of Israel. There is Mt. Hermon in the far north, the mountains and hill country of Galilee, the Samaritan mountains that run between the Jordan Valley and the coast, the mountains of Judea or the Judean hills which are between the Dead Sea and the coast and the mountains east of the Jordan, like the Golan Heights and the high country of Moab and Ammon. In Ezekiel's day the Jews lived predominantly in the hill country of Judea. Galilee and the Samaritan mountains were populated mostly by what would become the Samaritans, peoples who had been transplanted by the Assyrians to Israel. Josiah had retaken much of that territory and made it part of Judah again but few Jews actually lived there. However, whether Jew or pagan the mountains of the Promiseland were being used as pagan high places in Ezekiel's day. God says speak against them all.

God is going to bring a sword against the mountains and high country of Israel. That sword will smash the altars and destroy the people right in front of their idols. God will scatter bones around the pagan altars to defile them. Wherever the Jews live the Lord will bring the sword to smash their idols and ruin their altars to the pagan gods. The idols and altars the people have made will be destroyed and the people slaughtered. Then they will know that the Lord is God! The sad fact is King Josiah had smashed the idols and defiled the high places all over Judah and Israel in his reforms which took place beginning in 623. See *2 Kings 23* and *2 Chronicles 34-35*. If Ezekiel gives this prophecy after his symbolic siege of Jerusalem then the year is 591. It only took the Jews thirty years to rebuild all their pagan altars and high places and completely undo what Josiah had done. In one generation they had returned to their pagan idolatry and that is the reason God sent the Babylonians to judge his people. They had rebelled against him!

6:8-10 - God will spare some of his people from the sword but they will be scattered among the nations. The northern tribes of Israel were scattered and destroyed in 721 by the Assyrians. Some of them fled south to Judah and swelled its population. Now in Ezekiel's day the southern tribes that made up Judah were being scattered to Babylon. Ezekiel had already been exiled with a group of Jews the Babylonians had sent into captivity with King Jehoiachin in 597. Most of the country's leadership had been exiled with the king. Many others including King Zedekiah would be either executed or exiled in 586 when Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed Jerusalem.

God says when the captives arrive at the nations to which God has sent them, namely Babylon, then they will remember the Lord. They will finally understand how rebellious they have been. Their *"adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me"* and their lust for their idols have grieved God. They will loathe themselves for all the evil they have done. God says at least some of the exiles will repent of their sin. Their guilt will not produce despair and doubt but godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Paul speaks of this kind of godly sorrow in *2 Corinthians 7*. Their sorrow over their sins will lead them back to God in repentance. That is exactly what happened with some of the exiles and out of them God preserved a remnant of his people with which he could start over and preserve until he could send their Messiah, Jesus, 500 years later.

6:11-14 - God returns to the theme of judgment. He tells Ezekiel to stamp his feet and clap his hands and cry out. This behavior is not cheering for something but grieving over people or a situation. In context it sounds like these actions depict shock and great sadness. God tells Ezekiel to respond this way because of the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel. Here again Ezekiel emphasizes all of Israel and not just Judah. He is not prophesying against the north

kingdom but the whole people of God. History and tradition call the ten northern tribes the lost tribes of Israel. Obviously God knows where they are and who they are. They are not lost to him.

The Lord says Israel will fall by sword, famine and plague, three of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Revelation 6*. Jeremiah also prophesies the same thing. See *Jeremiah 21*. Those far away will die by the plague; those near will die by the sword and whoever survives the first two calamities will die of famine. God will spend his righteous wrath on Israel for all her sins of idolatry. When her people lie slain among their idols, around their altars and on their high places where they burned incense to their pagan gods then they will know that the Lord is God and their pagan idols were worthless. The Lord will stretch out his hand against the land and it will lie desolate from the desert, which is the Negev in southern Judah, to Diblah, wherever they live. Diblah is only mentioned here in the Bible. Some Hebrew manuscripts read Riblah, which is in northern Syria on the Euphrates River, which biblically is the far northern border of the Promiseland. It was also where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters during the final siege of Jerusalem from 588-586. Otherwise Diblah is unknown. God says when the people see the land destroyed then they will know that the Lord is God! Their idols could not help them; in fact their worship of those idols was the very reason God was judging them.

Chapter 7:

7:1-9 - God tells Ezekiel the end has come for Judah and Israel. He uses three words like titles for the same event: the End, Disaster, and Doom. The end is coming and it is now upon them. God is going to unleash his anger against Judah and judge her according to her conduct. He is going to repay the people for all their detestable practices, namely their idolatry and wickedness. He will not look upon them or pity them to spare them. He will instead repay them for their deeds, then they will know he is the Lord. Ezekiel repeats the same refrain in *verses 3-4* and *8-9*. He declares that the time has come and the day is near. There is panic not joy upon the mountains of Israel. Jerusalem was set on the slopes of Mt. Moriah above the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys. The disaster that is coming is unheard-of; it is without precedence. Doom has come. Doom means judgment, destiny and ruin.

7:10-14 - The day is here, Doom has come. The rod has budded and arrogance has blossomed. This is a curious phrase because of the use of the word rod. In *verse 11* Ezekiel uses rod in its more traditional sense as a shepherd's rod that he used to discipline the sheep to get the sheep to go where he wanted it to go. Often rod is used in this way as an instrument of punishment. That is clearly its use in *verse 11*. The rod in fact is Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army. God will use it to punish Judah. However, in *verse 10* Ezekiel says the rod budded and parallels the phrase with arrogance has blossomed. The only other time in the Old Testament that a rod buds or blossoms is Aaron's staff that sprouted almond blossoms in *Numbers 17*. The Hebrew word for rod in *Ezekiel* is the same as staff in *Numbers*. Aaron's rod blossomed in *Numbers 17* to show that Aaron was God's chosen priest and that the Levites were God's chosen tribe from which the priests were to come. This was in response to the Israelites' grumbling against Moses and Aaron and their leadership. Here in *Ezekiel 7* the budding rod represents the Lord's time of punishment upon a wicked people. Doom has come. God will deal with their arrogance which was epitomized by the official theology which said as long as they had the temple in Jerusalem and a king from David's line on the throne of Judah everything would be all right. They used that theology as an excuse to mix the worship of God with pagan worship and to live a wicked,

immoral lifestyle, thinking that God was still pleased with them. God says their arrogance has budded and now he will use the "rod" of Babylon to punish them.

God says none of "that crowd", meaning the people who have rebelled against God, will survive. If someone has bought land from one of these people they will lose it because God is determined to wipe them out. Not one of them will escape because of their sins. No one will preserve his life even though they blow the trumpet to sound the alarm and prepare for battle. God's wrath is upon the whole "crowd!"

7:15-22 - Outside the city is the sword and inside are plague and famine. Once again Ezekiel mentions three of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse from *Revelation 6*. Those who survive the sword inside the city will perish from famine and plague during the siege. Anyone who survives will flee to the mountains but they will moan like doves and be listless and weak with shock and hunger. Ezekiel is referring to the mournful cry of a dove. Their guilt over their sin will overwhelm them because the Lord has taken out his wrath upon them and they will know it. They will be in mourning with sackcloth and shaved heads. They will be covered with shame.

Their silver and gold they will throw into the streets because it cannot help them anymore. They had trusted in their riches and it will become to them an unclean thing. In their greed they had thought what money could buy them would satisfy but they will discover that money is powerless in the face of God's wrath over their sin. The worst thing they did with their silver and gold was use it to make their detestable idols and vile images. They were so proud of them. God will hand it all over to foreigners to plunder and loot. The "wicked of the earth" will defile it. The wicked here is the army of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. God will turn his face away from Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonians will do what the Jews thought could never be done. They will desecrate "my treasured place", meaning the Lord's temple. They will enter it and desecrate it. Five years after Ezekiel gives this prophecy in August of 586 Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, gave the order for his troops to burn the temple to the ground and destroy it. This happened after they had taken everything of value from the temple to Babylon as booty. Ezekiel's words were fulfilled and the official theology was shattered.

7:23-27 - God says to prepare chains for the prisoners of Judah because the land is full of bloodshed and Jerusalem with violence. God is about to bring "the most wicked of nations" to take possession of the city and the land. Ezekiel means Babylon. There is very little of redeeming value in Babylon; in God's sight it is the most vile and wicked of nations. No wonder *Habakkuk* wrestled with God over why he could allow Babylon of all peoples to conquer Jerusalem and destroy Judah. How could God use such a people as an instrument of his justice? They deserved his wrath even more than Judah did!

God is going to put an end to the pride of Zedekiah and his court, of the priests and their temple, everything that is upheld by the official theology. The temple itself will be desecrated. Ezekiel mentions sanctuaries. Normally one would think of the temple. It is possible by using the plural sanctuaries he is also referring to their palaces and fine houses besides the temple of the Lord in which they trusted. The leaders and nobles will seek peace and find none. As Jeremiah had said their false court prophets kept preaching peace when there was none. See *Jeremiah 6*. Terror will overtake them, calamity upon calamity.

Ezekiel says they will try and "get a vision from the prophet; the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders." These are the three great streams of

God's revelation in Israel and they also represent the three great sections of the Old Testament scriptures. This is the three-pronged system of revelation in Judah that they used to tell the government and the people what to do. The leadership of the country used these three ways to try and discern the Lord's will in any given situation. Ezekiel and the other prophets expose how it had been corrupted by sin among the leaders and so any conclusions about God's will and direction were false. First he mentions the vision from the prophet. There were true prophets in Israel and Judah but the whole movement of the prophets had been co-opted by the kings and been turned into the court prophets who most often simply told the king what he wanted to hear. The teaching of the Law by the priests was the proper function of the priests of the temple of God. But they too had been co-opted by the kings and their power so that there was no consistent teaching of the will of God among the people. The people did not know God's Law. The priests abandon their teaching function because they had paganized the religion of Yahweh. They had become like the Sadducees in the New Testament. As long as they kept up the temple and its rituals and gave Yahweh his due with the sacrifices everything was fine! The third stream of revelation is the counsel of the elders. Jeremiah in *Jeremiah 18* calls this the counsel of the wise. This represents the wisdom tradition of Judah and Israel seen in books such as *Proverbs* and *Job*. The elders possessed wisdom from God based on their faith in Yahweh and observations of life. When they abandon their fear of the Lord all they had left was human wisdom for the kings which most often consisted in counseling the kings to trust in Egypt and other alliances against Babylon. This appeared prudent political policy at the time but was folly in God's sight because it ignored their sin and rebellion against God!

Ezekiel says because all three streams of revelation to Judah have been corrupted by sin, greed and idolatry God will punish them according to their conduct. By their own standards he will judge them. The king will mourn and his court will be in despair. Then they will all know that Yahweh is God alone!

Chapter 8:

8:1-4 - Days after God releases Ezekiel from his symbolic siege of Jerusalem he has another vision. He gives the date as in the sixth year of Jehoiachin's exile in the sixth month on the fifth day. The NLT transposes the date from the Hebrew calendar into our modern calendar and gives it as September 17, 591. I had figured the date in my study Bible notes as August 5, 591. Either way this would be in the sixth year of Ezekiel's exile and the second year of his prophetic career.

Ezekiel says he was in his house and the elders of Judah were with him. Why had the elders come to see him? Were they concerned for his health? Did they accept the fact that Ezekiel was a prophet? Were they trying to gauge whether he was a threat to the other exiles that lived around him? We do not know. As they are sitting together God comes to Ezekiel again. He has another vision. This time he sees the figure of a man but who is definitely not human. From the waist down he is like fire and from the waist up he glowed like molten metal. He stretches out his hand and grabs Ezekiel by the hair of his head. Is this an angel or a theophany of God? It is difficult to know, but I think this is a theophany of some sort.

In his vision Ezekiel experiences the Spirit lifting him up into the air like a bird flying and he takes Ezekiel to Jerusalem, to the temple and the north gate of the inner court of the temple. The inner court is where the altar and the bronze sea were located right before the entrance to the holy place where only the priests could go. Ezekiel comments that the north gate was where the idol that provoked the Lord's jealousy stood. No biblical reference tells us to what pagan god the idol was dedicated. The fact that a pagan idol had been set up in the inner court of

the Lord's temple itself was cause enough for the Lord to be jealous for his own house. Ezekiel says there by the idol in the inner court of the temple the glory of the Lord appeared to him as he had seen a year before near the banks of the Kebar Canal in Babylon. Despite all the idols God's glory and presence are still in his temple. Yet Judah's idols are provoking the Lord to jealousy for his name and his house. This vision is a warning to the elders of Judah living in Babylon that God's patience has run out.

8:5-6 - Ezekiel is told to look toward the north and he sees the "*idol of jealousy*" standing on the north side of the altar of God in the temple. God asks his prophet if he sees the "*detestable things*" the house of Israel is doing in the Lord's temple. The things they are doing will drive the Lord far from his sanctuary. He then says "*you will see things that are even more detestable.*" This is a refrain that the Lord uses with Ezekiel three more times in *chapter 8*. Each time the practices are more detestable to God than before. God is showing Ezekiel the extent of Israel's idolatry not out in the countryside on the high places but in the Lord's own temple! The official theology was so twisted that the priests and leaders thought they could worship idols along with Yahweh even in his temple and God would still protect them because he would never allow his temple where his name dwelt to be destroyed. They had completely divorced their worship of God from their behavior and obligation to obey God's commandments. They had violated the covenant the Lord had made with his people. They were rejecting him. God is showing Ezekiel the evidence of their adultery so that he will understand why God will reject them. This vision is also given to the Jewish elders in Babylon in order to share with them the Lord's anger and jealousy so they will understand what they have done and why God has allowed their exile to happen.

8:7-13 - God brings Ezekiel to the entrance to the court and a hole in the wall. He tells him to dig in the wall and he does so and finds a doorway there. God asks Ezekiel to go in and see the wicked and detestable things the elders of Israel are doing inside the temple. When Ezekiel enters he sees paintings or drawings of all sorts of "*crawling things*" and detestable animals along with all the idols being worshipped by the Jews. I am reminded of Paul's description in *Romans 1* of the human descent into idolatry when people abandon the worship of God their Creator. They exchange it for images of mortal man, animals, birds and finally reptiles and snakes. These creatures were probably ones that were considered unclean by the Law of Moses, animals God said do not eat. Now the people of Israel were worshipping them and idols that represented them!

In front of all these idols in an inner room in the temple stood the seventy elders of Israel, including Jaazaniah son of Shaphan. Shaphan was the name of the secretary to King Josiah who was one of those who found the Book of the Law during Josiah's restoration of the temple of the Lord. It is possible that Jaazaniah was one of Shaphan's sons. If that is the case then Jaazaniah had abandon his father's faith for the detestable idols in the temple. The seventy elders of Israel first appear in *Numbers 16* when God anointed them with his Spirit. In Jesus' day the seventy elders had become the council of the Sanhedrin, the political and religious leaders of the Jews headed by the High Priest. Here those who are the leaders of the people are participating in the worst kind of idolatry and leading the people of God astray. They were offering incense which represented prayers and worship to what God named detestable idols!

God asks Ezekiel if he sees what is happening and what the elders are doing. They are in the darkness each at the shrine of his own idol. Their thinking is so twisted that they believe what

they do inside the temple in the dark the Lord does not see. Further they are praying to the idols because they believe the Lord has forsaken the land and so they are turning to pagan gods for help rather than repenting and turning back to the Lord. What makes this scene in Ezekiel's vision even more powerful is that Ezekiel is sharing what God is showing him with the elders of the Jews in Babylon. The elders committing idolatry in the temple were men the elders in Babylon knew! They had probably even served with them. Now they were betraying the Lord. How could the elders with Ezekiel continue to even hold onto the official theology in the face of such blatant sin?

8:14-18 - God brings Ezekiel to the north gate of the temple, probably the entrance to the inner court where the altar stood. He saw women sitting there mourning for Tammuz. Tammuz was the Babylonian god of spring and consort to Ishtar the goddess of love and fertility, the earth mother. When the plants would wither in the heat of summer and the cold of winter the Babylonians would mourn over Tammuz whom they believed had died. In their rituals they believed Tammuz would come back to life again in the spring. There right in the temple Ezekiel sees the women of Judah mourning over a pagan Babylonian god who dies. They have abandoned the living God who is the Creator of all things who never dies!

God then brings Ezekiel into the inner court of the house of the Lord right up to the entrance to the temple itself, between the altar and the great portico or porch with the two bronze columns Solomon had cast to adorn the entrance to the temple. There Ezekiel sees 25 men bowing down with their backs to the temple facing east toward the Mount of Olives. They were bowing down to the sun in the east. By Jesus' day all synagogues faced Jerusalem and the temple because that was where God had told the Jews to worship. Here the men turn away from God to worship the sun, something many pagan peoples did.

The act of turning their backs on the temple is more than ritual it is symbolic of their hearts as well. Judah has turned their backs upon God, even in the house of the Lord itself. Their worship of idols has led to violence and wicked behavior in the land. When we stop loving God we inevitably stop loving people too. They have violated God's covenant and broken his Ten Commandments. God will judge them. He tells Ezekiel to look at them putting the branch to their nose. This could refer to some kind of smudging ritual or maybe even smoking some kind of drug to induce a trance in their pagan worship. If that is the case then smoking drugs is related to pagan worship and is something Christians today should absolutely avoid!

God says because they are doing all these detestable things he will not have pity on them or spare them. Even if they cry out to him and shout to him he will not listen. Their prayers for deliverance will not reach him because of their sin. Judah is past the point of repentance. Only a terrible judgment awaits them. Ezekiel is telling all of this to the elders of the Jews who are with him in his house in Babylon. What were they thinking?

Chapter 9:

9:1-6 - Ezekiel hears God call for the guards of the city. He sees six men come to the upper gate on the north of the temple along with a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit in his hand. A writing kit was a small rectangular box that had space for reeds which served as pens and several hollowed spaces that held the ink which was in the form of a dried cake. One dipped the wet reed in the ink cake and the result was ink that one could write upon parchment or more likely papyrus. The man in linen represents a scribe. The guards have deadly weapons in their hands, probably swords. The seven men come and stand by the bronze altar in front of the temple.

Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord rise up from above the cherubim, presumably above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, and move to the threshold of the temple itself. God's glory leaves the Ark and moves to the doorway of the temple. The elders listening to Ezekiel would have viewed this as an ominous sign. God then speaks to the scribe dressed in linen, probably an angel, and tells him to go throughout Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things done in the city. God's angelic scribe is going to mark on the foreheads those of the Jews who are still faithful to God and who grieve over Jerusalem's sins. The mark in Ezekiel's vision is obviously a spiritual mark. This is very similar to John's vision in *Revelation 7* when God puts a seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 that are to be preserved from spiritual Israel, meaning the church. In *Revelation 13* the false prophet causes everyone on the earth to receive a mark on their right hands or foreheads without which no one could buy or sell. The mark is the name of the beast or the number of the beast, the antichrist, which is a human number, 666. In *Revelation 14* John contrasts those who have received the name and mark of the beast with the 144,000 who have the name of God and the Lamb on their foreheads. In Ezekiel the mark of God upon faithful Jews is a spiritual mark. Using *Ezekiel 9* as a guide it is clear that John in *Revelation* also views the mark of God and the mark of the beast as a spiritual mark. Is Ezekiel's mark the name of God, Yahweh, like God's mark in *Revelation 7 & 14*? It is possible. In any case to see the mark of the beast, which is its name, as anything other than spiritual, representing where one's allegiance and heart lies, seems ludicrous. It is not, contrary to some modern prophecy commentators, RFI chips in the hand or forehead. The mark of the beast is the opposite of God's mark. It is a sign that people belong to the beast and the false prophet, meaning their hearts belong to Satan!

God tells the six guards to follow the angelic scribe and kill without mercy those who do not have the mark of God on their foreheads. Kill them all, old and young, men and women and even children. Start at the Lord's sanctuary. The angel guards begin with the elders who were in front of the temple, bowing down to the sun. God is judging his people according to their hearts. Just because someone is a Jew does not guarantee their safety. The condition of their heart towards God is what will determine whether they are saved in the destruction of Jerusalem. What Ezekiel sees is a vision of God's angels slaughtering the unfaithful people of Jerusalem. Historically the Babylonian army was the instrument of God's judgment upon Judah. Ezekiel shows us that the Babylonians would have never been able to attack and destroy Jerusalem and kill so many Jews unless God beforehand had determined their fate. His justice will be done.

9:7-11 - God tells his angelic guard to defile the temple and fill its courts with the dead. They go out and begin killing in the city. In his vision Ezekiel is left alone in the temple and he falls face down crying out to the Lord. He asks God if he is going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in his wrath upon Jerusalem. God answers that the sin of Israel and Judah is "*exceedingly great.*" The land is full of injustice and bloodshed, which is the natural result of abandoning the worship of God for the worship of pagan idols. When one stops loving God one also stops loving people. The people say the Lord has forsaken the land and the Lord does not see. He doesn't know their troubles. They are unable to connect their sin with God's distance from them. As a note in my study Bible says, "We destroy society through injustice and greed. Then we complain that God has ignored us and cannot see our troubles or help us. God will not take responsibility for our sins." God says he will therefore bring down upon them what their sins deserve. He will show them no pity and will not spare them. Just as God tells Ezekiel this the angelic guards return and report that they have done as the Lord has commanded them. They have slain all those in

Jerusalem without God's mark on their foreheads. God's justice has been pronounced and carried out in the spiritual realm. Now all that remains is for that justice to be carried out in history. By his vision Ezekiel is telling the elders Jerusalem is doomed as are its people. Nothing the Jews do will stop God from carrying out his just and righteous sentence on the Jews for their sin. The official theology is exposed as a deception and a trap.

Chapter 10:

10:1-8 - Ezekiel looks and sees God's sapphire throne above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim that supported God's throne. This is the same vision of the glory of God and his throne with the cherubim below his throne as in *chapter 1*.

God commands his angelic scribe, the one clothed in linen who had put the mark of God on the Lord's faithful in Jerusalem, to go in among the wheels of the cherubim and take burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city. The cherubim were on the south side of the temple when the man went in and a cloud filled the inner court. The cloud is often the symbol for the direct presence of God. In *Exodus 40* it fills the tabernacle when it was dedicated and in *1 Kings 8* the cloud of the glory of the Lord fills the temple when Solomon, the priests and the people dedicate God's temple. In the New Testament God the Father speaks to Jesus, Peter, James and John out of the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration. The roaring sound of the wings of the cherubim that Ezekiel had heard above the Kebar River in Babylon he now hears in the court of the temple of the Lord.

The angelic scribe went in among the cherubim and stood by one of the wheels at their feet. One of the cherubim reached out and took some of the fire among the great angels and gave it to the scribe. He then took it and went out from the cherubim. Ezekiel comments he saw what looked like a man's hand under the wing of the cherubim. The fire probably represents the holiness and righteousness of God and of his heavenly court.

10:9-17 - Ezekiel describes again the appearance of the cherubim below the throne of God and the glory of the Lord. The wheels are the same as in his vision in *chapter 1*. The wheels and the cherubim appear and move in the same fashion as his previous visions. In fact there are only a few details that are different from his vision in *chapter 1*. In his vision in *chapter 1* only the rims of the wheels had eyes all around. Here in *chapter 10* the cherubim's bodies, backs, hands, wings and wheels are all full of eyes. He also hears the wheels being called "*the whirling wheels.*" That detail was not shared in *chapter 1*. The four faces are also different. In *chapter 1* he saw the face of an ox, a man, a lion and an eagle. In *chapter 10* he sees the four faces as a cherub, a man, a lion and an eagle. He does not describe the face that is the cherub. Presumably it does not look like an ox. We are left to speculate what a cherub's face looks like. How Ezekiel knew what it was he does not tell us. Ezekiel gives no explanation why some of the details of his vision of the cherubim are different than what he saw on the banks of the Kebar River in Babylon. In *verse 15* however he says these are the same creatures he saw by the Kebar. The only conclusion that makes sense is that visions are fluid and we need to be very careful when we try and take them too literally or try and make differences in similar visions seem significant. Visions are trying to describe events and people that are often beyond our ability to rationally understand. It is why God gave his prophets visions full of symbolic language in order to at least communicate his truth to us about things for which we often have no frame of reference. How does one describe the glory and throne of God? Ezekiel described it as a sapphire throne above a great expanse resting on the great cherubim who had wings and fiery wheels and four faces. That seems just as

good as any description! We have to remember however, this is how God chose to reveal himself to his prophet and to us. What Ezekiel saw was guided by the Spirit of God and his revelation. Within the confines of his vision this is a true representation of God and his throne.

The cherubim rose upward with the wheels moving with them. The wheels rose when the cherubim rose because the spirit of the cherubim was in the wheels. Are the wheels part of the cherubim or the mechanism by which they move? That is unknown. They are connected somehow by the spirit of the great angels themselves.

10:18-22 - Ezekiel now sees the glory of the Lord depart from over the threshold of the temple and stop. Then God's glory moved again. It rose up and stopped above the east gate of the temple, which by New Testament times was called the Golden Gate. Jewish tradition says the Messiah will enter into the temple via the Golden Gate when he comes in power on the Mount of Olives ala *Zechariah 14*. Also in Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple in *chapters 40-44* God reenters the temple by the east gate. It is the direction of the sunrise over the Mount of Olives.

God leaves the temple and rises up on the wings of the cherubim. Ezekiel comments again that these are the same living creatures that he had seen by the Kebar River in Babylon. He wants his readers to know there is no doubt; God's glory and presence are no longer in his temple in Jerusalem. He has left it and it is now wide open to destruction. The Lord will no longer defend his temple because he no longer dwells there. If the elders of the Jews in Babylon needed more convincing that any hope they put in the official theology was pointless, Ezekiel's vision wiped that out. God had left. Jerusalem and the Lord's temple were defenseless. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would take them and destroy them. Judah was guilty and God was no longer going to help them. The Jews in Judah and Jerusalem were on their own.

Chapter 11:

11:1-6 - The Spirit lifts up Ezekiel and brings him to the gate of the temple courts that faces east, the so-called Golden Gate of Jesus' day. At the gate were 25 men and among them was Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, who were leaders (elders?) of the people. Is this Jaazaniah the same as Jaazaniah son of Shaphan in *8:11* who was worshipping the images of reptiles in the inner rooms of the temple? It is unclear. Shaphan may have been his grandfather and Azzur his father. There is no other mention of his name. Pelatiah is otherwise unknown. Both Jaazaniah and Pelatiah must have been known to Ezekiel. Were they elders, priests, doorkeepers in the temple or even court prophets? We do not know.

The two men Ezekiel mentions are leaders of the people and part of the 25 men at the east gate of the temple. The Lord tells Ezekiel they are plotting evil in the city and giving wicked advice to the people. They tell the people the city is a cooking pot and we are the meat. Soon it will be time to build houses. The 25 appear to be holding onto the official theology and proclaiming that the people are safe within the walls of Jerusalem like meat in the pot. The meat is the most important ingredient in the cooking pot and therefore since they are the most important people God is going to protect them and Jerusalem is safe. They have the temple and a king from David's line on the throne!

Ezekiel is told to prophesy against them and tell them that the Lord knows their faulty and wicked thinking. He sees their deeds and knows they have killed many people and filled Jerusalem's streets with the slain. They are murderers and God is not going to let them get away with it. We cannot hide our thoughts and deeds from God!

11:7-12 - The Lord says Jaazaniah and Pelatiah think they are safe along with their friends and supporters in Jerusalem like meat in the pot. They are not because God is going to drive them out of the city where they will be chased down by the Babylonians and captured. They will be punished and fall by the sword. The Lord will execute his judgment upon them at the borders of Israel. They have not kept the Law of the Lord so therefore God is going to punish them and judge them at the borders of Israel. They are not the meat and Jerusalem is not the pot. There is nowhere for them to hide from the Lord or avoid his judgment. They have disobeyed the Lord and have conformed to the standards of the nations around them which included idolatry and murder.

When Nebuchadnezzar's army captured the city in July of 586, they took many of the chief priests, temple officials and advisors from Zedekiah's court to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah in Syria where he had his headquarters. Riblah was a city on the Euphrates River and according to some descriptions of the Promiseland like in *Deuteronomy 11*; it was the northern border of the land God gave to the Israelites. If that is the case then Ezekiel may be prophesying that the 25 men he sees in his vision including Jaazaniah will be captured taken to Riblah and be among those executed by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem. They will be judged.

11:13-15 - Ezekiel reports that as he was prophesying Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. How he knew this he does not tell us though presumably the Lord revealed it to him because Ezekiel is in Babylon with the elders of the Jews and Pelatiah is in Jerusalem.

When Ezekiel learns of Pelatiah's death he falls face down and asks the Lord if he will destroy the entire remnant of Israel? Ezekiel uses Israel here not as the northern kingdom that split off from the southern kingdom, Judah, after Solomon's death but as the entire people of God. From that point of view the Jews are the remnant of Israel. Ezekiel wants to know if God is going to destroy his entire ancient people. God replies you and your fellow Jews in exile with you are being spoken against by those who still live in Jerusalem. They say those people are far away from the Lord because they live in Babylon so now God is going to give all the Promiseland to us. In fact as God will show Ezekiel it will be the exact opposite. The exiles will return and inherit the land and those in Jerusalem will be killed or scattered.

The residents of Jerusalem show by their speech they have become paganized. Pagan religions believed that the gods were territorial and only had power in their own territory. That is why pagan nations wanted to expand their territory by conquest because then they expanded their god's territory as well. Ezekiel has already shown through his visions that the glory and presence of the Lord is not limited to the land of Israel. He is in Babylon too because he is the Creator of all lands and nations. The prophets helped to expand Israel's understanding of God beyond a localized deity to the Creator of all. The idolatrous Jews in Jerusalem thought God still protected them and would show them favor and because the Jews in Babylon were far away from God's land they were now beyond his reach and under the gods of Babylon. Their view of God was way too small and God sent *Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah* and *Habakkuk* to correct it and give them the larger understanding of who God is and Israel as his people.

11:16-21 - The apostate Jews of Jerusalem deceived by their official theology have said that God has forgotten the exiles. God says even though he has scattered them to a faraway land yet he has been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone. God has been their temple not a building as in Jerusalem. The Lord will gather them from the nations to which he sent them and

bring the exiles back to the land of Israel again. This is the first time in Ezekiel he has promised a return of the exiles. That return will be God's doing.

The remnant that returns will be his faithful people. They will rid the land of all of its idols and pagan shrines. God will give them an undivided heart, meaning they will be committed to the Lord alone and no longer try and worship Yahweh and idols at the same time. He will put a new spirit in them when he removes their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. They will follow his Law and commandments and will be careful to obey them. They will be his people and he will be their God. As for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile idols and images the Lord will bring down on them what they have done. He will judge them for their idolatry and wickedness. Ezekiel is changing the definition of who is part of God's people. It will no longer be simply anyone descended from Israel. It will be those who by faith are obedient to the Lord God. They will be his people and the Lord their God.

Ezekiel will repeat these themes later in his prophecy, especially in *chapters 34-39*. God will save a righteous remnant of the exiles and bring them back to the land. He will change their hearts by giving them his Spirit. No longer will their hearts be hard toward God because they will know the Lord's commandments and want to keep them. They will turn from idolatry and be faithful to the Lord. They will be his people and he will be their God. These themes are similar to Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant in *Jeremiah 31* and they look forward to the Day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension when God gave the Holy Spirit to the church. He had gathered a remnant from all over the Roman world to Jerusalem and then poured out his Spirit on all who believed in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. The gathering of the faithful remnant before God pours out his Spirit is an essential part of the prophecy of the transformation of the exiles. Many modern Dispensational scholars try and apply this prophecy to the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948, saying Jesus' return is soon because God has brought the Jews back to the land. The problem with that interpretation is that the modern nation of Israel is largely a secular state. They are not faithful Jews let alone filled with the Spirit of God!

11:22-25 - In his vision Ezekiel experiences God bringing him to the temple to show him what must take place. He has seen the glory of the Lord move from the temple itself to the east gate. Now the cherubim spread their wings and the glory of the Lord rises up from the temple and the city and moves to the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem. God's presence leaves Jerusalem. His Name is no longer in his temple. God has abandon Jerusalem to her judgment which he will use the Babylonians to execute.

The Spirit lifts him back up and brings him back to Babylon and the elders of Judah in exile. Ezekiel says his vision was given him by the Spirit of God and he told everything he saw to the elders. Now they know what God thinks of their idolatry and their fate as well as those who live in the city. Now they know the glory of the Lord has departed his temple and he will not protect it or the city. The official theology has been exposed as false by the Lord himself. The sin of the Jews will be judged but there is hope for the exiles. What did this vision produce in the elders? Were they outraged or grieved by their sin and the sin of their people? Were they afraid or hopeful or both? Ezekiel does not tell us, however, by 538 when Cyrus allowed the Jews to go home and rebuild the temple there were faithful Jews led by Zerubbabel who returned to the land. Luke says in *Acts 2* that on the Day of Pentecost when God gave his Spirit to the church there were devout Jews in the city from all over the Roman world. God did fulfill Ezekiel's vision!

Chapter 12:

12:1-7 - God gives Ezekiel a new message and prophetic action to do before the Jews in Babylon. He tells them they are a rebellious house and have eyes to see but do not and ears to hear and do not. Rebellion against God blocks our ability to see God at work around us and the evidence of his presence and to hear his Word to us. This was the core of the problem with the Jews in exile. They needed to repent and to turn again to the Lord. Even though they had suffered the trauma of capture and exile to Babylon they still did not understand the reason for their exile. This is why God had to send Ezekiel to preach to them so that they would repent. Until they did they were never going to be ready to go home and rebuild the temple. They would never be the righteous remnant God needed to start again.

God gives Ezekiel a symbolic act to perform in front of the Jews so that they will see and ask questions. Ezekiel is to pack his belongings in the day and as they watch set out for another place. He is to get his belongings ready for a trip and bring them out of his home in front of all the Jews that live near him. In the evening he is to go out like those who go into exile. While they watch God tells Ezekiel to dig a hole in the wall around his home or the town with his bare hands and then pick up his things and go through the hole. He is to cover his face so he can't see the land because God has made him a sign to the house of Israel. Some of the Lord's instructions are difficult to understand. It sounds like in the day and also the night he is to pack his things and go out like he is going on a journey. However, in the evening he is to dig through the wall and then go out. What is confusing is God does not tell him how far to go. It sounds as if he packs up, goes out for a distance, comes back and does it all over again except in the evening that is when he digs the whole in the wall. The message is that Judah is going to go into exile. It is possible that the Jews in Babylon are still holding out hope that they will be going home soon. That attitude could have been fed by the official theology and their wishful thinking plus blindness to their own sin and rebellion had clouded their judgment and understanding. Ezekiel's job was to break down and expose their faulty thinking and force them to face reality so that they would repent.

Ezekiel does as God commands him. He packs his things during the day, digs a hole in the wall at night and sets out carrying his things on his shoulders. He does all of this while the Jews around him watch.

12:8-16 - God asks Ezekiel in the morning if the people asked him what he was doing. He tells Ezekiel to say to "*that rebellious house*" that Ezekiel is a sign to Israel and to the prince in Jerusalem, probably meaning Zedekiah. As Ezekiel has done so it will be done to them. They will go into exile as captives. He says a hole will be dug in the wall for the prince to go through and he will carry his things on his shoulder at dusk when he tries to escape Jerusalem. However, God will spread his net over the land so he is caught by the Babylonians and they will bring him to Babylon. Yet he will have his face covered and never see the land. He will die in Babylon. The Lord will scatter those around the king, his staff and his troops and he will pursue them with the sword. The Jews will know that the Lord is God when he scatters them to the nations. But he will spare a few of them from the sword, famine and plague so that in the nations to which they are sent they may repent and acknowledge all their idolatry. Then they will know that the Lord is God!

This is a remarkable prophecy given several years before the fall of Jerusalem. In July of 586 the Babylonians captured the city of Jerusalem. That very evening Zedekiah escaped through a breach in the walls and fled east to the Jordan Valley with his sons, some court officials and

some of his troops. The Babylonians pursued him and captured him near Jericho. His troops were scattered and Zedekiah, his sons and many of his officials were captured. The Babylonians took them to Riblah on the Euphrates where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters. There Zedekiah's officials were executed as also were his sons. Then Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's eyes put out and he was taken in chains to Babylon where he died. Ezekiel's prophecy was quite literally fulfilled!

12:17-20 - God tells Ezekiel to tremble as he eats and shudder as he drinks because God is going to judge the people who live in Jerusalem and the land of Israel. They will eat their food with anxiety and drink their water in despair because everything they have will be stripped from them. God is going to bring disaster upon them because they have filled the land with violence. Their towns will be laid waste and the land be made desolate because of their sin. Their idolatry inevitably led to violence against people in violation of God's covenant and his commandments. It isn't just because of their idolatry that God is going to judge them it is because of the way they treat others as well. They have broken their relationship with God and with their fellow Israelites. Therefore God will take their peace and shalom and it will be replaced by anxiety and despair. That is what happens to us when we do not repent and instead continue in our sin and rebellion against God.

12:21-28 - God tells Ezekiel the people site a proverb that downplays the visions of the true prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel God sends to his people. They say, "*The days go by and every vision comes to nothing.*" They mean the prophets declare judgment and doom and yet nothing happens. Days go by and nothing comes to fulfillment. The arrogance of this viewpoint is amazing because the Jews in Babylon who were saying this are all *EXILES!* Ezekiel is given this message probably around 591, six years after Jehoiachin had been taken captive along with most of his court. It would be five more years before Jerusalem is destroyed and Zedekiah captured. The Jews are right in the midpoint between the first and second exiles. Ezekiel has only been prophesying about a year to the exiles in Babylon. The visions the people are talking about that "*come to nothing*" are probably those of Jeremiah because by this time he had already been prophesying doom and destruction for 35 years. Jerusalem was still standing. The temple was still there and a king from David's line was still on the throne. The official theology seemed to be truer than the visions of judgment given by the Lord's prophets.

God tells Ezekiel to tell the people that he is going to put an end to the proverb they recite. There will be no more delay. Every vision by the prophets of the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem will be fulfilled. God will not tolerate any more false visions and flattering divinations from the court prophets who were propping up the official theology and causing false hope among the exiles. They kept declaring that the exiles would soon be coming home and Jehoiachin would even be released. Jeremiah was constantly battling the court prophets who were actually false prophets. Ezekiel was beginning to experience the same thing in Babylon.

God says he will speak what he wills and it will be fulfilled. In the days of this rebellious house of Judah everything the Lord has given his prophets will come to pass. In other words this current generation of exiles will live to see Jerusalem's fall.

The people say Ezekiel's vision is for a time many years from now. They push the possibility of God's judgment way off into the future. It was a function of their denial. God says none of his words will be delayed any longer. Whatever he says will be fulfilled. In three years'

time Zedekiah would rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would lay siege to Jerusalem. Time was running out on the "*rebellious house of Israel!*"

Chapter 13:

13:1-9 - Ezekiel is told to prophesy against the false prophets. These are most likely the court prophets in Jerusalem who were advisors to King Zedekiah. Jeremiah fought them as well because they opposed him and the Lord's true Word. See *Jeremiah 23 & 28*. Their messages had been passed on to the exiles in Babylon and because they supported the official theology and the King they continually prophesy that everything will be fine and that God will protect Jerusalem and the Jews have nothing to worry about. God says they are wicked foolish prophets who follow their own spirits and who see nothing. They are not filled with the Spirit of the Lord and he did not send them! They are like jackals among the ruins, scavengers who feed on carrion. They have not "*gone up to the breaks in the wall to repair it*" so that Israel will stand firm in the day of battle. In other words they have not preached God's Word to the people so that they will repent and turn back to God and therefore be strong in the Lord. Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. Divination took various forms of occult practices such as reading the entrails of an animal or an induced trance or consulting with the spirit of a dead person. It was all designed to try and discern the future in order to know what to do in the present. God provided for his people by giving them his true prophets and the priests also had the Urim and Thummin, the sacred lots, to discern the will of God. God could also speak directly to his leaders through prayer. Therefore God forbade Israel from using divination and sorcery because the practices were pagan and occult in origin. See *Leviticus 19 & Deuteronomy 18*. The New Testament adds the insight that these pagan and occult practices gained their power from demons. God says the divinations of the false court prophets are lies. That makes sense when one considers that Satan is called the father of lies by Jesus in *John 8*.

God has not sent these lying prophets. Their visions are false and the Lord has not spoken through them. Because of their false visions and lies God is against them. They will no longer belong to the council of the people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel nor will they enter the land of Israel. The council is the king's council of advisors of which the court prophets would have been part. Their names no longer being listed in the records of Israel is a reference to the genealogies of the Jews. In other words their family line will be wiped out. There will be no record of them or their progeny. They will not enter the land of Israel means God is going to disinherit them. The piece of the Promiseland God gave to their family through their tribe in the time of the conquest will be confiscated and given to someone else. God is going to disinherit them and it will be as if they had never existed. He will totally wipe them out and cut them off from his people. This is the cost of their false prophecy and pagan divinations. Their lies only served to perpetuate the idolatry and sin of the Jews and kept them from repenting. God is going to put a stop to them and hold them accountable for leading his people astray!

13:10-16 - God says he will tear down the false prophets like a flimsy wall covered in whitewash. They say peace, peace when there is no peace. See *Jeremiah 6:14 & 8:11*. Jeremiah in Jerusalem was speaking against the same court prophets who preached peace when judgment was coming. They were duped by the official theology. Ezekiel gives a vivid picture of the official theology and its belief that Jerusalem was safe because of the temple and the king from David's line on the throne of Judah. It is like a flimsy wall that someone painted with whitewash. It looks good on the outside but when the rains come and the hail beats down and the wind blows

the wall falls down. It will not stand. When the wall collapses Ezekiel says people will ask the false prophets, where is the whitewash with which you covered the wall. In other words they said the wall was strong when it was not. Clearly their message was false. God will expose them as false prophets. He will tear down their flimsy wall covered in whitewash so that its foundation will be laid bare. When their false theology is exposed for all to see then the false prophets will be destroyed. They prophesied peace when God was sending judgment. He neither sent them nor spoke through them. Their messages were all from their own imaginations fed by their desires for power and influence.

13:17-23 - God now turns his attention to the women who prophesy falsely to the Jews out of their own imaginations. The content of their messages is similar to the court prophets but they give them through magic charms and witchcraft. The charms on their wrists and the veils of various sizes are probably references to magic practices that have to do with spells that were designed to harm someone or bring them good luck. The charms were often in the shape of various pagan gods or represented pagan idols like the moon or sun. The veils of various lengths could represent a client or a target depending on the circumstances. Ezekiel says the women do this for handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. They practice their magic arts for pay. The Old Testament condemns such practices because they are all linked with pagan gods and idolatry. The New Testament condemns them because it recognizes that the spiritual power behind such practices is the demonic and Satan. Ezekiel's description of the situation paints a picture of rampant idolatry, magic, sorcery and witchcraft in Judah and Jerusalem. The practices have been going on in Judah for a long time but reached their peak during Manasseh's reign. Josiah's reforms halted them for a time but the occult arts returned with a vengeance after his death. Now the idolatry and sorcery of Judah is as bad as it ever was. The exiles have been taken to Babylon which was the seat of many of these practices in the ancient Near East. God needs to show his people who will become his faithful remnant that his power is far greater than any power of the enemy. Magic spells and curses are no match for the power of the Living God. He will judge those who practice such things among his people and will put a halt to them permanently.

The consequences of the women's magic practices are what Ezekiel is most concerned about. They have led God's people astray. The women are lying to the people and they end up listening to the lies and not the Lord. By their spells some have died who should have lived and some have lived who should have died. Those circumstances belong to God alone to determine because he is the author of life and our lives are in his hands. This witchcraft has interfered with God's purposes through occult powers and spells.

God says he is against these women and he will set free those whom they have ensnared. Even today people are trapped in occult practices and witchcraft. God wants to set them free. The demonic has power but it is nothing compared to the truth and power of God Almighty! God says he will tear off their veils and save his people from their hands and they will no longer fall prey to the women's power. Ezekiel recognizes the occult power in the women's magic arts but knows God's power is greater. He says because they have disheartened the righteous with their lies when the Lord had brought them no grief and because they encouraged the wicked not to repent of their sin and so be saved God will no longer allow their power to function. He will put a stop to their visions and keep their spells from working. He will save his people from these wicked women and so they will know that the Lord is God.

This is an important picture for us today to understand. Occult and demonic power is real and can affect even God's people to deceive them and make them think things that are not true.

But God's power is far greater and can totally break the power of the occult. For us the power of the Holy Spirit in us and the Name of the Lord Jesus can break the power of any occult spell and in fact can keep them from working at all. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world! The enemy has been defeated!

Chapter 14:

14:1-6 - The elders of the Jews come to Ezekiel again and as they do the Word of the Lord comes to him. He has a message from God specifically to the elders. They have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. God raises the question of whether he should let them inquire of him at all because of their sin and rebellion. God tells Ezekiel to say that whenever an Israelite has set up idols in his heart and thereby puts a stumbling block in front of him and then goes and inquires of a prophet of the Lord if there is any Word from the Lord, God will answer that person in keeping with his idolatry and not his faith. He will do this to recapture the hearts of his people who have deserted the Lord for idols. The Lord then calls all of Israel to repent, turn from their idols and renounce their detestable practices.

The phrase "*idols of the heart*" is profound. It is what we do, even if we never set up a golden statue and burn incense to it or bow down to it. Whenever we put something in the place of God in our hearts we have set up an idol in our heart. We are idolaters just like the ancient Jews were in Ezekiel's day! The phrase "*put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces*" refers to the fact that they have taken their focus off of God and put it on that thing they are now worshipping and it will lead them into sin. It will cause them to stumble because they are looking at it and not watching how they are living! When money, sex, power, success or whatever it is becomes an idol in our hearts we become obsessed with it and focus on it to the exclusion of everything else. It limits our moral vision and causes us to not be able to watch where we are going. The result is we stumble into sin and wicked behavior that becomes destructive to us and to those around us. God says he will allow us to experience the consequences of our wicked foolish behavior in order to turn us away from the idols of our hearts.

14:7-11 - God says he will judge those who set up idols in their hearts and then in their blindness and arrogance come to inquire of the Lord from one of the Lord's prophets. He will set his face against that person. In other words he will not favor them to bless them but will judge them to punish them. God will make the person who sets up idols in their hearts an example of what happens when people allow idolatry to dominate their lives. He will cut them off from his people. That can mean death but it can also mean God will isolate that person from the community of his people and from his family. The culture of the Jews in Ezekiel's day defined a person by their family and tribal connections. If one was cut off from that connection and community one lost one's identity. They would be utterly alone and for a Jew of that time that would be unthinkable!

God had given his prophets insight into people and their sin through the power of his Spirit within them. If any prophet is foolish enough to give a message to someone who is an idolater who has come to them for a Word from the Lord, God will hold that prophet accountable as well. He will judge the foolish prophet and cut him off from the people. They will be held just as guilty as the one who has set up an idol in their heart. The Lord will not defile his Word by giving it to people who worship idols rather than him and refuse to repent of their idolatry and then still want to come and receive a Word from God. Nor will he bless prophets or preachers of

the Word who try and use God's Word for their own sinful purposes. They will find God's Word turned against them. The minister of the Word who is foolish enough to cooperate with the wicked shares their guilt. The Lord will not be mocked! God wants a people for himself who will obey him out of their love for him just as he loves them. Then he will be their God and they will be his people. One cannot be part of the people of God with a divided heart. One cannot have an idol in one's heart and love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength.

14:12-16 - God explains to Ezekiel why he is judging Judah even though there are some righteous people within it. This is a watershed moment in God's revelation to the Jews of his moral will and justice. In *Genesis 18* Abraham had pleaded with God concerning Sodom and Gomorrah that God not judge the cities if only five righteous people were found there. The reality was there were fewer than five so God destroyed them. Abraham's argument is it is not fair to judge the righteous along with the wicked in a community. The principle was if there are enough righteous people among a people then the whole people will be safe from judgment even if many within that people are wicked and rebellious. This is part of the Hebrew communal understanding of God's people. The Lord shows Ezekiel that the people are made up of individuals and if as a whole a people turn away from God and abandon their covenant with him the Lord is justified in judging that people even though there are some who are righteous within it. The corollary to that principle is the handful of righteous people within the sinful community God will save but their righteousness before God will only save themselves and not the whole nation. This principle has enormous implications for America today!

God tells Ezekiel if the nation sins against the Lord and rebels against him and he stretches out his hand in judgment to cut off the food supply and bring famine, then even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the nation their righteousness would only save themselves and not the nation. There is a shift in how God reveals who is part of his people. The people of God are made up of individuals who are righteous before God and not individuals who have been born into the nation of Israel. This is related to the idea that each person bears responsibility for their own sins and that the true Israel is made of those who by faith have a relationship with the Lord and not those who are simply Israelites by birth. Circumcision is of the heart and not the flesh. This fundamental idea about who belongs to the people of God sets the stage for the New Testament and faith in Jesus Christ as the way in which one becomes part of God's people. All these ideas are related.

God gives Ezekiel the names of three righteous men in the stories of Israel that are examples of people who by their faith and deeds are righteous before God. Noah, Job and Daniel. Daniel is the most controversial name in the list. The reason is the Hebrew consonants of his name are DNL. In Hebrew only the consonants are written. The vowels are added as one reads the words. The vowels can be read as either a, i, e or a, e. The name can read either Daniel or Danel. If the name is Daniel then this is a remarkable reference to the prophet Daniel who would have already been an advisor in Nebuchadnezzar's court for 11 years at the time God gave Ezekiel this prophecy. See *Daniel 1:1*. If Daniel is the correct name, he would have been known to the exiles and stories of his fame and deeds would have been circulating among the Jews in Babylon. If the name is Danel then we do not know to whom Ezekiel is referring. Presumably it is an ancient person who was righteous in his life like Noah and Job. There is a famous wise man in the literature recovered from ancient Ugarit, a city in northern Mesopotamia, but it is doubtful such a man would be referenced by Ezekiel in his prophecy to the Jews. The reference to Job

here also tells us that the basic story of Job was known among the Jews by the time of the Babylonian exile. It was already part of their literature.

God tells Ezekiel that if the nation rebels against God so that he sends famine to the people and wild beasts to kill a rebellious nation so that the people are left childless, even if Noah, Job and Daniel are living among the Jews they would not save their own sons and daughters. Those three alone would be saved. God will send famine and beasts against Judah and nothing can stop his judgment from coming, even despite the presence of some of the greatest righteous heroes of Israel's past and present, Noah, Job and Daniel.

14:17-23 - God outlines to Ezekiel the last two of the four great instruments of his judgment upon Judah, the sword and plague. These four judgments: famine, wild beasts, sword and plague are all listed in the covenant curses of *Leviticus 26* as punishments God would bring against Israel if she abandoned her covenant with God and disobeyed his Law. They also are similar to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Revelation 6*. Once again God tells Ezekiel that even if Noah, Job and Daniel were present in the people their righteousness would only save themselves and not a rebellious nation.

The Lord says when he sends the four terrible judgments against Judah and Jerusalem there will be survivors. Sons and daughters will be brought out of Jerusalem to Babylon. He tells Ezekiel when they arrive observe them because when you do you will see why the Lord was justified in destroying the nation. In other words, the conduct of the new exiles will be so sinful that Ezekiel's questions about whether God was fair and just in destroying Jerusalem will be answered. God says, "*you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause.*" God is just and the Jews deserved his judgments for all their sin and rebellion. This is the same message *Jeremiah* and *Habakkuk* were proclaiming in Jerusalem. In many ways Jeremiah experienced firsthand what Ezekiel was prophesying would happen from Babylon. He was righteous and God saved his prophet out of the sack of Jerusalem. Yet Jeremiah alone was not righteous enough to save the city or the nation. God had determined to bring it down. A handful of righteous people cannot save a sinful rebellious nation. If that is the case then God's people in America need to be praying for revival and repentance because if God determines that America is under his judgment even his faithful church will not be able to save it. God will save us and preserve us but America will fall because she had turned away from the Lord!

Chapter 15:

15:1-8 - God gives Ezekiel an analogy concerning Israel and Jerusalem. He asks Ezekiel if the wood of the vine is better than the wood of a tree in a forest. The obvious answer is no, because the wood of a grape vine is too weak and small to be of any use for anything, even making wooden pegs. Once the vines are trimmed their wood is used for fuel in the cook fires. Even then it burns too quickly unlike the wood in a tree. The wood in the vine was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made useful after it has been burned in the fire?

God then compares Jerusalem and its people to the wood of the vine. They are useful for nothing! They will be burned up in the fire of God's judgment because he has set his face against them, meaning he has turned away from them. Even if some of them survive the destruction that is to come another fire will consume them. This is most likely a reference to the trials of the exile. Some Jews did survive the destruction of Jerusalem only to be killed in things like Ishmael's killing of Gedaliah at Mizpah (see *Jeremiah 40-41*) or the long journey to Babylon into exile. God through Ezekiel is trying to shatter the false idea of the official theology that

somehow Jerusalem is inviolate because of the temple and the king from David's line that was still on David's throne when Ezekiel wrote this. He continues to use graphic examples and pictures to try and get the Jews to listen and repent. They would not and after Jerusalem's fall Ezekiel's task turned to giving the exiles hope again that God had not abandoned the Jews as his people. The emphasis before Jerusalem's fall had to be on judgment because the official theology had so clouded their ability to see their own sin. They were blind to it. Sometimes God must allow tragedy and distress into our lives so we will see the truth about our own attitudes and behaviors. He does it not because he hates us and wants to punish us but because he loves us and longs for us to be close to him. Yet God's love is never separated from his holiness and vice versa. We must always relate to him with both characteristics in mind because God will always relate to us in the same way. His love for us can never be an excuse for us to sin because God is also holy!

Chapter 16:

16:1-8 - God tells Ezekiel to confront Jerusalem about her sins, her detestable practices. He uses the analogy of a baby growing to mature womanhood to describe Jerusalem. God says Jerusalem was a pagan girl, born in the land of the Canaanites, whose father was an Amorite and whose mother was a Hittite. Up until David conquered the city in around 1000 BC Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, a part of the larger Canaanite culture in Canaan. God is saying Jerusalem was not born of Israelite blood she was a pagan city in the beginning.

When she was born she was abandoned to die. Her cord was not cut, nor was she washed with water or rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. Apparently newborn infants were rubbed or sprinkled with salt. This was probably done for medicinal purposes since salt was seen as a preservative. It helped dry the newborn infant's skin after birth. It could also have had covenant overtones because salt was used in the making of covenants between people and groups, i.e. the covenant of salt in *Numbers 18:19*. The point is no one took care of the baby. She was left exposed in the elements to die because she was unwanted. No one had pity or compassion on her. Jerusalem was not seen as one of the great cities of Canaan. It had a well defensible location on Mt. Zion and the slopes of Mt. Moriah above the Kidron and Ben Hinnom Valleys and a good water source in the Spring Gihon, but it was not a strategic location since no major road through Canaan passed near the city. That is probably one reason the Lord says Jerusalem was despised in the beginning.

God however saw her lying there dying and said to Jerusalem, "*Live!*" He took pity on her, washed her and cared for her and gave her to David to be his capital and the site of the Lord's temple. God chose Jerusalem out of all the cities of the world to place his Name. He grew her into a beautiful city and she became the rarest of jewels. She grew to maturity into a lovely young maiden.

When God saw she was old enough for love, meaning the young maiden had reached puberty and could now be a wife; he "*spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness.*" In *Ruth 3:9* Boaz covers Ruth as she slept at his feet as a sign of betrothal and acceptance. He agreed by covering her to protect her and commit himself to her. Here God says he will protect Jerusalem and commit himself to her. Ezekiel says God will cover her nakedness. Is that referring to her nakedness when she was alone and abandoned or is there something sexual in the reference, meaning a man would desire a maiden and so would cover her in order to claim her? Obviously there is nothing sexual going on here but there was very little courtship in ancient Israel. Marriages were almost always arranged. This could be a reference to what

happens when a man desires a woman who is unattached. The "*covering her nakedness*" is a way to claim her before all other men and tell them she is his since there are no parents with whom to bargain for her hand in marriage. The result is God entered into a covenant with Jerusalem and she became his. This means he purposed to place his temple and his Name in Jerusalem and give it to David and his ancestors as their hereditary capital.

16:9-14 - God bathed Jerusalem, cleaned her up, and put fine ointments on her. He dressed her in the finest clothes and put leather sandals on her feet. He gave her the finest jewelry and put a ring in her nose and earrings in her ears and a crown on her head. The girl that had once been abandoned to die was now a beautiful queen adorned with the finest clothes and jewelry. This is probably a reference to the glory of Jerusalem during David and Solomon's reign when the city became one of the richest and most beautiful cities in the ancient Near East.

The food she ate was of the finest variety, fine flour, honey and oil. Jerusalem rose to be a queen and her fame spread among the nations on account of her beauty. God says the splendor he had given Jerusalem made her perfect in her beauty. God transformed the rejected city into a queen that the nations called beautiful.

16:15-22 - Things changed however between the Lord and his city. She abandoned her trust in the Lord and began trusting in her own fame. She used it to become a prostitute. Jerusalem, which had been dedicated to the worship of Yahweh alone, became a center for pagan religions and worship. She took that which God gave her and made high places to worship idols. Such things should not have happened because she was God's wife! She committed adultery and took the finest jewelry the Lord had provided for her and used it to make idols. She took the best food the Lord had given her and offered it to pagan gods. She even took her sons and daughters, the children the Lord had given her, and sacrificed them to pagan idols for their food. Child sacrifice became a common practice in Jerusalem, especially in the days of Manasseh. In all her prostitution and idolatry the city forgot her origins and what the Lord had done for her. She had been naked and bare when the Lord took her and cared for her. Now she had rejected him!

16:23-29 - God says woe to Jerusalem! Her idolatry is so rampant she has built a pagan shrine in every public square. She is a city filled with idols! She has committed adultery with foreign gods at every opportunity. She has committed adultery with Egypt, the Philistines, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Despite all this she is still not satisfied. Her lust for pagan idols is insatiable! Even the pagan nations are shocked by her behavior. God punished her and warned her. He reduced her territory but still she did not stop.

16:30-34 - God says she is weak because even though she plays the prostitute with all these foreign gods and idols she never even demands payment! God says, "*You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!*" Prostitutes demand their fees but Jerusalem hands out her favors to everyone who passes by and expects nothing in return. She is sick. No one runs after her favors but she gives payment when none is given to her. Even a prostitute plies her trade with some logic giving her sexual favors for payment. Jerusalem does no such thing. She pursues pagan gods because she is addicted and cannot stop. God is going to judge her!

16:35-42 - God says because of Jerusalem's adultery with pagan gods and her many idols which led her to sacrifice even her children to them God will punish her. His jealous anger and wrath

will burn against her. God will gather all the foreign nations whose gods Jerusalem has worshipped and expose her for all of them to see. He will strip her naked in public and totally shame her. The Lord will sentence his people to the punishment of a woman caught in adultery and who sheds blood, in other words, murder. The punishment in the Law of Moses for adultery was stoning to death. In the story of Judah and Tamar in *Genesis 38* Tamar was to be burned at the stake for being a temple prostitute. That incident however takes place before the Law was given. Either way adultery carried a death sentence. Murder obviously demanded the same, death.

God will hand over Jerusalem to the nations she has sought as her lovers. They will strip her bare and leave her naked and bleeding. They will tear down her shrines and take her fine jewelry. Josiah in his reforms in *2 Kings 22-23* tore down the shrines and high places as an act of faithfulness to Yahweh. However, it only took the people one generation to rebuild them all and worship their idols again. God is going to remove them permanently through the actions of the nations who will attack Jerusalem. He is burning with anger like a jealous husband and he will take his just anger out on his unfaithful and wicked wife. Jerusalem will be destroyed and her houses burned. The Lord will put a stop to his people worshipping idols and practicing adultery with them. When all of this has taken place then God's wrath against Jerusalem will subside and his jealous anger will be satisfied. The Lord will be calm toward Jerusalem again.

16:43-48 - God tells Jerusalem because she did not remember the days of her youth he will bring upon her all the punishment she deserves for all her detestable practices. Jerusalem has forgotten her roots and her relationship with the Lord. She has rebelled and gone away from God. Now she will pay the price for her deeds.

Ezekiel uses a current proverb, like mother like daughter, to describe what Jerusalem has become. He says she has despised her husband and her children. In the analogy Ezekiel is using God is Jerusalem's husband. Her children would be her citizens or the people of Judah that she leads. God has already said Jerusalem's parents were pagan in *16:3*. Now he reiterates that statement here in *16:45*. Her mother was a Hittite and her father an Amorite. They were Canaanite and pagan. Ezekiel then describes Jerusalem's sisters as her older sister Samaria, the wicked capital of the north kingdom Israel, and her younger sister Sodom. The age he uses for the sisters is curious because it is not related to history but to geography. Sodom's sin and destruction was much older than Samaria's by almost 1200 years. Instead Ezekiel lists Samaria as the older sister. He refers to the fact that Samaria lived to the north of Jerusalem. It was finally destroyed in 721 by the Assyrian king Sargon II. The north kingdom of Israel had practiced idolatry from its beginning under Jeroboam I. Samaria was its capital. Not one of Israel's kings was completely faithful to Yahweh as were at least some of the kings of Judah. Sodom was destroyed for her sins in the time of Abraham, 2000-1900 BC. The location of Sodom was south and east of the Dead Sea. God destroyed Sodom directly according to *Genesis 18-19*. God did not use a foreign power to invade and destroy the city like he did Samaria. Instead he reigned down fire and brimstone on it, along with Gomorrah, and wiped it off the map.

Ezekiel says Jerusalem has not only copied the sins of her sisters she has even gone beyond them! She is more depraved than Samaria and Sodom! She has done things her sisters never did.

16:49-52 - Ezekiel lists the sins of Sodom. She was proud, arrogant, overfed and unconcerned with others, not helping the poor and needy. The NLT translates that her sins were "*pride*,

gluttony, and laziness, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door." He lists pride again, calling it haughty and says Sodom did detestable things before the Lord. Sodom's sins were not done in secret. The Lord knew all that she was doing. It is interesting to note that her pride is the chief sin of Sodom and not her sexual immorality and debauchery which is the chief reason *Genesis* says the Lord destroyed her. Throughout Scripture pride is one of the greatest sins that separates us from God. Ezekiel says Sodom was destroyed because of it and now Jerusalem is worse than Sodom! Her pride is out of control! What about America today? Our sexual sins are approaching Sodom and Gomorrah in severity. Ezekiel tells us here that a far more dangerous sin is our pride. We are in deep trouble as a nation!

God says Samaria did not commit half the sins of her sister Jerusalem. In fact Jerusalem has committed more sins and worse sins than Samaria and God destroyed Samaria for her wickedness. Jerusalem is so bad now that she makes Sodom and Samaria seem righteous by comparison! God says Jerusalem needs to bear her disgrace for all her sins. Her punishment is coming.

The crisis of the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 597 and the years following during King Zedekiah's reign exposed the character of the leaders and people of Jerusalem. They have broken their covenant with God and are Jews in name only. They are like what Paul says to Timothy in *2 Timothy 3:5*; they have a form of godliness but deny its power. They maintain the temple and its rituals yet in every other way show by their behavior that they do not follow the Lord or have a relationship with him. They have completely divorced their behavior towards people from their behavior towards God, something God's covenant fundamentally linked together. How bad is her behavior? Jerusalem is worse than Samaria and Sodom, so bad in fact that she makes those two wicked cities that God destroyed look righteous by comparison!

16:53-58 - Ezekiel gives a remarkable prophecy of restoration in these verses. God promises to restore Sodom and Samaria along with Jerusalem. When all three are restored then Jerusalem will be ashamed of all her sins because she was so bad even Sodom and Samaria felt better about their own sins. God promises that Sodom and her daughters and Samaria and her daughters "*will return to what they were before.*" How are we to take this? From an historical perspective this has never happened. Samaria was never rebuilt nor did it ever return to the glory it had when it was the capital of Israel. Sodom has never been rebuilt. The land around it now is dry and desolate. In what way then can we say that Ezekiel's prophecy has been fulfilled? Jerusalem was rebuilt, in fact within 150 years the temple was completed and its walls were rebuilt by Nehemiah. By Jesus' day 500 years later it was a temple city and Herod's temple was seen as one of the great temples and wonders of the world. From a literal viewpoint one has to say this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled and further it is difficult to foresee any circumstances within which it would be fulfilled. The only possibility is sometime in the Messianic Kingdom after the Lord Jesus returns. However, there is another way to view Ezekiel's prophecy and that is as a parable of forgiveness and renewal. God can forgive, heal and restore anyone, even the worst of sinners. Surely Sodom and Samaria are examples of people who were so wicked and far away from God that God destroyed them. Now Ezekiel says one day God will restore them. There is always hope for God to restore us. There is no sin and no situation that is beyond his grace to redeem. I think that is the best way to take Ezekiel's prophecy here.

God says Jerusalem used to be so proud that she looked down upon Sodom as an example of wickedness and in arrogance assumed that she was better than the people of Sodom. When God restores all three cities Jerusalem will bear the shame of her sin and know how evil and

wicked she had become. Now, even the people of Edom and the Philistines, Jerusalem's nearby pagan neighbors, despise what Jerusalem has become. She will have to bear the consequences of her sin and her idolatry. Part of her restoration is to come face to face with the severity of her sin and bear the guilt and shame that comes with that realization. Yet there is hope for redemption beyond just recognizing how bad we are. God can restore us.

16:59-63 - God concludes by telling Jerusalem that he will deal with her as her sins deserve because she has broken her covenant with the Lord. Yet even after judgment God will restore Jerusalem because he remembers his covenant with her. Our sin breaks our covenant with God and we cannot restore our relationship with him, but God can. He can renew us and as he tells Jerusalem, "*establish an everlasting covenant with you.*" This is language that is similar to *Jeremiah 31* and the New Covenant. God says when he restores Jerusalem, Sodom and Samaria he will establish his covenant and make atonement for all she has done. God will renew Jerusalem and from then on she will cover her mouth in humiliation over the magnitude of what she has done and for the grace and forgiveness shown to her by God. She will never again boast in her pride of her beauty and compare herself to her sisters that she had seen as so wicked and deserving of God's judgment.

When we think of ourselves and our sin before a holy God we are silenced in our guilt and shame and know we do not deserve his forgiveness. In fact, when we compare our sins to other's sins we are too often tempted to think we are better than they. It is when we compare ourselves and our behavior to a holy God that we see the reality of our sin and the need for repentance. Ezekiel says Jerusalem had been comparing herself to Sodom and Samaria and not to the covenant standards to which God had called her. When God exposes her sin as he sees it she is struck silent by the magnitude of what she had done. The same holds true for us. We cannot compare ourselves to others and their sins. We have to compare ourselves to God and his character and nature. When we do we are silent before him. All grounds for pride in our moral accomplishments or all comparisons of ourselves to others and their wickedness stop. God does not grade on a curve. His standard is himself and the absolute perfection of his holiness. That is an impossible standard when compared to human behavior but we have to remember we were created to meet it and live it. It is we who broke our relationship with God. We are the rebels. Further, when we think of his grace to us we are silenced again because we are overwhelmed at his love and mercy. All grounds for boasting in our own righteousness and merit are gone. For by grace you have been saved, this is not your own doing lest anyone should boast!

Chapter 17:

17:1-24 - This whole chapter is "an allegory" of Israel. Ezekiel continually calls Judah, the south kingdom, Israel and speaks as if the Jews are the entire ancient people of God. In an historical sense they were because there was a remnant of the northern tribes within Judah. Here he tells the story of God's plan for Israel and her rebellion in an allegory, a story using symbolic pictures. He also calls this story a parable but it is different from the parables of Jesus in that Ezekiel's story is declaring God's judgment toward Israel whereas Jesus' parables are stories he told that press the listeners to make a decision about him or about God's Kingdom. That element is here but not as strongly as in Jesus' parables.

Ezekiel says a great eagle came to Lebanon and took hold of the top of a cedar and broke off the topmost shoot. He carried it away to a land of merchants where he planted the cedar shoot in a city of traders. The eagle took some of the seed of your land, meaning Israel, and put it in

fertile soil. He planted it by abundant water and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine. Its branches turned toward the eagle but its roots grew strong in the ground. The vine stretched out its branches to the eagle for water. It had been planted in good soil with abundant water so that it would produce branches and bear fruit and become a "*splendid vine*." But God asks will the new vine thrive? Won't it be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers? All its new growth will wither. In fact it won't take a great army or much effort to pull up the new vine by its roots. God asks, even if it is transplanted will it grow? No, it will wither completely when the east wind strikes it. It will wither away in the soil in which it was planted.

In *verse 11* God tells the Jews the meaning of his allegory. He says through Ezekiel; the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and carried off her king and her nobles to Babylon, the land of merchants and the city of traders. It is interesting to note that John in *Revelation 18* describes the grief all the merchants and sea captains had over the fall of Babylon-Rome. In 597 Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, captured Jerusalem and carried off King Jehoiachin and the leaders of Judah to Babylon. God says, then Nebuchadnezzar took a member of the royal family, namely Zedekiah, and made a treaty with him, putting him under an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. In other words Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah king who became his vassal. In that time Nebuchadnezzar took many of Judah's leading citizens into exile to Babylon so that Judah would be "*brought low, unable to rise again, surviving only by keeping its treaty*." Nebuchadnezzar used the exile of Judah's king, nobles and leaders to weaken Judah so that it would not be able to revolt. Zedekiah would be dependent upon Nebuchadnezzar to maintain his reign and his country as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal. The Babylonians still used exile as a tool of conquest but unlike the Assyrians did to Israel they kept some of the citizens of Judah and installed new leadership that would be loyal to the Babylonians. It saved them the difficulty of settling the newly conquered territory with other conquered peoples as the Assyrians had done to Israel. In that sense it was still brutal but more subtle in nature. The result however was still the same. It made it very difficult for the newly conquered territory to rebel because it was in a greatly weakened state and dependent upon Babylon for survival and protection. However, the new king, meaning Zedekiah, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. He sent envoys to Egypt to get a large army to break the Babylonian hold upon Judah. God asks, will Zedekiah succeed? Will he break his treaty and oath and yet escape? Zedekiah did rebel against Babylonians in 587. Pharaoh Hophra marched from Egypt to support Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar was forced to temporarily lift the siege of Jerusalem to meet Hophra in battle. Nebuchadnezzar routed the Egyptians and Hophra abandoned Zedekiah to the Babylonians. No more help from Egypt would come. It was too weak to save Judah and Zedekiah. This may be the setting for Ezekiel's allegory. If it is then the final siege of Jerusalem is in its early stages and Ezekiel is telling the exiles in Babylon that there is no hope for Zedekiah and the city. God is judging it.

God says in *verse 16* King Zedekiah will die in Babylon in the land of the king who put him on the throne and whose oath he despised and whose treaty he broke. Zedekiah was captured in July of 586 near Jericho, his eyes were put out and he was taken to Babylon in chains where he died, blind and in prison. Ezekiel tells the exiles that Pharaoh Hophra with all his army will be no help to Zedekiah because Zedekiah broke his word and defied his oath to Nebuchadnezzar. He will not escape. God will bring down on Zedekiah all his wrath and fury for breaking his oath not only to Nebuchadnezzar but to the Lord. He will be caught, brought to Babylon and judged there because he was unfaithful to the Lord. That is exactly what happened some 18 months later than this prophecy. All his army will be scattered or destroyed. Ezekiel says when these things

happen then the Jews will know that the Lord has spoken. False prophets fueled by the official theology were continually telling both the people of Jerusalem and the exiles in Babylon that God would rescue the exiles and save Jerusalem. The Babylonians would leave. Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylon spoke against that false message and told the people the Lord's true Word in order to prepare them for the destruction of Jerusalem and bring them to repentance.

The allegory turns to the positive in *verse 22* and God speaks of restoration. He himself will take a shoot from the top of a cedar and plant it. He will break off a tender shoot and plant it on a high and lofty mountain, on the mountain heights of Israel. This new shoot will flourish. It will produce branches and bear fruit for God. It will become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it and find shelter in its branches. All the trees of the field will know that the Lord himself will cause the little tree to grow into a great tree. It is the Lord's doing to bring down the tall tree and lift up the little tree. The Lord will do it.

This is a picture of the renewal of the Jews after the exile. Ezekiel looks forward to the Kingdom of God and the coming of the Messiah and his Kingdom. Jesus came to Galilee, to the mountain heights of Israel. He spoke of the Kingdom as a mustard bush that grew so great the birds of the air took shelter in its branches. God is still in control. Even though he will destroy Jerusalem using Nebuchadnezzar and his army and even though the nation of Judah will cease to exist, yet God's people will still flourish. He will restore them and out of the remnant will come a new people for himself. The birds of the air in the New Testament are a picture of the nations of the world, the Gentiles. Someday God will restore the Jews so that the nations will come to them and find shelter through them. There is no hope for Judah and Zedekiah but there is hope for God's people the Jews and his faithful remnant. Out of the ashes of Jerusalem and the smashed hopes of the exiles God will raise up a new people for himself through whom he will fulfill his plan for his world!

Chapter 18:

18:1-4 - Ezekiel quotes a current proverb used by the exiles, "*The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.*" Jeremiah quotes the same proverb in *Jeremiah 31:29*. Apparently both the people in Jerusalem and the exiles in Babylon were using this proverb as a way to blame their parents' generation for their current troubles.

God says the people will no longer quote this proverb because everyone will be responsible for their own sins. God then says something even more profound. Every living soul belongs to the Lord, the father as well as the son. They both alike belong to God. We are not our own; God is our owner and we are responsible to him. Paul refers to this fact when he declares to the philosophers in Athens in *Acts 17* that in God we live and move and have our being. God not only owns the world and everything in it he owns us too! *Ecclesiastes 12:7* says when we die our bodies return to the dust out of which they were made and our spirits return to God who gave them. I belong to God! If the living soul belongs to God what about those who have died? Paul argues in *Romans 14* that whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. Jesus died and rose to new life so that he might be the Lord of both the living and the dead because we will all stand before his judgment seat. Ezekiel adds that the soul who sins will die. Sin's result is death, just as Paul says in *Romans 5* the wages of sin is death. If we sin we die. All die because all sin.

Ezekiel is teaching the exiles that we are all responsible for our own sins and are accountable to God for them. Jeremiah was teaching the Jews of Jerusalem the same thing at the same time. As far as we know the two prophets never communicated to one another about what

they were preaching. It is remarkable that though the forms and styles of their communication are different their message is precisely the same. They were separated by a 1000 miles yet the Spirit was inspiring them to preach the same message to the Jews in Judah and the Jews in exile in Babylon. It is no coincidence but evidence of the Spirit's inspiration of his prophets.

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, is trying to get the Jews to understand that though they are part of a covenant people and what they do individually still affects the corporate body, yet they are each individually responsible before God for their actions. They cannot blame their parents' sins for their current situation. They have sinned themselves and must bear the consequences of their own actions. They may complain to God about their predicament and *Lamentations* shows us what to do with those kind of complaints; take them to God. But, they cannot push responsibility for their own sinful choices onto someone else. "*It's not my fault!*" is not an argument God accepts. We are all responsible to God for our own actions. We cannot live off of our parents' righteousness any more than we can foist blame onto them for our sinful choices. Plus we cannot pass onto our children our righteousness before God either. Each person must take responsibility for their own choices and actions before God.

18:5-9 - Ezekiel outlines what a righteous person does and how they behave. By doing so he gives us a description of a Jew whom God considers righteous. Overall to be righteous means one does what is just and right. He is faithful to God and does not worship idols or participate in pagan rituals. He keeps the first and most important commandment to have no other gods before God and to love the Lord! He is sexually pure. He does not commit adultery and keeps his marriage covenant with his wife but he also is holy in his sexual conduct; his sexual conduct follows God's holiness laws. He treats the poor fairly and justly. He does not oppress anyone or use their misfortune against them. When he lends to someone he returns whatever they have given as collateral. He does not charge a fellow Jew interest as the Law of Moses prescribed. He gives food to the hungry and helps clothe the naked. He judges fairly in disputes and does not practice wrongdoing. In short he follows God's Law and keeps his commandments. He fulfills his part of God's covenant with Israel out of love and devotion to God. He loves his neighbor because he loves God and his worship of God is not divorced from his conduct towards others. God says this man is righteous and will surely live before the Lord.

The problem was very few in Judea and Jerusalem lived this way. God was not able to find righteous people. They were like the violent son of the righteous man in *verses 10-13*.

18:10-13 - Ezekiel contrasts the righteous man with the unrighteous son. He is doing this to show that each person is judged by God on the merits of their own lives not on the merits of their parents.

The unrighteous son of the righteous man is condemned because he is violent and sheds blood, meaning he murders someone or is complicit in someone's death and he does any of "*these other things*" that his father did not do.

He worships idols and commits adultery with his neighbor's wife. He defiles the marriage covenant between a man and woman. He oppresses the poor and needy by robbing them or refusing to return what they had given in collateral for a loan. He charges usury and excessive interest to a fellow Jew. Most importantly he looks to idols for guidance and has abandoned the Lord. His idolatry leads him to practice "*detestable things*." Ezekiel does not say it directly but there were many Jews in his day whether in Jerusalem or Babylon who lived this way but still claimed to worship Yahweh and think of themselves as faithful Jews. They had divorced their

behavior towards others from their worship and behavior towards God. They had paganized their religion.

Ezekiel asks, will such a man live? No, God will judge him and put him to death for his unrighteous life. His blood will be on his own head. His father won't be punished but the son will. Each will answer to God for their own deeds.

18:14-18 - Ezekiel presents yet a third case. Suppose a wicked father has a son who sees all the unrighteous things his father does but refuses to follow the example of his sinful father. He does not practice idolatry and eat at the pagan high places. He does not commit adultery or oppress anyone. He does not require anything in pledge for a loan or commit robbery. He gives to the poor and clothes the naked. He does not practice wicked behavior and refrains from practicing sin. He keeps the Law of the Lord. God says though his father will be judged and die for his own sins yet the righteous son will live. Once again Ezekiel is outlining the principle that each person will be judged by God for their own actions and attitudes and not because of their parents or their children. We can apply this to both men and women even though Ezekiel gives us only male examples.

It is interesting to note that the unrighteous father is described as practicing extortion which Ezekiel defines as charging excessive interest or any interest on a loan to a fellow Jew. Think of the credit card companies and the payday loan firms of today! Ezekiel would charge them with practicing extortion!

18:19-20 - The exiles still wanted to blame their parents' generation for their exile and so ask God why the son doesn't share in the guilt of his father. This had been a principle of the Law of Moses. God himself had said he will judge the sin of those who rebel against him to the third and fourth generation. God replies he will judge the righteous son as deserving of life because he has been righteous not because his father has sinned or has been righteous. Each is judged on their own behavior. The soul that sins shall die. If you are righteous before God and do not sin you will live no matter what your parents did. From a New Testament perspective we know all have sinned. Ezekiel is focusing on a person who keeps God's Law as a general rule. I do not believe he is arguing here that the man he describes as righteous is without any sin in any form but rather it is the pattern of his life that is righteous and obedient to God rather than wicked and sinful. He loves the Lord and therefore loves people. The wicked man however, is exactly the opposite. Paul will argue in *Romans 3-7* that all sin and there is no one who is righteous before God therefore all deserve death and judgment.

In *verse 20* Ezekiel looks ahead to what Jesus will do on the cross. He says the righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him and the wickedness of the wicked man will be charged against him. Each one shall die or live according to each one's own righteousness or wickedness. However, in Jesus his righteousness is credited or reckoned to us! Paul outlines this in *Romans 4*.

18:21-23 - These verses express a key understanding in the prophets concerning sin, repentance and God's forgiveness. Ezekiel has already said the soul that sins will surely die. The question is; can there be any hope of forgiveness once someone has turned to a sinful life? Is there a chance for repentance and reprieve? God's answer in these verses is **YES!** If a wicked person repents of his sin, turns back to God and begins to do what is just and right then he will not die. None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he

has done God says he will live. The key to this passage is to understand God is not saying because the wicked person's good deeds now outweigh his bad deeds he will be forgiven and live, rather it is a matter of the heart. Repentance has led the wicked person to turn back to God, turn away from their sinful life and dedicate themselves to living a godly life. Their relationship with God has been restored and now God counts them as righteous because of it. Repentance is the key!

Ezekiel says in *verse 23* that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, rather his desire is that they repent and turn from their sin and live. This gives us a profound insight into the judgment of God. He must punish and judge sin because of his absolute holiness. Yet God does not relish punishment or take pleasure in condemning the guilty. It grieves him because he also loves the sinner. God is not a God who is out to get us or is just waiting for an opportunity to pounce on us to punish us when we sin. His mercy wants to give us every chance to repent. When we do not he will punish our sinful hearts. This is why God gave Israel and then Judah every chance to repent and turn back to God. It is why he sent the prophets to preach to his people. He did not want to punish them he wanted them to repent. It is why he delays Jesus' Second Coming now for as Peter says in *2 Peter 3:9* the Lord is patient because he does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance and salvation. God's heart is to forgive the repentant sinner not punish them.

18:24 - Conversely if a righteous and godly person turns away from God and begins to practice idolatry and wickedness God will punish that now wicked person for his or her deeds. They will die for their sins. None of the righteous things they have done before they turned away from God will count or outweigh the evil they have begun to practice. Therefore my good outweighing my bad is not a principle of God's judgment. Rather Ezekiel makes it clear it is the condition of the heart that is the key. Our behavior is not separated from our relationship with God. If we are close to God and faithful we will be living as God desires. It does not mean we will never sin but when we do we will promptly admit it and repent. When our hearts are far from God our behavior will show it and we will not care about repenting because we have broken our covenant with the Lord. Our deeds are the evidence of our hearts. As Jesus observed in the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 7* you will know a tree by its fruit.

These verses in Ezekiel raise a tricky issue however. From a New Testament perspective what about the Christian who is saved and yet turns away from God and begins to live a sinful lifestyle? Are they still saved or have they negated their salvation? In other words does Ezekiel argue against the Calvinist doctrine of "*once saved always saved*"? I think one must be very careful not to stretch Ezekiel's argument beyond his context. In the verses that follow he makes it clear he is dealing with the exiles and the people of Jerusalem who have been blaming their predicament upon their parents. They thought God was judging them because their parents sinned. Ezekiel is showing them that God judges each person on their own behavior, whether righteous or wicked. Each person is accountable to God for their own actions. When he speaks of death in *chapter 18* I do not think he has in mind eternal life or eternal damnation. Ezekiel is looking at the immediate consequences of the Babylonian invasion and exile of his fellow Jews. The Jews were claiming God was unjust because people were dying. They blamed their fates on their parents. Ezekiel corrects that false understanding and says each is responsible before God. He is calling the exiles and those still living in Jerusalem to repent so that they will not die. He isn't talking about eternal salvation in these verses but literal life and death in the immediate future. To stretch his argument beyond his context violates the text and makes it say something

Ezekiel does not say. One can argue "once saved always saved" from other Scriptures just not *Ezekiel 18*.

18:25-32 - Ezekiel summarizes what he has been trying to say to his fellow Jews. God is not unjust in his righteous judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. Those who practice wickedness will die and the righteous will live. The wicked who repent and turn back to God will also live and there is still an opportunity for that to happen. It is never too late for repentance! The Lord is not unjust the house of Israel is wicked!

God is seeking a righteous remnant through which he can rebuild his people. The reality is the exilic community would be founded on those who repented. Yet even a century later in Malachi's day they were already struggling with returning to their pagan and sinful ways. As *Ezekiel* and *Jeremiah* prophesy, it will take a work of God in the human heart to truly change us. It will take the Holy Spirit in us to transform us. It will take a New Covenant.

God will judge each of the Jews according to what they have done. What their parents did will not enter into his judgment. If they are wicked Ezekiel calls them to repent and be delivered from death. If they are righteous before God because they endeavor to keep the Lord's covenant Ezekiel calls them to remain faithful. God calls his people to repent and get a new heart and a new spirit. This reinforces the understanding that wickedness and righteousness before God is a matter of the heart and a matter of one's relationship with God. Our deeds simply show what is in our hearts. Finally Ezekiel reiterates that God takes no pleasure in the judgment and death of anyone for their sins. He desires all to repent and live! God's first inclination is mercy and forgiveness not judgment. God's love is always his first choice but he will judge sin if people do not turn back to him because he is also holy. Israel's whole history is a parable of the patience of God toward sinners. Eventually their time ran out and God punished them for centuries of rebellion and sin. 500 years later he would punish the whole human race for its rebellion and sin, not by wiping it out as he did in Noah's flood but in putting all our sin on his One and Only Son on the cross. The holiness of God was satisfied and the love of God was demonstrated toward sinners in Jesus Christ. The cross is where the love of God and the holiness of God intersect in history. Therefore forgiveness and eternal life are available to all who repent and surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 19:

19:1-4 - Ezekiel uses a symbolic poem to once again express the history and fate of Judah and Israel. This time he uses the metaphor of young lions as pictures of Judah's kings. Their mother is Judah. The young lion that was trapped in the pit and with hooks led to Egypt is probably Jehoahaz, son of Josiah. Jehoahaz was only king for three months before Pharaoh Neco captured him and took him to Egypt. He was not in any historical sense a "*strong lion*". Ezekiel may be using sarcasm here to describe the kings after Josiah, or especially the two kings, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin who were taken into exile before Jerusalem's destruction. The image of the lioness who was their mother is probably related to Judah being called the lion by Jacob in his prophecy of his twelve sons in *Genesis 49*. It could also refer to the lion throne of Solomon in *1 Kings 10*. Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin both sat on that throne whether they deserved to or not. Finally, John in *Revelation 5* calls Jesus the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

19:5-9 - Ezekiel says when the lioness of Judah saw her cub taken captive in Egypt she put another of her cubs on the throne and made him a strong lion. This cub "*broke down strongholds*

and devastated towns." The whole land and all who lived in it were terrified of his roaring. But the nations came against the young lion and spread their nets and captured him. They pulled him into a cage and took him to the king of Babylon. There they put him in prison and his roar was no longer heard on the mountains of Israel. The king here is undoubtedly Jehoiachin whom Nebuchadnezzar captured, took to Babylon and put in prison. Once again Ezekiel uses sarcasm to describe the young king who only reigned three months before he was captured and taken to Babylon. He never had the chance to develop any kind of fierce reputation. Plus he was only 18 when he ascended the lion throne of Solomon. From an historical perspective Jehoiachin was a weak king and in no way a lion that would strike fear in any of the nations around Judah.

Ezekiel may be "lamenting" the two captured kings in order to attack the official theology. The people falsely believed that because they had a king from David's line who sat upon Solomon's throne Jerusalem would never be captured or destroyed. God would protect the king because of his covenant with David. They had divorced the covenant with David from the covenant God made with all of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The official theology didn't even consider the king's behavior according to God's Law. Josiah did but the rest of the last kings of Judah did not. The problem for the kings was God felt like Josiah. He cared very much how the kings acted and whether they were obedient to his commandments. It is as if Ezekiel says all the nations around Judah and the Lord himself saw Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin for what they were; young weak kings who were in over their heads and had no chance of succeeding. The official theology saw them as "*young lions*" who devoured their prey and whose roar terrified the peoples around Judah. False teaching and doctrine can blind us to the truth of the situation. That is what happened to the leaders and people of Judah.

19:10-14 - Ezekiel now describes Judah itself as a vine. He changes metaphors from a lioness who puts one of her cubs on the throne to a fruitful vine planted by abundant water. In *Genesis 49* Jacob describes Joseph as a fruitful vine planted by springs of water. Isaiah uses the picture of Israel as the Lord's vineyard in *Isaiah 5*. Jeremiah uses the image of Judah as a vine in *Jeremiah 2* and Ezekiel has already used the metaphor in *Ezekiel 15 and 17*.

The vine he describes here was great enough and strong enough to provide branches that were large enough for a scepter. It was a great vine that towered over everything else. But it was uprooted in fury and thrown to the ground. The east wind shriveled its fruit and fire consumed its branches. Now the vine that was Judah is planted in a dry and thirsty land and no strong branch is left fit for a ruler's scepter. Judah is now bereft of power and is incapable of raising up leaders who will lead the country out of its disaster. This is a scathing critique of Zedekiah who is king in Jerusalem at the time Ezekiel writes this lament. In his lament Ezekiel sarcastically calls Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin lion cubs who were strong rulers. Zedekiah is "*not fit for a ruler's scepter!*" Ezekiel's point is Judah is doomed and her king will be judged and there is nothing he or anyone else can do about it. All they can do is lament Judah and Jerusalem's fall.

Chapter 20:

20:1-2 - The 7th year, 5th month and 10th day of Jehoiachin's captivity I calculated as July 10, 590. The NLT calculates the date as August 14, 590. Ezekiel says on that date some of the elders of Israel came to him to inquire of the Lord. He still refers to them as elders of Israel and not Judah. Ezekiel often views the exiles as representative of all of Israel and not just Judah.

God is not inclined to let them inquire of him and tells Ezekiel to tell the elders. If this had been in Jerusalem the elders could have gone to the temple and inquired of the chief priest

who could use the Urim and Thummin, (the sacred lots; see *Exodus 28:30 & Numbers 27:21*) to tell them what the Lord's will was. Or they could have gone to one of the court prophets to inquire of the Lord or even a true prophet like Jeremiah or Habakkuk. However, in exile their only real alternative is to come to the one man they know is a prophet of the Lord and that is Ezekiel. This is four years before the fall of Jerusalem and at least two before Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. Why do the elders come to Ezekiel at this time? Is it because it is the seventh year of their captivity and that is a spiritually significant number? Have events in Babylon made the elders think there is hope Nebuchadnezzar may release the king and send the exiles home? Or is their false belief in the official theology starting to falter because events are not turning out as they had anticipated? The king is still in prison and they are still in exile and Nebuchadnezzar doesn't appear to be changing at all. Something is wrong. That is probably the most likely explanation. However, it is difficult to pinpoint any clear reason why they come to Ezekiel at this time.

20:4-12 - God asks Ezekiel to judge the elders. Confront them with the detestable practices of their parents' generation. Remind them of their history. God chose Israel and swore to bring them out of Egypt and deliver them from slavery. He delivered them and revealed himself to them as the Lord their God. He swore to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey, a beautiful land. For their part they were to rid themselves of the idols they had worshipped in Egypt and worship the Lord alone. But the people did not listen to God. They did not get rid of their idols and forsake the gods of Egypt. God said therefore he would judge them so that his name would not be profaned among the nations in which Israel lived. God brought them out of Egypt and did what he said he would do but they did not. He led them into the desert and gave them his Law which gives life. He gave them his Sabbath command as a sign that the Lord had made them his holy people.

Ezekiel, like many of the prophets, appeals all the way back to the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai in around 1290BC. Ezekiel writes this prophecy in 590, some 7 centuries later. Ezekiel is rehearsing Israel's history to help the elders of Israel understand that God has kept his Word and his covenant with his people. It is they who have not. God still holds them accountable to his covenant and expects their obedience. He is still the Lord their God!

20:13-20 - Despite all the Lord did for Israel they still rebelled against the Lord. Even in the desert they rebelled. They desecrated his Sabbaths and worshipped the golden calf. God said he would pour out his wrath on them in the desert and destroy them but for the sake of his name and his promise to them he did not. He did not want his name profaned in the sight of the nations who saw him deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. He took pity on the children born in the desert and did not destroy Israel. The generation that came out of Egypt disobeyed the Lord. They rebelled against him. They did not keep his Law and worshipped idols. They desecrated the Lord's Sabbaths. Therefore God did not lead them to the Promiseland. Instead he caused them to wander in the desert until everyone but two of those who came out of Egypt died in the desert. Only Joshua and Caleb survived to enter Canaan. He warned the next generation born in the desert wanderings not to imitate and follow their parents. He told them to keep his Law and be careful to obey God's commands. God called them to keep his Sabbaths holy as a sign between God and Israel. Then they would know the Lord as their God.

Ezekiel does here what many biblical writers do. He rehearses the story of Israel in order to explain and illuminate current events. *2 Kings 17*, *Nehemiah 9*, and Stephen in *Acts 7* are all examples of this practice.

20:21-26 - The children of Israel born in the desert did not obey the Lord. They rebelled just like their parents. God therefore swore to scatter them and disperse them among the nations because they had disobeyed the Lord. They had lusted after the gods and idols of their ancestors.

Verses 25-26 are difficult. The Lord says he gave them over to statutes that were not good and laws they could not live by. He let them be defiled through their gifts, the sacrifice of their firstborn children, so that they would be filled with horror and know that the Lord alone was God. The difficulty is the context sounds as if this all happened to the generation of Israel who wandered in the desert before they invaded Canaan. However, even though *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* detail the people's disobedience there is no evidence that the people were sacrificing their children to pagan idols. That practice did not occur historically until the reign of later kings like Manasseh. It is also difficult to understand to what Ezekiel is referring when he speaks of laws they could not live by that were not good. It is possible he is referring to the time when the Assyrians had conquered the north kingdom and Judah was under Assyrian rule. The Jews were forced to worship the Assyrian gods and obey their laws. They abandoned the Law of God at that time. Perhaps the best way to understand what Ezekiel is saying in these verses is to see them as prophetic. The Lord was going to hand over the generation that was born in the desert and scatter them among the nations for their disobedience. It is their descendants who have experienced all these things. The generation who came out of Egypt was corrupted. The generation born in the desert was corrupted. And the generations descended from those who conquered the Promiseland have also become corrupted. No one in Israel has obeyed the Lord.

If one looks at Israel's history from *Joshua* through *2 Kings* in every generation the Israelites disobeyed God. There were brief times of faithfulness but the people always returned to their pagan rebellious ways. In *1 & 2 Kings* NO king of the north kingdom Israel was ever completely faithful to Yahweh and his covenant. There are a handful of the kings of Judah who are, the most important being Hezekiah and Josiah, but most of the time the kings of Judah are unfaithful to the Lord as well. The facts are the people of Israel throughout their history were a rebellious people and were not faithful to God and his covenant. The remarkable fact is that the Lord allowed them to occupy his land and be his people for 7 centuries before he had finally had enough of their idolatry, wickedness and rebellion. God bent over backwards way beyond what we would have done, giving them every chance to repent. It took the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon to bring them to their knees so he could start over.

20:27-29 - The people born in the desert conquered the Promiseland with God's help but it was not long before they forsook the Lord. They began worshipping pagan gods on every high place and leafy tree. They would offer sacrifices and incense and drink offerings to Baal, Asherah and Astarte, the gods of the Canaanites. They would indulge in the detestable worship practices of the Canaanites, a people who were so corrupt and evil God used Israel to judge them and gave Israel the land of Canaan in which to live. Yet even into Ezekiel's day the people still go up to the high places, the Bamah and worship pagan gods.

Bamah in Hebrew literally means ridge or ridgeback, but it came to refer to a "high place", a pagan shrine built on a hill. At times the Israelites would worship the Lord at high places. As worship was centralized in Jerusalem after the building of the temple the people

worshipped God less and less at the high places but unfortunately began to worship the pagan gods more and more at those same bamahs. When Jeroboam I split off to form the north kingdom of Israel he allowed and even encouraged worship at the high places all over Israel. His construction of the two calf shrines at Bethel and Dan encouraged the simultaneous worship of Yahweh and pagan gods which led to the worst kind of syncretism between the true worship of the Lord and pagan religion. All these practices violated God's first commandment to his people. You shall have no other gods before me and his second command: you shall not make any idols to worship. Israel rebelled against God!

20:30-31 - God returns to the theme of letting Israel inquire of the Lord as they continue to defile themselves with idols, even practicing child sacrifice. God's answer is no, he will not let them ask anything of him. Faithlessness and rebellion push us away from God. Without repentance we cannot expect him to answer our prayers or speak to us. The only Word we will hear from him in our rebellion is judgment. Until we repent our prayers will not reach him. He will not allow it.

20:32-38 - The elders of the Jews wanted to find out what was going to happen to them and to Jerusalem but did not come to Ezekiel with repentant hearts. God tells them through his prophet that he will not let them inquire of him. Yet the irony is in these next paragraphs he tells them exactly what he is going to do but it is something the elders don't want to hear!

God exposes their hypocrisy. They want to worship Yahweh and have all the benefits of his covenant with them and yet at the same time *"be like the nations."* They want to do what they want and worship what they want, covering all their bases and still have the benefits of Yahweh's protection and blessing. God says he will not let them. He does have a plan for his rebellious people but it is not their plan. God has scattered them and with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm he will bring them back to the land, but he will do so with his outpoured wrath against their sin and rebellion. Ezekiel uses the language of the exodus here to describe God's plan for the exiles. *Isaiah* in the second half of his prophecy uses the images of the exodus as well. God's message is consistent through the prophets ministering to the people at this time.

He will judge the exiles and the people of Judah just as he judged the Israelites in the desert after he had led them out of Egypt. Yet he preserved the people in the wilderness and raised up a new generation born in the wilderness through whom he conquered the Promiseland. God says he will do the same thing again. He will bring them under his rod like a shepherd counts his sheep. He will bring them under the bond of the covenant but first he will purge the rebellious from among his people. God will use the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and their homeland to purify a remnant, a righteous remnant with whom he can start over. When they finally return to the land they will be purified through God's doing.

God refused to let the elders inquire of him because of their sin and yet he tells them exactly what he is going to do!

20:39-44 - God tells the elders go serve your worthless idols. They will not help you in your current situation at all. Afterward, they will finally listen to God. The afterward is probably referring to the destruction of Jerusalem.

When the exiles are finally purged and refined they will listen to God and will serve him on God's *"holy mountain"*, meaning Mt. Zion. God will finally accept them. They will once again bring their sacrifices to him at his temple and he will accept them because they are no longer rebellious but repentant. They will offer him incense and their choice gifts. An NIV text note

says, "*and the gifts of your first fruits.*" That would be a good description of the first fruits offerings. They were the choicest of the animals and produce one could bring to the Lord. They were the best! God will once again gladly receive their worship. He will bring them back from among all the nations to which he scattered them and will show himself holy among them. God will renew his covenant with the Jews and return them to the land he swore to give their ancestors. The Jews themselves will remember what they have done and how they have treated God and will loathe their conduct. They will be truly repentant. God will do all of this for his Name's sake and not according to their evil and corrupt ways. God tells the Jewish elders he is justified in wiping them out completely because they have shattered his covenant with him. Yet God will not wipe them out. He will judge them but will also purify them and raise up a faithful remnant with whom he can start over. He will both judge their sin and punish them for it and remember his covenant and promise with Abraham and by purifying them continue to fulfill it. Ezekiel describes God's actions as holding in tension the unconditional covenant he made with Abraham and the conditional covenant he made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. God is going to fulfill both covenants for his Name's sake because he keeps his promises. That is why he does not completely destroy Israel and the Jewish people even today!

20:45-49 - Ezekiel is told to prophesy against the south and the forest of the southland. The Lord does not give a specific location for the south but it is presumably Judah and Jerusalem. From a geographic perspective Jerusalem would have been almost straight west from Babylon. But from a spiritual perspective if one takes the temple as the center point Ezekiel is speaking against the towns and forest south of Jerusalem, like Bethlehem and others all the way down to the Negev. Today there are forests south and west of Jerusalem. Whether there were in Ezekiel's day is unknown. The forest of the southland could be simply a symbolic picture of Judah. In *verse 49* Ezekiel complains to God that the people keep saying he is only speaking in parables, meaning he does not speak plainly about what he means. He uses symbolic stories all the time. The point of the "*parable*" is judgment is coming to the south, to Judah, and everyone will see it and no one will be able to stop it. All will be scorched by it from south to north. God himself will kindle the fire and it will not be put out. God is going to use Nebuchadnezzar to judge Jerusalem and Judah.

Chapter 21:

21:1-7 - God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against Jerusalem and the sanctuary or the temple. He is told to prophesy against the land of Israel. It is almost as if God is answering the people's critique of Ezekiel's messages. This prophecy is not against a vague forest of the southland but against Jerusalem and the land of Israel. He gives Ezekiel specificity.

God says he is against the land and the city. He will draw his sword and cut off both the righteous and the wicked in the land. The calamity will be so great that the righteous will be caught up in it along with those who truly deserve God's judgment. The sword of the Lord will come against the whole land.

Ezekiel is told to groan with a broken heart and with bitter grief. When the people ask him why he is groaning he is to tell them because of the news that is coming. Everyone's heart will melt and their hands go limp. Every spirit will faint and every knee will become weak. God's judgment is coming against Jerusalem and nothing can stop it. This prophecy was given before 586, probably even before the final siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's problem is too many of the exiles still cannot see the truth of their sin and rebellion against God. The false official theology

is still governing their thinking. God is telling them he is going to expose the official theology for what it is: a lie. He is going to destroy Jerusalem and even his temple. He is going to eliminate the reign of the kings from David's line!

21:8-12 - God has prepared a sword against the people and against the king of Judah. He has sharpened it and polished it, readying it for battle. He asks if the people should rejoice in the scepter of my son Judah. No, the sword despises every such stick. The scepter of his son Judah is a reference to *Genesis 49:10* and Jacob's prophecy over his sons. It says, "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs.*" Or it can read until "*Shiloh*" comes. This was taken as a Messianic prophecy. In *Deuteronomy 32:40* Moses gives a prophecy over Israel. In that verse he speaks of God's judgment upon a rebellious and sinful people. He says, "*I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.*"

Ezekiel combines the two prophetic passages to show that even though God promised a scepter to the tribe of Judah through King David's line yet God will bring a sword of judgment against Judah for all her rebellion and sin. The sword the Lord raises up against Judah, namely Babylon, will not care about God's promise to David. It will not respect the scepter of Judah. It will be a mere stick in the eyes of the Babylonians.

God tells Ezekiel to cry out in grief because the sword will be raised against all the princes of Israel. They will be slain by the sword. In 586 King Zedekiah was captured by Babylonian troops and taken to Riblah in Syria where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters. There his sons, the princes of Israel, were slain before him and then his eyes were put out and he was taken captive to Babylon and thrown into prison where he died. Some members of David's royal line survived, like Zerubbabel, probably because they were born in captivity or were only infants when they were carried into exile in 597 with Jehoiachin. Zerubbabel would return to Jerusalem, leading the exiles to help lead the effort to rebuild God's temple after Cyrus the Great's decree in 538. The line of David is reckoned through him in both *Matthew's* and *Luke's* genealogies of Jesus.

21:13-17 - Testing is coming to Judah and to the scepter of Judah, the kings from David's line. Ezekiel asks, what if the scepter does not continue? What happens to David's line and God's covenant with David if the sword of the Lord destroys the kingship? This is at the heart of the official theology. It said as long as Judah had a king from David's line sitting on the lion throne in Jerusalem the city was safe because God would keep his covenant with David and protect his king and his city. Ezekiel is saying no he won't if the rebellion of the king and the city is too great because God also made a covenant with all of Israel at Mt. Sinai which they have broken.

God's sword of judgment prophesied by the Lawgiver, Moses himself, will come against Judah because of her sin. It is a sword for slaughter and it will exact God's just punishment on Jerusalem and upon the scepter of Judah, the king.

21:18-23 - God tells Ezekiel to mark out two roads for Nebuchadnezzar to take. One fork is to lead to Jerusalem and Judah and the other fork is to lead to Rabbah of the Ammonites, modern day Amman in Jordan. God reveals to Ezekiel Nebuchadnezzar will stop at the fork in the road and consult his omens to see where to go. The road from Babylon he describes is the King's Highway on the Golan Heights east of the Sea of Galilee. The main road from Syria ran down

the eastern heights where there was water until it reached the Arabah and the Red Sea at Elath. Nebuchadnezzar will need to make a decision as to where to send the bulk of his army. He will cast lots with arrows; consult his idols, meaning his priests would seek a vision from one of the gods. He will examine the liver, consulting the entrails of a sacrificed animal for guidance as to what to do. This is divination. God says into his right hand will come the lot for Jerusalem and he will send his main battle force there to lay siege to the city. They will erect siege works against its walls and bring up a battering ram to smash its gates. Nebuchadnezzar will give the command to his army to slaughter the city and its inhabitants if they do not surrender. God has not only foreseen it he has commanded it.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, will use the normal pagan ways of casting lots, seeking oracles from idols, and divination of sacrificial animals looking for omens to know what to do. All these ways God forbade Israel to practice. By Ezekiel's day the kings and leaders of Judah were doing them all because they had fallen so far away from God and his covenant. God told Israel not to practice these occult practices because they involved demonic powers. This we learn in the New Testament. Paul says in *1 Corinthians 10* that behind all idols are demons.

God will use Nebuchadnezzar's demonic, pagan practices to steer him in the direction he wants him to go, Jerusalem. To the people of the city under the influence of the official theology the omens Nebuchadnezzar sees will seem like false omens. They will not be able to understand how he could have perceived that he is to attack Jerusalem. God is supposed to protect his city not open it to invasion and destruction! Yet this is God's purpose in order to remind King Zedekiah, his court and the temple priests that they swore an oath before God to obey Nebuchadnezzar and they have broken that oath. God is going to send Judah into captivity and destroy his temple and the city he calls his own. There will be nothing they can do to stop it!

21:24 - God says because Israel-Judah has not repented and their behavior has revealed their sins for all to see, including the pagan nations around them, God is about to judge them. They will be taken captive into Babylon. Judah's time has run out. There comes an end to even God's patience and he must act in holiness to punish sin.

21:25-27 - God speaks directly to the "*wicked prince of Israel*", meaning Zedekiah, son of Josiah, King of Judah. His day has also come just as Judah's day of judgment has come. Ezekiel says Zedekiah's time of punishment has reached its climax. God tells him to remove his crown because it will not be as it once was. The lowly will be exalted and the exalted brought low. God will make it a ruin. "*It*" means the crown and throne of David will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs. This is a prophecy using the words of the Shiloh prophecy of *Genesis 49:10*. Someday Ezekiel says a new king will come to the throne of Israel and he will be the rightful king, not one who came to the throne appointed by a pagan conqueror, like Zedekiah.

This whole chapter sets up the final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It asks the question, what happens to David's crown and scepter if Jerusalem is destroyed? The official theology said God would always protect the king on David's throne. God explains how that belief is false. *Verse 25* declares God's judgment on Zedekiah, and his crown will be taken away. *Verse 27* then quotes *Genesis 49:10*, the Shiloh prophecy, and points ahead to Jesus. David's crown will be taken away until Messiah comes to whom the crown belongs. The lowly one, Jesus, will be exalted, and the exalted one, Zedekiah, will be brought low.

21:28-32 - God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the Ammonites and their insults. Nebuchadnezzar took the fork in the King's Highway that led to Jerusalem and sent the bulk of his army there. However, he also invaded Ammon and took the territory of the Ammonites. Ezekiel's prophecy warns the Ammonites that disaster is coming.

A sword is coming, drawn for slaughter that will consume the Ammonites. False visions and divinations have said they will be spared but the Lord says they will not. The Ammonites would be destroyed by the Babylonians just as Judah was. Jeremiah in *Jeremiah 49* prophesies the Ammonites destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel does the same thing here. Their punishment has reached its climax just like Zedekiah and Judah. The Babylonian invasion destroyed both countries as Nebuchadnezzar campaigned down the King's Highway through Ammonite territory as he was laying siege to Jerusalem. God says the Ammonites will be remembered no more. Modern day Jordan is populated by Arabs. No one really knows where the remnants of the Ammonites are today. They have passed from history. *Jeremiah 49* says God will one day restore their fortunes, but only God knows where they are and who they are. Ezekiel's prophecy has been literally fulfilled.

Chapter 22:

22:1-5 - God calls Ezekiel to judge Jerusalem, "*the city of bloodshed.*" He tells him to confront the people with all their detestable practices. Jerusalem will bring God's judgment down upon herself because the people have shed blood in their midst, meaning murder. They defile themselves by making idols and worshipping them. They have become guilty because of their shedding of blood and their idolatry. Ezekiel makes a clear link here between idolatry and murder. When people abandon God and start worshipping idols it inevitably leads to treating others with violence and even murder. God says because of their murder and idolatry he will make Jerusalem an object of scorn among the nations and a laughingstock to all countries. He will publicly shame Jerusalem and punish her for her deeds. God has reached the limits of his patience and he will no longer tolerate or forgive the violation of his covenant and his Law by his people. He will allow the city which he chose for his Name to dwell to be destroyed and her people sent into exile.

I read this and wonder about America today. We have shed innocent blood in the holocaust of abortion. We have worshipped the idols of greed and power and allowed them to corrupt our leaders and our ways. We have made idols of material things and focused our lives on gaining them rather than serving God and people. As we have become more idolatrous as a nation we have seen violence rise and murder grow just like Judah. We have abandoned the Godly values and principles this nation was founded upon. How long will God continue to have patience with us? How long before our nation and our capital city bear the consequences of our sin? How long before God withdraws the incredible blessings he has showered upon America and replaces them with judgments designed to bring us to our knees and repent? Have we passed the point of no return as Judah had? I do not know but the signs are there that God is beginning to punish America and not bless it. We had better wake up.

22:6-12 - God outlines the charges against Judah and Jerusalem. They had forgotten God and it led to idolatry which led to bloodshed and murder, extortion, contempt for parents, all kinds of sexual sin, mistreatment of the poor and the alien among them and widows. These are all the natural consequences of forgetting God. Ezekiel's charges mirror Paul's description of an idolatrous culture in *Romans 1*. This is too much like our day!

Ezekiel says each of the princes of Israel uses his power and position to shed blood. That means the king's court had become so corrupt and power hungry that every member of the royal family was involved in corruption and even murder to keep their power. The entire royal family had forgotten God's covenant with David and Israel. No wonder God took the crown away from it and reserved it for the Messiah when he would come.

Like Paul's list in *Romans 1* Ezekiel includes contempt for one's parents as one of the most grievous of the sins of Judah and Jerusalem. This too is something one sees today in America. Yet we laugh at it or downplay it and say it is just kids being rebellious. It's no big deal. It's a huge deal to God!!! He sent his people into exile and destroyed Jerusalem partly because their families had deteriorated to such an extent that children held their parents in contempt! We are blind to our own sins today in America!

Ezekiel indicts Jerusalem for its treatment of the downtrodden among them, the poor, the alien, the widow and orphan. God's Law had provisions in it to protect those who had lost their land and freedoms, who were vulnerable because of life situations. God many times through the prophets says he has a special place in his heart for the poor, the widow and the orphan. His design was for his people to treat them with dignity and to lend a helping hand so that that they were taken care of when they could not care for themselves. Today as a church we need to continue to care for the poor among us. God is watching. As a society we need to continue to help the poor. We have many government programs and we need to ask ourselves whether they truly help or do they trap the poor in dependence upon the government and rob people of the dignity and value of work. God will judge us for how we treat the downtrodden among us just as he judged Jerusalem.

God says he will judge Judah for desecrating his Sabbaths and despising his holy things. The people, led by the priests who were supposed to teach the people God's Law, had stopped paying attention to God's Sabbath and had failed to keep it holy. The violation of the Sabbath was a symptom of their deeper disrespect for God's Law and their covenant with God. In America today as a culture we do not keep the Sabbath to God. We keep the weekends for ourselves or we work seven days a week in order to worship at the altar of money and success. The further we have moved away from the Lord's Sabbath as a practice the more stressed, anxious and out of balance we have become as a culture! Rather than being a minor thing violating God's Sabbath has become a major problem for America just as it had for Judah!

Ezekiel says there are slanderous men in Jerusalem who are bent on shedding innocent blood. They lie and cheat in order to murder and get financial gain from it. The command not to murder predates the Ten Commandments. In *Genesis 9:4-6* God tells Noah after the Flood that anyone who sheds the blood of another, meaning murder, will be held accountable and his or her life will be forfeit. Even before that God tells Cain in *Genesis 4* that his brother Abel's blood cries out from the ground into which it was spilled. *Numbers 35:33* says bloodshed pollutes the land and atonement cannot be made for the blood shed on the land except by the blood of the one who shed it. That means that from the viewpoint of God's Law the only way to make atonement for all the bloodshed done in Jerusalem and Judah was through the death of the ones who shed the innocent blood. The bloodshed in the land had polluted the land according to God! *2 Kings 21* says Manasseh filled Jerusalem from end to end with innocent blood and because of it the Lord determined to judge Judah. Much of the bloodshed Manasseh committed was child sacrifice to Molech on the altar of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. The point is when innocent blood is shed whether by premeditated murder or child sacrifice to an idol it pollutes the land and God sees and remembers. *Numbers* says the only way for atonement to be made for those

murders is for the one who killed the innocent to be killed as well. Therefore according to God's Law all the princes of Israel were guilty and deserved to die. Many in Jerusalem who had committed murder and polluted the land deserved to die and all who had sacrificed their children in the fiery idol of Topheth deserved to die. The people had polluted and defiled God's city and God's land with the blood of the innocent. God was going to atone for that blood in order to cleanse the land. How stained are our cities and our land today with the blood of the innocent? We have no idea what the murder of so many innocents has done to the land of America in God's sight. The slaughter of the unborn is as great a holocaust as we can imagine. Their blood cries out to the Lord for justice. Will the Lord ignore their cries? I fear he will not and we are under a sentence of death because of it. God help us!

Ezekiel continues God's charges stating that in Jerusalem and Judah are people who eat at the mountain shrines and commit lewd acts. The people have become idolatrous, worshipping idols at the high places as if that was normal and good. They betray God's covenant and break their relationship with him. Then they break their relationships with their neighbors and family as well. Lewd acts describe the sexual sins like cult prostitution at the pagan high places. Ezekiel goes on to describe the sexual immorality in Judah. Adultery, incest, and all sorts of sexual sin were rampant in the city and the country. No one paid any attention to God's ceremonial laws and to the Holiness Code of Leviticus when it came to sexuality. The people disconnected their sexual practices from their relationship with God. Their idolatry has led directly to sexual immorality. In fact the more idolatrous they become the more sexually perverted they become. Ezekiel establishes a direct link between idolatry and sexual impurity. The same is true in America today. The further away from God we have gone as a culture and a country the greater our sexual immorality. That which God calls an abomination we celebrate, including homosexual "marriage". In America today the only real sexual taboo is the sexual abuse of children. We still call that immoral and deviant but for how long? The epidemic of pornography is not the cause of all of this but a symptom. Ezekiel helps us understand that our culture is sexually immoral because we are idolatrous! We have forgotten God and therefore we commit lewd acts with one another. Paul says the same thing in *Romans 1*!

Finally Ezekiel says there are people who are so bent on gaining power and wealth in Judah and Jerusalem that they accept bribes and kill others to get it. They extort people with excessive interest and usury which God's Law expressly forbid. They make unjust gain by extorting their neighbors. We see that today all over America, from credit card companies that charge exorbitant interest to pay day loan companies who trap people in debt to government officials who are deep into corruption and bribes from lobbyists to keep their power. Ezekiel says all of this is happening because the people have forgotten God. They have abandoned their relationship with him. It is clear from his description of their behavior that we in America have abandon God as well. We are doing the same things Judah and Jerusalem were doing. God judged and destroyed them. Will he do the same to us? There is no reason to believe he will not unless we repent and turn back to the Lord as a nation. Repentance, revival and awakening are our only hope!

22:13-16 - God will judge Judah and Jerusalem because of their wickedness, their unjust gain and murder in their midst. Will they still have their courage when it happens? They will not be able to stand against the Lord's wrath over their sin. God has spoken and he will do it. Nothing they do can stop the judgment that is coming. God has reached the limits of his patience with them and they have passed the point of no return. Not even the people's repentance will stop God

from sending them into exile now. He has determined to put an end to their uncleanness. They will finally recognize the Lord and turn back to him when he has executed his judgment against them and scattered them among the nations. The exiles would repent after the fact and God used their repentant hearts to rebuild their people but the generation who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem would not be the generation who rebuilt it again.

22:17-22 - God tells Ezekiel that Israel has become like dross to him. The people are like the copper, tin, iron and lead left inside the furnace when they smelted for silver. The other metals are valuable and the Israelites used them but the purpose of the smelting was to obtain pure silver. They have devalued their purpose and now are simply to be melted and thrown out. God says he will gather the people into Jerusalem and pour out his wrath upon the city like the fiery blast of a smelting furnace. God will blow on them with his wrath and melt them all. They will not be able to withstand the Lord's anger.

Silver was rarely found in its pure state and its ore contained other metals mixed in with the silver, especially lead, like galena. In order to separate the silver the ore had to be smelted. The ore was placed in a clay pot in the furnace and the heavier metals in the ore like lead sank to the bottom. The silver which was lighter floated on the top and could be poured or skimmed off in order to be worked. The lead and copper and other heavier metals sank to the bottom of the pot and were then disposed of or used as the need arose. The image here of Israel as the silver which has become dross in God's sight means Israel should have floated to the top but instead it has sunk to the bottom. The picture is a vivid one of Judah's moral decay. They have sunk lower than the dross and God is going to melt them in order to refine them.

22:23-29 - Ezekiel speaks against Judah's leaders. He first notes that the land has not had rain which is a warning of God's impending judgment upon Judah. God warns Israel in *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28* that if they break their covenant with the Lord he will stop the rain and the land will experience drought that will cause their crops to fail. This is what was already happening in Judah. Ezekiel calls the people to wake up and realize what is going on. He then lists the sins of the leaders of the nation. The princes are like lions tearing their prey, taking what they want through violence and extortion. The LXX says princes while the Hebrew reads prophets. The context indicates princes because in *verse 28* Ezekiel speaks against the court prophets, so the LXX is the better translation. The royal family has abdicated its job to lead the people in following the Lord and maintaining a just society under God. The priests violate God's Law, the very Law they were supposed to teach the people to obey. They profane God's holy things failing to teach the people the difference between the holy and the common so that the people also disobey God. They ignore the Sabbath so that the people do not keep it and so profane God's Name. Ezekiel says Judah's officials also are greedy for unjust gain to the point of murder. They are all about gaining and keeping power and wealth and it has corrupted them. Those who call themselves prophets ignore the immorality of the nation's leaders and do not speak out against it. They are caught up in maintaining their power and influence as well. They have been corrupted with defending the official theology that justifies the immorality of Judah's leaders. They still say, "*Thus says the Lord*", when the Lord has not spoken. The result is the people of the land have followed the example of their leaders. They practice extortion, commit robbery, oppress the poor and mistreat the alien. They deny the lowliest among them justice before God and before the Law. That was their sworn duty as Judah's leaders but they have abandoned it. They were to be a check and a balance against one group holding too much power

and becoming corrupt but they have banded together to help each other maintain their power and ignored their calling. God has had enough. He will judge them.

Leaders are held to a higher standard by God than the people they lead. Ezekiel demonstrates the principle here that the behavior of the people is a result of the behavior of the leaders. When leaders are corrupt they corrupt the people. All are guilty before God, leaders and people alike. Therefore all will be judged and punished for violating God's covenant.

22:30-31 - God says he looked for a man among the princes, priests, officials and prophets of Judah, among their leaders, who would stand before God in the gap on behalf of the land. The image of standing before God in the gap is an image of intercession and prayer. It says that God desired to find someone among the leadership of Judah who would speak to the people and the other leaders to hold them accountable for their actions before God and to speak to God on their behalf in order to turn away God's wrath over his people's sin. God does not want to destroy Judah and punish his people. His heart is for forgiveness and restoration. But his holiness cannot ignore sin even though God is patient. The tragedy of these verses is God's admission that he found not one leader in Judah willing to take on the role of standing in the gap for God.

Clearly men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel were called of God to be prophets to the people in the time of the crisis with Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem. Even though Ezekiel was a priest yet he had not yet started his ministry. Jeremiah had been called as a teenager to be the Lord's prophet. What God is after here is someone from the centers of Judah's power to come forward. No one did. That says the entire leadership structure of the nation of Judah was corrupt and apostate from God. None of them were faithful; as are the leaders so are the people. God will therefore judge Judah and Jerusalem and consume them in his wrath over their sin and rebellion. He will bring down on their heads what their deeds deserve, his wrath over sin. Jeremiah and Ezekiel's job was to declare the Lord's just punishments against Judah and to prepare the remnant who would survive the calamity of 586 to bring them back to God so that God could rebuild his people. The leaders failed in their responsibility. Fortunately Jeremiah and Ezekiel succeeded in theirs.

These verses today are often used to call God's people to intercession. In context God's call is to leaders to intercede for the people. Leaders today would include government officials, pastors of churches, leading pundits and others who have influence in our society. Are there any willing to step forward and stand in the gap for America. Thankfully there still are some today. God help us if the Lord ever looks for some and finds no leader willing to call the people to repentance and pray for America. Intercession, prayer, is critical if we are to turn around our city, our state and our nation. Repentance starts with God's church and that means it starts with God's pastors. The question is will we step forward and stand in the gap for our country and our people?

Chapter 23:

23:1-4 - God gives Ezekiel another picture of his people, this time as two adulterous sisters who became prostitutes named Oholah and Oholibah. Oholah he says, is Samaria, the capital of the north kingdom Israel and Oholibah is Jerusalem the capital of the south kingdom Judah. The two sisters became prostitutes in Egypt in their youth and there they allowed themselves to be fondled and caressed. The image is of the Israelites worshipping pagan gods. Within a few months after God led them out of Egypt into the Sinai they had made a golden calf and worshipped the gods of Egypt claiming they were the gods that brought them out of slavery. God

says from the beginning his people were rebelling against him and sinning by worshipping other gods before Yahweh. In the entire history of Israel from the Exodus right up to Ezekiel's day at the end of the south kingdom Judah, seven centuries, there were only a handful of times that Israel was truly faithful to God. For most of their history they were trying to worship Yahweh and pagan gods at the same time. One could easily make the case that from the beginning they were disobeying the first two commandments, have no other gods before God and make no idols. They did not love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and strength.

The name Oholah means she who has a tent or tent-woman. The picture is of someone who worships at a tent shrine or is a shrine prostitute. The name Oholibah means the tent is in her or woman of the tent. The two names are very similar and paint the image of two shrine prostitutes who pitch their tents to attract their lovers in order to practice adultery and pagan worship.

23:5-10 - Oholah or Samaria engaged in prostitution "*while she was still mine*", meaning she committed adultery while she was the Lord's wife. Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel the north kingdom, built the two calf shrines at Bethel and Dan at the very beginning of the Kingdom of Israel's history and so from the start the nation was rebelling against God.

Ezekiel says she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians. Israel at times opposed Assyria and at times was a vassal state and ally. Ezekiel says she gave herself to all the Assyrian commanders and governors, all their handsome men clothed in blue. He paints a picture of Oholah defiling herself with the elite of the Assyrians. Ezekiel portrays Israel as having sex with her Assyrian lovers, committing adultery with them. *Verse 7* gives the true picture of what God means by the image: Israel defiled herself with all the pagan idols she lusted after; Baal, Astarte, Asherah and the gods of Assyria. She returned to the behavior of her youth that began in Egypt but now was out of control with the Assyrians. She abandoned God her husband for her lovers! See the book of *Hosea*, written before the fall of Israel. God commands Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute, as a living example of God's broken relationship with his people.

Ezekiel says God therefore gave Israel over "*to her lovers*", the Assyrians for whom she lusted. He allowed her to be stripped and shamed. They took away her sons and daughters and killed her with the sword. Israel, Oholah, became a byword among other nations as her punishment from God was carried out. When Hoshea the last king of Israel rebelled against Shalmeneser V, king of Assyria, he came and laid siege to Samaria in 724 for three years. The records are fuzzy but it appears that his successor, Sargon II, finished the task in 721, captured the city and Hoshea and carried almost 28,000 people into exile to Assyria, settling them in what is modern day Armenia. The Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist. God had carried out his judgment against her that his prophets had warned was coming if they did not repent. They didn't and God fulfilled his Word.

23:11-31 - Oholibah, Judah, saw the destruction of her sister because of her adultery and prostitution with idols. But she did not repent. In fact she was even more depraved than her sister Israel. Israel's destruction should have made Judah evaluate her conduct and repent. Instead she lusted after the Assyrians too and defiled herself with them. She did worse than her sister Oholah-Israel. This is a reference to Manasseh and his conduct as king of Judah and vassal of Assyria. Manasseh was the most idolatrous and immoral of all the kings of Judah. His sins, including the sacrifice of his own infant son in the idol of Topheth, led God to condemn him and

Judah to judgment. Manasseh crossed the line and God's patience with his rebellious people finally ran out.

Ezekiel says Judah carried her prostitution even further. She saw the Babylonians or Chaldeans, handsome men dressed in red, not blue like the Assyrians, with their flowing turbans on their heads and she lusted after them. She sent messages to Chaldea or Babylon, inviting them to come to her. This may be a reference to Jehoiachim becoming a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar and pledging him loyalty as did Zedekiah. Ezekiel says the Babylonians came to Judah and defiled her in their lust. After they had defiled her Judah turned away from Babylon in disgust. Yet God had already turned away from Judah when she committed adultery with Babylon and her idols just as Israel had been adulterous with Assyria. God saw their prostitution and immorality with other gods and turned away from his people. They had betrayed him. Judah however became more and more idolatrous as the earlier visions of the temple in Ezekiel have shown. She lusted after other gods and practiced her prostitution like in the days of her youth when God brought them out of Egypt. Ezekiel claims that the gods of Egypt whom Israel craved had genitals like donkeys and their semen was like that of horses, an image of the worst kind of sexual sin, bestiality, something God says in *Leviticus 18* is an abomination to him.

God says because of the behavior of Oholibah-Judah God will stir up her lovers against her. The Babylonians whom she turned away from in disgust will come against her from every side. The men of Pekod, Shoa and Koa and all the Assyrians will invade the land. They will come against Judah with weapons and chariots and lay siege to Jerusalem on every side. The three cities or peoples Ezekiel mentions, Pekod, Shoa and Koa, are all peoples from the Mesopotamian Valley. They are all part of the Babylonian Empire and their invading army. God will use the Babylonians and their army to punish Oholibah-Judah for all her adultery and idolatry. God's jealous anger over his people will be directed through the Babylonians against Judah and Jerusalem. In graphic detail Ezekiel describes what will happen to the Jews. They will be captured, mutilated, many killed and all their wealth that they had amassed through their prostitution and idolatry will be stripped from them. They will be exposed naked for all to see and shamed before the world. God will finally put a stop to their lewdness and adultery that Judah began way back in Egypt. They will finally be so ashamed that they will not look on their former idols with longing anymore.

God declares he has determined to punish Judah and hand her over to those she hates, those she had turned away from in disgust, namely Babylon. They will treat the Jews with hatred and take away everything they have worked for, leaving Judah naked and full of shame. God says Judah's idolatry and promiscuity have brought this upon herself because she has defiled herself with her idols. Therefore God will punish Judah because she has gone the way of her sister. God will put the cup of his wrath against Israel's sin in Judah's hand for she has done the same thing as her sister.

This whole chapter may have been written around the time of Zedekiah's revolt against Babylon which would have been sometime after 590. The picture of Judah turning away from her lover Babylon in disgust may be referring to Zedekiah's rejection of Nebuchadnezzar which ultimately led to Nebuchadnezzar invading Judah and destroying Jerusalem to punish his rebellious vassal. God used history to judge his people and their sin.

23:32-34 - God declares that Judah will drink her sister Israel's cup, meaning the cup of God's wrath and judgment for her sin. It is a large cup, filled with scorn and derision because it holds so much. Judah will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. This is probably not literal

drunkenness but grief and pain over the destruction of Jerusalem. The cup of God's wrath is a cup of ruin and destruction. Samaria, the capital of Israel, had drained this cup, now it is Jerusalem's turn. God says Jerusalem will drink it and drain it dry, meaning God's full punishment for Judah's sin will be poured out on her. After she drinks it she will smash it to pieces because it brings no joy, only pain and grief. There will be no celebration as at a wedding when the guests drink a cup of wine to bless the newly married couple. This cup Jerusalem will be forced to drink because it is the Lord's doing and they cannot avoid it. God has spoken.

Isaiah and Jeremiah both use the picture of the cup of God's wrath. Isaiah uses it in *chapter 51*, the section of *Isaiah* written to the exiles. At the time of Ezekiel the exiles may or may not have had access to Isaiah as yet. *Jeremiah* mentions the cup of God's wrath several times often speaking of the nations and their judgment. Here Ezekiel plainly refers to Judah drinking the cup as a symbol of God's just punishment upon her for all her idolatry.

23:35-39 - God continues to describe the sins of Oholah-Israel and Ohibah-Judah. They have forgotten God in their idolatry and thrust him behind their backs, meaning they turned their backs upon the Lord and stopped paying attention to him and his commandments. God says they must now bear the consequences of their sin.

God calls Ezekiel to confront both Israel and Judah with their sins. This is prophetic and poetic language because historically God had already dealt with the idolatrous northern kingdom of Israel. It was completely destroyed in 721, some 130 years before Ezekiel wrote this passage. God's prophets often telescope historical events in order to make a point. Plus it reflects the fact that God is outside of time. The Creator is the Lord of time itself and all moments for him are now.

Israel and Judah have committed adultery and there is blood on their hands. God specifically singles out the sacrificing of their children on the altar of Topheth in the Ben Hinnom Valley. See *Jeremiah 7*. In their adultery they have committed murder by sacrificing their children whom God says, "*they bore to me.*" God's people are God's. They belong to him. We are not our own as Paul says in *1 Corinthians 6*. We were bought with a price. Ezekiel, in *chapter 18*, has already said every living soul belongs to the Lord. The people of Jerusalem and Judah have denied that reality and in idolatry and selfishness they have taken the lives of their children, God's children, to satisfy an idol's hunger. It is an abomination to God!! Further as they were defiling their covenant with God by killing their children they came to the Lord's house and went through the rituals of worshipping Yahweh at his temple as if there was nothing wrong and the Lord accepted their worship. They have completely divorced their worship of God from the commandments of God and have totally paganized their religion. They continue to act as if nothing is wrong and cannot understand how God can be mad at them because they keep bringing him their sacrifices and worship!

23:40-45 - God tells Ezekiel the people of Jerusalem even sent for men from foreign lands, here probably referring to Assyrian, Egyptian and especially Babylonian envoys. They dressed in their finest and put on jewelry and perfume to impress the envoys. They spread a banquet for them and invited them into their bed to sleep with them. They used incense and oil that should have been used in the Lord's house but instead used it to impress their lovers. They brought in people to party like the Sabeans, meaning the drunkards, and reveled in their debauchery. It is possible the Sabeans are a reference to some Arab desert tribes known for their drunkenness and partying. The reference is unclear.

God says the foreign guests and even the Sabeans slept with "*the one worn out by adultery*", meaning Jerusalem. God tells them to use her like a prostitute and so the foreigners sleep with "*those lewd women.*" Again Ezekiel is speaking to Judah-Oholibah, but he also mentions Oholah-Israel as if she is present. They are both guilty of idolatry and adultery with pagan gods. God will send righteous men who will sentence them to the punishment of women who commit adultery and murder. The sentence is death. The Law of Moses said to stone such women to death. God will see it done and Jerusalem as a city will be killed, and her people slaughtered or taken into exile. God is going to put an end to Judah's adultery.

23:46-49 - God says bring a mob against Jerusalem and give her over to terror and plunder. Jerusalem and Judah will now suffer the same punishment as her sister Israel and Samaria. A mob, meaning the army of Nebuchadnezzar, will attack the city and cut the people down with swords and kill their sons and daughters and burn down their houses.

God will put an end to the lewdness of the land that all women may take warning not to imitate the behavior of Oholibah-Judah or they will suffer the same punishment and fate. Judah will bear the consequences of her sin and idolatry and when she does she will finally realize that the Lord is God.

This prophecy is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem a few years after Ezekiel writes this passage. It is also fulfilled in the behavior of the exiles. They would struggle with paganizing their worship of God, bringing him not their best but whatever they had and expecting God to bless them. They would begin once again to divorce their worship of God at the second temple with their behavior towards one another. However, the evidence of Ezra-Nehemiah, and the prophetic books of *Haggai*, *Zechariah* and *Malachi*, written in the post-exilic period shows that idolatry was not prevalent among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem. Even in Jesus' day idolatry was not the central problem with the Jews. The central problem Jesus spoke against was the belief that one could earn one's salvation as the Pharisees taught. They had divorced obedience to the Law from God's gracious choice of them as his people. The exile finally cured the Jews of idolatry. It did not cure them of pride, sin and rebellion against God.

Chapter 24:

24:1-5 - I noted in my Bible that the ninth year, the tenth month and the tenth day was January 10, 588. The NLT based on their calculations of the Hebrew Lunar Calendar has January 15, 588. This is the date that Nebuchadnezzar began the final siege of Jerusalem. He surrounded the city and began to build siege works against it. The siege would last two and a half years until July 586. God tells Ezekiel to tell the people a parable about Jerusalem because he is bringing about his judgment upon the city through Nebuchadnezzar.

God says put the cooking pot on the fire and pour water in it. Put in the choice pieces of meat, the leg and the shoulder. Fill it with the best of the bones from the pick of the flock. Pile the wood beneath the pot and bring it to a boil so the meat and the bones will cook. Is the pot a simple pot that anyone would use in their homes or is Ezekiel referring to a pot the temple priests would use when they cooked the meat from the fellowship offerings sacrificed on the altar in the temple? It is unclear but it is possible this is the case. If it is the pot of the priests then the symbolism of the pot is it is holy but now has such a deposit in it that it cannot be cleaned anymore except by melting it down. Judah had been holy to the Lord but now is so unclean it can no longer be saved. It needs to be melted down in order to be clean again.

24:6-12 - Ezekiel calls Jerusalem the city of bloodshed and the encrusted pot whose deposit will not go away. God says empty the pot piece by piece without casting lots for the pieces. No cross reference explains this practice but I surmise this was a practice of the priests with the dedicated meat from the sacrifices. The priests would cast lots for who got what piece, letting "*God decide*" who got to eat what part of the sacrifice that was dedicated to the Lord. Jerusalem is so unholy and her pot so encrusted that no one should cast lots for the contents of the pot. Empty it!

The city is filled with bloodshed. This is a consistent theme in Ezekiel. The bloodshed is not from the Babylonians but from the rich and powerful in Jerusalem. They have sacrificed their children to Molech on the altar of Topheth but Ezekiel's other references to bloodshed indicate many used murder as a means to gain wealth and power, taking what they wanted from those they had killed. Ezekiel says they even poured the blood of the slain on bare rock so that it would not be covered and not on the ground where it could be absorbed. They stained the land with the blood of the murdered and slain and so defiled it.

God says he will bring woe to the "*city of bloodshed*." He will pile the wood high and cook the meat well. Put spices in the pot and let the bones be charred. Put the empty pot on the coals till it becomes so hot it glows so that its impurities may be melted away and its deposit of sin burned away. No effort at cleaning the pot of Jerusalem has worked. In order to get the copper kettle clean God will heat it to almost melting, till the copper glows in order to remove the heavy deposit of sin in his city.

24:13-14 - Jerusalem's impurity is her lewdness which refers to her idolatry and the sexual immorality that resulted from it. God has tried before to cleanse the city but it would not be cleansed. This may be referring to both Hezekiah's reforms in the 700's and Josiah's reforms a few decades before Ezekiel. Both kings cleansed the temple and the high places around the land and tried to bring the people back to Yahweh but the reforms did not last. Very quickly the people reverted back to their idolatry and immorality. God says this time only his wrath will cleanse the city and it will be clean only after he has poured out his righteous anger on Jerusalem. They are beyond the point of reform and repentance. God's righteous judgment is the only remedy left.

God says the time for him to act has come. He will not hold back, have pity or change his mind. Jerusalem will be judged according to its conduct and she will receive from the Lord what she deserves. If the siege had already started within 2 years everything Ezekiel was prophesying about Jerusalem's destruction would be fulfilled. The exiles would have to face the awful truth of their sin and rebellion and that their deeds brought on Jerusalem's destruction.

24:15-27 - God tells Ezekiel his wife, the delight of his eyes, is going to die and he is not to mourn or shed tears for her. He is to grieve alone and in quiet. He is not to unfasten his turban, meaning go about with his head shaved or barefoot. Publicly he is to show no outward signs of mourning. He is not to eat the food that mourners customarily eat. I am not sure what it was but it may have been a special kind of bread and wine. Friends and relatives brought the food to those who were grieving. In some ways we do the same things today although it appears from Ezekiel's comments that some food served to grieving people was only served on the occasion of a funeral and loss.

Ezekiel tells the people what God told him in the morning and that evening his wife died. Sometimes God's commands and messages to his prophets were extremely difficult to carry out. It doesn't seem fair to Ezekiel but he was obedient. This is the burden of the prophet. I cannot

imagine how much this command must have both grieved and confused Ezekiel. God does not allow his prophet to stop carrying his message to his people even in a time of great personal loss for Ezekiel. I don't know if I could have been as obedient.

The people ask him what God's command to him has to do with them. He tells them. God is about to desecrate his sanctuary, something the official theology said would never happen. That in which the people of Jerusalem take pride God is going to destroy. He will allow the Babylonians laying siege to Jerusalem to take the city and burn it. When that happens the people in exile will do as Ezekiel has done. They will be in such shock and mourning that they will not follow the normal customs of mourning the Jews follow. They will waste away in their sins because they will not understand why all of this has happened. God is going to undo the official theology and it will take time for the exiles to adapt to the prophetic theology of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*. When false teaching has been the basis of our thinking and acting and it has allowed us to continue to justify our sinful behavior we are in the same danger the Jews were in during the siege of Jerusalem. We refuse to see the truth because the lie has become our truth. When the false teaching is finally exposed as a lie we are left stunned and bereft of any intellectual and spiritual framework within which to understand the terrible events that have happened to us and God's discipline for our sin. That is what happened to the Jews. The generation that came out of Jerusalem into exile in Babylon struggled to understand the destruction of the city and the temple. The generation born in exile in Babylon was ready when Cyrus told them they could return to Jerusalem and go rebuild the temple. Are we in danger today in the USA of not seeing God's judgment that is coming because we falsely believe America is somehow blessed and protected by God? I pray not!

God tells Ezekiel that a fugitive fleeing from the destruction of Jerusalem will come to Ezekiel after the city has fallen and tell him the news. At that time God says Ezekiel's mouth will be opened and he will speak to the people and no longer be silent. He will be a sign to the people that Jerusalem's fall and the temple's destruction is the Lord's doing. It appears from these verses that after Ezekiel explains why he is not grieving over the death of his wife as a sign to them that they will be in such shock over Jerusalem's fall they will not grieve either. God tells him to be silent. He is not to speak until a fugitive from Jerusalem's destruction brings him news of the city's fall. Then he will speak to the people again. In *Ezekiel 33:21* on January 5, 585, some six months after Jerusalem's capture a fugitive reports that the city has been destroyed. It is difficult to tell when Ezekiel began his silence but it could have been as early as this prophecy which would have been January 10, 588. That's almost three years of not speaking!! Does Ezekiel mean he did not speak to anyone during that time or does he mean he did not speak to the people as the Lord's prophet? The situation is confusing. However, the reality is no matter which option is true Ezekiel did not prophesy during the siege of Jerusalem. God's judgment had been pronounced. There was no more possibility for repentance left to the Jews. That is the chilling message behind Ezekiel's silence. God's people could not reach God or speak to him to even repent. That time had passed. He had turned away from them as they had turned away from him!

Chapter 25:

25:1-7 - Chapter 25 through the first part of chapter 32 are all prophecies to the nations around Judah and Jerusalem similar to *Jeremiah chapters 46-51*. They show that God's prophets spoke not only to Judah but to the Gentile nations around Judah. They reinforced the Biblical understanding that God is the Lord over the nations and over the entire human race. He is the God of all not just the God of the Jews. Some of these prophecies were written before

Jerusalem's fall and some after. They were probably gathered together in one section of Ezekiel's prophecy because they concerned the nations. Whether Ezekiel did this as his own editor or someone else did it is unclear although it seems probable that like many of the prophets he had a later editor that gathered all his messages into one coherent book.

This message is written against the Ammonites, the people who lived on the Golan Heights and the modern day Jordanian Highlands to the east of the Jordan River. The King's Highway, the main route south from Syria to the Red Sea at Elath ran through Ammonite territory. It appears from *verse 3* that this prophecy was written after the destruction of the temple in August of 586.

Because the Ammonites rejoiced at the destruction of the temple and the slaughter and exile of the Jews God says he is going to give the territory of the Ammonites to the "*people of the East*." They will set up their camps and pitch their tents in Ammonite territory. They will pasture their camels in Ramah and Ammon will become pasture for their sheep. Because the Ammonites rejoiced at the judgment of the people of Israel God will take away their land and give it as plunder to the nations. He will cut off the Ammonites from the nations and exterminate them. God will destroy them as a people.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Ammon during his campaign against Jerusalem. His army marched down the King's Highway looting as they went. The people of the East may be the Arabs, the desert tribes and Bedouins who lived in the Syrian Desert. After the Babylonians destroyed many of the Ammonite cities the Arab tribes took advantage of the power vacuum to settle there. Today Ammon is the modern nation of Jordan whose people are Arabs.

25:8-11 - Ezekiel speaks against Moab, the country just to the south of Ammon, on the highlands east of the Dead Sea. Its northern boundary was a wadi near Mt. Nebo. God says because the Moabites did what the Ammonites did, celebrated at Jerusalem's fall, God will do to them what he did to Ammon. Their territory will be given to the Arab tribes to the east and the Moabites as a people will not be remembered among the nations. In other words Moab will disappear as a nation. Today Moabite territory is part of Jordan which is populated by Arab peoples. Ezekiel's prophecy has been literally fulfilled! The three Moabite cities Ezekiel mentions represent all the territory of Moab. Beth Jeshimoth was in the north near the plains of Moab at the foot of Mt. Nebo. Baal Meon was in the central part of the country on the highlands overlooking the Dead Sea. Keriathaim was in the southern portion of the highlands above the Dead Sea. No part of Moab will be preserved. All her cities and territory will be given to the "*people of the East*", the Arabs.

25:12-14 - God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against Edom, the land of Seir, settled by the descendants of Esau son of Isaac and brother of Jacob. Edom is the territory south and east of the Dead Sea. They were allies of Nebuchadnezzar and fought against Jerusalem. The short prophecy of *Obadiah* and *Psalms 137* written during the exile in Babylon, both speak against the Edomites and condemn them for supporting Nebuchadnezzar and Jerusalem's destruction. Ezekiel says God will destroy Edom, its men and animals for taking revenge on his people the Jews. He will lay it waste from Teman to Dedan and they will fall by the sword. The two cities mentioned like Moab represent Edomite territory. They were trade cities built near the King's Highway, the caravan route from Elath on the Red Sea north to Syria and Damascus along the Jordanian highlands to the west of the Arabian-Syrian Desert. Today Edomite territory is part of modern day Jordan.

25:15-17 - Ezekiel prophesies against yet another of Judah's neighbors who did not help the Jews but rejoiced at their destruction, Philistia. God says he will stretch out his hand upon the Philistines and their lands along the coast because they sought Judah's destruction. Ezekiel is expressing God's commitment to his covenant with Abraham to bless those who bless Abraham's descendants and to curse those who curse them. Even though God is judging his people Israel and may have even used Israel's neighbors to carry out his just punishment yet he is still fulfilling his promise to Abraham. Nations attack the Jews at their peril!

God says he will punish the Philistines and destroy those remaining on the coast. Nebuchadnezzar sacked many Philistine cities both during his siege of Jerusalem and later in his campaign to take Egypt in 568. Today Palestinian Arabs occupy the Gaza Strip, what was once ancient Philistia. The Philistines, the descendants of the Sea Peoples have all but disappeared.

Chapter 26:

26:1-6 - God gives Ezekiel a message about Tyre, dated in the eleventh year on the first day of the month. That would put the prophecy sometime in 586, the year of Jerusalem's capture and destruction. *Verse 2* indicates that Jerusalem has already fallen, which happened on the ninth day of the fourth month, July 9, 586. The first month would be March-April. The dates therefore are confusing. The NLT solves the problem by amending the Hebrew text, arguing that the date formula is incomplete compared to other parts of Ezekiel. They argue for the eleventh month of the twelfth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, which they calculate as February 3, 585. This solves the dilemma but adds to the text and there is no way to know whether the NLT is correct or not. Their date of 585 does however agree with *verse 2* which clearly dates this message after the fall of Jerusalem. That means that it could not have been given in the first month, March-April of 586. It has to have been given after July of that same year.

Ezekiel is told to speak against Tyre as he had spoken against Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia. Tyre has also mocked Jerusalem's destruction therefore God will destroy it. Tyre's statement about Jerusalem is curious. It says the gate of the nations is broken and its doors have swung open to me, so that now that Jerusalem is in ruins I will prosper. This is curious because Jerusalem held no threat to Tyrian commerce. It was not a strong military power and certainly could not rival Tyre or the other great Phoenician port cities like Sidon or Acco. The NLT translates the passage so that it refers to Jerusalem's influence over the great caravan routes to the east. That would mean that Judah had influence over the King's Highway and the caravan trade from the Red Sea up the Arabah to Damascus and into Syria. It is possible that with Jerusalem's downfall and the destruction of Ammon and Moab Tyre saw an opportunity to exert its influence over the caravan trade and increase its wealth.

However, God says he is going to bring many nations against Tyre like the waves of the sea and they will destroy its walls and pull down her towers. Tyre will become a place to spread fishnets not the greatest trading port of the eastern Mediterranean. She will become plunder for the nations and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword.

In Ezekiel's day Tyre consisted of two parts, a mainland city and port where much of the population lived and an island surrounded by great walls linked to the mainland by a causeway. This may be the meaning of the reference to *"out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets."*

26:7-14 - God says from the north he is going to send Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon against Tyre. He will come with horses and chariots and a great army. He will lay siege to Tyre and

demolish it. His troops will enter the city when they break through the walls. They will plunder Tyre's wealth and demolish its fine houses, throwing the rubble into the sea. God will put an end to "your noisy songs". He will make Tyre a bare rock and you will become a place to spread fishnets, meaning a fishing town and no longer the great center of seafaring trade. God has spoken.

Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years from 587-574 but could not take the island fortress, though he sacked the mainland section of the city. Tyre eventually did recognize Babylonian rule but was not completely destroyed. It prospered again under Persian rule and once again its ships traveled all over the Mediterranean bringing it wealth. Alexander the Great attacked the city in 332 and laid siege to it for seven months, building a mole across the causeway to the island fortress and finally took it and destroyed it. During the Seleucid dynasties Tyre recovered and later Herod the Great rebuilt its main temple. Today there are many people who live in Tyre which is part of modern day Lebanon. The island is still the center of the city and the causeway has widened considerably due to silting. The city is still a port for trade but fishing boats also dock there. Modern day Tyre is a mixture of Lebanese Shi'as, Palestinian refugees who are mostly Sunni and a Christian community. It was held by the Israelis in the Lebanese War in the 1980's. The island fortress is now gone and only ancient ruins remain.

26:15-18 - God says when he judges Tyre the kings of the nations of the coastlands, those who depended upon Tyre for trade and wealth, they will tremble in fear. They will step down from their thrones, lay aside their royal robes and sit on the ground trembling, appalled at what has happened to Tyre. The coastlands could be many nations but in the Mediterranean world it could be places like Cilicia, Lydia, Greece, Carthage, Rome, Sicily, Cyrene and North Africa. All of these nations would have benefited from trade with Tyre and the Phoenicians. Carthage was the greatest of Tyre's colonies.

The kings of the coastlands will take up a lament for Tyre. They call her the city of renown, peopled by men of the sea. She was a power on the seas and her citizens put terror on all who lived along the coastlands. Now those same people tremble at Tyre's fall. The coastlands are terrified at her collapse. Perhaps they are afraid because they fear they will be next. If mighty Tyre could fall, why can't they?

Part of this lament is curious because it sees Tyre as a military power rather than a trading power. Tyre, as far as we know, did not have a large standing army, though it did have naval vessels. Carthage, its great colony in North Africa near modern day Tunis in Tunisia, had a large navy which influenced trade in the western Mediterranean. Carthage also had a large army, the most famous of which was led by Hannibal in the Punic Wars with Rome in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. Hannibal however, lived three centuries after Ezekiel wrote this lament about Tyre, plus Hannibal led the Carthaginian armies attacking Rome. He did not lead the armies of Tyre. This, plus the prophecy of Tyre's total destruction in *verses 1-14*, lead me to wonder if this whole section on Tyre not only reflects the immediate threat of Babylonian conquest by Nebuchadnezzar but also some kind of eschatological threat that is far to the future. Some of the lament over Tyre that follows in *chapter 27* sounds like John's lament over Babylon in *Revelation 18*. Perhaps Tyre becomes a symbol for the economic and trading powers of the Mediterranean nations and God through Ezekiel is telling those nations their time is numbered. One must honestly say this prophecy of Ezekiel's is only partially fulfilled because Nebuchadnezzar did not totally destroy the city. In fact it survives even today. Therefore, there must be some part of Ezekiel's vision yet to be revealed and fulfilled.

26:19-21 - God says he will make Tyre like a city no longer inhabited. The ocean waves will cover its houses and walls. He will bring Tyre down to the pit, literally the dungeon or well, and to those who lived long ago and are no more. In other words God is going to wipe out Tyre and her city and her inhabitants will be like cities long since destroyed and never settled again. They will not return or be rebuilt, but be only a memory. God will bring Tyre to a horrible end and she will be no more, never to be sought and never to be found again.

These verses confirm my hypothesis that this vision of Ezekiel's concerning Tyre is yet to find its complete fulfillment. Tyre was not totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Even after Alexander captured it in 332 the city was rebuilt by the Seleucids and later enhanced by Herod the Great. In Jesus' day Tyre was a flourishing city. It did not sink into history never to be found again. This prophecy must therefore have some eschatological meaning that we as yet do not understand. Otherwise Ezekiel's vision was wrong and according to the Law of Moses in *Deuteronomy* he does not pass the test of a true prophet of the Lord. That we know is not true because his prophecy is recognized as true Scripture and prophecy.

Chapter 27:

27:1-9 - God tells Ezekiel to "*take up a lament concerning Tyre.*" This lament is mostly a description of Tyre's trade with the many nations of the Mediterranean basin and the vast amount of goods and products that came through her because of her trade. This is similar in tone to John's lament against Babylon-Rome in *Revelation 18*. Ezekiel gives us historical insight into the scope of the trade of Tyre and the geography of the ancient Biblical world in the early part of the 6th century B.C.

God describes Tyre as the gateway to the sea, merchant to peoples on many coasts. Israel had a small port at Joppa but no major sea trading center. The Phoenician port of Acco was on the northern edge of the Bay of Haifa but Tyre was the closest major trading center for ocean going trade for Israel. From Solomon through the destruction of Israel on down to Zedekiah's day as the last king of Judah, Tyre was an ally and trading partner. Israel used Tyre to ship its goods all over the Mediterranean Sea.

God says Tyre in her pride thought she was perfect in beauty. Her domain was on the high seas as she was never a land based conquering people. Tyre used her prowess on the seas and in shipbuilding to forge an empire of trade that brought the wealth of nations into her.

Ezekiel describes a Tyrian ship built from the pine trees of Mt. Hermon, a mast of cedar from the mountains of Lebanon, and oars made from the oaks of Bashan, meaning the Golan Heights above the Sea of Galilee. The ship's deck was made from cyprus wood or possibly pine from Cyprus, Kittim in Hebrew. It was inlaid with ivory. Her embroidered sail was of the finest Egyptian linen. The ships awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah, which might have been on the east coast of Cyprus. Men of Sidon, her Phoenician sister city to the north on the Lebanese coast and of Arvad, which was another Phoenician city built on an island just off the Syrian coast north of Sidon and Byblos to the west of Hamath in Syria, staff her ships. Arvad was one of the four great Phoenician trading centers of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos and Arvad, on the Lebanese-Syrian coast. Ezekiel says the men of Arvad and Sidon were the oarsmen but the skilled sailors and seamen were all from Tyre. Veteran craftsmen from Gebal or Byblos were on board, shipwrights and carpenters who caulked the seams of the ship and kept her seaworthy. Ships from all across the Mediterranean Sea came to her to trade for her wares.

Ezekiel's description of Tyre as a ship helps us understand how as a trading center Tyre grew so wealthy. She had access to the riches of the eastern Mediterranean coast and forged

alliances and cooperation with the other great Phoenician cities on the Syrian coast. They mutually helped each other and thereby increased their ability to trade and gain wealth. Israel and Judah took advantage of their neighbor to the north benefitting from Tyre's ability to ship Israel's products all across the Mediterranean. Tyre never built a political empire with a conquering army like Assyria and Babylon. She built a trading empire based on trade and her shipbuilding and sailing prowess, something the Israelites never mastered. Thus the ships of the Israelite and Judean kings that sailed out of Elath on the Red Sea to Arabia and Africa were built and manned by sailors from Tyre.

27:10-12 - Tyre never had a large population compared to the Egyptians, Assyrians or Babylonians with which to build a massive army. Therefore many of her soldiers were mercenaries from the nations of the ancient world. Ezekiel describes mercenaries from Persia, Lydia in Asia Minor and Put or Libya in North Africa, serving in her army. Men of Arvad, the northernmost Phoenician city, and Helech were on her walls. Helech may be a place but the NASB translates the phrase, "*the sons of Arvad and your army*". Helech may therefore be descriptive and not a place-name. The same may be true of the men of Gammad. There is no reference for where Gammad might have been however the NASB says, "*the Gammadim were in your towers.*" An alternative reading says the valorous ones. Like Helech the phrase may be descriptive in nature and not a place. Ezekiel says all these mercenaries brought Tyre's beauty to perfection.

Many nations used mercenaries in ancient times when they did not have the population to field a large standing army. Ezekiel says Tyre used this practice to defend the city. Tyre was rich enough it could hire the best soldiers from the nations around it. Ezekiel's picture is of a fabulously wealthy and beautiful city whose influence was felt by many nations from the eastern Mediterranean coast all across the Great Sea.

27:12-24 - Ezekiel gives a list of all the places with which Tyre traded and exchanged goods. The first on the list is Tarshish. Tyre exchanged her goods, especially the rare blue and purple dyes or cloth for metals from Tarshish; silver, iron, tin and lead. Tarshish is mentioned several times in Scripture but its exact location is unknown. However, it appears to have been far to the west of Israel across the Mediterranean Sea. Jonah took ship to Tarshish to flee from God's call upon him. Various locations have been proposed, including Tarsus, the home of the apostle Paul, but that seems doubtful. Tarshish represents a trading city or nation, similar to the Phoenicians that were a seafaring people. The most likely candidates for the location of Tarshish are Carthage, founded in the 800's by people from Tyre, Cadiz or another port on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, or the island of Sardinia off of Italy. Some have even speculated that Tarshish was an ancient port city home to a great seafaring civilization on the Atlantic Spanish coast beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Some scholars even relate the Atlantis legend to Tarshish. My best guess is Carthage which was already growing as a sea power in the western Mediterranean in the early 6th century BC. Three centuries later under Hannibal she would challenge Rome in the Punic Wars for supremacy in the western Mediterranean.

Ezekiel says Greece, Tubal and Meshech traded with Tyre bringing it slaves and bronze. Greece in Ezekiel's day was dominated by the emergence of city-states like Athens and Sparta and the spread of Greek settlements and civilization around the Aegean Sea, especially in Asia Minor and around the Black Sea. Tubal most likely represents the Indo-European tribes or kingdoms of the southern Caucasus region of modern day Georgia, on the northeastern shores of

the Black Sea. It is north of Armenia and south of the Caucasus Mountains. Meshech refers to a people who also spoke an Indo-European language who settled the Anatolian plateau in central Asia Minor after the collapse of the Hittite Empire southeast of the Black Sea. Some Dispensational scholars believe Meshech refers to Moscow and Tubal represents the tribes of the steppes of Russia. They connect Russia with the eschatological attack of Israel in *Ezekiel 38-39*. That theory however is dubious at best. If one understands that Greek settlements and city states were already present on the Aegean Coast of Asia Minor and Tubal and Meshech represent peoples who settled central and eastern Asia Minor, Ezekiel's reference to Greece, Tubal and Meshech represents the peoples of Asia Minor.

The people of Beth Togarmah traded horses, both work horses and war horses, and mules for Tyre's merchandise. Ezekiel in *chapter 38* refers to Beth Togarmah again as an ally of Gog and Magog, who send troops against Israel in the final eschatological battle. They are described as a people from the far north. Other ancient records refer to Beth Togarmah as a people who settled in the Caucasus area of Asia Minor, between the Caspian and Black Seas. Ezekiel says they supplied horses to Tyre which could mean they were from the steppes of the region around the Caspian Sea known as the Pontic Steppe which runs from the north shores of the Black Sea north of the Caucasus Mountains and to the western shores of the Caspian Sea. The earliest tribes who settled the region were Indo-European and are said to be the first to domesticate horses. They may be related to the Scythians, a nomadic horse culture of the Steppes near the Caspian Sea that often invaded or warred against the empires of Mesopotamia.

Verse 15 says the men of Rhodes traded with Tyre and many coastlands were Tyre's customers. They paid in ivory tusks and ebony for Tyre's goods. The Hebrew reads Dedan which was an oasis city on the spice caravan route in northwest Arabia. *Verse 20* refers to Dedan. The Septuagint reads Rhodes here. The NIV follows the Septuagint which seems the more likely translation because of the reference to the coastlands. Rhodes was an island port city off the southwestern coast of Asia Minor settled by the Greeks. In the New Testament Paul took ship from Troas along the Aegean Coast of Asia Minor past Ephesus and stopped at Rhodes before heading on to Tyre. Rhodes was home to the so called Colossus of Rhodes, an immense bronze statue that was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world built in the 4th century BC to honor their sun god.

Aram represents Syria or northern Syria which would have been a ready business and trading partner with Tyre. The other great Phoenician trading ports of Byblos and Arvad were in Syrian territory, north of Tyre and Sidon. The great caravan trading routes from Egypt and Arabia to Mesopotamia and Asia Minor went through Syria. Ezekiel says the Arameans traded turquoise, purple fabric, embroidered cloth, fine linen, coral and rubies for the goods available in Tyre from all over the Mediterranean Basin.

Ezekiel then lists Judah and Israel as trading partners, trading mostly agricultural goods like wheat, honey, oil and balm. He mentions confections which various translations render in different ways because the Hebrew word is uncertain. The NLT says figs, while the NASB reads cakes. Ezekiel notes the wheat came from Minnith which probably refers to a city of the Jordanian highlands in Ammonite territory which had been controlled by Israel and Judah. The reference to both Israel and Judah leads me to believe that Ezekiel is thinking back to the glory days of the two kingdoms, perhaps to the time of Jeroboam II and Uzziah when Israel and Judah were at the height of their power before Assyria's ascendancy. In Ezekiel's day Judah was tiny and weak and Israel no longer existed. That could also mean that his picture of Tyre is an

idealized one that sees Tyre at its zenith and not necessarily its current status threatened by Nebuchadnezzar's armies.

Damascus did business with Tyre because of its many products. Damascus in Syria was the meeting point of several major routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia along with the spice routes from Arabia and Africa. It was a major crossroads for land based trade in the Middle East. Tyre was a major crossroads for sea based trade throughout the Mediterranean. It was only logical and beneficial that the two cities would be huge trading partners, especially since Damascus was on the eastern side of the Lebanese Mountains and Tyre on the western side on the coast. There is some evidence to suggest Helbon was a town in the wine growing region north of Damascus. The whereabouts of Zahar are unknown.

Verse 19 is very interesting. The NIV reads Danites and Greeks from Uzal bought your merchandise. The NLT reads Greeks from Uzal. The NASB reads Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal. The Hebrew word Vedan means "*and Dan.*" Javan means Greeks or Ionia. The NASB does not translate the Hebrew words but leaves them as obscure place-names. The NIV translates them but by doing so adds to the mystery. Why are the Danites, presumably members of the tribe of Dan linked with the Greeks? And where is Uzal? One reference is in the Table of Nations in *Genesis 10:27*. Uzal is listed as the son of Joktan, the brother of Peleg, an ancestor of Shem. Peleg is the ancestor of Abraham so Uzal would have been a distant cousin. The other reference to Uzal is in the genealogies of *1 Chronicles 1:21* which link Uzal with Arabia. The problem is the reference to Vedan or the Danites. Dan was the northernmost tribe which settled around Mt. Hermon and the borders of Lebanon. By Ezekiel's day it had been absorbed into the Assyrian Empire, which had since fallen to Babylon. The New Bible Dictionary suggests that Vedan is either a scribal error or an Akkadian loan word "*dannu*" meaning large vat or jar used for storing wine. This would lead to the translation, "*and vats of wine from Uzal they exchanged for your wares.*" Uzal may refer to a town in northern Syria named Izalla where Nebuchadnezzar obtained wine. The whole verse is unclear. If the NIV translation is correct had the Danites by Ezekiel's day somehow become allied with or mixed into the Greeks who traveled and traded the Eastern Mediterranean? That seems highly unlikely. The "*Danites and Greeks*" traded iron, cassia, a spice, and calamus, a fragrant reed, for things they could purchase in Tyre.

Dedan traded saddle blankets with Tyre. Dedan was an oasis on the caravan spice route in northwest Arabia. Ezekiel says Arabia and the princes of Kedar traded with Tyre. Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael. The Kedarites were a semi-nomadic people that traveled the Syrian-Arabian Desert from Palestine to Mesopotamia. They pastured their flocks from oasis to oasis. Thus Ezekiel says they traded their lambs, rams and goats for the goods of Tyre.

The merchants of Sheba and Raamah traded with Tyre and brought the city precious stones, spices and gold. Sheba most likely refers to the Sabeans, a southern Arabian people who built trading cities and ran caravans from southern Arabia and northeastern Africa up through the Arabah to Damascus and thus to Tyre and Mesopotamia. The Sabeans were traders and raiders who also dealt in the slave trade. Raamah is a reference to a people who settled in what is modern day eastern Yemen, which would have been directly east of Sabea or Sheba on the Gulf of Aden across from the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia in what is western Yemen.

Haran, Canneh and Eden traded with Tyre, as did merchants from Sheba (mentioned above in *verse 22*) Asshur, and Kilmad. Except for Sheba these are all cities and towns in the upper Mesopotamian Valley. The cities would have all been part of Assyria and then in Ezekiel's day the Babylonian Empire. Interestingly enough Ezekiel doesn't mention Tyre trading directly

with Babylon yet many of the cities with which she did business were part of Nebuchadnezzar's empire.

This whole section paints a picture of the vast network of trade that Tyre oversaw. She was not a military power instead her influence was through the goods and services that she exchanged with nations and peoples from the western Mediterranean like Tarshish to the spice caravans from southern Arabia. Her power was not in her armies but in her markets. Tyre also had power in her navy and trading vessels. Empires like Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander coveted Tyre in order to control her trade. Conquering empires like the Babylonians often used conquest to gain wealth and treasure. Tyre used her ships and markets to amass wealth through trade. The problem was if you destroyed Tyre one would severely impact the economies of the eastern Mediterranean and even all the way into Mesopotamia and diminish the long term opportunity for wealth through trade. Ezekiel recognizes Tyre's value to the nations all over the Middle East, including Israel and Judah. Even today markets and trade are a far better avenue for gaining and maintaining wealth than war and conquest.

27:25-36 - Ezekiel finishes his lament for Tyre. He reverts back to a poetic form as in *27:1-11* to finish the lament. In the middle from *27:12-24* is the description of all the nations that trade with Tyre and what they trade.

Ezekiel says the ships of Tarshish carry Tyre's cargo out onto the high seas. The Hebrews being a desert people always saw the sea as something mysterious and dangerous. They never had a strong sea-going tradition even though their land bordered the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The sea very often represented the forces of chaos in the world. Even here Ezekiel shows great respect for the Tyrian sailors who pilot her ships. Yet, the east wind will break Tyre into pieces in the heart of the sea.

All her wealth, mariners, merchants and soldiers, all who serve Tyre will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of her shipwreck. The east wind could be Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's army laying siege to Tyre. This lament could also be eschatological in nature because it speaks of Tyre being shipwrecked in the ocean depths. Nebuchadnezzar and later Alexander attacked Tyre from the land not the sea.

Ezekiel's lament is similar in style and scope to John's lament about Babylon in *Revelation 18* concerning all who mourn over Tyre's fall. The shore lands quake and her sailors cry out. All her oarsmen will abandon ship. The mariners and seamen will stand on the shore and cry out in grief over Tyre's sinking. They will shave their heads and put on sackcloth in anguish over her destruction. They will sing a lament for Tyre. It will ask what city has ever been like Tyre in all its trade and influence? She satisfied many nations with her trade and her goods. She made all who traded with her wealthy but now she is gone. All her wares have perished with her and kings shudder in horror and they are filled with fear. Tyre has come to a horrible end and will be no more.

This lament of Ezekiel's needs to be seen as an eschatological lament, expressing God's final judgment upon Tyre. Historically Tyre was attacked by Babylon and finally surrendered but was not destroyed. Alexander sacked the city two centuries later but it was rebuilt under the Seleucids. By Roman times Tyre was once again a busy seaport, so in biblical times it was never completely destroyed like Babylon was. Ezekiel's lament could be what I referred to in the notes for *27:12-24*. Tyre gained power and wealth through trade and not through conquest like Assyria, Babylon and later Greece. If Tyre were destroyed then the economies of many nations around the Mediterranean Basin that depended upon her trade would be threatened. Nations

would be asking, how will our goods get to markets across the sea if Tyre is gone? Ezekiel's lament could be expressing those fears which would include Judah as any trade they had that brought in wealth for her products depended upon the great Phoenician trading cities like Tyre. Plus historically Tyre had a long term alliance and partnership with Israel. Its destruction would be an economic calamity for Judah. That is possibly the underlying reason for this lament about Tyre. One must also not overlook the theological reason either. Tyre was a pagan nation and God had every right to judge it for its behavior which was definitely not godly!

Chapter 28:

28:1-5 - *Chapter 28* is a prophecy against the King of Tyre. It is clear that parts of it specifically fit a human king whose ego had led him to consider himself as a god, deserving worship by his subjects. But parts of this prophecy go far beyond that view. Later in the chapter Ezekiel states that the king was in Eden serving as a "*guardian cherub.*" It is possible that Ezekiel is being extremely sarcastic about Tyre's king who thought himself a god but the description he gives does not match any human being on earth. Many scholars believe that behind the proud figure of Tyre's king stands Satan and that Ezekiel is describing Satan and his character. Certainly even if he is being sarcastic and speaking in hyperbole the descriptions of the king's pride are Satanic in nature. His sins are the same kinds of sins Satan exhibited that caused him to be cast down from heaven in his rebellion against God. It is probably best to take Ezekiel's portrait of the King of Tyre as a type of Satan and not literally Satan himself.

God says in the pride of his heart the King of Tyre has proclaimed himself to be a god. Pride is the worst of sins because it repulses God and drives us away from him. To view oneself as a god and deserving of worship is the height of arrogance for a created creature whose very soul is owned by God. See *Ezekiel 18*. Every breath we take is a gift from our Creator and we exist moment to moment because of his grace. For a mere human to claim one is a god is ludicrous. Ultimately pride blinds us to the reality of God.

The king saw himself as enthroned on the heart of the seas because of Tyre's trade and wealth. God replies to his arrogance by stating the truth; he is a man and not a god, though he considers himself as wise as a god.

God asks if the king is wiser than Daniel. The Hebrew can be pointed as Danel. It is possible because of the alternative pointing that Ezekiel is referring to someone other than the Prophet Daniel; perhaps a famous wise man that the exiles in Babylon knew about. According to the Book of Daniel he had been taken captive in Babylonian raids on Judah in 603, six years before the first exile in 597 when Jehoiachin was taken prisoner. He quickly rose in stature in Babylon and became one of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors because of God's gift to him of the ability to interpret dreams. When Ezekiel writes this prophecy Tyre was probably under siege by Nebuchadnezzar. His siege lasted thirteen years from 587-574. If that timing is correct then Daniel would have served as an advisor in Nebuchadnezzar's court for at least 16 years and maybe longer. His story and status in Babylon would have made him a source of pride for the Jewish exiles that a mere Jew could rise to such status in the great empire. If Ezekiel is referring to Daniel and not some legendary unknown figure named Danel, then this reference confirms Daniel's story written in his prophecy. God asks the King of Tyre if he understands secrets like Daniel. Daniel is given the ability to interpret dreams by God, similar to Joseph in *Genesis*. The King of Tyre claims his wisdom comes from himself. God is mocking the king and his pride.

God says by his own wisdom the king has acquired great wealth and treasure. His skill in trade has increased that wealth and because of it his heart has grown proud as if it has all been a

result of his own efforts and intelligence. He has ignored God and his gifts. On the one hand this attitude is to be expected from a pagan king who does not acknowledge Yahweh as king of the universe and the only God. On the other hand no one is exempt from being accountable to God regardless of whether they acknowledge him or not. There was enough of the Creator in his creation for the King of Tyre to know God existed and it was through him that the king had gained his knowledge and wisdom. Pagan false religion is no excuse for ignoring God or thinking we are not accountable to him!

28:6-10 - God speaks to the King of Tyre through Ezekiel. He tells him because he thinks he is wise and is a god he will bring foreigners against him and his city. He will bring the most ruthless of nations, namely Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. The Babylonians laid siege to Tyre for 13 years before the city finally surrendered. God says they will bring down Tyre and the reign of the king. He will die a violent death in the heart of the seas. That is a reference to where Tyre's power laid, the heart of the sea. God asks the king if he will still say he is a god when he confronts those who will kill him. He will die the death of the uncircumcised at the hands of foreigners. God has spoken.

When Tyre finally surrendered to the Babylonians it is unclear whether Nebuchadnezzar had the king executed. Tyre's king was executed during an attack first by Esarhaddon and then Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 664. Ezekiel may be looking back to that incident and personifying all the kings of Tyre in one representative king. I would surmise that the death of the uncircumcised means he dies without hope and without God. There was just beginning to develop in Ezekiel's day in Israel's theology the idea of life after death. It is also possible that since circumcision is related to the promise of Abraham and that the promise would carry on in the progeny of the circumcised that to die as the uncircumcised meant to die outside God's covenant and promise to Abraham. One dies without progeny to carry on one's name. In the ancient world that would be a terrible curse indeed.

28:11-19 - The Lord now tells Ezekiel to compose a lament concerning the King of Tyre. As noted above, either Ezekiel is speaking in extremely exaggerated hyperbole or he is using the King of Tyre as a type of someone or something else, namely some sort of angelic creature. No human being fits his description in these verses. Plus Tyre's king did not worship Yahweh he was a worshipper of Baal and Astarte. His religion was Canaanite in origin and not that of Israel. Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, was the daughter of the priest-king of Tyre and Sidon and was a dedicated worshipper of the Tyrian Baal named Marquart. She almost succeeded in wiping out the worship of Yahweh in Israel but was thwarted by the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Many scholars believe that Ezekiel is giving a description of Satan at his creation and then describing his fall from heaven in these verses. That is possible but one must be cautious in that application.

Ezekiel describes the king as the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. He was in Eden, the garden of God. He was adorned with all kinds of precious stones. These appear to be jewelry he wore because Ezekiel says their settings and mountings were made of gold. All nine of these stones are listed in the twelve stones that were mounted on the breastplate of the high priest in *Exodus 28*. The three that are not listed but were on the breastplate were agate, jacinth, and amethyst. The meaning of the stones adorning the king is uncertain however, because they were part of the high priestly garments and were holy and precious to God. I think that is the meaning of the stones here. The king was created and the

jewels and their mountings were prepared just for him. They were gifts from the Creator who made him so beautiful and wise.

He was anointed as a guardian cherub and God ordained him, chose him as such. The implication is that the king was given this title and role by God. Yet no human being could be named a guardian cherub; that is an angelic title and role. The cherubim are angelic creatures who in Ezekiel's prophecy are closest to the throne of God. They are the living creatures Ezekiel saw in *chapter 1*. In *Exodus 25* they are the two angelic creatures whose wings overshadow the Mercy Seat, the cover for the Ark of the Covenant. In *Genesis 3* after God drives Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden God sets two cherubim to guard the entrance to the Garden with a flaming sword that flashed between them. It is possible that Ezekiel is describing the King of Tyre as one of those guardian angels. The point is Ezekiel is not describing a human being. He is describing an angelic creature a cherub who is so powerful, so beautiful and so wise and intelligent as to be beyond our comprehension.

He says that this creature, the king, walked among the fiery stones on the holy mount of God. The phrase, the fiery stones and the mount of God appear only here in *Ezekiel 28* in the Old Testament. The mount of God may be a reference to Mt. Zion but it is more likely to represent the dwelling of God in heaven. The fiery stones could be referring to the holiness and presence of God. Fire in the Old Testament often represents God's presence. Consider for instance the burning bush, the pillar of fire, and fire from heaven in Elijah's day as all representing God's holy presence. If I am correct then the King of Tyre was in the direct presence of God in heaven itself. He was close to God, perhaps closer than any angel or cherubim. He was perfect.

Ezekiel says the king was blameless in all his ways from the day of his creation. This is the second time Ezekiel emphasizes that the king was a creature. He was a created and not a god having existence in and of himself. There was a moment when he was not, and then God made him. His life is from God and he is dependent upon him. That is important because in *28:2* Ezekiel says the king claimed he was a god and not a man. God created this angelic creature blameless and holy "*till wickedness was found in you.*" This beautiful, wise, powerful, perfect creature fell because of his pride over his beauty and wisdom.

God says through his widespread trade the king was filled with violence and he sinned. This sounds like a human being again because the kings of Tyre traded with many nations. God is not saying trade itself is evil. It was the pride and violence of the king that led him to sin and led others to sin as well. Trade became not a means to a good end but a means to spread his sin, violence and pride to others. He corrupted the nations with which he did business. In the first part of *verse 16* it sounds as if Ezekiel is describing an earthly king. In the second part he is describing the angelic creature again that is unlike any human being. God drove the guardian cherub from the mount of God and from among the fiery stones. In other words God expelled the King of Tyre from his direct presence in heaven. He threw him to the earth because of the pride of his heart and the corruption of his wisdom. He had begun to prize his beauty and splendor not as reflections of God but as things in himself that deserved to be worshipped. Most theologians believe that Satan's greatest sin was pride. This was Milton's interpretation in *Paradise Lost*. In *Revelation 12* John says Satan was thrown down from heaven to the earth but he does not say for what reason. It is understood by John that Satan is God's ancient enemy bent on the destruction of the human race who tries to thwart the coming of the Kingdom of God. He is not equal to God but he is God's enemy. Here Ezekiel is clear to state the King of Tyre is a creature, a created being who was given extraordinary beauty, wisdom, authority and access to God's direct

presence. Yet in his pride he was corrupted so God cast him from his presence and threw him to the earth.

God says he made a spectacle of the king. His many sins and his dishonest trade desecrated his sanctuaries. His own pride corrupted his worship of God and he turned to pagan worship and the worship of himself as a god. Ezekiel says God made a fire come out of him and consume him. He reduced him to ashes in the sight of all who watched. The fire from within the king may have been the holiness of God that was being withdrawn because of his sin. All that was left of his being was his corruption and it burned him to ashes. All the nations who knew the king are now appalled by him. He has come to a horrible end and is no more. From the standpoint of human history the kings of Tyre were finally deposed after Tyre was conquered many times by successive empires including Nebuchadnezzar's. From the larger spiritual history of God's Kingdom on earth, *Revelation 13, 19 and 20* describe Satan's fall to earth, his binding at the return of Jesus the Messiah and his final destruction and judgment by God in the lake of fire that burns forever. He will be consumed by fire by God's righteous and holy judgment. All those that worshipped and served him will see the awful truth and mourn the fact they had been duped by Satan and deceived into following him rather than God.

There are enough elements in this chapter to believe that Ezekiel is writing about more than a mere human being. Theologically this chapter describes many details that the church over the centuries has come to understand reflect the character and being of Satan. Yet there are also details in this chapter that appear to be exactly what they are, a description of a proud and wealthy human king whom God has found deserving of his judgment and will bring down because of his pride. Is Ezekiel speaking of Satan in this chapter or describing the King of Tyre as Satanic in his character? In the end both, but the simple fact is he does not say Satan but describes this perfect cherubim as an earthly king. We do well when interpreting this passage to remember that fact and not go beyond what Ezekiel actually says.

28:20-23 - Ezekiel is told to prophesy against Sidon, the second great Phoenician port about 25 miles north of Tyre on the Lebanese coast. Sidon was founded before Tyre and was the oldest of the great Phoenician port cities. It had two harbors and great fortified walls to protect the city. It was attacked several times by the Assyrians and sacked but then rebuilt each time. Esarhaddon captured the city and killed much of the population. People from Elam and Babylon were brought in to replace the slain. The city began to flourish again after the fall of Assyria but Nebuchadnezzar captured Sidon in 587 which would have been during his campaign to capture Jerusalem and subdue Judah. Sidon led a rebellion with Cyprus against the Persians and the city walls were destroyed by Artaxerxes III in the mid 300's. They were never rebuilt but the city flourished as a center of trade under the Seleucids and the Romans.

Ezekiel says God will gain glory over Sidon when he inflicts punishment upon the city. He will show himself holy within her streets. God will send a plague on Sidon and blood will flow in her streets. Given the historical context the plague is probably not disease but Nebuchadnezzar's invasion which captured the city. Ezekiel prophesies that many will be slain and the sword will come against Sidon from every side. When the city falls then the people will know that Yahweh is the true God.

One has to remember that even though the Phoenician cities were independent of Israel as were the Philistine cities in the Gaza Strip all were part of the lands that God promised to Israel. The true Promiseland went from the Wadi of Egypt on the border of the Sinai Peninsula all the

way up through Syria to the Euphrates River at Hamath. Thus both Tyre and Sidon were part of the land God had promised to Israel.

28:24-26 - God says that the days are coming when Israel will no longer have neighbors who are thorns in their sides and treat them maliciously. God will one day gather the people of Israel from all the nations to which he scattered them and bring them back to their land. They will live in the Promiseland in safety. They will prosper and the Lord will punish all of Israel's neighbors who have treated them with contempt.

This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. God gathered the righteous remnant at Pentecost and gave those who believed in Jesus as Messiah the Holy Spirit. However, Israel did not live in the land in safety. Nor have they ever since 1948 and the formation of the modern state of Israel. Some of the Arab nations around Israel have peace treaties with Israel but there is still widespread opposition to the Jewish state within every Arab nation. Israel is not safe from her neighbors today. This prophecy must therefore be seen as an eschatological one that will only be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus returns. When he comes he will exact judgment on all of Israel's neighbors that have persecuted her. This prophecy has its roots in God's promise to David in *2 Samuel 7:10-11* where God promised David rest from his enemies and that Israel would dwell securely in the land and have peace. One better make peace with Israel today or face God's judgment tomorrow!

How does one relate this prophecy to the gathering of the remnant and the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church? How does this promise relate to the church? The New Testament declares that the church is the people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles and the inheritor of all the promises God made to his ancient people Israel. Yet Paul in *Romans 9-11* argues that God still desires to save the Jews and will someday through Jesus Christ, once the full number of Gentiles comes into the church. How does one balance the theology of the people of God revealed in the New Testament without going to the two extremes of a complete replacement theology on the one hand and Dispensational theology on the other? The former declares there is no place in God's heart for Israel; his plan has all been transferred to the church. The latter declares that God's plan for the Jews is separate from his plan for the church and that his plan for the church is completely hidden in the Old Testament prophets. That to me seems completely ludicrous because otherwise the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost would have never been promised in the prophets. Yet Peter clearly says *Joel* prophesied about Pentecost and that God was fulfilling his Word to give his Holy Spirit to all his people. There has to be a happy medium between the two views.

Chapter 29:

29:1-6 - By my calculations the tenth year in the tenth month on the twelfth day would be January 12, 587. The NLT calculates January 7, 587. Ezekiel receives a message from the Lord on this day concerning Egypt and Pharaoh. The Pharaoh at the time of Ezekiel's prophecy is Hophra or Apries as the Greeks called him. He rushed to intervene against Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem but the Babylonians repulsed him in 587 and Hophra left Zedekiah to his fate. This is probably the setting for Ezekiel's prophecy and the images of Egypt left in the desert and falling in the open field in these verses. Hophra, as did his predecessors, relied heavily on Greek mercenaries to field his armies.

God says he is against Egypt, the great monster lying among its streams. Monster here is *tannim* in Hebrew or Leviathan. Leviathan could be a crocodile; it does have a combination of

skin on its underbelly and scales on top like all reptiles. The image would fit because the Nile crocodile lives in the rivers and streams of Egypt and eats mostly fish although it will consume other prey as well. Egypt in its arrogance says the Nile is mine and I made it. The Lord is going to show Egypt otherwise. God tells Pharaoh that he will put a hook in his jaw and draw him away from his streams with his fish clinging to his scales. Is this a reference to Hophra's Greek mercenaries? Egypt will be left in the desert and fall in the open field. God will leave his carcass to be food for the carrion eaters. Then all who live in Egypt will know that the Lord is God!

Israel and Judah were often tempted to view alliances with Egypt as the solution to their problems especially with the empires of Assyria and Babylon. The kings of Judah often trusted more in Egypt's ability to help Judah rather than the Lord's ability to save them if they but trusted him. That strategy failed again and again because Egypt was never as strong as they had been in the days of the exodus. Yet Judah, like an addict, kept going back to Egypt again and again expecting a different result each time. They never learned until it was too late. Nebuchadnezzar's repulsion of Hophra and his forces proved the final blow. Egypt could not help Judah and Zedekiah was left to defend Jerusalem by himself. The city fell within 18 months.

29:6-12 - God says Egypt has been a staff of reed for the house of Israel, meaning it looks strong but is really weak. See the note above for *verses 1-6*. Whenever the Israelites have trusted in Egypt and its power to save them they have broken and splintered in their hands and they have wrenched their backs. In other words every time Israel has trusted in Egypt they have been hurt.

God says he is going to bring a sword against Egypt and kill their men and animals. Egypt will become a desolate wasteland. The Egyptians have said they have made the Nile and it is theirs. God says he will make the land a ruin from Migdol to Aswan, as far as Cush. Migdol was a fort on the Canaanite frontier probably at the edge of the Sinai Peninsula. Aswan is a city built near the first great cataract or rapids on the River in the south of Egypt or Upper Egypt. Cush is Southern Sudan, the area below Aswan down to Khartoum where the White Nile and the Blue Nile combine. In other words God says from the borders of Lower Egypt to the borders of Upper Egypt God is going to devastate the land. No one is going to live there for 40 years, probably a symbolic time and not necessarily literal. God is going to disperse the Egyptians among the nations and scatter them through the countries.

Nebuchadnezzar would invade Egypt in 568-567. The Persians would invade and conquer it in 525. Alexander would "free" Egypt during his conquests but it became a Greek kingdom under the Ptolomies after his death and finally came under Roman rule. Egypt never again regained its former status in the ancient world. Today it is a player in the Middle East being the most populous country yet it does not rule its neighbors. Nassar tried in the mid to late 20th century to restore Egyptian greatness but failed. Historically the Egyptian people were conquered after Hophra several times. Whether they were carried into exile and scattered among the nations is more difficult to trace. However, it is clear that Egypt was never a player on the world stage after Hophra's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar. That may be to what Ezekiel is referring.

29:13-16 - God says at the end of forty years he will gather the Egyptians from the nations to which they were scattered and bring them back from captivity. God says he will bring the people back to Upper Egypt, Pathros in Hebrew, the land of their ancestors. It will be one of the lowliest kingdoms and never again will it exalt itself over other nations. Egypt will never again be a source of confidence for Israel but a reminder of their sin in turning to it for help. When all of this happens Israel will know that Yahweh is God.

It is unclear what Ezekiel means by the forty years of Egyptian captivity. Historically there is no record of it. However, his statement that Egypt will no longer be a power among nations after this forty year period was literally fulfilled. It never again regained its influence. The reference to returning the captive Egyptians to Upper Egypt is also curious. The center of population in the Persian, Greek and Roman times shifted to Lower Egypt. By New Testament times Alexandria on the Mediterranean Coast was the chief city in Egypt. The population was dominated by Greeks however and not native Egyptians. There was also a large contingent of Jews who lived there. Ezekiel could be referring to the fact that the native Egyptians would shrink in number and immigrants from other parts of the Mediterranean world would replace them. The population centers would shift north to Lower Egypt and the Nile Delta. Today, the same is true. Cairo is at the base of the Nile Delta and the other large cities of Egypt are in the Delta area. The population is made up mostly of Arabs not native Egyptians by race. It is also true that following the destruction of Jerusalem and the conquest of Egypt by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans the Jewish people never again looked to Egypt for solutions to their political and military problems. In that Ezekiel's prophecy has also been literally fulfilled. I believe the forty years of captivity for Egypt therefore must be some kind of symbolic number representative of Egypt's decline in influence over the nations and over Israel.

29:17-21 - Ezekiel receives a message about Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt on March 1, 570 by my reckoning. The NLT has the date as April 26, 571. God says Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre yet got no reward for all his effort. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for 13 years from 587-574 but could not take the island city. It eventually surrendered to his rule but Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy it. God therefore is going to give the spoils of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as a reward for all of his effort to take Tyre. It seems as if God prophesied through Ezekiel Tyre's destruction and Nebuchadnezzar was going to be God's instrument to take the city. When he failed in his task God decides to reward him with the spoils of Egypt. It is an interesting puzzle but it gives a clue into prophetic utterance. God uses pagan nations to carry out his purposes and the implication is sometimes they fail in their assigned tasks, not because God did not foresee it but because of historical circumstances. God still uses human agents to carry out his will, in this case the destruction of Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar failed but God saw how hard he tried. He laid siege for thirteen years and his troops were exhausted. God rewards his pagan instrument for his effort.

Three years after Ezekiel's prophecy in 568-567, Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt and carried off much of its wealth, although the Babylonian accounts of that invasion are incomplete. God rewarded the pagan king who had been his instrument of judgment on his sinful people and on the pagan nations God had chosen to judge and destroy as well.

The horn that will grow in the house of Israel on that day is difficult to identify. In 570 the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon with Jehoiachin were well into their third decade of captivity. A horn signifies strength. God says he will open Ezekiel's mouth at that time. Is Ezekiel still silent in 570? That doesn't make sense according to 33:21 which says a man came to Ezekiel in Babylon and declared Jerusalem has fallen. At that time Ezekiel speaks again after his silence. It is possible this reference to God opening Ezekiel's mouth is to more prophecy. The temple prophecies are given in 572. I wonder if the horn refers to Zerubbabel who would have been born in captivity in Babylon and who was to lead the exiles back to Jerusalem in 538. He is also featured prominently in the writings of the post-exilic prophets *Haggai* and *Zechariah*. If he was born in 570 he would have been 32 years old when he led the exiles back to Jerusalem. It is only speculation but it is an interesting theory.

Chapter 30:

30:1-5 - God tells Ezekiel to take up a lament for Egypt. He calls on the Egyptians to wail and cry out in grief because the Day of the Lord is near. It will be a day of clouds and doom for the nations. A sword will come against Egypt and Cush or Sudan. When Egypt is slain her wealth will be taken away and her foundations torn down.

Verse 5 is difficult. Ezekiel says Cush or southern Sudan and Put or Ethiopia will fall. There is some debate about the location of Put and many scholars argue that it means Libya or even foreign bowman speaking of Egypt's mercenary army at this time. Ezekiel then lists Lydia, which if this list is geographical describing the nations right around Egypt that were traditional allies with her makes no sense because Lydia was in central Asia Minor. At this time Lydia was an independent kingdom whose capital was Sardis and it maintained its independence until Cyrus the Great conquered Lydia in 546. It is possible that Ezekiel's reference here is to Lydian mercenaries that are part of Egypt's army. He says all Arabia will fall. The phrase could also mean the mixed people. It is difficult to pinpoint but Arabia did have trade and political ties to Egypt. Libya is the next nation or people listed which is in North Africa on the Mediterranean Coast. The NIV says the people of the covenant land will fall which sounds like he is referring to Israel or Canaan. The Hebrew reads "*the sons of the covenant*". However the NASB translates the phrase, "*the people of the land that is in league*" and the NLT translates it, "*and all their other allies.*" I find it difficult to justify the NIV's translation based on the context here. Israel and Judah's judgment by God are not linked with Egypt's. Ezekiel never hesitates to speak against God's covenant people for their sins and to link them here with Egypt seems a stretch. The NLT's translation of this phrase is probably the best. Egypt and all her allies, all the peoples who had sent her mercenaries and were allied with her in trade and political intrigue will fall. God will judge them all!

Nebuchadnezzar would invade and sack Egypt in 568-567. The Persians would invade and sack Egypt and destroy many of her important cities under Cambyses II in 525. The Persians also took Lydia and most of the nations around Egypt as well. Alexander and the Romans would take the rest.

30:6-9 - God says Egypt will fall from Migdol on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta to Aswan in the south at the first great cataract of the Nile. From one end of Egypt to the other people will fall by the sword. Egypt will be desolate and ruined. All that remains today of ancient Egypt is ruins. The Egyptians will know that Yahweh is God when he sets fire to Egypt and all her allies are crushed. Egypt needed to be taught the lesson God taught them when he freed the Hebrew slaves in the exodus. Now 800 years later God must teach it to them again.

God says he will send messengers to frighten Cush which is southern Sudan or even Ethiopia, though not the modern day Ethiopian highlands. Cush would be the region near Khartoum where the White and Blue Niles come together. When the Sudanese hear of Egypt's fall they will be seized with fear themselves. Historically Nebuchadnezzar only invaded Lower Egypt, the Nile Delta and down to Memphis and On or Heliopolis. He did not reach down to Upper Egypt and the Sudan.

30:10-12 - God says he will put an end to the hordes of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar's hand. This prophecy must be speaking of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and sacking of Lower Egypt in 568-567. The hordes of Egypt were probably her mercenary armies that could not withstand the Babylonian's attack. Ezekiel describes the Babylonians as "*the most ruthless of nations.*" They

will invade Egypt and slay many. God will dry up the streams of the Nile and sell the land to evil men. Foreigners will lay waste to the land and everything in it. After Nebuchadnezzar came the Persians under Cambyses II, then Alexander and the Ptolomies and finally the Romans. Egypt never again was independent from foreign rule. Even though the Ptolomies tried to adopt many Egyptian customs they were Greeks and not Egyptians. Egypt under Roman rule would become the breadbasket of the empire but she would not be an independent nation. God fulfilled what he had spoken through his prophet Ezekiel.

30:13-19 - Ezekiel continues his lament over Egypt detailing how God is going to judge her for her many sins. He will destroy the idols in Memphis, one of Lower Egypt's great cities. There will no longer be a prince in Egypt; the Egyptian dynasties will come to an end. God will lay waste to Upper Egypt. He will set fire to Zoan, which was Tanis or Rameses, the great trophy city in the northeastern Nile Delta. God will inflict punishment on Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt about 100 kilometers north of Aswan and the first cataract of the Nile. It was around 500 kilometers upriver from Memphis built on the Nile across from the Valley of the Kings where many Pharaohs were buried. Ezekiel forms a chiasm here to describe the destruction of all of Egypt from Zoan in the Delta to Thebes on the Nile in the south.

God says he will pour out his wrath on Pelusium, Hebrew Sin, which was a seacoast fortress on the Canaanite frontier in the northeast. He will cut off the hordes or armies of Thebes, which was the capital of Upper Egypt. Once again Ezekiel describes the destruction of the whole country from north to south, from Lower Egypt to Upper Egypt. Nothing will escape, including Thebes which was protected by the long course of the Nile from the sea some 700 kilometers up river. Memphis will be in constant distress as well as Heliopolis, the city of the sun just north of Memphis at the base of the Delta, and Bubastis, a temple city in the southeastern corner of the Nile Delta near Goshen. The three cities of Memphis, Heliopolis and Bubastis or Pi-Beseth in Hebrew, were all temple cities, headquarters for the worship of major Egyptian gods. The true God will destroy them all.

God says it will be a dark day when he breaks the yoke of Egypt and Tahpanhes or Heliopolis, will fall. Heliopolis was the center of the worship of the Egyptian sun god Amun or Amun-Ra. The yoke of Egypt probably refers to the Egyptian gods that tempted Israel from the very beginning all throughout her history. God will cover Egypt with clouds meaning judgment and her towns and people will go into captivity. Then all of Egypt will know that Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews is the one true and only God. He is the Lord of History and the nations not the false idols of Egypt.

30:20-26 - Ezekiel receives another Word from God concerning Egypt. He gives the date as the 11th year, 1st month and 7th day which the NLT dates as April 29, 587. This would have been one month into King Jehoiachin's 11th year in Babylonian captivity. He was captured in Jerusalem on March 16, 597. Is there any significance to the 1st month and the 7th day? I don't think so.

God tells Ezekiel that he has broken the arm of Pharaoh King of Egypt who would have been Hophra at this time, who had just become Pharaoh a year earlier. His arm has not been bound in a splint so that it can heal in order to hold a sword again. God says he is against Hophra and will break both of his arms and make the sword fall from his hand. The Lord says he will disperse the Egyptians among the nations and will strengthen the hand of the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. In fact he will break Pharaoh's arms and brandish his sword against Egypt.

After Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in January of 588, Pharaoh Hophra marched out of Egypt to the aid of Zedekiah to keep Babylon in check. Nebuchadnezzar briefly halted the siege of Jerusalem and moved to repulse Hophra's forces. Whether they fought or not is unclear. However, Hophra did withdraw his forces and return to Egypt after his encounter with Nebuchadnezzar's army. He did not interfere in Babylonian affairs in Judah again. Hophra was killed in 570 in a conflict with his own regent, Ahmose. God completely broke his power and the power of Egypt and fulfilled the Word of his prophet.

When Hophra marched out of Egypt to aid Zedekiah against Babylon hope surged in Judah that the siege was going to be lifted and Judah delivered from Nebuchadnezzar just as God had delivered King Hezekiah from the siege of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. This was what the court prophets of the official theology were prophesying in Jerusalem. God revealed to Ezekiel in Babylon and Jeremiah in Jerusalem that no such rescue was in Judah's future. In fact God would break the power of Egypt to do anything for Judah. As Ezekiel said, the Lord had put his sword in the hand of the King of Babylon. Judah's hope in Egypt was smashed.

Chapter 31:

31:1-9 - Ezekiel receives another message about Egypt and Pharaoh this time comparing him to Assyria and one of the cedars of Lebanon. The message comes on June 21, 587, about two months later than the message in *30:20-26*.

God tells Pharaoh Hophra, who was Pharaoh at the time of this message, to consider Assyria. It towered over other nations like a great cedar in Lebanon. It was well watered and grew above all the other trees. The birds in the air came and nested in its boughs. Jesus uses this image to describe the Kingdom of God and the mustard shrub that grew from a tiny seed. The birds represent the nations. Beasts of the field sheltered their young under its branches and all the great nations lived in its shade, meaning all the nations around Assyria felt its influence. Assyria rose to great heights among the nations, even rivaling the pine trees in the Garden of God. Ezekiel says no tree in Eden could match its beauty. Assyria had accomplished things no nation had done, things of art, culture and beauty. God allowed Assyria to flourish and prosper.

Ezekiel in highly poetic and dramatic language deals with the positive accomplishments of Assyria and her greatness and the beauty and majesty of Nineveh and her other cities. He does not mention her cruelty or brutality or the fact that much of her wealth and beauty was based on the slaughter of her conquests. Ezekiel deals with those issues in *31:10-18*.

31:10-18 - Ezekiel continues his message to Pharaoh, comparing him to Assyria and its fate. Assyria towered over all the other nations around it and grew proud of its height. Therefore God handed it over to "*the ruler of nations*" which is probably Babylon, to deal with it according to its wickedness. God did not look the other way concerning how Assyria had gained all her wealth and power. The *Book of Jonah* tells us God even sent one of Israel's prophets early in her empire under Tiglath-Pileser III to bring the city to repent. It did but only for a time. Assyria grew worse in her sins and God cast it aside using "*the most ruthless of nations*" to accomplish his purposes. The great tree that had towered over all the other trees now lay broken. The nations of the earth that had sheltered under it fled at its fall and left Assyria. The birds and beasts settled on the fallen tree, meaning they picked at the spoils like carrion.

God declares that no other trees by the waters are ever to tower so proudly again. No other trees are ever to reach such a height again. They are all destined for death, for the grave because they are mortal. God gives a warning to all nations never to try and reach the height of

Assyria again or grow too proud. If they do God will bring them down. If they do they are destined for death. God alone is Lord of History and all nations answer to him! All great empires and despots who have aspired to world conquest God has eventually brought down. The only "cedar tree" that will rule the world with justice and beauty that will never fall is *"the Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever!"*

The day God brought Assyria down to Sheol, or the grave, he held back the streams and covered the deep waters with grief. God clothed Lebanon with gloom and all the trees withered away. The Lord made the nations tremble at the sound of Nineveh's fall. The trees of Eden whose beauty Assyria had rivaled all rejoiced because Assyria and all her allies went down to the grave with her. They were killed with the sword when the Babylonians and Medes sacked Nineveh in 612 and when Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered what was left of the Assyrian army along with Pharaoh Neco's army at Carchemish in 605.

God tells Pharaoh Hophra this is what will happen to him and to Egypt. His days are numbered. The Lord God has spoken. Hophra was killed in a conflict with his regent in 570. Twenty years after Ezekiel's prophecy Egypt was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar and Memphis sacked in 568-567. God fulfilled his Word through his prophet.

Chapter 32:

32:1-10 - Ezekiel is given a further message, a lament about Pharaoh Hophra's fall on March 3, 585 (NLT date), some 8 months after Jerusalem's fall, and about two months after Ezekiel had been informed that Jerusalem had been destroyed as God had foretold. The 12th day of the 12th month may be significant symbolically, as it is related to the number 12 which often represents God's people. Ezekiel had given a lament for Egypt in *30:1-19*. Now he gives a lament for Pharaoh, who at this writing was Hophra or Apries, his Greek name.

God says Pharaoh is like a lion among the nations and a monster in the seas. The Hebrew word for monster is tannin, which can mean sea monster, dragon, or whale depending on the context. Here Pharaoh is a monster thrashing about in the streams of the Nile, muddying its waters. The picture Ezekiel paints is of a predator among the nations, a beast that is feared.

Yet, God will cast his net over Pharaoh and many men will haul him up on the land and throw the sea monster or the whale on dry land and the beasts and birds will feed upon his carcass. God will spread his flesh upon the mountains and fill the valleys with his remains. He will drench the land with Pharaoh's blood. God says when he snuffs out Pharaoh there will be signs in the heavens, darkness and cloud and the stars will darken over him, just as God brought the plague of darkness to Egypt in the Exodus. The darkness is meant to tell Pharaoh and the Egyptians Pharaoh's fall is God's doing and not a human thing.

Many peoples will be troubled because of Pharaoh's fall. Nations he has not known will be disturbed by his death and people will be appalled at him. Kings will shudder when the Lord brings about Pharaoh's downfall.

Hophra tried to interfere in Nebuchadnezzar's empire building policies and for him punishing Judah for rebelling against him. After Neco's defeat at Carchemish in 605, Neco and Psammetichus II both stayed out of Babylon's way. Hophra however, tried to assert Egyptian influence and power in Judah and was stung by Nebuchadnezzar. Following that humiliation he was supplanted by Ahmose in 570. Soon after in 568-567 Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and then Egypt was conquered by Cambyses II of Persia in 525 and ceased to be an independent power.

32:11-16 - Ezekiel continues his lament against Pharaoh and Egypt. He says the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, will come against you. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Lower Egypt in 568-567 and went as far as Memphis. God says the hordes of Egypt will fall. Hophra had built an army centered on Greek mercenaries. They will be conquered by the Babylonians, that most ruthless of nations, a description Ezekiel has used several times of Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Hophra had already been deposed in favor of Ahmose in 570. However, Ahmose's troops could not withstand the Babylonian invasion and were defeated. God says all Egypt's hordes will be overthrown.

He will destroy her cattle beside her abundant waters, probably meaning the waters of the Nile Delta, the area which Nebuchadnezzar invaded. God says he will make Egypt desolate and strip the land of everything when he strikes down all who live there. Then Egypt will know that Yahweh is God. The Lord tells Ezekiel this is the chant or song of lament that the daughters of the nations will chant for Egypt. Even her armies who will be defeated, all her mercenaries will chant it.

32:17-21 - Ezekiel receives another Word from the Lord in the 12th year on the 15th day of the month. This is presumably the 12th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity and the 15th day of the month is in the 12th month, the same month as the lament over Pharaoh in *32:1-17*. According to the NLT's calculations of the Hebrew lunar calendar that puts the date of this message as March 17, 585, two weeks after the lament over Pharaoh and about four months after the fall of Jerusalem.

God tells Ezekiel to wail over the hordes of Egypt and the daughters of mighty nations and with all who go down to the pit, meaning Sheol and death. This message from God will mention the armies of many nations, Assyria, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, Edom, and the Sidonians along with Egypt and Pharaoh. Egypt's fate will be that of these many nations and their armies because Egypt is no more favored than these other pagan nations. The Egyptians will go down to the grave and be laid alongside the uncircumcised. They will fall among all those killed with the sword because the sword is drawn against her. The mighty leaders of Egypt's army and her Pharaohs will be consigned to Sheol, the place of the dead.

Sheol in the Old Testament is a shadowy place where the dead go. They have no real existence and at this time in Israel's history Sheol does not represent eternal life or eternal punishment. It appears that Ezekiel is not talking here about Sheol being like Hades or Gehenna in the New Testament, a place of punishment. The hordes of Egypt will lose their life and all the blessings of life. However, there is a hint of the pit or the grave being a place where there is suffering and pain. The beginnings of the New Testament concepts of the Hades and Paradise sides of Sheol may be here but it is tentative at best.

32:22-25 - God tells Ezekiel that Assyria and all her mighty army is there in the pit. Their graves are in the depths of the pit, the deepest part because Assyria was Israel's mortal enemy and the cruelest and most brutal of nations. She spread terror to the nations around her and now all her troops have fallen by the sword. Nineveh fell in 612 to Nabopolassar of Babylon along with Scythian hordes from north of the Caucasus and the army of the Medes. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar crushed what was left of the Assyrian army along with Pharaoh Neco's army at Carchemish in northern Syria. That battle marked the final defeat of the Assyrian Empire.

God tells Ezekiel that Elam is there in the pit with all her armies who have been killed in battle. Elam was the region to the east of Babylon up against the mountains of Persia whose

capital was Susa. Sennacharib and Ashurbanipal of Assyria conquered Elam which controlled the trade routes to the Iranian Plateau. They deported some of the population to Samaria and took many Israelites to Elam. That may be why Elam is included in Ezekiel's list here. The Babylonians absorbed Elam into their empire after the collapse of Assyria. Luke mentions there were Jews from Elam in Jerusalem at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to the church. They may have been descendants of Israelites who were deported from Samaria or other Jews who settled there following the Babylonian exile.

Elam's soldiers who have died in battle will be in the pit alongside other uncircumcised nations. They will bear their shame in Sheol. This is the first hint of Sheol as a place of punishment and a place where what is done in life is reflected in death. They spread terror in the land of the living so they will bear their shame in the grave. In the shame-honor based culture of the Middle East there could be no worse fate in death than to bear shame forever in the pit.

Ezekiel mentions the uncircumcised nations. Many nations around Israel practiced circumcision as a sign of adulthood and a rite of puberty. For Israel it was the mark of the covenant on all Israelite males who were circumcised not at puberty but in infancy on the 8th day of life. Ezekiel names the pagan nations who now reside in the pit, the grave, as uncircumcised, meaning they do not belong to God's covenant people and do not experience the blessings given to Abraham and Moses. They are wicked people who do not worship God and deserve the shame they experience in the pit because of their actions in this life. Within that concept are the beginnings of the understanding of Hell in the New Testament.

32:26-28 - Ezekiel says that Meshech and Tubal and all their armies will be in the pit, the grave, along with the other nations. They are uncircumcised nations that spread terror in the world. Ezekiel says the punishment for their sins rested on their bones; meaning their guilt stayed with them in death. This is the clearest statement yet of punishment for sin beyond the grave in Ezekiel. He adds that Pharaoh will suffer the same fate as the soldiers of Meshech and Tubal. He too will lie with the uncircumcised and those killed by the sword.

Meshech and Tubal probably refer to peoples who populated the Caucasus region of Asia Minor and north of the Caucasus Mountains. They would have lived in modern day Armenia and northeastern Turkey. There is no evidence to suggest that Meshech refers to Moscow and Tubal represents the Russians and their armies as some Dispensational scholars have said.

32:29-32 - Ezekiel declares that Edom with all her kings and princes will be among those killed with the sword. Edom was an ally of Babylon during the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel has already prophesied about God judging Edom for allying themselves with Nebuchadnezzar against God's people Judah and his city Jerusalem in *Ezekiel 25*. This continues that judgment.

He says all the princes of the Sidonians and of "*the north*" are in the pit alongside the rest of the slain. The princes of the north may refer to the other great Phoenician ports of Byblos and Arvad which were north of Sidon along the Syrian coast.

God says Pharaoh will be laid alongside all these pagan kings and armies in Sheol. He will take comfort in the grave that he and his army are not the only ones who will bear their shame in Sheol. God allowed him to spread terror in the land of the living but in death he and his army will lie with the uncircumcised nations. God will judge Pharaoh and that judgment will last beyond the grave in Sheol. Ezekiel gives us some of the first pictures of God's eternal judgment beyond this life that is based upon our actions in the world while we were alive. Those ideas will be fully fleshed out in the New Testament in its understanding of heaven, hell and eternal

judgment and rewards by God. His justice will prevail against those who rebelled against God and his Law no matter whether they were his people or the pagan nations of the world. God is both Creator and Judge of all!

Chapter 33:

33:1-6 - God describes the function of the watchman to Ezekiel and his responsibility to the people and the people's responsibility to heed the warnings of the watchman. If the people choose a watchman and he sees the enemy coming against the land and blows his trumpet to warn everyone and people hear the trumpet but do nothing, then they will be responsible for their own deaths and the watchman will be innocent of their blood. However, if the enemy comes and the watchman does not warn the citizens of the land and they die because of his inaction then the watchman will be guilty of their blood. God is using this description of the watchman's function to set up Ezekiel's task as a prophet, warning the people of the danger that is to come.

The same holds true for us today. If we know the truth and do not declare it and people's lives are ruined or worse taken because they did not know the truth then God holds us responsible because we did not do the task he gave us. If we do speak the truth however and people do not respond, then we have done our job and God will hold the people responsible for not listening to the truth of his Word. The church has a prophetic function in society today just as God's prophets had in ancient Israel and Judah.

33:7-9 - God tells Ezekiel he has made him a watchman for the house of Israel. He is to give the Jews God's warning. God says if he gives Ezekiel a message to the wicked man to repent and Ezekiel stays silent the wicked man will die in his sins but God will hold Ezekiel responsible for the wicked man's death because he did not speak God's message and give the wicked God's warning. But if Ezekiel gives the wicked man God's warning and he ignores it and does not repent he will die in his sins but Ezekiel will not be held responsible. Ezekiel will not be held accountable for the wicked man's blood. God clearly outlines Ezekiel's responsibility as God's prophetic messenger. God restates the moral principle that God's messengers are accountable to speak God's message. They are not accountable for how people respond to that message. They are to be faithful to their task. What people do with God's message is their responsibility.

33:10-11 - God tells Ezekiel to tell the house of Israel that they say their sins weigh them down and they are wasting away because of them. They ask, how then can we live? God says he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants to see people, even the most wicked turn away from their sins and live. He desires repentance! So he tells Israel, *"Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die O house of Israel?"*

God takes no pleasure in judging and punishing the wicked. He wants them to repent. That is why he has sent Ezekiel and his other prophets to them. He loves his people but he is also holy and just. He wants to give them every chance to repent so he does not have to execute his holy justice upon them. God cannot look the other way when sin occurs. He must punish it. But he does not relish punishing those who disobey him. His first inclination is to forgive so he gives people every chance to repent. God's priority is grace over wrath. Wrath comes only when his grace and love are rejected.

The reason for the cross and God's sacrifice of his only Son are explained here in Ezekiel. God does not desire the death of the wicked over punishment for their sins; he desires their repentance so that they can be saved and rightly related to him. It is a total mistake to see God

first as full of wrath and judgment. Ezekiel shows us his first inclination is mercy, grace and forgiveness. God is a God of love besides holiness. The cross of Jesus Christ expresses both the holiness of God and his love toward the sinner. He provided a way so the sinner could be saved. We now have the privilege of preaching the gospel so that people may repent just as Ezekiel had the responsibility as Israel's watchman to preach repentance so that people would not die. How the people responded to his message was up to them just as how people respond to the gospel when we share it is up to them and not up to us.

33:12-16 - God outlines for Ezekiel how repentance works. God centers on our relationship with him and he totally explodes the myth of *"if my good outweighs my bad God will let me into heaven."* The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him if he disobeys and sins nor will the wickedness of the wicked man condemn him if he repents.

God says the righteous man if he sins will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness. If the Lord tells a righteous man he will live but then he trusts in his own righteousness and goes out and does evil none of the righteous things he has done will count for him. They will not outweigh the evil and sin he has committed. They will not save him and he will die for the evil he has done. Sin demands death in payment even if I have been righteous in my past. Sin and disobedience cancel out any good I might have done. The implication is one sin undoes a lifetime of righteous living and I will pay for it with my life because sin demands life in payment! God's holiness does not grade on a curve; it is absolute! That is why no one can be justified before God based on their own righteousness. Our good does not outweigh our bad!

Is there no hope? Yes there is hope if we repent! God's holiness is absolute but God is always willing to forgive the repentant sinner. God says if he tells the wicked man he will surely die and he repents of his sin, turns away from it and begins to do what is right then he will surely live; he will not die. God briefly outlines what right living looks like. The repentant man gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, he returns what was stolen and he follows the decrees that give life, meaning God's Law. He turns from evil and does good. None of his past sins will be remembered against him because he has repented. He now is in a right relationship with God. One must trust in one's relationship with God and not our own righteousness because our good does not outweigh the sinful things we do.

The life and death Ezekiel speaks of is life and death here and now. In the context of his prophecy he is not talking about eternal life and eternal death and punishment. Heaven and Hell are not in his vision at this point. Yet, with New Testament understanding we can see how this applies eternally as well as temporally. Ezekiel is looking at the problem of God's justice concerning Judah and the Jews and Jerusalem's destruction. He is not talking about eternity. However, we can apply his principles to eternity as we filter his premise through the New Testament and the fulfillment it brings in the Messiah Jesus.

Ezekiel describes God's Law as the decrees that give life. God's Law is life-giving and not life-stealing. Sin lies to us when it says God's Law and will are too restrictive and will rob us of the good life. The exact opposite is true! Obedience to God's will brings life not death!

33:17-20 - The Jews complain to God that his way is not just. They are still trying to deny their sins and claim that their good should outweigh any sin and rebellion against God. Why then does God judge them? Ezekiel sums up **33:10-16** saying that a righteous man who turns away from God and sins shall die for his sin and a wicked man who repents shall live. Israel still claims the way of the Lord is not just and God replies he will judge each one according to his own actions.

God is judging his people but he is also judging each individual according to their own deeds. No one will be able to hide behind the righteousness of the community. All will be judged individually. This principle of individual responsibility for one's own sin was a new development in Israel's theology. It is especially outlined in *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*. The shift was from national judgment to individual judgment and paved the way for a redefinition of the people of God. Who makes up Israel? Is it anyone who is a Jew and born an Israelite or is it people who have a relationship with God and who are faithful to him? For much of the Old Testament the definition of Israel was the former. Jeremiah and Ezekiel pave the way for the New Testament definition of the people of God which is the latter.

33:21-22 - In the twelfth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day or January 8, 585 by the NLT's reckoning, a man came to Ezekiel from the ruins of Jerusalem and reported to him that the city had fallen. This was 6 months after the Babylonians had breached the walls and 5 months after Nebuzaradan had torn down the walls and burned the temple. Ezekiel had been silent for a long time, not speaking to anyone in Babylon although he continued to receive words from the Lord and write them down. In *24:27* God instructs him to be silent until a fugitive from Jerusalem would come to him and report that the city had fallen. That message, though it is difficult to date could be as early as January of 588, which is three years earlier!

The night before the fugitive comes to Ezekiel God speaks to him and opens his mouth again to speak. Ezekiel says God opens his mouth which implies that not only did Ezekiel not speak to anyone he could not because God shut his mouth. This was more than voluntary obedience on Ezekiel's part. God shut up the mouth of his prophet. When he finally talked and he did so on the very day the fugitive came to report Jerusalem's fall to the exiles the sign could not have been lost on the Jews of Babylon!

This moment in January of 585 also marks a turning point in Ezekiel's prophecy. Up until this time Ezekiel has been unwavering in speaking out against Israel's idolatry and declaring God's judgment upon a sinful people and nation. From this moment on themes of grace, restoration and even Messianic themes begin to occur in Ezekiel's prophecy. He still speaks about Israel's idolatry and sin but now there is hope for God to forgive and restore his people once again. But it will not be as it was. The Jews will no longer be citizens of the nation of Judah. Now God's people the Jews will be his faithful ones, with whom he will renew his covenant within whom he will put his Spirit.

33:23-29 - God gives Ezekiel a message for the survivors of Judah's fall. They say Abraham was one man and he possessed the land. Surely because we are many we will possess it too. God says they continue to disobey him by eating meat with blood in it and shedding blood and worshipping idols, how can they possibly believe they will possess they land? They rely not on the Lord but their sword to protect them and they continue to defy the Lord by their behavior including committing adultery. They will not possess the land because even now they will not repent!

Those that are left in the ruins of Jerusalem will fall by the sword. Those out in the country will die by wild beasts and those in the strongholds will die by plague. God's judgment will find them all because they have not repented! God is going to make the land a desolate waste and the mountains of Israel will be desolate as well. God is going to make the land a waste because of all the detestable things the Jews have done within it.

Jeremiah 39-44 tells the tragic story of the survivors of the sack of Jerusalem and how Gedaliah the governor was murdered and the survivors fled to Egypt with Jeremiah where he died in exile. In fact all those that had fled to Egypt with Johanan died there. Very few that were left in the land after Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem thrived. God continued to judge his people until they repented. When the survivors did not and still insisted on believing a twisted theology rather than trusting to God's covenant God turned away from them as well.

33:30-33 - God gives Ezekiel a message for the exiles in Babylon. They all come to Ezekiel's house to listen to the Word of the Lord and news of Jerusalem. They are eager to hear the message but not to do what the Lord says. They do not put it into practice and so continue not to repent. With their mouths they proclaim their devotion to the Lord but their behavior shows their hearts are still far from God. They are still filled with greed and injustice. Ezekiel to them is like a musician who sings love songs for their entertainment. They like to listen but do not respond to what the Lord through Ezekiel is telling them. God says when all this comes true, that is when Jerusalem finally falls and even the survivors are judged, then they will realize that a true prophet of the Lord has been among them. Heart and character are what really matter to God. Religion and religious devotion to God are all outward and can be false. True heart attitudes will eventually work themselves out in behavior. The exiles' true heart attitudes were still not fully devoted to God.

The implication of God's words to Ezekiel is that even in Babylon the people were still holding on to the remains of the official theology and not believing that God would totally destroy Jerusalem and his temple. They even believed that Ezekiel was a prophet of God but did not pay attention to his words or do what God said through him. It was not until Jerusalem actually fell and the temple was actually burned to the ground that they finally believed Ezekiel was truly God's prophet. When the Lord's judgment finally came they were left with nothing but to come to Ezekiel and seek the Lord through him. Everything else they had ever held dear and true was gone. What hope had they but the Word of the Lord through one of his true prophets? God had to get the people to that point before he could begin to shape the generation who would return to the land and rebuild his temple. He had to break them totally before they were ready to return to the Promiseland.

Chapter 34:

34:1-6 - God gives Ezekiel a message for Israel's shepherds, those who were in leadership. This prophecy applies to Judah's priests, prophets, wise men, court officials and the king. The most direct application was probably to the priests who were to watch over the people and did not have political responsibilities like the court officials and the king. Ezekiel describes what a shepherd/pastor should do by describing what Israel's spiritual leaders did not do. It is marked by compassion and care for those in need.

God says woe to Israel's shepherds who only take care of themselves and take advantage of God's flock. They were supposed to take care of the flock but instead have allowed the people to be scattered and attacked. The people are vulnerable and the shepherds have done nothing.

God then lists their job description. They should have strengthened the weak. That means teach the people how to thrive, encourage them, coach them how to overcome their weaknesses. It also means to protect the weak among the people and shelter them so that they have time to learn and get stronger. The shepherds needed to heal the sick. Whatever medical wisdom the leaders possessed they needed to apply to those who were sick. Spiritually that means teaching

the people God's Word and how to relate to him. They should have been helping those who were spiritually wounded. The shepherds should have bound up the injured. One could apply that literally to those who had been wounded in the Babylonian attack but I do not think God is talking here about splinting a broken bone. The worst wounds among the Jews were spiritual. People needed to be led to repent and given hope again. That was the job of Israel's spiritual leaders. They did not do that but instead kept clinging to the false official theology. If it had not been for Jeremiah and Ezekiel and other prophets the wounded spiritually among the Jews would have died. Part of binding up the wounded and healing the spiritually sick is to teach them God's Word and give them God's truth so that they can heal. God says the shepherds should have brought back the strays. Many among the Jews strayed away from Yahweh. The shepherds' job was to bring them back. They did not. Instead by their example they led the people astray to worship idols and to put their hope in a false theology and teaching. In order to bring someone back one needs to first know the truth and then go and seek out the person who has strayed and talk with them and encourage them to return. The leaders did neither. Finally, God's job description for his shepherds is to search for the lost. We immediately think of those who do not know the Lord Jesus and that is not an incorrect application for us but in the context I think Ezekiel means the shepherds had the responsibility to search for those who had completely abandoned their faith in God. Someone who was lost had not just strayed away but had totally stopped worshipping God and left Israel's faith all together. The shepherds were tasked with searching for them. They did not. Instead they ruled over the people harshly and brutally. The result was God's people were left scattered and vulnerable spiritually, emotionally, politically and physically. God held the leaders responsible! Many of those who went into exile with Ezekiel were what God defined as Israel's shepherds!

34:7-10 - God tells the shepherds that because they did not do their job and treated the people like their own possession to do with as they pleased God is against them. It is as if there was no shepherd in Judah at all because the shepherds, the spiritual leaders of Israel, have cared for themselves rather than God's flock. God will hold the shepherds accountable for his flock and will remove them from their position. They will no longer be able to exploit the people and will have to fend for themselves. God will rescue his people from the failed shepherds and they will no longer be food for them to be used by them.

God's people are his flock and he cares about them deeply. When their spiritual leaders fail to care for them in the same way, God holds those leaders accountable. He will not allow them to exploit his people for an extended time. God will move to act and defend his people because their spiritual leaders have failed in their ministry to protect and feed God's flock. Leaders who take their position for granted and use that position for personal gain at the expense of God's people God holds accountable and disciplines. Spiritual leaders must always remember that the church they serve is *NEVER* theirs. It is God's flock not their flock. They may be pastor and shepherd and love their congregation and treat them like their own flock but the true shepherd, the ultimate shepherd is God and not them. All pastors will answer to the Lord for how they treated his flock. To paraphrase David in *Psalms 23*, the Lord is our shepherd!

34:11-16 - God says because the shepherds, the spiritual leaders of Israel, have failed to watch over God's flock and now the flock is scattered among the nations and vulnerable, God himself will be their shepherd. He will search for his lost sheep and look after them. God will look after his sheep as the good shepherd looks after his flock. God will rescue them from the nations to

which they have been scattered and bring them back to the land. He will pasture them on the mountains of Israel and resettle them in the land he gave them. God will tend them and they will lie down in good grazing land. This language reflects David's in *Psalms* 23 that the Lord is my shepherd; he makes me lie down in green pastures and restores my soul. Ezekiel's images here are ones of rest and renewal not judgment and flight. God will be Israel's shepherd and will do what he had given his spiritual leaders to do but they failed in the task. He will search for the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. That is the reverse order of God's job description for his shepherds in *34:4*. God says the sleek and the strong he will destroy because he will shepherd his flock with justice. The leaders of Israel had exploited God's people and had grown rich off of their labor and suffering. God holds those shepherds accountable and will judge them with justice.

God speaks gently to his people and gives them reassurance of his love and care. He is not speaking judgment here but restoration. If the exiles were questioning whether or not they were still God's people in these verses Ezekiel reassures them that they are. God is their shepherd and he will care for them like a good shepherd cares for his flock. God will gather them, restore them to the land and care for them there. The picture is one Jesus used in *John 10* when he described himself as the good shepherd who cares for his flock. Any judgment that is expressed here is pointed at the shepherds of Israel that failed in their mission to protect and care for God's flock. To the people God speaks words of encouragement and comfort.

34:17-24 - God tells his people that he will judge between them, one sheep from another and between the rams and goats. The image goes back to his promise to hold the failed shepherds accountable. The people had suffered greatly not only at the hand of the Babylonians but at the hands of corrupt leaders who took advantage of the people's suffering to get rich and fat. God as the good shepherd will not let that stand. He will judge those who grew rich off the people. The priests were provided for in the Law through the sacrifices the people brought to the Lord's temple. That priestly portion was designed to provide for the priests not make them rich. The priests in Ezekiel's day exploited God's plan and expanded it so that not only could they maintain their power but they grew wealthy because of it. Meanwhile the people suffered. God gave them good pasture but they trampled it. God gave them good water to drink but they fouled it and left the rest for the people to use. God is judging them for their behavior.

Many of the priests were taken into captivity when King Jehoiachin was captured in 597. Those that were left were also captured and executed when Nebuzaradan came to the city in August of 586. God fulfilled his Word to his shepherds that had failed him and failed his people.

God tells his people that he himself will judge between his sheep and care for them. He will save his flock and will give them a new shepherd, even David himself and he will tend them. This is a direct Messianic passage in Ezekiel. Yet here the Messiah is not a conquering general but a good shepherd who will care for God's flock. When that happens God will be their God and David will be their prince over them. From a New Testament vantage point this prophecy speaks more to Jesus' first coming than his second. He will save his flock and shepherd them, caring for them even as he does now. This prophecy I would count as fulfilled when Jesus came.

34:25-31 - God says he will make a covenant of peace with Israel and rid the land of wild beasts so that his people may dwell in the land safely and securely. This may refer to Jesus' mission to save us from sin and defeat the power of Satan or it may refer to the time of his second coming when he saves his ancient people Israel and fulfills his promises to them. One of the important

promises in the covenant with David in 2 *Samuel* 7 was that Israel would have peace in the land and rest from all her enemies. This prophecy expresses that promise. When David is Israel's shepherd again he will bless the land and his people. God will send showers of blessing and the land will yield its crops and the trees will flourish. God will break the yoke of captivity and rescue his people from those who enslaved them. No one will harm them and they will live in the land in safety. God will bless them and bless their land so that they will no longer be vulnerable to famine or attack. Then they will know that God is their God and he is with them and they are his people his sheep and his flock.

There are many ways to take this prophecy. One can take it all metaphorically and say that Jesus' mission to die on the cross to save a people for himself has fulfilled all of this. Now we live in a new relationship with God and are blessed because of it. A more literal interpretation says that this paragraph refers to Jesus' second coming when he sets up the Millennial Kingdom and reigns over Israel as their Messiah. God will gather them back to the land of Israel and bless them. A third way is to see this prophecy as being fulfilled in stages. God has saved his people in Jesus' first coming. Even today he is gathering them back to the land and blessing it with fertility, though Israel does not yet live in safety and security. Finally when the Lord Jesus returns he will finish the fulfillment of this prophecy. All along however as people receive the Lord Jesus as Lord and Savior, he is their God and they are his people. I think the third way is the more comprehensive way to view the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Chapter 35:

35:1-9 - The Lord gives Ezekiel a prophecy against Edom or Mt. Seir, a mountain height in Edomite territory that is often used as another name for Edom just like Mt. Zion was another name for Jerusalem. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Edom was an ally of the Babylonians when they invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Edomite territory was centered to the east and south of the Dead Sea, to the east of the Arabah Valley all the way to Elath or Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea. The King's Highway ran through Edom from the Red Sea north into Moabite territory and then all the way to Damascus and Syria.

God says he will make Edom a desolate land and turn its towns into ruins. God declares because Edom harbored an ancient hatred against Israel and Judah and fought against them in the time of God's judgment upon them the Lord will now judge Edom. Since Edom did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will now pursue the Edomites. God will bring devastation down upon Edom and make her towns desolate forever.

Edom was overrun by the Arabs in the 5th century B.C. and a century later by the Nabataeans. After the fall of Judah many Edomites settled in southern Judah. When the Arabs invaded and took over Edomite territory they were slowly absorbed into the Jewish population who had re-settled the land after the exile. Herod the Great was mostly Edomite in ancestry yet the Romans considered him Jewish. See the note on *Jeremiah 49:7-11* and his prophecy against Edom. Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Edom yet it was destroyed. The Nabataeans made their capital Petra and it flourished for many centuries. Today the territory of Edom is in modern Jordan and is largely desolate and unsettled. Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled! Edom is a barren wasteland.

35:10-15 - God says because the Edomites thought they would take control over the Promiseland that God had given to Israel by taking advantage of the Babylonian's invasion and destruction of Jerusalem, God will destroy Edom. He will treat them with the same anger and jealousy with

which they treated their cousins the Israelites. He will judge Edom. The Lord knows all their plots and plans and has heard all their boasting against him. God says while the earth rejoices he will make Edom desolate! Because Edom rejoiced when the inheritance of Israel was destroyed and made desolate, God will destroy them.

God was just in punishing his people after they had disobeyed and rebelled against him for centuries. Yet he will not excuse the violence and pride of those nations he used to punish his people. Edom is one of those nations. God may discipline his people but he also remembers his covenant with Abraham and punishes those who curse Israel. Even today in our modern era it is a dangerous thing for a nation to oppose and seek to destroy Israel and the Jews. God's promise still holds. The one who blesses the Jews God will bless and the one who curses them God will curse.

Chapter 36:

36:1-7 - God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the mountains of Israel. The enemies of Israel have conquered Israel and wanted to divide up its choice territory in order to use it for themselves. Not only Babylon but Edom and other nations going all the way back to the Assyrians a century and a half earlier have wanted to possess "*the mountains of Israel.*" Ezekiel continues to speak to the exiles as if they represent all of Israel and not just Judah. Geographically the mountains of Israel were the mountains or hills of Samaria and Galilee. The mountains and hills around Jerusalem and further south were most often called the hill country of Judah. Ezekiel is using the mountains of Israel as representative of all Israel and all the territory God's people had possessed, not just the territory of Judah.

The nations have ravaged the land and plundered it. They have ridiculed Israel and tried to take possession of the land for themselves. God has seen this and will not let it stand. As the nations have moved against Israel and her territory with malice, including Edom, God in his jealous wrath for his people will cause those same nations to suffer scorn themselves. This prophecy is similar in tone to the prophecy against Edom in *chapter 35*. It reflects back to God's promise to Abraham. The nations have cursed God's people Israel and his land. Therefore God will curse the nations who cursed his people. Even though they have turned away from him and he has punished them and disciplined them for their sin, God is still jealous for his people. He still loves them. Ezekiel is trying to help the Jews see that God has not forgotten them and he still is for them. His justice will prevail against the nations that have attacked and destroyed Judah and even all of Israel. The prophecy also reiterates that some of the ten northern tribes have survived amidst the Jews. God has not abandoned the northern tribes nor rejected them utterly. There is a remnant left among the people of the Jews, even those in exile. The nation state of Israel has been gone for a century and a half but some of the people of Israel still live on and are not completely wiped out.

36:8-12 - God tells the mountains of Israel they will produce fruit for God's people because they are coming home soon. God loves them and will look on them with favor. The land will again be plowed and sown and the people will multiply in the land, even the whole house of Israel not just Judah. Towns and cities will be rebuilt. This is a prophecy of the return and the re-settling of Israel begun under Zerubbabel and continued under Ezra and Nehemiah. God promises he will make Israel prosper and there will be more people than before in the land. God took Israel away from his Promiseland but he will bring his people back and they will once again settle in the land. God says the land will never again deprive Israel of their children.

God's covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai was conditional which they broke. They did not keep his commands and continued to rebel against God so God brought upon them all the covenant curses in *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* he had warned them he would bring if they disobeyed him and violated his covenant. Within those passages however is the promise of restoration if they repented. The covenant with Abraham given 700 years before Mt. Sinai was an unconditional covenant and promised the descendants of Abraham the Promiseland. God in his grace would give Israel a land of their own. Ezekiel tells the Jews that God is keeping his promises to them. He will restore them to the land and there will always be Jews in the land of Promise. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 and forbid the Jews access to the city the center of Judaism shifted north to Galilee. There have always been Jews in the Promiseland even during the Crusades and after when the Muslims controlled Israel. During all of that time they were a conquered people and they were few in number. It was not until 1948 that millions of Jews began to return to Israel not under the rule of some other nation but as free citizens of the newly formed nation of Israel. God has fulfilled his promise to his people. He will complete it when the Lord Jesus returns.

36:13-15 - It is difficult to tell whether Ezekiel is still speaking to the mountains of Israel and the land in these verses or if his focus has shifted to the people of Israel themselves.

People, meaning the nations, taunt Israel saying they devour men and deprive the nation of its children. The NLT reads, Israel is a land that devours her own people. God says he will put a stop to that behavior. No longer will the land or the people devour others and make the nation childless. This could be a reference to the child sacrifice that was practiced from the days of Manasseh onward. It is unclear. God says he will put a stop to the taunts of the nations and Israel will no longer suffer the scorn of the nations around them. Israel's sin and idolatry had led God to punish them for their rebellion. Israel's neighbors like Edom had used God's judgment as an opportunity to not only ridicule their neighbor who had often occupied Edom's land but to also occupy Judah's land. God is going to reverse the fortunes of his people. If one remembers that the culture of the Middle East is a shame-honor based culture then the taunts of Israel's enemies would have been as unbearable as the consequences of their disobedience to God. God is going to put a stop to their shame one day when he restores Israel as his people.

36:16-21 - Ezekiel now turns to the people in the land rather than the mountains of Israel and the land itself. He declares again the people's sins and how by their conduct they defiled God's land. He says their conduct was like a woman's monthly period in the Lord's sight, when she was unclean for that time. God told Israel in the Holiness Code in *Leviticus* that a woman was unclean during her period and could not come and worship at the tabernacle and later the temple. It was due to her flow of blood which in ancient times was difficult to manage unlike today. Her uncleanness according to the Law of Moses isolated her and must have carried a moral stigma as well, as if there was something wrong with her and she was dirty. It is difficult to completely understand the reasons behind God's cleanliness law in her case. But she was excluded from the temple during that time and was not holy according to God's commands. God says that is like the whole house of Israel. They were unclean before him not because of a natural flow of blood but because they shed innocent blood and worshipped idols! God therefore poured out his wrath on them and dispersed them among the nations, sending them into exile. He judged them according to their conduct and gave them what they deserved. Furthermore wherever they went among the nations to whom the Lord sent them they continued to profane the Lord's name. This includes the

Babylonian exiles to whom Ezekiel is writing. They are the Lord's people and yet they had to leave his land because God cares for the holiness and honor of his name. Their disobedience and rebellion had caused God's name to be ridiculed among the nations. Israel's mission was to glorify the Lord's name and lift it up by their lifestyle so that the nations would want to seek the Lord. Their sin produced the exact opposite effect.

36:22-23 - God tells Israel the reason he is going to gather them from the nations and bring them back to the Promiseland is not because of them but because of his name. God is going to restore the honor to his name among the nations that the Jews have profaned. He is going to prove his holiness to all the nations around Israel and show himself to be holy through Israel. When God brings the Jews back to the land the nations of the Middle East will know that God can do what all thought impossible. The people will still survive and they will survive to worship God and live for him when he brings them back to the land he promised to give them.

God's holiness in this context is not so much his moral purity as his power, prestige, honor and worthiness to be worshipped. The Jews have profaned all those things by their rebellion and conduct and the Babylonians and other nations around Israel have seen their behavior. Some would have concluded that Yahweh was a weak God because he allowed his people to be conquered and his temple to be destroyed. The prophets however have been clear. Israel deserved her punishment from God for her sin and rebellion. They do not deserve his deliverance and grace to them. He will demonstrate that grace when he returns them to the land and when he overcomes Babylon, the power that conquered Israel and all the Middle East. God will raise up a new power, Persia, to accomplish his purposes for his people and for his world. As he does so he will show himself to be holy and restore the honor due his name.

36:24-32 - This is one of the most important prophecies in Ezekiel and is directly fulfilled at Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension when the Holy Spirit was given to the brand new church. God promises that one day he will gather Israel from all the countries to which he sent them into exile and he will bring them back to their own land. Then he will sprinkle clean water on them and they will be clean from all their uncleanness and sin. The priests would sprinkle those who were cleansed from leprosy or other skin diseases to symbolize they were now clean before God. Ezekiel uses that symbol here to describe God cleansing Israel from their sins. The Lord himself will cleanse them from idols and give them a new heart and a new spirit. In fact he will take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Their hearts had been hard towards God when they rebelled against him. Now God will change their hearts and soften them towards him. God will put his Spirit in all of them and move them to keep his commandments and obey him.

God says he will do this in some future time. It does not say the last days or soon or give any time clues as to when this will happen. God simply says someday he will do it. The first thing he will do is gather the remnant of his people and bring them back to the land. One can say this began to be accomplished when Zerubbabel led the people back to Jerusalem from Babylon in 538. However, Luke makes it clear in *Acts 2* that God had gathered faithful Jews from all over the Roman world to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in the year of Jesus' resurrection. Clearly they represent the remnant gathered by God back to the land. God says he will transform his people by giving them his Spirit to live in them and the Spirit will cause them to be able to keep God's commands and do his will. This also happened at Pentecost. Ezra's revival might have prefigured God's Spirit being given but the people still did not completely repent and change. By

Malachi's day the revival had already waned and their zeal for God's Law had diminished. The history of the Jewish people proves that unless God gives all of us his Spirit to produce his character in us we will not have the ability to obey God and love him. It is a fundamental tenet of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to do God's will not by our own works but by faith. This is in direct fulfillment to Ezekiel's prophecy here and to Joel's prophecy in *Joel 2* about the giving of the Spirit in the last days. Ezekiel does not mention the prophetic timeframe but Joel puts the giving of the Spirit in the last days, the days of the Messiah.

The second half of this prophecy is about Israel living in the land and being blessed. God restates his great desire in all of Scripture that Israel would be his people and God would be their God. This is stated over and over again all throughout Scripture and summarizes God's Kingdom purposes to have a people for himself. Israel will live in the land when God gathers them and it will prosper. There will no longer be any famines in the land and the trees and fields will yield their crops. The Jews will no longer be disgraced among the nations. It is at this time when they are experiencing God's covenant blessings again that Israel will remember their sins and be ashamed of what they have done. God tells them all of this will take place not because they have deserved it but because God has decided to honor his name and make his holiness known among Israel and the nations. He invites them to be ashamed for their conduct and disgraced by it.

This part of the prophecy is yet to be completely fulfilled. Israel did return to the land in 538 but the people struggled. By Jesus' day they had become established and were flourishing yet they were under a Roman yoke. After the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 70 they were scattered again. Not until 1948 did the Jews have their own country again and people started returning in large numbers to the land. Today Israel is beset by enemies all around them yet "the land responds to the Jews" as Ze'ev our guide in Israel told us. Israel's land is fertile and they grow more produce and crops than any of the other nations around them. But today the Jews have not yet completely turned back to God. Some worship and seek him but only a tiny minority recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Most aren't even religious but secular. Their hearts are still made of stone and God has yet to soften them. Ezekiel's remarkable prophecy has already been fulfilled at Pentecost in *Acts 2*, yet it still has important elements that are not yet complete. God's process of fulfilling his Word continues even in our day.

36:33-38 - God promises Israel that on the day he cleanses them from all their sins he will resettle their towns and rebuild their ruins. Jesus' cross and resurrection cleansed the Jews and all of humanity from sin and the land of Israel had been repopulated by Jesus' day. However, after the Jewish revolt many Jews were killed or taken into slavery by the Romans. It was not until 1948 and the establishment of the modern state of Israel that many Jews began to return to the land from their exile and resettle Israel. They have been cleansed from their sins but most Jews do not accept God's provision of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. This prophecy like the one before it in *36:24-32* has been partially fulfilled but it awaits Jesus' return and the final turning of the Jews to their Messiah.

Today in Israel much of what Ezekiel speaks about concerning the desolate land producing like the Garden of Eden has been fulfilled. There are great forests in Israel today all planted after 1948. Agriculture has flourished under the Jews even in the most desolate areas like south of the Dead Sea. There Israel grows some of the sweetest tomatoes in the world in the salt water of the Dead Sea for shipment to Europe. The desert has blossomed. One can look at all of that and say at least some of what Ezekiel spoke about has come to pass. But the most important part of about God cleansing them from their sin they have yet to accept through believing in their

Messiah, Jesus. God has repopulated the land and more and more Jews are immigrating every day to Israel. 6 million were slaughtered in the Nazi Holocaust but 7 million Jews now live in Israel and their numbers are swelling. God has resettled his land and the ruined cities have been rebuilt. That all points to the Messiah returning soon!

Chapter 37:

37:1-8 - God gives Ezekiel a new vision of a valley filled with dry bones. It is a symbol for Israel and the faith of the Jews concerning what God can do now that Jerusalem is destroyed and the leaders are dead or in exile. They believe everything is lost and they are dead as a people. God shows Ezekiel the opposite is true. As one preacher said, "*God is in the business of raising the dead!*"

The Lord leads Ezekiel in a vision to a valley. Ezekiel says the hand of the Lord was on him and he brought him out by the Spirit and set him in a valley filled with dry bones. His description of the Lord bringing him to the valley almost certainly describes a vision God gave Ezekiel. The valley is not a literal place but a symbolic one within the vision God gives Ezekiel. God leads Ezekiel back and forth in the valley and he saw a great many bones that were very dry, meaning they had lain there for a considerable time. Exposed bones like this would have been considered unclean in the Law of Moses. *Jeremiah 8* said Judah would not be buried but would be exposed where they died. Josiah in *2 Kings 23* used human bones to defile and desecrate the pagan altars he was removing from the land. Given these examples, God is showing Ezekiel that the Jews are an unclean people in God's eyes. Their sin has separated them from God and he has judged them for it.

God asks Ezekiel if these bones can live. Ezekiel's response is almost humorous. *O Sovereign Lord you alone know*. Basically he tells God, I have no clue, you're the only one who knows! On a practical level Ezekiel knows it is impossible for dead bones to live again. But God is showing him the valley of dry bones and he knows something is going on so he qualifies his answer.

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and tell them the Word of the Lord. This too seems strange because they are bones and not people. They were people once but no more. They are dead! God says prophesy to the bones and tell them the Lord will make breath enter them and they will come to life. There is a play on words here with the Hebrew word *ruach* which can mean wind, breath or spirit. God says he will send *ruach* into the bones and they will live just like God breathed into Adam the *ruach* of life and he became a living being. God will make tendons and flesh come upon the bones again and they will be covered with skin and he will put breath-*ruach* in them and they will live. God will do the impossible, raise the dead!

Ezekiel does what God commands and prophesies to the bones and when he does there is a great rattling noise as bone came together with bone. The old spiritual sang: "*The foot bone connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected to the shin bone, the shin bone connected to the knee bone, the knee bone connected to the thigh bone and hear the Word of the Lord!*" That is what Ezekiel heard and then he saw the bones coming together and tendons, flesh and skin appeared on them. The bones looked again like people. Yet there was no breath, no spirit, no *ruach* in them. They looked alive because they were no longer just bones but they were still dead. The breath of life was not in them.

37:9-10 - God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, the *ruach* and tell the four winds, the four *ruachs* to breathe-*ruach* into these slain that they may live. Ezekiel does as God commands and

the wind blows and breath entered into them and they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army. God puts the breath of life, the *ruach* back into his people. He puts his *ruach*, his Spirit in them and they are resurrected. They were dead and now they are alive again. Ezekiel had already prophesied in *chapter 36* God would put his Spirit, his *ruach* into his people when he brought them back to the land and they would have a new heart and change their ways. They would live to obey him. God gives Ezekiel another vision of that same process. Only God could raise his people from death and make them live again. Only God has the power of the breath of life and the Spirit of God, the power of resurrection.

In the New Testament Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits of the great resurrection at the last day. His resurrection however is not a prophetic vision but an historical fact that points ahead to a new reality. God will raise his people from the dead. The gift of his Holy Spirit to those who have faith in Jesus the Messiah is the earnest money and guarantee that he will raise them from the dead. Paul says the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us and now we know that that same Spirit-*ruach* will raise us as well. God has promised it and given us his Spirit as the seal of that promise.

37:11-14 - God says to Ezekiel that the bones represent the house of Israel. They say that their bones are dried up and all hope is gone. They are cut off from God. They are dead. This is the emotional response the Jews are having to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile.

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to Israel. Tell them that the Lord is going to open their graves and bring them back to life and bring them back to the Promiseland. God will raise them from what they view as the death of Israel as a people and raise up a new people for himself. He will bring them back to the land he gave their ancestors by his promise and he will put his Spirit-*ruach* in them and they will live and settle in their own land. God will do what they cannot do, raise the dead. When he brings them back and they live again as his people they will know that Yahweh is God! One must remember this is a vision God gives Ezekiel, therefore it is highly symbolic. God did not literally raise the Jews who had been killed in the siege of Jerusalem from death. But the exiles had begun to believe that God had abandoned them and they were dead to him as a people. They were finished. They had always defined themselves as God's people because they were citizens of the nations of Israel and Judah. Those nations had ceased to exist therefore they had ceased to exist as God's people too. God was showing them through Ezekiel's vision that they were not dead to God. They were still his people. Israel and Judah were dead as nations but the Jews were still the people of God and God was going to raise them up again to be his people. They would be his people through a relationship with him, through his Spirit not through being subjects of a king or citizens of a nation. God was going to resurrect his people in a brand new way. What it meant to be a Jew was going to change. The true people of God would become those that put their trust in God and worshipped him, not those who were citizens of a corrupt and sinful nation-state. God was going to set the stage for the New Testament and redefine his people as those who had a relationship with God by faith, by Spirit and not flesh. That is the most important lesson in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones to the Jews. Only God could resurrect them and make them his people again. God is in the business of raising the dead!

37:15-23 - God tells Ezekiel to take two sticks. On one he is to write Judah and the Israelites associated with him and on the other Ephraim's stick, Joseph and all the Israelites belonging to him. The two sticks represent the two divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They represent all

God's people, all twelve tribes of Israel. God tells Ezekiel join the two sticks together in his hand so they become one.

When the people ask Ezekiel what this means he is to tell them that the Lord is going to join together Ephraim or Joseph, the symbol for the northern tribes, and Judah the symbol for the southern tribes, into one nation again. God is going to gather the remnant of his people from all around and bring them back into their own land. He will make them one nation in the land. They will no longer be two and they will have one king to reign over them. They will never again be divided into two kingdoms and God will cleanse them of all their idolatry and backsliding. They will be God's people and God will be their God.

Ezekiel shows us that even though the north kingdom of Israel had been destroyed a century and a half before he writes and the ten northern tribes scattered, yet God knows who they are and where they live. There was a remnant preserved of the ten northern tribes within Judah. In the last days when God will send one king to rule over his people he will preserve them all not just Benjamin and Judah. As we have seen before, the ten northern tribes may have been lost to history but they were not lost to God.

This prophecy was only partially fulfilled in the return from the exile. One thing however was fulfilled. From this point on even though the people of Israel were called the Jews and they identified themselves as such, even when they gained their independence under the Hasmoneans they were one nation. They never again fragmented into two or more nations. The Jews were one. Further in the revival brought by Ezra and Nehemiah the Jews rededicated themselves to God. Yet it was not until the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus that the faith of Israel was renewed and Ezekiel's vision was at least partially fulfilled. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy and of *verses 24-28* awaits Jesus' second coming and the establishment of his Millennial Kingdom.

37:24-28 - The one king God will give to his people is his servant David. He will be their shepherd and they will follow God's commandments and be faithful. The people will live in the land God gave their ancestors and David will be their prince forever. These are all elements of God's covenant with David in *2 Samuel 7* that will be fulfilled when God brings the exiles back to their land and fulfills his promises to them. God is going to create a new unity in his people. They will no longer be two nations divided but one, with one king, his king, David, to rule over them. God will bring them back to the reign of his king, the man after God's own heart to whom he promised an eternal throne and dynasty.

The Jews knew David had died. This is a Messianic promise that the future king from David's line will come to rule them like his father David. But there is a hint of resurrection here. Ezekiel had shown them in the valley of dry bones that God was going to resurrect his people and bring them to life again. Here he promises David himself will one day rule over a reunited faithful Israel. Could one see the Messiah as David resurrected? It is most likely that the promise of the Davidic covenant needs to be interpreted as the Messiah will be of the line of David not David resurrected. Jesus was that promised Messiah. Some of the Jews received him as king others rejected him. By his resurrection and ascension God showed that Jesus is indeed David the Lord's servant whom God has given Israel as king over them. Yet the Jews denied him and now Ezekiel's promise here is yet to be fulfilled. From a New Testament perspective this is already fulfilled in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth but not yet complete because all of Israel does not proclaim him king and they are not all back in the land and faithful to God. The Jews could not see the many faceted mission of their Messiah. They could not piece together the strands of

prophecy and see that Jesus would be the Davidic Messiah but also the Servant of God who would die to pay for human sin. They could not understand that he would be the Son of Man, both a true human being and the one who comes from heaven with the clouds from *Daniel 7*.

God promises that his people will live forever in the land he gave to their ancestors. He will make a covenant of peace with them when David rules over them. This is fulfilled in the reconciliation with God that the Lord Jesus gives to all who believe in him. God says he will put his sanctuary, his dwelling place among them forever. The Hebrew words for sanctuary and dwelling place are different words but they are parallel in meaning. They refer to the tabernacle or the temple which the Hebrews believed represented God's dwelling place on earth. He was present in his temple. God says the nations will know that he makes Israel holy when his sanctuary is among them forever. John's gospel understands Ezekiel's prophecy is directly fulfilled in the presence of the incarnate Son in *John 1:1-14*. God himself became a human being; the Word took on flesh, and made his dwelling among us. Jesus revealed who God was by living among us and the disciples saw him, touched him and lived with him. God has made his dwelling place among his people in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his Holy Spirit. He has made the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles into his holy people. He is with us always. Ezekiel saw God would put his sanctuary in the midst of his people. He did not see that the sanctuary, the tabernacle was not a structure but a man, Jesus Christ, who would fulfill his vision.

Chapter 38:

38:1-6 - *Ezekiel 38-39* describe the eschatological attack by Gog of the land of Magog from the north. Except for Shishak's invasion in the early days of Judah, all attacks by foreign nations on Israel and Judah came from the north. *38:10-14* says this attack will take place when Israel is dwelling in the land in safety and peace. It is unclear whether that time is the same time as Ezekiel describes in *37:15-28*, when David their king reigns over them again and God has brought the exiles back to the land. The point is this eschatological attack is after God has fulfilled many of his promises to Israel. This could even be after the coming of the Messiah. Gog represents all the enemies of Israel who have opposed God's people and the Lord God himself. Here Gog is the king or prince of Magog which is the nation. In *Revelation 20* Gog and Magog are nations which represent the eschatological enemies of Israel who invade from the north. The LXX agrees with that identification in its Greek translation of Ezekiel that Gog and Magog are nations. John in *Revelation 20* follows Ezekiel's timeline in that the attack of Gog and Magog is after the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. They gather all those opposed to God and come against the Lord Jesus and his people in Jerusalem. God sends fire down from heaven and destroys them. However, Gog and Magog in *Revelation 20* are not the beast or Antichrist of *Revelation 19*. He has already been judged and destroyed by the return of the Lord Jesus. Here in *Ezekiel 38-39* the time frame seems to be after the return and renewal of the exiles and after David their king begins to reign. It is tenuous to use the order of Ezekiel in these last chapters and say it is absolutely chronological. Visions are notoriously fluid at best. The timeframe of this eschatological attack needs to be established from evidence in the text and not the order the vision occurs in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Ezekiel says Gog is the chief prince of the land of Meshech and Tubal. Literally the Hebrew words read the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. The NIV along with many other modern translations uses chief prince, rendering Rosh as referring to Gog and not naming a nation. Other translations render Rosh as referring to a country in the north along with Meshech

and Tubal. Famous Old Testament scholar Gesenius suggested Russia but that identification seems unlikely due to the fact that Ezekiel and the Jews were not aware of Russia's existence at all at this time plus as another well-known Old Testament scholar Delizsch noted, there is an Assyrian word *rasu* which refers to a people on the northwest of Assyria which were the Medes. This fits the history and context of Ezekiel far better than a fanciful Dispensationalist interpretation that tries to justify the scenario that in the Tribulation Russia and her allies will attack Israel, which is what most Dispensational scholars teach.

Meshech and Tubal are mentioned in *Ezekiel 27:13* in the lament against Tyre as allies or nations related to Greece. That could locate them north of Greece such as Macedonia or modern day Romania. Assyrian inscriptions indicate Meshech and Tubal were peoples from the north of Assyria. Other ancient evidence suggest Meshech and Tubal were Indo-European peoples who had migrated from the steppes around the Caspian Sea and settled Armenia and Anatolia in northern and northeastern Turkey. See the note on *27:12* for more details. The fact that Ezekiel links Gog, Magog, Russ, Meshech and Tubal together and they all describe peoples who were at the limits of Ezekiel's knowledge and world suggest that these nations are to be seen as eschatological figures rather than historical nations and kings. This is the interpretation of John in *Revelation 20* and it was also the interpretation of the later Jewish rabbis. As the New Bible Dictionary says, "*The popular interpretation of Rosh with Russia, Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk in Siberia has nothing to commend it from the standpoint of hermeneutics.*"

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against Gog and tell him God is against him. He will turn him around and put hooks in his jaws like a fish and bring Gog out of the north with his whole army, all his great horde to attack Israel. Persia, Cush, which is the southern Nile region Sudan or Ethiopia, and Put which is North Africa or Libya, will be with Gog as allies. Gomer too will be there along with the other nations. Some Dispensational scholars and writers say Gomer is modern day Germany but ancient sources point to the Cimmerians which were an Aryan people who settled in Armenia in northeast Turkey. This would put them near the possible locations of Meshech and Tubal. Beth Togarmah is most likely the city of Togarmah which was located near Carchemish in the northern Euphrates Valley on the main trade route to Mesopotamia. The point is all these allied nations with Gog come from the north of Israel from which invaders always came.

God says he will turn around Gog and with a hook in his jaw lead him to attack Israel. That implies that Gog was going another way or did not want to attack Israel but God stirred him up. It is not clear from the text what Gog was intending to do at first. What he did was attack Israel along with many other nations from the north. This is all part of God's plan to settle with the enemies of his people!

38:7-13 - God tells Gog get ready and gather all your armies, your hordes. God will call Gog to arms after many days, in future years. This puts the timeframe of Ezekiel's prophecy a long ways into the future, and most likely in the last days. God says in future years Gog will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel. The reference to the mountains of Israel and the Jews being gathered back to the land puts this prophecy after *chapters 36-37*; after God has gathered his remnant, put his Spirit in them and given them David to reign over them. Ezekiel says God's people will be living in safety not anticipating any invasion from any foreign power. Gog however will gather all his troops and advance on an unsuspecting people.

God tells Gog that on that day, the day God has set; it will come into Gog's mind to devise an evil scheme. He will decide to invade a peaceful people who are living in safety. Their villages have no walls, or gates or bars. They have resettled the ruins of a former time and now prosper by the Lord's hand. The picture of living without walls, gates or bars is one that would be strange to any of Ezekiel's readers. Ancient people built walls and gates for protection from invaders. Without them they were vulnerable to attack and destruction. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls so that the people could be safe and truly resettle the city. In the days before cannons, and mechanized warfare with tanks, strong walls were the surest guarantee of safety and defense for any city or town. That is why Constantinople stood for so many centuries. Its walls were impregnable until the Turks used cannons against them. Ezekiel describes an existence that was unheard of in the ancient world. It is during this time of peace and security that Gog will attack.

Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish ask Gog if he has come to plunder. They want to know if Gog's armies have come to carry off the gold and livestock because they want to share in the plunder. Ezekiel shows that the nations were jealous of Israel's prosperity after God has brought them back to the land and restored them. Sheba and the rest are not part of Gog's armies but they see an opportunity to gain wealth. Sheba is most probably an area in southwest Arabia identified with the Sabaeans who were camel traders on the spice route from Africa. Dedan was in northwest Arabia that also lay on the spice-incense route from Arabia to Syria to the Mediterranean. The fact the caravan route connected to the Mediterranean links it with Tarshish and the Phoenician traders that benefitted from the spice trade. That route from Arabia up the Arabah on the King's Highway to Damascus then to the coast was controlled by Israel in the days of the kings. It allowed Solomon, and later Jeroboam II and Uzziah to become incredibly wealthy because they could impose tariffs on the caravans for safe passage through their territory. Here Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish see Gog's invasion as an opportunity to make money in the chaos following an invasion and the lowering of the tariffs. Israel may be dwelling in safety living in a renewed faith in Yahweh with David's Son as their king but the nations all around are still filled with violence and greed. Paradise conditions have not been restored to the whole world as yet.

38:14-23 - God tells Gog that he will attack Israel in a day when God's people are dwelling in safety in the land. He will come with his hordes, a mighty army from the far north and the many nations who are his allies. His army will all be riding on horses which would have been totally out of the ordinary for ancient armies. They used cavalry but not as the main attack force. Even Alexander who used his cavalry to great effect only used them to attack the flanks of enemy formations because most ancient armies relied on mass infantry formations and frontal charges to break an enemy's line. Having a whole army all riding horses would have been unheard of and would have struck terror into any people. God tells Gog that he will bring Gog against "*my land*" so that all the nations may know Yahweh when he shows himself holy through Gog's attack. At this point there is no hint that Israel will be slaughtered when the attack comes. This attack is not an attack of judgment on a sinful nation for their idolatry like the prophecies of the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem earlier in Ezekiel. This attack is designed to show God's holiness and to render judgment on the nations who would attack his people. God is going to use Gog to carry out his holy purposes in the world!

God says his prophets have spoken in former days of Gog and his armies and their coming attack on Israel. God says they prophesied for years that Gog would attack. The question

is where in the prophets are those prophecies? There is no other mention of Gog and Magog in any other prophetic scriptures. The name only occurs as a nation attacking God's people here in Ezekiel and in *Revelation 20*. It appears that Ezekiel is saying Gog and Magog represent Assyria and Babylon and that the prophets before Ezekiel when they prophesied about the two great Mesopotamian powers attacking Israel and Judah to carry out God's judgment on them were talking about Gog. If that is the case then Gog is definitely representative of all of Israel's enemies who attacked her from the north and is *NOT* a specific country or nation. This is the eschatological attack against God's people when they are dwelling in the land in safety and peace. This prophecy of Ezekiel represents the final settling of accounts with Israel's traditional enemies and the enemies of God.

God says when Gog attacks his anger will be aroused against Gog and God will bring a great earthquake to the land of Israel to express his wrath against Gog for daring to attack his land and his people. This great eschatological earthquake is mentioned several times in Scripture especially in *Revelation 6:12, 11:13 and 17:18*. *Zechariah 14* describes a massive earthquake that will split the Mount of Olives in two when the Lord himself comes to save his people when the nations surround Jerusalem to attack her. In *Zechariah* that attack will result in half the people killed or carried into exile but the other half God will save. The difference here is that Ezekiel indicates that even though Gog attacks, God's people will be spared. When the great earthquake happens every living creature, including the fish, the birds, the beasts and all people will tremble at the mighty power and presence of God. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs crumble and every wall will fall down. God says he will summon a sword against Gog at that time and execute his judgment against Gog. Every man's sword will be against his brother. In other words the armies of Gog will turn on themselves just like the armies of Midian did in Gideon's day in *Judges 7* or the Moabites and Ammonites in Jehoshaphat's day in *2 Chronicles 20*.

God says not only will he send a great earthquake against Gog and set his army to fight against itself he will also pour down torrents of rain and hail, which sounds like a massive thunderstorm, and also burning sulfur or fire and brimstone. He sent the same kind of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in *Genesis 19*. John says in *Revelation 20* that when Gog and Magog and all the nations with them who oppose God come to attack the Lord Jesus and his people in Jerusalem God sends fire and brimstone from heaven and destroys them. Ezekiel says when Gog attacks and God destroys his army along with the armies of all the nations who have come to attack God's people with him, the Lord will show his greatness and holiness in the sight of many nations. Yahweh will show that he alone is God and he alone is the Lord.

Chapter 38 of Ezekiel relates much more closely to the Gog and Magog account of *Revelation 20* than it does Jesus 2nd coming as detailed in other places in Scripture and especially in *Revelation 19*. There are similarities to the Messiah's coming in other prophetic passages like in *Zechariah 14*, yet the fact that Israel has been restored to the land, the Davidic Messiah reigns over them and they dwell in safety and prosperity, points to a different attack than the eschatological battle of Messiah's return against the Antichrist. Revelation calls that battle Armageddon. Therefore this prophecy has a lot more to do with the final post-Millennial attack of sinful humanity following the Millennial reign of Christ in *Revelation 19 and 20* than it does a Tribulation attack of Russia and her allies against Israel that will trigger Armageddon. I think the Dispensationalists have it wrong!

Chapter 39:

39:1-8 - Ezekiel continues his prophecy against Gog. He makes it clear that it is the Lord himself who is behind Gog's attack on Israel. God is the one who will drag Gog from the far north and send him against the mountains of Israel. Ezekiel does not mean that God fosters evil or participates in it. He means that God is in control of the events of history. He will be the one that motivates Gog to attack so that the Lord's name might be lifted up and honored among all the nations. Gog will come in his pride thinking to take Israel, a land without defenses and walls. But he has forgotten that Yahweh, the Lord, is Israel's defense. God will cripple Gog's army and on the mountains of Israel they will fall, Gog and all the troops of the nations with him. Their dead bodies will be food for the wild animals and all the carrion birds to feed upon. John in *Revelation 19* says that God calls all the carrion birds to feast on the defeated army of the Antichrist when the Lord Jesus returns. He says the birds gorged themselves on the dead. That could lead one to think that Gog's attack here in Ezekiel is really Armageddon and not a post-millennial attack of the enemies of God. However, one must remember prophecy can be very fluid and passages do not always fit together in a perfect puzzle. As an example Ezekiel says in *verse 4* Gog will come against the mountains of Israel and fall there yet in *verse 5* he says Gog will fall in the open field.

God says he will send fire on Magog. God said in *38:22* he would send burning sulfur, brimstone from heaven, against Gog. In *verse 1* Ezekiel says Magog is the chief prince of Gog, Meshech and Tubal. Here in *verse 6* it sounds as if Magog is a nation along with Gog. It could also be that Magog as the king or prince of Gog represents Gog. Again, prophecy is fluid.

Fire from heaven or from the Lord in the Old Testament is a manifestation of the power and judgment of God. Fire from God consumed Nadab and Abihu when they burned unauthorized incense before God in *Leviticus 10*. Fire from the Lord consumed some of the people when they complained against the Lord in *Numbers 11* and again in *Numbers 15* when the 250 tried to offer incense to the Lord in opposition to Aaron. Fire from heaven consumed Elijah's offering in his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in *1 Kings 18*. Here in Ezekiel fire from heaven consumes Gog and all his armies. It also consumes those who live in safety in the coastlands. The term only appears in the exilic prophets, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. It describes the people who live far away across the Mediterranean Sea. It is sometimes linked with Tyre and Sidon and the peoples with whom they trade. It generally describes people on the other side of the Mediterranean like the Greeks, those in North Africa like Carthage or even Italy. To an Israelite these would be peoples a long ways away. Some Dispensationalists like Hal Lindsay have suggested that this is a reference to the United States and that the fire from heaven is a nuclear exchange. That interpretation is pure speculation and has no basis within the text.

God says through his judgment on Gog and the nations who have joined him the Lord will redeem his holy name among the nations. It will no longer be profaned but honored. All people will know that the Lord is the Holy One of Israel! God says the day is coming and will surely take place. This is the day of which the Lord has spoken. Ezekiel is referring here to the Day of the Lord; God's day when he will save his people and destroy his enemies. Often it is linked to the coming of the Messiah. Here in *Ezekiel 38-39* and the attack of Gog there is no mention of the coming of the Messiah or him leading his army to defeat Gog. The context suggests the Messiah is already reigning in Israel and the people live in the land in peace and safety. God's deliverance of his people from Gog and his hordes is his final vindication of his name and demonstration of his justice to his people and all the nations. That concept is often linked to the Day of the Lord in the prophets. Once again prophecy is fluid and can't always be put into a precise scenario with every piece fitting precisely with every other. It is more like a

symphony with various themes which form a whole but various parts are able to stand on their own as well.

39:9-13 - God says after he defeats Gog, those who live in the towns of Israel will gather up all the weapons of the soldiers of Gog, all the spears, shields, bows and arrows, anything that will burn and they will use the wood for fuel. There will be so many now useless weapons that they will not even have to gather wood with which to cook. They will not have to cut any trees in their forests. There will be enough abandoned weapons for seven years' worth of fuel for their cook fires! The people of Israel will also plunder and loot the armies of Gog who had come to plunder them.

On the day of the Lord's defeat of Gog, he will set aside a valley to bury all the soldiers of Gog. There is some confusion in the various translations as to the exact location of the valley. The NIV reads, "*in the valley of those who travel east toward the Sea (meaning the Dead Sea)*". A footnote reads "*of*" instead of "*toward*". That changes the location. The first implies the valley going down from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. The variant implies a valley on the plains of Moab on the eastern shore, perhaps one of the wadis along the eastern shore that come down from the Mountains of Moab. The NLT reads, "*in the Valley of the Travelers, east of the Dead Sea.*" The NASB reads, "*the valley of those who pass by east of the sea.*" It seems the best location is a valley to the east of the Dead Sea, one of the many wadis that flow into the shore of the Dead Sea. God says there will be so many bodies it will block travelers from going through the valley and it will be renamed, the Valley of Hamon Gog or the Valley of the Hordes of Gog.

God tells Ezekiel that the Jews will take seven months to bury all the dead soldiers of Gog in order to cleanse the land. It also makes sense that the valley is east of the Dead Sea because then the Promiseland proper is not defiled by the graves of the dead soldiers of Gog. Everyone who lives in the land of Israel will help in the cleansing and burial of Gog's dead army. God declares that the day the Lord is glorified when he defeats Gog will be a memorable day for the people of Israel. They will know that God is their God and all their enemies are now defeated! They will live in safety! The seven years' worth of wood from the abandon weapons and the seven months to bury all the dead soldiers of Gog support this conclusion because the number 7 is the number of completion of God's plan in the world. He has finally defeated all the enemies of his people!

39:14-20 - God tells Ezekiel that in the aftermath of God's defeat of Gog and its allies, men will be hired to go throughout the land and mark bodies for burial. Then the grave diggers will come and haul the bodies away for burial in the Valley of Haman Gog east of the Dead Sea. In this way the land will be cleansed from Gog's defilement. God says in *verse 12* that the process will take seven months to complete there will be so many dead soldiers!

God then tells Ezekiel to call all the birds and wild animals to come from all around to feast on the great sacrifice that God is preparing on the mountains of Israel. God promises they will eat the flesh and drink the blood of the fallen of Gog. The birds and animals will eat the bodies of princes and mighty men as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls. They will be fat for the taking like animals from Bashan, the Golan Heights where prime cattle were grazed in the time of Israel's prosperity. God tells the birds and beasts they will eat until they are glutted and drink blood till they are drunk. God invites them to "*my table*". The soldiers, horses (which every soldier in Gog's army rode, see *38:15*), and mighty men will all be served up for them.

The picture here is a horrific one of so many dead that the carrion birds and wild beasts feed on the bodies of the slain. It is also a logical picture given the scope of the slaughter. If it will take seven months to bury all the slain there is simply no way that the gravediggers can bury the dead fast enough to keep the bodies from being eaten. Eventually the bodies of Gog's dead soldiers are buried, yet because they have lain in the open and been consumed by animals their shame is all the greater. In the Middle Eastern culture of the time burial took place soon after the person died. There was no long wake as in later European cultures. For a body to lay exposed to the elements was a great shame. Dead bodies were not ceremonially clean and could not be touched or the person became unclean. Thus they were buried quickly in order to maintain ritual purity. The bodies of the soldiers of Gog would take seven weeks to bury and gravediggers would be hired to mark bodies for burial and to haul them to the Valley of Haman Gog for burial. Many in Israel would be unclean for weeks. The land with lots of corpses mutilated by animals as they feasted on them would be unclean. God tells Ezekiel it would take a long time to cleanse the land and make it clean again from the slaughter of Gog. Yet the greater shame and uncleanness would be visited on all the nations and their soldiers who had joined with Gog to attack Israel. God does not imply that the land will be unclean forever because of the dead from Gog's army. He says Israel will be clean again because God will see to it.

John in *Revelation 19* says when the Lord Jesus returns and defeats the armies of the Antichrist at Armageddon God will invite the birds and beasts to "*the great supper of God.*" There they will eat the flesh of kings and generals, mighty men and horses and the flesh of all people both slave and free. The picture is the same as here in Ezekiel. However, in Ezekiel the timing of the feast is after the defeat of Gog when Israel was living in the land in peace and safety. It appears to be after the Messiah has begun to reign. In *Revelation 19* the feast of the animals is right as the Lord Jesus has returned and begun to reign. The final attack of Gog and Magog in *Revelation 20* is after the Millennium. There are similarities and differences between when Ezekiel and John say God's great feast for the birds and beasts of the enemies of God and his people takes place. Another instance when prophecy is fluid and not always consistent.

39:21-29 - God says throughout the attack and defeat of Gog he will display his glory among the nations through the punishment he inflicts upon them. From that day onward Israel will know that the Lord is their God without a doubt. The implication is they will know because God himself will defeat Gog. The armies of Israel will not even have to fight. Yahweh will fight for his people as he did when he brought them out of Egypt and defeated the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

All the nations will know that the Lord sent his people Israel into exile because of their sins. He punished them because of their unfaithfulness and he dealt with them justly as their deeds deserved. God turned away from them. However, God will bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on him and the Lord will be zealous for his holy name. Israel will forget her shame and all her unfaithfulness and sin against the Lord. When the Lord restores them and they once again live in safety in their own land they will live in peace and no longer fear anyone. When the Lord brings them back to the land he will demonstrate his holiness to his people in the sight of all the nations. They will know that it was the Lord who sent them into exile because of their sin and it was the Lord who brought them back to the land from exile because of his grace to them. The Lord will bring them back and reveal himself to Israel for he will pour out his Spirit on them when he gathers them back to the land.

These two paragraphs summarize Ezekiel's prophecies of God's just punishment on Israel, his gathering the remnant back to the land, his giving them his Holy Spirit and his deliverance of Israel from all their enemies. When all of this will happen Israel will live in the land with shalom and safety. God's promise to them and to David and his line will be fulfilled. Some of what God promised through Ezekiel has already taken place and is already fulfilled in the return of the Jews, the first coming of the Lord Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Some it appears is being fulfilled in our day in the further return of the Jews to their land. Much is still to be fulfilled because the Jews as a people do not yet recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. They certainly do not live in the land in safety and peace. There are enemies all around Israel that would see them destroyed. Ezekiel's prophecy is already being fulfilled but is not yet complete, just like the New Testament prophecies of the return of the Lord Jesus. The task is to try and integrate Ezekiel's prophecies with the rest of the prophetic passages in both the Old and New Testaments. A clearer picture will emerge from that process but it will not be a precise scenario because prophecy is too fluid and imprecise. May God give us the wisdom to understand his Word!

Chapter 40:

40:1-4 - The last eight chapters of Ezekiel are his vision of a rebuilt temple and a rebuilt Israel. His temple is an idealized vision that was never built. Ezekiel being a priest would have believed the temple was central to Israel's worship of Yahweh. He had seen the glory and presence of God depart from his temple in *chapter 10*. Now here in these last chapters of his prophecy God gives him the ultimate picture of a restored temple and a restored Israel. The vision ends with the phrase, "*the Lord is there.*" God will dwell in the midst of his people just like he did in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. They will live secure and will be faithful to him and he will never leave them. Their prince, meaning the Messiah, will reign over them. Ezekiel sees a rebuilt and idealized temple and an idealized Israel. Only a small part of his vision for Israel's future has been fulfilled. Perhaps the greatest question is whether his vision of the temple will be literally fulfilled or is his prophecy figuratively fulfilled in the living temple of Jesus' church?

Ezekiel dates his prophecy in the 25th year of the exile, meaning 572, on the tenth month in the 14th year after the fall of Jerusalem, which again puts this prophecy in 572. The NLT dates the prophecy as April 28, 573. The month may be accurate but the year is off by one year and I don't know why they give the year as 573. In my reckoning it is March 10th, 572. April 28 is probably more accurate given the Hebrew lunar calendar. March-April would have been the first month of the Hebrew year. In *29:17* Ezekiel gives March 1, 570 as the latest date for any of his prophetic visions. That vision was concerning Egypt. The temple vision in these last chapters is given two years earlier. He began his career as a prophet to the exiles on June 5, 592 and prophesied for 22 years, all in Babylon.

Ezekiel says God's hand was on him and like in the vision of the valley of dry bones God took him to a different place in his vision. In this case God took him to Jerusalem. He set him down on a very high mountain on whose south side was some buildings that looked like a city. Ezekiel is taken to the temple mount and the city is Jerusalem and the City of David to the south of Mt. Moriah. Mt. Moriah is not geologically a very high mountain but it is spiritually. It is the highest mountain of all because it is the center of the worship of God on earth! God takes him to Mt. Moriah and he sees a man there who shines like bronze and who is standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand. The figure is probably an angel as in the earlier visions of his prophecy and the gateway is probably the gateway of the temple. God tells

Ezekiel to listen carefully to all he hears and observe carefully all he sees because he is to tell the house of Israel everything he sees. That is why he has been brought to the temple mount. His vision of the renewed temple is his most detailed and precise. It is important to remember that when Ezekiel is given this vision of the renewed temple the actual temple has been a burned out pile of rubble for fourteen years!

The greatest question surrounding this prophecy is what does it mean? It has never been completely fulfilled and even Herod did not use Ezekiel's plan for his remodeling of the Second Temple. How then shall Ezekiel's prophecy be fulfilled? Must there be a literal fulfilling? If so it has to be in the future somehow during the time of the return of the Lord Jesus but it is not clear how. From a New Testament perspective why would God allow the Jews to rebuild the temple and carry on animal sacrifices when the Lord Jesus' death on the cross is the once for all sacrifice that forever forgives sin? That is the argument of the *Book of Hebrews* and its truth must inform whatever prophetic scenario one constructs to explain a rebuilt temple or the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. Dispensational scholars who firmly teach that the Jews will rebuild the temple and institute animal sacrifices again before Jesus returns and will continue them in Christ's millennial kingdom ignore the plain truth of Scripture in *Hebrews 6-10*! Why would God allow his renewed people to demean the sacrifice of his One and Only Son? It doesn't make any sense! Therefore, the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision of a rebuilt temple must have some other meaning besides a literal fulfillment. What that is however, is not clear.

40:5-16 - Ezekiel sees the man or the angel in his vision begin to measure the temple and its courtyards. He uses a measuring rod which was 6 long cubits in length. A normal cubit was around 18 inches. A long cubit was around 21 inches. It was a cubit plus a handbreadth. His measuring rod was six long cubits or about 10.5 feet in length. The rod was like an ancient tape measure. The man's rod is longer than a normal measuring rod which would have been around 9 feet. Everything in Ezekiel's temple is bigger. It is supersized!

The man in Ezekiel's vision measured the wall that completely surrounded the temple and its courts. It was one rod high and one rod thick. That means it was 10.5 feet high and 10.5 feet thick all around the temple.

He goes to measure the eastern gate, which would later be called the Golden Gate. It faces east towards the Mt. of Olives and the sunrise. In later Jewish tradition Elijah will lead the Messiah from the Mt. of Olives through the Golden Gate into the temple on the day the Messiah comes. Until that time the Golden Gate is sealed shut. The gate itself was 10.5 feet deep and the alcoves for the guards were one rod long and one rod wide, also 10.5 feet. Ezekiel's vision of the ideal temple is very consistent throughout in its measurements.

Ezekiel describes a huge and massive eastern gate. The width of the entrance was ten cubits or 17.5 feet and 22.75 feet in the gateway passage inside the entrance going into the temple courtyard. There were guard alcoves all along the inside of the gate which all measured one rod square or 10.5 feet square. One wonders why in such an ideal temple there would need to be guards but Ezekiel doesn't tell us. Perhaps they were merely ceremonial since the implication of the entire last chapters of Ezekiel is that Israel is now at peace and her people have renewed their faith in Yahweh and are obedient to him.

Ezekiel comments that all around the walls in the portico with the alcoves they were decorated with palm trees. He doesn't say if these were carved into the stone or painted on in some way. The palm tree decoration would have been similar to Solomon's temple.

The other more interesting question is why all the detailed architectural description of the temple? Why the elaborate measurement? What difference does it make whether the wall was 10.5 feet in width or 9? What is the spiritual significance of these chapters since from an historical point of view Ezekiel's temple was never built? His plans were not the blueprint for the second temple or Herod's remodeling project. The one thing that makes sense to me is that God gave Ezekiel this detailed vision of his house of worship because he has a precise plan for his people. The temple is the central symbol of God's relationship with his people and his covenant with them. In that sense God knows every intimate detail of what is happening with the Jews and has a plan for their restoration that is not vague. He is going to rebuild them as a people in ways that will be greater than what they had before. The temple is the symbol of that restoration and God's purposes with them. I believe that is the reason behind all the elaborate description of a rebuilt, renewed temple. I don't know what else it could be!

40:17-37 - The man or angel in Ezekiel's vision brings him to the outer court of the temple. There were thirty rooms and a pavement all around the court. The length of the court the angel measured as 100 cubits on the east and north sides, which is 175 feet.

The angel measures the north gate and it is the same dimensions as the east gate, fifty cubits long and 25 wide or 87.5 feet by 43.75 feet. The north gate's opening and its portico or porch was also decorated with palm trees. It had seven steps leading up to it and there was a gate to the inner court facing the north gate just as on the east. From the gate on the outer court to the gate on the inner court were 100 cubits or 175 feet.

The angel leads Ezekiel to the south gate and he measures all of it the same as he had measured the east and north gates. The south gate faced the City of David and Jerusalem because Mt. Moriah or the Temple Mount is north of the ancient city. All the distances are the same from the inner court to the outer court on the south side of the temple.

The angel brought Ezekiel to the inner court of the temple through the south gate. All the measurements were the same as the other gates. God's plan is symmetrical and orderly. The temple had outside gates to the outer court and inner gates on each side to the inner court. Seven steps led up to the gates on the outer side and eight steps led up to the gates on the inner sides. All along the walls between the gates were rooms and alcoves for storage and offices just like in Solomon's and Herod's temples. They were all decorated with the palm trees.

40:38-43 - After describing the outer and inner gates of the new temple Ezekiel now describes the rooms where the burnt offerings and sacrifices were prepared by the priests. The rooms were in the porticos of the inner gateways. These were where the burnt offerings were washed and readied for sacrifice. There were two tables on which the burnt offerings, sin and guilt offerings were slaughtered. There were tables on each side of the gateways, eight in all where the sacrifices were prepared. There were two stone tables for the burnt offerings each about 31 by 21 inches. The utensils for the sacrifices were placed on the tables. The tables in the porticos were where the priests would cut up and butcher the meat of the sacrifices. Depending on the type of sacrifice that meat would be eaten by the priests or shared in a meal with the worshipper. Certain of the internal organs would be burned on the altar along with part of the fat of the meat. The actual killing of the sacrificial animal was done in these rooms or nearby then the blood and the parts of the animal to be burned on the altar would be brought to the altar by the priests and offered to God. The rest of the meat would be butchered and either eaten or disposed of depending on the type of offering. For the complete regulations for the sacrifices see *Leviticus 1-*

7. *Leviticus* instructs the people to present their sacrifice before the Lord at the entrance to the Tabernacle; lay their hands on the animal's head and then the priests would slaughter the animal. The blood and other parts to be burned would then be brought to the altar. Here in Ezekiel's new temple all of that process takes place in the rooms off of the inner gates of the temple. The blood and the parts of the animal to be sacrificed were still brought to the altar by the priests. It appears the sacrificial system in the new temple is much more formalized and controlled. There are places specifically set aside for the priests to perform some of their most important duties. The description of Solomon's temple in *1 Kings 6-7* does not include any rooms for the priests to perform their duties. It only describes the main temple sections, the altar, the bronze sea and the temple furnishings like the lampstands and the table for the Bread of the Presence. Ezekiel's description of the new temple is much more detailed. It only makes sense that he would pay close attention to where the priests were to perform their duties since he himself was a priest.

40:44-47 - Inside the inner court were two rooms. The NLT reads two one room buildings. The rooms were for the priests, and were across from one another on the north and south sides of the courtyard. The NIV follows the LXX here and reads, "*were two rooms, one at the side of the ...*". The NLT follows the Hebrew and reads, "*two one-room buildings for the singers, one beside the north gateway...*". The NASB also follows the Hebrew. I am guessing the NIV follows the LXX in this verse because in *verses 45-46* Ezekiel says the rooms are for the priests who have charge of the temple and the altar and are the sons of Zadok who serve before the Lord. They would not be Levite temple singers. Even though the NLT and NASB follow the Hebrew text in *verse 44*, it is more confusing. The LXX makes more sense given the context. That is why the NIV reads as it does.

The south facing room Ezekiel says was for the priests who have charge of the temple. He does not say but this would be the high priest and his assistants. The room facing north is for the priests who have charge of the altar. These would be the priests who bring the daily, monthly and special sacrifices to the altar of the Lord and use the rooms in the inner gateways to prepare the sacrifices. The priests who minister before the Lord are all descended from Zadok who was the priest who aided David and Solomon. See *2 Samuel 8 & 1 Kings 1*. Zadok supported Solomon as king over against Abiathar the priest who supported David's other son Adonijah. God however had instructed David and Nathan to anoint Solomon king. Zadok, because of his support became high priest and his line continued the high priestly line of Aaron throughout the first temple era.

The temple court the angel measured as one hundred by a hundred cubits or 175 square feet. The cubits he uses to measure continue to be the long cubits, 21 inches and not the normal 18 inches.

40:48-49 - The man or angel brings Ezekiel through the inner gates and courts to the temple itself. He measured the portico or porch of the new temple. The altar was in front of the temple in the square surrounding the temple just like Solomon's structure. The porch or entrance to the temple shrine itself was fourteen cubits wide or 24.5 feet. The portico was 20 cubits or 35 feet in width. The number of cubits, 20, is the same as in Solomon's temple. The difference is the new temple is measured using the long cubit, which is 21 inches rather than the 18 that was used in Solomon's temple. That means that even though the proportions are the same in the new temple as they were in Solomon's the dimensions are larger. Ezekiel's new temple is a bigger and better version than Solomon's, the temple in which God had promised to dwell.

The meaning of the dimensions is clear. God is going to restore his temple to Israel. The glory and size of the new temple will be even greater than Solomon's temple that was destroyed because of Israel's sin. When God brings his people back to the land, changes their hearts and gives them his Spirit he will dwell with them again. The symbol of that dwelling will be a greater and grander temple in Jerusalem from which his glory will never depart. He will be with them always!

Chapter 41:

41:1-4 - The angel or man in Ezekiel's vision now brings him to the outer sanctuary of the temple, the temple building proper. He measures the door jambs of the entrance which were 6 cubits on each side or according to the long cubit of Ezekiel's new temple, 10.5 feet. Measured using normal cubits it would have been 9 feet wide. The entrance itself was ten cubits wide or 17.5 feet and the sanctuary itself was 40 by 20 cubits or 70 by 35 feet. The dimensions of Solomon's temple were 60 feet by 30 feet. As noted above in the note on *40:48-49*, the proportions of the new temple are the same as Solomon's but the size is slightly bigger because the angel used the long cubit of 21 inches to measure the new temple rather than the normal cubit of 18 inches. The inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies measured 20 by 20 cubits or 35 square feet.

The design and size of the new temple illustrates God's grace. The latter state of the temple will be greater than the former even though Israel had sinned and gone into exile because of her sins. God will rescue them and restore them. This theme of greater grace can be seen most directly in God's plan to save the human race. Adam had direct fellowship with God but then fell into sin and was separated from him. He and Eve were cast out of Paradise with God. But through faith in Jesus Christ our relationship is restored with God and now we are his adopted children, heirs with Christ of heaven and the Kingdom. The latter redeemed state of the human race is greater than the original state because Adam was never an heir with Christ and an adopted son of God. God moves to greater and greater grace! For Israel the Kingdom of Judah was no more but now God's people would be part of the Kingdom of God. Ezekiel's new temple was a prophetic symbol of that fact even though it was never built.

41:5-11 - The angel or man in Ezekiel's vision measured the wall of the temple and the rooms built into the wall on the sides. They were 7 feet wide and there were three levels one above the other with thirty rooms on each level. These were rooms for the priests. The construction techniques used in the new temple of ledges and supports not built into the walls of the temple were the same as Solomon's temple. See *1 Kings 6:5*. This was done so that the stone walls had no interruption in them of a support sticking out for the rooms on the inner walls. The temple was made this way to reflect as perfect a structure to the eye as possible. God's temple is a living demonstration of God's perfection and holiness.

The church is called the living temple in the New Testament. We are being built into a holy dwelling for God to live in; see *Ephesians 2:19-22* & *1 Peter 2:4-5*.

41:12-26 - When the angel measures the temple building itself it is 100 cubits by 100 cubits or 175 feet square. The courtyard in front of the temple was also 100 cubits or 175 feet in length. Solomon's temple was 60 cubits (using the standard cubit and not the long cubit as here in Ezekiel). It was 90 feet long. The sanctuary is of the same proportions but bigger.

The building itself was made of stone blocks but the rooms of the temple were lined with wood. Ezekiel does not say what kind of wood but one can probably assume it was cedar as that was the wood Solomon used to construct his temple and the new temple reflects the old in its construction.

There were carved cherubim at regular intervals in the walls of the inner and outer sanctuary. In *Ezekiel 10* the cherubim have 4 faces, a man, an ox, a lion and an eagle. Here in the new temple they only have two, a man and a lion. I do not know why the difference. It is possible that these cherubim are of a different kind than the ones who surround God's throne in Ezekiel's vision but that seems unlikely. The more probable explanation is that prophetic visions are fluid and not always consistent. There are also carved palm trees decorating the walls of the sanctuary.

Ezekiel describes a doorway to the outer and inner sanctuaries, one to the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. He says in front of the door to the Most Holy Place was a wooden altar 3 by 2 cubits square or 3.5 by 5.25 feet. This appears to be the altar of incense although the man in Ezekiel's vision calls it the table that is before the Lord. By its position however it is probably the altar of incense. It is larger than the altar built for the Tabernacle in *Exodus 30*. There is no description of the size of the altar of incense in *1 Kings 6* in Solomon's temple. Once again in Ezekiel's new temple everything is bigger. The new temple had double doors to the Most Holy Place which was similar to Solomon's.

Ezekiel gives us all this detail about the new temple that is far more than *Kings* describes for Solomon's temple. We must remember that Ezekiel was a priest and to his mind and training the temple was the center not only of Israel's worship of Yahweh but of their relationship with him as well. In these last chapters of his prophecy he is describing a renewed relationship between God and his people so therefore he gives us a detailed description of the new temple that will be the centerpiece of that relationship.

Chapter 42:

42:1-14 - The man or angel in Ezekiel's vision takes him to the north wall into the outer court of the temple and into the rooms that were dedicated to the priests. He measures those rooms which were 175 feet long. There was a passageway along the entrances to the rooms and there were three levels or stories of rooms for the priests but the upper rooms were narrower than the lower. He took Ezekiel to the south side of the temple and measured those rooms as well. The rooms on the opposite side or south side of the temple were the same as the north in all their dimensions and design.

The angel told Ezekiel that these rooms are for the priests to use when they eat the most holy offerings to the Lord. All the burnt offerings, grain offerings and sin and guilt offerings are to be eaten in these rooms for they are holy. Once the priests enter the holy precincts which are the rooms they are not to go out into the outer court until they change their garments for the ones in which they minister and eat the holy food are holy to the Lord. When they go out to minister to the people in the outer court they are to change their clothes.

42:15-20 - When the angel had finished measuring the temple he took Ezekiel out through the east gate of the temple and measured the outside of the temple all around, east, north, south and west. He measured 500 long cubits in length on each side. That is 875 feet. The holy precincts of the temple separated the holy from the common.

Ezekiel envisioned a temple with a wall enclosing the entire temple precincts with gates on all four sides of the wall. The temple had an outer court with rooms for the priests where they were to perform their holy duties and an inner court that also held rooms. Inside the inner court was the temple building proper with the altar in front of it.

875 feet is around 291 yards. I do not know the dimensions of the platform upon which Herod built his temple, but I believe it is larger. The point is the new temple precincts were built upon a perfect square 500 cubits on each side. It is another sign of the perfection and symmetry of the new temple which reflects God's perfection and holiness. The building reflects the character of the one to whom it is dedicated.

Chapter 43:

43:1-9 - The angel-man brings Ezekiel to the east gate, the Golden Gate, of the temple. There he sees the glory of the Lord coming from the east. The sound is like the rushing of many waters and the land shone with the Lord's glory. Ezekiel says the glory of the Lord as it was coming to Jerusalem looked just like it did by the River Kebar in the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy. In *Ezekiel 10* the glory of the Lord had departed from the east gate of the temple because of Israel's sin and their defilement of the Lord's house. Now the glory returns to the new temple. The glory represents God's active presence among his people. He returns to the temple through the Golden Gate, the east gate and his presence filled the temple. Later in *chapter 44* God tells Ezekiel that only "*the prince*" may enter through the eastern gate because it is holy because that is where God's glory entered the temple. In Jewish tradition the Messiah will enter the temple through the eastern gate on the day of his coming. He will come on the Mt. of Olives and then go to the temple led by Elijah through the Golden Gate. God fills the new temple with his glory just like he did the Tabernacle in *Exodus 40* and Solomon's temple in *1 Kings 8*.

Ezekiel hears the voice of God from within the temple speaking to him. The Lord tells him that the new temple is the place of his throne and the place of the "*soles of my feet*" where he will dwell among the Israelites forever. The temple, especially the Ark of the Covenant was often described as the footstool of the Lord's throne and represented God's presence among his people. The reference to the soles of the Lord's feet either refers to the temple as God's footstool or it has a more symbolic meaning. We know God is spirit and Ezekiel is not saying here that God has feet or a physical being. The New Testament speaks of the church as God's living temple wherein he dwells through his Spirit. In many respects that New Testament picture of God's people as a living temple is the only way Ezekiel's vision can be fulfilled. From an historical perspective the second temple was never built to Ezekiel's vision and its remodeled version, Herod's temple, was destroyed by the Romans in 70. No other temple has ever been built on the site of Mt. Moriah. God has not lived among Israel forever in a physical temple in Jerusalem built for his worship. Many prophecy writers and scholars maintain that a third temple must be built before the Lord Jesus returns because it must exist in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. That view presents many difficulties, not the least of which is that it violates the *Book of Hebrews* and completely nullifies God's church as his living temple, his people, made up of both Jews and Gentiles in whom dwells his Holy Spirit! The most likely fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision of a new temple is the New Testament vision of God's church!

It is most curious that in Ezekiel's new temple there is no ark. The Lord's presence fills the Holy of Holies but the Ark of the Covenant is not there. Ezekiel does not mention the ark nor offer any explanation for why the mercy seat is not present in the new temple.

God says never again will Israel defile his temple and holy name with their adultery or prostitution through the worship of idols. It was their kings that had led them to idolatry and God destroyed them because of it. Now God says they will put away their idols so that he will live among them forever.

43:10-12 - The angel-man tells Ezekiel to describe the plan of the new temple in detail so that Israel may be ashamed of their sins. Ezekiel was to give the people the plan so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all of its regulations. The language of the angel reminds me of the language of the description for the design of the Tabernacle in *Exodus 25-27*. Exactly why the Jews would be ashamed of their sins when they hear the design for the new temple the angel does not say. The most likely reason is that the new temple is larger and more perfect than even Solomon's temple. It is more specific about where the priests were to perform their duties and that nothing unclean was to enter the temple area. Both before and after Josiah's reforms to cleanse the temple the kings and priests of Judah had allowed idols back in the temple and the worship of Yahweh had become corrupted with idolatry. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel strongly speak against this idolatry and condemn it. In fact it is one of the chief reasons that God decided to punish his people and allow the Babylonians to finally destroy both the temple and Jerusalem. The contrast between what the temple had been in the last days of Judah and Ezekiel's new temple was to convict the Jews of their sins and idolatry so that they would never do it again. This is what God wants from the Jews when they worship him. They were far away from his desires!

Ezekiel is given a new "*law of the temple*." The entire area on top of the mountain, meaning Mt. Moriah will be most holy to the Lord. Herod the Great essentially fulfilled this prophecy when he remodeled the second temple. He made a great platform upon which he built the temple which today is called Temple Mount. The Turks later reinforced it by building a new wall after the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock were built in the 800's. The only thing left from Herod's temple today is the Western Wall or Wailing Wall that was part of the western portion of that great platform. The Romans destroyed the rest. Today the Jews consider Temple Mount to be holy and the most orthodox Jews will not even walk upon it for fear of defiling the Most Holy Place since they do not know the precise location of the Holy of Holies of the temple. This prophecy of Ezekiel's has been fulfilled as the Temple Mount today is holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

43:13-27 - Ezekiel describes the altar and its measurements using once again the Hebrew long cubit of a cubit and a handbreadth. A normal cubit was 18 inches, the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. The long cubit added another 3 inches and so was 21 inches long.

The altar rose 3.5 feet from the gutter around it to the lower ledge. From the lower ledge to the upper ledge was another 7 feet and from the upper ledge to the hearth it was another 7 feet, or 17.5 feet high in total. On top of the hearth were the four horns of the altar where the priests would often sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices. The altar was to be 14 cubits square or 21 by 21 feet. There were steps going up the east side of the altar. Compare these measurements to the altar of the Tabernacle which was 4.5 feet high and 7.5 feet square. This altar is almost four times as large!

Ezekiel was then given the regulations for burnt offerings and the sacrifices to consecrate the altar. A young bull was to be given to the Levites who are of the family of Zadok, the priest who helped David and Solomon. In the new temple the priests are to be allies and supporters of

the line of David and not just descended from Aaron. The blood of the bull is to be sprinkled on the four horns and the ledges of the altar to make atonement for it. The second day a male goat without defect is to be offered for a sin offering and the blood used in the same way as the blood of the bull. Then a young ram and a young bull are to be offered. The priests are to sprinkle salt on them as they are burnt in sacrifice. Often salt was used as a sign of the covenant between God and his people.

For seven days the priests are to sacrifice a male goat for a sin offering, and a young bull and a ram without defect to make atonement for the altar and cleanse it. At the end of the seven days on the eighth day the priests are to present the people's burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. God says then he will accept the Israelites. Seven days of sacrifices to consecrate the altar symbolize the completeness of God's plan and the holiness of the altar in the new temple. The people had brought their sacrifices in Solomon's temple even when they were sinning, expecting God to accept them. In the new temple God needed to purify his people from their idolatry and build a holy and pure temple the people had not defiled with their idols in order for them to offer acceptable sacrifices on God's altar so that he could forgive their sins and guilt. Ultimately as the *Book of Hebrews* argues the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. Only the life of God's One and Only Son our High Priest can put away the guilt of sin once and for all. Ezekiel does not speak of that sacrifice but he points to a temple and an altar that is much greater and holier than even Solomon's temple if the people are to be pure before God. Something more must come for Israel to be God's holy people. That something more is Jesus Christ!

Chapter 44:

44:1-4 - The angel-man brings Ezekiel to the outer gate of the sanctuary facing east. He tells him this east gate must remain shut and no one may go through it because the Lord God of Israel entered the temple through it. He is talking about the Golden Gate. Then he tells Ezekiel that the prince is the only one who may sit inside the gateway and eat in the presence of the Lord. However, he is to come and go through the gateway's portico or foyer and not through the gate itself. Jewish tradition says Elijah will lead the Messiah through the Golden Gate into the temple on the day of his coming on the Mt. of Olives. That somewhat contradicts what Ezekiel says here.

Who is the prince? When Ezekiel writes this Judah has no king and will not until the Hasmoneans four centuries into the future. The most likely identity of the prince is he is the Messiah. In *chapter 34* in a prophecy of the restoration of Israel Ezekiel says David will rule over a renewed Israel as their prince. Calling the Messiah the prince emphasizes the ancient ideal of Yahweh being king over Israel. The human kings who ruled Israel and Judah were princes under the Lord's reign and rule. The Messiah-prince may eat in the Lord's presence in the eastern gate because he is holy. No one else may come into the Lord's presence and fellowship with him in this manner, not even the priests!

Ezekiel is then taken around to the north gate and sees the front of the temple and the glory of the Lord filling the temple. He falls to his face in awe and worship. God will fill the new temple with his glory unlike Solomon's temple which was defiled by idols from which the Lord departed in *Ezekiel 10*. God fills his new temple with his presence and glory just as he did Solomon's temple in *1 Kings 8* and the Tabernacle in the wilderness in *Exodus 40*.

44:5-9 - God now speaks directly to Ezekiel, calling him by God's favorite name for him, son of man. The Lord tells him to pay special attention to the regulations for the temple and all the exits to the sanctuary. God is concerned about his sanctuary because of Israel's sin committed in Solomon's temple. They brought uncircumcised people into the temple along with all the idols they set up in the temple itself. Then they went on offering sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord as if nothing was wrong! They put people in charge of God's holy sanctuary who were not qualified and God did not appoint. In the new temple God's command is clear: no foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh may enter the Lord's sanctuary, not even those who live among the Israelites. The new temple is to be holy to the Lord alone!

Why all the concern about the entrances and exits in the new temple? In Josiah's revival in *2 Kings 22* there were so many idols in and around the temple they had almost obscured the entrance! Plus when Ezekiel is shown the vision of the temple in Jerusalem in *Ezekiel 8* idols have been set up again by the last kings of Judah who followed Josiah. The people and even the elders were bowing down to them in the Lord's temple itself!! God is making sure that this will never happen again!

The implications of the new temple are that no Gentile may enter the temple. A full proselyte who had been circumcised and converted to the worship of Yahweh could, but a Gentile God-fearer like in the *Book of Acts* could not. One had to be circumcised in body and spirit to worship in the new temple. This creates problems for prophetic fulfillment. From a New Testament perspective all those who believe in the Messiah Jesus are circumcised in the heart even if they are not circumcised in the flesh. Faith in Jesus is what saves us. The revealed truth of the Gospel trumps Ezekiel's vision of the new temple in the Kingdom of God. Once again however, it raises the issue of exactly how is Ezekiel's vision to be fulfilled? Is there any historical-physical fulfillment of the new temple in the time of the Messiah or is this entire vision fulfilled in a spiritual, symbolic way? It is a difficult question with no clear answer.

44:10-14 - God tells Ezekiel that the Levites who strayed far from the Lord who were serving in the temple must bear the consequences of their sin. They were to be examples to Israel and instead they led them into sin. They served idols when they should have been serving God alone. Because of that the Lord will limit what they can do in the new temple. They may guard the gates of the temple and watch over them; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices and serve the people doing those things. However, because they were spiritual leaders and led the people into the sin of idolatry they may not serve the Lord as priests or come near any of his holy things or most holy offerings. The Lord has sworn this with uplifted hand that they will bear the consequences of their sin. They must bear their shame. Yet they are not excluded from serving in the new temple. The Lord will put them in charge of all the duties of the temple that need to be done except those that only a priest may do.

The principle here is that spiritual leaders are held to a higher standard than others. The Levites had a role to play with the people of Israel and they failed in that role. God exercises discipline with them by excluding them from moving up into the priesthood. They may assist the priests in their duties but they may not perform any duties or handle anything that the priests do, especially those things that have to do with the sanctuary itself. They may assist in the sacrifices but not burn incense, or change the Bread of the Presence or present any of the blood of the sacrifices in the sanctuary itself. That is reserved for the priests alone. God does this because of their sin. There is both grace and judgment in this pronouncement. God could have excluded the Levites all together for their sin but he merely limited what they could do. When leaders fall into

sin and it leads the people to sin there are consequences. Sometimes even though God forgives them his discipline prevents them from returning to the role they had before. Sin can be forgiven but here on earth it can't be made as if it never happened. There are always consequences. The Levites had to bear their shame for leading the Israelites astray in the very place where the Lord's Name dwelt. In the New Testament Jesus bears all the shame our sins deserve and we no longer bear it. However, even repentant leaders may not always be restored to the same ministry they had before. In that sense the Levites in the new temple are examples for us today.

44:15-16 - God says the Levites may not serve, however the faithful priests of the line of Zadok will be the only ones who may serve the Lord in the sanctuary of the new temple. They may come before the Lord and offer sacrifices of fat and blood to the Lord. They alone are to come into the sanctuary and minister at the table of the Lord. The table is either the table of the Bread of the Presence or the altar of incense. This is probably the table for the Bread of the Presence. The bread was to be changed every Sabbath and held twelve fresh loaves for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It represented the covenant God made with his people Israel and the fellowship God had with his people. See *Leviticus 24*. The bread was part of the priestly portion of the sacrifices and because it was holy to the Lord could only be eaten by the priests. Only the priests could change the bread each Sabbath.

The Lord calls it "*my table*". In the church we often refer to the Lord's Supper as the Lord's Table. The Bread of the Presence reinforces the idea that the bread in the Lord's Supper is a sign of fellowship and relationship with the Lord and does not represent the sacrifice of his death. The blood or cup represents that.

Ezekiel says only the faithful priests from the line of Zadok may serve in the new temple. Zadok was the priest who served David and Solomon. This passage raises an interesting question. Were there *ANY* "*faithful*" priests left among the exiles from the line of Zadok? There were priests who were consecrated to serve in the second temple built by Zerubbabel from the line of Zadok. Did they meet God's criterion here in Ezekiel? It is unclear. We know Ezekiel was of a priestly family whose father was Buzi but that name does not occur any other place in Scripture. Plus, Ezekiel was not yet old enough to begin his service as a priest when he was taken into exile and called as a prophet. Could it be the priests who were faithful priests of the line of Zadok were related to Ezekiel? There is not enough evidence to know one way or the other.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ forgives all of our sin and sets us free. In Christ we are all priests of God, a holy people and nation who are holy to the Lord. Our past sins are wiped clean. The new temple limited the number of priests who could serve. In the New Testament *ALL* are priests no matter who they are and may serve before the Lord because all are holy to him. There are no limitations and restrictions. Once again from a New Testament perspective one must ask, how will Ezekiel's vision of the new temple be fulfilled? Some parts of it are fulfilled in the New Covenant but I cannot foresee any circumstances even as Israel finally turns to the Lord Jesus in faith where this temple and all its regulations and restrictions would be built and operate. Ezekiel's vision of an ideal temple in an ideal Israel is completely trumped by the coming of the Messiah and our true high priest, Jesus of Nazareth!

44:17-23 - God gives Ezekiel further instructions for the priests who will serve in the new temple. All of them reflect instructions the Lord gave Moses about the priests in *Exodus*, *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*. There is nothing different here which makes sense. Ezekiel as part

of a priestly family who was waiting to come of age to serve as a priest would have known these instructions and the regulations for staying holy before the Lord.

The priests are to wear only their linen clothes, nothing made from wool which would cause them to sweat. Linen is light and breathes and so would cool the body. If they wore wool and perspired they might smell and have body odor and that would make them unclean before God! The priests must maintain separation between a holy God and his people. They are the ones who will represent the people before Yahweh himself. He is holy and his people are not.

Ezekiel reinforces the sacred clothes the priests are to wear, the linen turban and the linen undergarments. When they finish their ministry before the Lord in the sanctuary and they go out to serve the people they must change out of their holy clothes and put on other clothes so that they do not accidentally consecrate the people by means of the clothes they have worn in the Lord's presence. Holiness is viewed here as it is in *Leviticus* as a good infection that can be spread. But it is dangerous. If the people are consecrated accidentally they may do something out of ignorance and defile themselves or the temple. God gives the priests careful instructions on how to avoid those situations.

The priests are to keep themselves groomed properly. They must not shave off their hair. Often this was done in a time of mourning. They must not drink wine and thereby be drunk when they enter the temple to serve the Lord. They must only marry a virgin and not a widow or a divorced woman. They are to stay holy in every part of their lives so that they can teach the people the difference between the common and the holy, the clean and the unclean. All of these regulations are repeats of instructions from Moses to the priests of Aaron's line in the Pentateuch.

44:24-31 - Ezekiel finishes the chapter by completing his instructions to the priests, all of which are taken from the Pentateuch. He restates the priestly role of serving as judges in disputes between the Israelites. The priests were to know God's Law and decide cases accordingly. They are to keep all of the Lord's Law and the decrees for the Lord's appointed feasts and the Sabbaths. The priests in the temple in Jerusalem before it was destroyed had stopped being faithful to the Lord. They had forgotten the Lord's Law and led the people astray. They had judged them not according to the Law but according to their own power or what was expedient. In the new temple God will have priests who obey him and serve him!

The priests will not defile themselves by going near a dead person and so becoming unclean. The only exception was for one of his own family. But there was a seven day cleansing period after he had become unclean. At the end of that time he was to offer a sin offering for himself. Jesus in the Good Samaritan used the Pharisees' expansion of this law to indict the religious establishment and the Pharisees' oral tradition. The man who fell among the robbers was mostly dead not fully dead. The rabbis had decided that someone who was mostly dead should be considered as dead and so was unclean. Thus the priest and the Levite pass by the man who fell among robbers on the other side of the road so that they are not made unclean. God's Law never forbids a priest to tend to a gravely wounded man. This command in Ezekiel reiterates the command not to defile themselves by touching a dead body.

The Lord is to be the only inheritance the priests are to have. Ezekiel is speaking here of the inheritance of the land and the share of the Promiseland allotted to each of the twelve tribes. The tribe of Levi and the priests received no land except a few cities which became the cities of refuge. The Lord was to be their inheritance, their share of the Promiseland. In light of that the priests were to be given all the grain offerings, the parts of the sacrifices that could be eaten and everything Israel devoted to the Lord, including the first fruits offerings. The priests were to feed

their families from the offerings of the temple and not eat anything that was found dead or killed by wild animals or eaten by birds. Even their food must remain holy!

The whole idea of the Lord as the priests' inheritance and not a section of land is carried over into the New Testament. God's saints are his holy people, a kingdom of priests as *1 Peter* says. The Reformers called this the priesthood of all believers. Our inheritance is the Kingdom of God. It is kept in heaven for us. We inherit and share the inheritance of Christ as God's own Son. We are joint heirs with him. Our inheritance is not land or any earthly kingdom but out of our relationship with him we are given eternal life and all its benefits. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a guarantee of that promise. The priests in Ezekiel's day were a type of the inheritance of God's saints. They were not given any land here on earth. They were given the Lord and their relationship with him. That is our legacy as well. Why would I want some earthly blessing when all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places have been given to me? Paul declares this in *Ephesians 1*. We receive the blessings of our High Priest and Lord, Jesus Christ!

Chapter 45:

45:1-6 - The Lord tells Ezekiel that when the restored Promiseland is to be allotted among the people they are to reserve a portion of the land for a sacred district for the temple and the priests. It is to be 25,000 by 20,000 long cubits in area. That works out to about 8.33 by 6.66 miles. Within that area they are to reserve a section 500 cubits square or 875 feet square for the sanctuary or temple. Within the sacred district measure off an area 8.33 miles by 3.33 miles wide. The Most Holy Place will be within this and it will also be sacred land for the priests of the Lord who minister at the temple. They will live within it and the sanctuary will be within it as well. Next to the sacred land will be another section also 8.33 by 3.33 miles in area that will be for the Levites. They will live within that area next to the priests. Next to the two sections for the priests and temple and the Levites will be a section of land 5000 long cubits by 25,000 long cubits or 8.33 by 1.66 miles which will be set aside for the new city of Jerusalem where anyone can come and live. It will belong to the whole house of Israel.

In Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Israel with a new temple and the "*prince*" ruling over them the Levites are to be concentrated around the sacred precincts in Jerusalem. In the *Book of Joshua* the Levites were given certain allotments spread throughout Israel for their own cities which also became cities of refuge. That was before David conquered Jerusalem and God's temple was built. Now with Jerusalem being God's city where he will put his Name the Levites and priests will live near the temple and not be spread throughout the land. Historically this has never happened. Even in Jesus' day there were Levites and priests who lived all over Judea and Galilee. The priests and Levites would travel to Jerusalem to serve in the temple when their turn came but they lived outside of the city. John the Baptist's parents lived in the hill country of Judah south of Jerusalem. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates a priest and a Levite returning home after their service in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's vision has yet to be fulfilled. The vision of the Promiseland and Jerusalem, like the temple, is an idealized one that has not yet found historical fulfillment. One wonders in what way Ezekiel's vision has been fulfilled and can be fulfilled.

45:7-12 - The Lord continues to show Ezekiel a renewed Israel with a renewed temple and land for her people. The "*prince*" will have a portion of land bordering the sacred district and the city on the west and the east of the city. It will run lengthwise from west to east parallel to one of the tribal portions. This land will be his in Israel. This did not happen after Joshua conquered the Promiseland. David and his successors had a palace and other lands they acquired but the kings

of Israel and Judah had no particular portion of the land as an inheritance. In Ezekiel's vision they do.

God says "*my princes*" will no longer oppress his people but allow them to live in the land according to their tribes. The implication of *verses 8-12* is that the line of David will be restored; there will be a prince ruling over God's people but there will also be a succession to the throne as it used to be before Jerusalem was destroyed. Earlier in *chapter 34* Ezekiel said when God brings Israel back to the land and renews and restores them, giving them his Holy Spirit, David their shepherd will rule over them. These verses in *chapter 45* seem to backtrack from that promise. From a prophetic perspective they cannot be Messianic. Ezekiel's vision is totally temple-centric and not Messiah-centric. It is difficult to know how to harmonize the two visions even within Ezekiel's own prophecy. Which takes precedence? With Ezekiel's temple vision Scripture must interpret Scripture. We need to accept that there are parts of Ezekiel's vision that we do not know how to interpret in the larger scope of the prophetic Scriptures.

God speaks to the "*princes*" or kings of Israel or Judah. He reminds them of their sin that was one of the major causes of God's judgment on Israel and Judah. He calls them to give up their violence and oppression and to do what is just and right. He demands that they stop dispossessing the Lord's people. He is describing seizing people's land which was the Lord's inheritance to them for the king's own possession. That may be why the Lord tells the kings they will have their own section of the land near the temple in Jerusalem. They will no longer need to seize the land of others.

Then the Lord calls the kings to use accurate scales and measures. He gives instructions for the volume of both the ephah, a dry measure, and the bath, a wet measure. He says they are to be the same size, meaning they are to have the same volume like our American or English cup. He then outlines the weight of the coinage in the renewed Israel. A shekel is to consist of 20 gerahs and one mina is to equal 60 shekels. The normal mina was 50 shekels. Here again, in the renewed Israel everything is supersized, even the money!!

The Lord gives instructions through Ezekiel to the rulers of Israel for weights, measures and money because that was one of the major sources of corruption in Israel in the days of the kings. The government controlled the weights and measurements as they collected taxes on merchants and their goods. One easy way to make more was to skew the weights so they would result in more tax revenue. The same is true of the money which was figured by the weight of a particular coin and not a set value of a coin like our money. Shekels and minas could fluctuate in value rather than be standardized. The Lord says in a renewed Israel the money will be standardized so that corruption will be eliminated. In the new Israel there will be justice and the kings will do what is right for their people as the Lord had intended and called them to do. They will have good and fair kings and not kings who lead Israel into idolatry and sin.

45:13-17 - God gives instructions to Ezekiel on the special offerings the people are to give to the prince, his share of grain, oil and sheep from their herds. The Hebrew measurements mean the people are to give the prince one bushel of wheat for every 60 they harvest and one percent of the olive oil they harvest as well, plus one sheep for every two hundred in their flocks. The prince is to be responsible for providing the burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings at the New Moons, Sabbaths and all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel. The appointed feasts would have been Passover-Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Day of Atonement-Tabernacles. The prince is to provide the priests and the temple the animals, grain and oil for the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to make atonement for the

house of Israel. It will be his job to collect the people's share and turn it over to the priests and Levites for sacrifice. The people may still bring these offerings themselves to the temple to make atonement personally on other days but the Sabbaths, New Moons or new months, and high feast days the prince is to provide the offerings. This ensures that the temple will never be without the proper animals, grain and oil needed for the special days of Israel's calendar. God is delegating responsibility to the king-prince so that the temple is provided for in a restored Israel.

The prince has a specific role related to the new temple whereas in Israel's history before the exile the king's role was as a political-military leader. Only Solomon was given the task of building the temple. Hezekiah and Josiah reformed the temple, and cleansed it but that was as leaders of a revival and not as fulfilling a prescribed role that God had laid down in his Law. Both those kings contributed animals, oil and grain for the sacrifices of the Passover and Hezekiah contributed regularly for the ongoing sacrifices in the temple after his reforms according to *2 Chronicles 31*. *2 Chronicles* reports that the king's officials and the people also brought animals, oil and grain for the feasts and the sacrifices after the temple was cleansed in Hezekiah's day. However there was no requirement that the people bring the king a specific share of their flocks and grain so the king could ensure there would be enough for the temple sacrifices. Ezekiel takes the examples from the two faithful kings and they become the norm for the kings in the new temple era.

Once again Ezekiel's vision has never been fulfilled in Israel's history since Ezekiel prophesied it. The only possible way this could be fulfilled completely is in some future time. However, that is difficult to foresee because of the complications of a third temple where God would accept animal sacrifices as securing atonement for his people after the cross of his One and Only Son, Jesus Christ. Another possibility is that somehow in a spiritualized sense Jesus' cross fulfills Ezekiel's vision of a renewed temple. That too is difficult to understand exactly how it could be done. In many respects Ezekiel's vision stands alone as a testament to an unfulfilled future in a renewed Israel. It is almost as if in Ezekiel's vision of the new temple the Messianic Era is hidden and not foreseen. From a New Testament perspective the Gospel trumps Ezekiel's vision. Yet, his vision is the Word of God and so one must struggle to understand what God was saying to Israel and to us as believers today. That struggle continues to be a difficult question.

45:18-25 - God gives Ezekiel instructions for purifying the sanctuary. On the first day of the first month, March-April of each year, the priest is to take a young bull without defect and use some of the blood as a sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the new temple, the four corners of the altar and the gateposts of the inner court. The priest is to do the same thing on the seventh day of the first month for anyone who sins unintentionally or through ignorance to make atonement for the temple. These instructions for cleansing the temple sanctuary, altar, doorposts and gateposts are different than the Day of Atonement instructions God gave Moses for Aaron and his sons in *Leviticus 16 & 23*. The Day of Atonement was to be the 10th day of the 7th month in September-October of each year, not the first day of the first month. Aaron was also to take the blood of a young bull and sprinkle it in front of the mercy seat, then on the four horns of the altar to make atonement for them and for him and his family. Here God gives Ezekiel an atonement ritual to make atonement for the temple building itself.

The renewed Israel is to celebrate Passover on the 14th day of the first month for seven days when they shall only eat unleavened bread. This was the same date as given in the Law of Moses. On Passover the prince is to provide the sacrifice of the young bull without defect for a sin offering for himself and all the people of the land. Every day during the seven days of the

feast he is to provide 7 bulls and seven rams for burnt offerings to the Lord and a male goat for a sin offering. *Numbers 28* instructs Moses to sacrifice 2 young bulls, one ram and 7 male lambs as burnt offerings to the Lord and one male goat as a sin offering on the first day of the feast. In Ezekiel's new temple the prince is to bring the sacrifices for both Passover and Succoth or Tabernacles. His instructions are slightly different than those given to Moses for the tabernacle. It is likely that Solomon's temple followed the instructions given for the tabernacle. It is not clear if the prince's offerings in the new temple are to be over and above those prescribed in the Law of Moses or as a substitute for the Mosaic sacrifices. Nor does Ezekiel give any explanation for the differences.

More significantly, the prince is to provide a sin offering for himself which means he cannot be the Messiah who is without sin or the Servant of God who offers himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the people as in *Isaiah 53*. This raises the issue once again of how we are to take Ezekiel's prophecy of a restored Israel and a new temple in *chapters 40-48* following the prophecy about the defeat of Gog. When Ezekiel prophesies in *chapter 37* that David will be Israel's prince forever and they will keep his covenant and God will live among them and put his sanctuary among them the implications are that David is an ideal David who does not sin. Here in the new temple vision in *chapter 45* the prince is definitely a man who has followed his father in a line of succession like the kings of Judah before the fall of Jerusalem. The temple is an ideal temple but the prince or king is not an ideal prince like the Messiah. Is this vision of the new temple in *chapters 40-48* separate from Ezekiel's earlier visions of a renewed Israel? Is it a different time frame or a separate picture of Israel's future? How does the new temple relate to the Messianic reign and age? His visions are very fluid and there are no clear answers. One must do the best one can in trying to relate Ezekiel's picture of an ideal temple and future for Israel into the larger picture of the Messiah's reign in the rest of the prophets of the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Chapter 46:

46:1-8 - Ezekiel is given instructions for when the prince brings his offerings to the temple on the Sabbath and the New Moon. He is to come to the gate of the inner court facing east, the Golden Gate, which will be shut on the six working days but open on the Sabbath. He may enter from the outside and come as far as the gatepost on the inner gate. There he may stand and watch. The priest is to sacrifice his burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and the prince may worship in the doorway of the inner gate. He may go out through the gate by which he came which will not be shut until the evening. According to Ezekiel's instructions the prince may not enter the temple proper or the sanctuary, something the kings of Judah did. In the new temple they may not. The people of the land, when they bring their sacrifices for the Sabbath and the New Moons, may worship at the gateway to the temple but they may not enter the temple. This regulation was not enforced in the second temple of Zerubbabel or in Jesus' day in Herod's temple. The most likely reason Ezekiel is given such instructions in his vision is that in his new temple absolute holiness is to be preserved at all times in the temple as a reminder that a holy God is dwelling in the midst of a sinful people, even though they have been redeemed.

The prince is instructed to bring Sabbath and New Moon offerings. In *Numbers 28* the Sabbath offering was to be 2 lambs and a grain offering of 2/10's of an ephah. In the new temple the prince is to bring 6 lambs and a ram along with a full ephah of grain, or half a bushel of flour for the ram. He may give whatever he pleases for a grain offering for the lambs, along with a gallon of olive oil for each ephah of flour he brings. *Numbers 28* says the New Moon offerings

are to be 2 bulls, one ram and 7 male year old lambs with three tenths of an ephah of flour for each bull, 2/10ths for the ram and 1/10 of an ephah for each lamb. Ezekiel says the prince is to bring one bull, 6 lambs and a lamb. The grain offerings are to be a full ephah for the bull and the ram and whatever he wants to give for each of the lambs. He is to bring a full gallon or hin of oil for each ephah of flour he offers. The animal sacrifices to be brought are slightly different in their makeup than those commanded by the Law of Moses in *Numbers 28*. Why God gave Ezekiel different instructions for the new temple is not clear nor is any reason given for the discrepancy. What is different are the amounts of flour to be offered for the grain offerings. They are all extravagant! They are three to ten times those commanded in *Numbers* and the Mosaic Law. A ram along with 6 lambs and 10 times the grain is to be offered at the Sabbath day offering. The New Moon offerings have fewer animals than the Law commands but far more grain. Plus, the prince's offering is both by law or command and by heart and faith. He is commanded to bring so many animals and so much grain for certain sacrifices but he is also free on some of the sacrifices to bring as much as he wants to give. The prince's sacrifices in the new temple become not only a sign of his obedience but also a sign of his love and faith in the Lord.

46:9-12 - Ezekiel is given instructions for the people when they come before the Lord at the appointed feasts. If they enter by the north gate they must go out by the south gate. The people are to go out a different gate, namely the opposite gate by which they entered the temple. The prince is to be among the people when they go to the temple to worship. I am guessing that Ezekiel was given these instructions to insure that holiness is preserved within the temple. A person who has been in the temple and has become holy by virtue of being in the temple is not to mix with those coming into the temple that are not yet holy. That is why if you entered by the south gate you went out the north gate. The problem is of course if you are going out the north gate what if you mingle with people coming in by that gate. My reasoning breaks down but it is the best explanation I have for why the people must go out a different gate than the one through which they came into the temple. The bottom line is Ezekiel doesn't give a reason for why the people need to leave by the opposite gate from which they entered.

During the feasts any grain offering given with a bull or a ram is to be a full ephah of flour, half a bushel, and whatever one chooses to give with each lamb. A full gallon of oil is to be given with each ephah of flour offered as well. This is more than the Law of Moses stipulates.

When the prince provides a free will offering the east gate is to be opened for him. It appears that only the prince may use the east gate, the Golden Gate. After he has offered his sacrifices he is to go out the east gate and then it will be shut once more. He is the only one who may go out the same gate by which he came into the temple.

Ezekiel's vision of the new temple is very priest-centric and not Messiah-centric. The prince or king is downplayed in his role within the temple and the priestly role is elevated. In *Kings* and *Chronicles* often Solomon and the kings of Judah would come into the temple and offer sacrifices for the people and themselves before the Lord. In Ezekiel's new temple only the priests may offer the sacrifices and minister before the Lord in the temple sanctuary. The prince has a far more restricted role and though he may use the eastern gate yet he may not go into the temple sanctuary itself.

46:13-15 - Ezekiel is given instructions for the daily burnt offerings to the Lord. His instructions only include the morning sacrifice and not the evening or afternoon sacrifice. *Numbers 28* stipulates two lambs shall be sacrificed daily, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The

times in Herod's temple were usually 9 & 3 daily. In *Numbers* a tenth of an ephah of grain and a quarter of a hin of oil are to be offered with each lamb. Here in Ezekiel he is told to offer a year-old lamb without defect in the morning with a sixth of an ephah of grain mixed with a third of a hin of oil. The oil and grain are more than the Law of Moses stipulates. God gives Ezekiel no explanation as to why the afternoon sacrifice is not mentioned as it is in *Numbers* or why the amounts of the grain and oil are increased. He is simply told this is to be a lasting ordinance from the Lord.

Six centuries later in Jesus' day at Herod's temple the priests followed the pattern of *Numbers 28* and offered a morning and evening sacrifice. There does not appear to be any evidence that Ezekiel's pattern for the new temple was followed at all. It appears the rabbis did not consider the second temple a fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. In many respects Zerubbabel's temple could not have been the new temple because it was far smaller and less grand than either Solomon's or Ezekiel's vision. Perhaps the rabbis just like us today did not know what to do with Ezekiel's vision of a restored Israel and new temple and had the same difficulty we do to fit this prophecy in Ezekiel into the rest of the prophecies of the Messianic era and the end times.

46:16-18 - The Lord gives Ezekiel instructions on the inheritance for the prince in the new temple era. If he gives an inheritance to one of his sons it is to belong to his descendants as well and will be their share of the new Promiseland. If however he gives an inheritance to one of his servants he may keep it in his family until the year of freedom or Year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year or seventh Sabbath year, and then it will revert back to the prince since it was the prince's share of the Promiseland. It shall only belong to the king's sons and not his servants. This was to insure the land stayed in the prince's family. That way none of the prince's descendants would be deprived of their rightful inheritance from God of the land of promise. Ezekiel's vision assumes the Jews would keep the Year of Jubilee. There is no evidence in the historical books of Scripture that the Jews ever kept that command in *Leviticus 25*.

Here is yet another passage where Ezekiel sees a regular succession of the Davidic throne in the new temple era. There is no immortal Messiah who lives forever like in *Isaiah* and the other prophets. There is a king from David's line but he rules like his ancestors ruled, the one exception being he will always be a good and holy king and no evil king will rule God's people ever again. Ezekiel's vision of the new temple era with a restored Israel is temple-centric.

46:19-24 - The man-angel who has been guiding Ezekiel through the new temple shows him the rooms on the western end of the temple that belong to the priests. These are the rooms where the priests prepare the sacrifices and cook the meat and bake the grain from the grain offerings. The priests cook the sacrifices here in order to avoid bringing them into the outer court and consecrating the people. Holiness is seen here as a good infection but it is to be limited to the inner courts of the temple and the priests lest the people who worship in the outer courts be made holy and accidentally desecrate the temple or the holiness of the Lord.

The angel-man then brings Ezekiel to the outer court and leads him around all four corners of the temple courts. He is shown enclosed courts in each of the four corners of the temple that were forty by thirty long cubits or 70 by 52.5 feet in dimension. These courts are the kitchens where the priests cook the sacrifices the people bring to the Lord. They are separate from the priestly kitchens in the inner court in order to maintain strict holiness in the temple.

Ezekiel is given a comprehensive vision of the new temple in many ways far more detailed than the Lord's instructions for the Tabernacle to Moses in *Exodus* or the description of

Solomon's temple in *1 Kings*. Ezekiel is a priest as well as the Lord's prophet. His vision is an ideal picture of a temple that is holy and not defiled by idolatry and pagan worship practices that are not from the Lord. It is a visual symbol in the midst of God's people of the holy God who lives among them. It is also a visual symbol of how far Israel must be reformed if they are to be faithful to Yahweh alone as their God so that they can be his people.

Chapter 47:

47:1-12 - The angel-man who has been guiding Ezekiel through the temple brings him back to the entrance of the temple where he sees water coming out from under the threshold of the temple flowing to the east. The water was coming out from under the south of the altar and flowing from the south side of the temple to the east. The south side today would be where the Al Aqsa Mosque is situated.

The man measured off 1000 cubits, about 530 meters or 1750 feet using the long cubit as per the rest of Ezekiel's vision of the temple. The water was ankle deep in those first 1000 cubits of the stream. He measured off another 1000 cubits and the water was knee-deep. In another 1000 cubits it was waist deep. He measured off another 1000 cubits and the water was a river so deep Ezekiel could not cross unless he swam the river. He was now 4000 cubits from the temple or 2120 meters or 7000 feet. He was about one and a quarter miles to the east of the temple. The point is in Ezekiel's vision the geography of Jerusalem has radically changed. Today if one walked one and a quarter miles from the temple mount east one would be on the backside of the Mt. of Olives. It is only around 500 meters from the eastern edge of the Temple Mount to the top of the Mt. of Olives. No river could flow uphill to the east in today's Jerusalem. Ezekiel has said in *chapter 40* that he saw the temple standing on top of a very high mountain. Ezekiel sees Jerusalem standing above everything else and water flowing straight down to the Jordan. In *Zechariah 14* when Zechariah sees the Lord coming down to fight for his people on the Mt. of Olives the mountain is split in two forming a great valley, half to the north and half to the south. Perhaps Ezekiel's vision is related and the waters from the temple flow down to the Jordan through the great valley in the Mount of Olives. Ezekiel however does not mention any great earthquake or the mountain splitting in two.

The angel-man takes Ezekiel to the bank of the river. There he is shown fruit trees that grow along the banks on each side of the river. He is told the waters flow down to the Arabah or the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. When they empty into the Sea the water is made fresh and swarms of living creatures including fish now live where nothing lived before. The land is renewed. Fishermen will fish from the shores of the Dead Sea from En Gedi to En Eglaim. The springs of En Gedi are about halfway down the western shores of the Dead Sea. There is no other reference to En Eglaim. Its location is unknown. Presumably it was somewhere to the south of En Gedi or perhaps on the opposite eastern shore. Ezekiel is picturing the Dead Sea as fertile fishing grounds where fishermen fish from the shore; they don't even have to go out in boats. All kinds of fish will be found there like the fish in the Great Sea or the Mediterranean. The swamps and marshes will not become fresh they will remain salt marshes for the creatures and birds that live there. The fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river and their leaves will not wither and their fruit will never fail. Every month they will bear because the water from the temple flows to them. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.

Ezekiel sees a Promiseland remade where God has turned that which is dead into living waters and changed the very nature of the Arabah into fertile ground with abundant fish. The Dead Sea now lives and teems with life. John in *Revelation 21 & 22* picks up Ezekiel's vision of

the river of living water flowing out from the presence of God. Here in Ezekiel it flows from under the altar in the temple. In *Revelation* it flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. John says the fruit trees are the Tree of Life as in the Garden of Eden. They bear every month and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. It is clear from this part of Ezekiel's vision of the new temple that the setting of Ezekiel's vision is in an eschatological future of Israel and the Promiseland. There can be no historical fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Israel. It can only happen in the Age to Come with the return of the Messiah. The problem of the Messiah verses the prince and his successors remains but the timeframe is now clear. John's reinterpretation of Ezekiel's vision in *Revelation 21 & 22* confirms this.

47:13-23 - In Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Israel in some future eschatological time God has given them a rebuilt and enlarged temple in which to worship and now he reiterates his promise to Israel to give them a land in which to live. He outlines the boundaries of the new Promiseland to Ezekiel. He specifically mentions the promise that the tribe of Joseph will receive two shares of the land, one for each of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. At the time of the Babylonian exile when Ezekiel received his vision the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh no longer existed. They had been captured, killed and taken into exile by the Assyrians a century and a half before. God however, still knows who and where they are! God tells Ezekiel he made a promise to his people to give them the land and he will keep it.

God then outlines the borders of the new Promiseland for Ezekiel. The northern border runs from the Mediterranean Sea to the road past Hamath, Berothah and Sibraim. These towns are all in northern Syria near the Orontes and Euphrates Rivers. King David received tribute from them after he came to power and consolidated his empire. When Solomon came to the throne of Israel he ruled directly or received tribute from Damascus and all of central Syria below the Euphrates. From a biblical perspective Syria has always been part of the Promiseland! It is in Ezekiel's vision too! The eastern border runs down to the east of Damascus along the Jordan River between Gilead and Israel down to the Dead Sea to Tamar which was on the western side of the Arabah south of the Dead Sea in the Negev Desert. The southern border will run from Tamar to Kadesh in the Sinai Peninsula to the Wadi of Egypt, a wadi on the eastern side of the Sinai. The western border will be the Mediterranean Sea all the way to Hamath in northern Syria. That means all of Lebanon and the fertile parts of Syria, excluding the desert were to be parts of the new Promiseland. God gave Israel the entire middle section of the Fertile Crescent and Canaan from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt! The only significant difference between Ezekiel's description and that of the rest of the Old Testament is that the lands east of the Jordan River along the Golan Heights in Bashan and Gilead are not included here. In *Numbers* and *Joshua* the Lord grants those lands to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Otherwise the description of the borders is essentially the same.

The land is to be distributed according to the tribes of Israel and everyone will receive a share of the land along with the aliens who have settled among the Israelites. That means that Gentiles will receive their share of the Promiseland as well if they have settled among the Jews! God says they are to be considered as native-born Israelites and receive a share of the Lord's inheritance! Their share will be allotted depending upon where they settle, in which tribal area. In a veiled way this is a picture of the New Covenant. Ezekiel doesn't even say these aliens have converted to worship Yahweh only that they have settled in the land among the Israelites. The Gentiles are part of the new covenant times of Ezekiel's vision!

Chapter 48:

48:1-8 - Ezekiel is given the order of the tribes and their portion of the Promiseland. In *Joshua* the order is approximately this from north to south: Dan, Naphtali, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, Manasseh, Gad, Ephraim, Benjamin, Reuben, Judah, and Simeon. Dan was originally given the area of the Gaza Strip but could not conquer it because of the Philistines so they took the territory in the northern section of Israel at the foot of Mt. Hermon just to the south of Lebanon. In Ezekiel's vision all the tribes receive an inheritance in the land but the order is different. He outlines the tribal portions from north to south. Dan is first and is given the territory of Syria at the far northern border of the renewed Promiseland near Hamath. Each tribe receives an equal portion and Ezekiel describes them as from east to west, the western edge presumably being the Mediterranean Sea. He does not say how large the portions are from north to south. Dan is first followed by Asher, then Naphtali, then Manasseh, then Ephraim, then Reuben then Judah.

On the southern border of Judah will be a special territory that Ezekiel calls a gift. It will be 25,000 cubits wide from east to west and will be the same width as the other tribal portions. The temple will be in the center of it. 25,000 long cubits would be 8.33 miles. This temple strip would be 8.33 miles in depth and as wide as the other tribal portions. It would be a strip running across the entire width of Israel, the same width as all the other tribal portions but not as deep. In the center of it will be the temple.

48:9-29 - The special portion of the land where the temple will be located is also the allotment for the priests and Levites. Rather than a few cities of refuge spread throughout the land Ezekiel envisions the priests and Levites being given a special portion of the land around the temple. The temple portion will be 25,000 long cubits by 10,000 long cubits or 8.33 by 6.66 miles in area. This will also be the sacred portion for the faithful priests, the Zadokites who stayed faithful in serving the Lord and the faithful kings of Judah. The Levite territory will be beside the priestly-temple portion. The Zadokites receive the temple portion because they stayed faithful while the Levites went astray.

The Levite portion will be next to the priestly-temple portion and will be the same size, 8.33 by 6.66 miles in area. This is a special gift to the Levites and will be a most holy portion that they are never to sell or exchange because it is holy to the Lord. God says this is the best of the land. Today in Israel the land around Jerusalem is rocky with tree lined hills and valleys. It is not the most fertile land in Israel. It is the best of the land from God's perspective because it is nearest to his temple, his throne and dwelling place in earth! Once again Ezekiel's vision is temple-centric!

The remainder of the sacred temple portion an area 1.23 miles by 8.3 miles, will be for the city of Jerusalem, its houses and pastures. The renewed and rebuilt city will be in the center of it and will be 4500 cubits square on each side, or 1.5 miles per side. A buffer of pastureland 150 meters in width will surround the city on all sides. The remainder of the sacred portion 10,000 cubits on all sides or 3.3 miles in length will supply the food for the city and will be dedicated to farms for the workers of the city of New Jerusalem. The workers who farm the land around Jerusalem will be from all the tribes of Israel because the temple is for all the tribes and not just Judah. John in *Revelation 21* sees the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a cube 1400 miles on each dimension. Obviously his vision of Jerusalem is far larger than Ezekiel's yet there are some similarities. Both are very precise in their dimensions for the city; Ezekiel as a square and John as a cube.

What remains of the sacred portion that is not taken up by the temple, the city and the farmland around it will be for the prince. It will be 25,000 cubits or 8.33 miles in width beginning at both the eastern and western borders of the temple portion. The temple portion will be on either side of the prince's portion of the most sacred section of the Promiseland, Jerusalem. The priestly share, the Levites' share and the city will lie in the center of the prince's share between the portion of Judah on the north and Benjamin on the south.

The remaining tribal portions will start on the southern border of the temple portion and will be the same width and depth as the tribes to the north of the temple portion. Benjamin will be first, followed by Issachar, then Zebulun, then finally Gad. The southern border of Gad will run from the waters of Tamar to Kadesh then to the Wadi of Egypt, which Ezekiel has already said is the southern border of the new Promiseland.

Seven tribes will have their portion on the north side of the central temple portion and five tribes will receive their portion to the south of the temple and city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be in the center of the tribal portions and Judah and Benjamin will be to the north and south of it. Ezekiel's order except for Judah and Benjamin being the closest to Jerusalem seems random. It does not follow the order of the tribal allotments in *Joshua* nor does it follow the birth order of the sons of Jacob. He allots the tribal portions according to his own pattern but it is unlike any other Old Testament list. However, every tribe is listed and the tribe of Joseph, represented by Ephraim and Manasseh, receives a double portion as it did in *Joshua*. In Ezekiel's vision even Levi receives a portion of the land. They receive the most sacred portion around the temple in Jerusalem. John in *Revelation 21-22* borrows from Ezekiel's vision for some of his details of heaven. His vision of the 144,000 in *Revelation 7* is completely unique to *Revelation* and now that I have examined Ezekiel's in detail, I am more convinced than ever that John's vision is symbolic and does not represent a literal Israel.

48:30-35 - Ezekiel describes the gates of his renewed Jerusalem. There will be 12 gates, one for each of the 12 tribes. The city was 4500 long cubits square or 1.5 miles long. The three gates on the north were for Reuben, Judah and Levi. The three on the east were named for Joseph, Benjamin and Dan. The three gates on the south were named for Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun. The three on the west were named after Gad, Asher and Naphtali. The tribal order of the gates follows no other pattern in the Old Testament. Once again Ezekiel's pattern is independent. The distance to walk all around the city was 18,000 long cubits or 6 miles. John in *Revelation 21* says the New Jerusalem will have 12 gates, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 foundations, one for each of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

Ezekiel gives the name of his new Jerusalem. From that time on it will be called "*The Lord is there.*" The name is a promise of God's presence because when Ezekiel wrote his vision in 572 Jerusalem had been destroyed, the temple burned and its walls torn down. It would be another 57 years until the second temple would be finished and 127 years until Nehemiah would lead the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and restore the city. Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord depart from the temple in *chapter 10* before the temple was destroyed in 586 by the Babylonians. God was not there! He closes his prophecy with a vision that shows God would not only rebuild the temple and the city but he would restore Israel, all of Israel to the land he had promised them. He would dwell in their midst and would be with them forever. In that sense Ezekiel's vision of God dwelling in the midst of his people forever is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah Jesus. John says in his gospel in *John 1* that the Word, God, became flesh and dwelt or tabernacled among us and we beheld his glory. With the coming of the Holy Spirit in *Acts 2*

the Lord Jesus promises to be with us through his Spirit forever. Paul says in *Ephesians* we are to be built into a spiritual temple where God will dwell through his Spirit forever. Perhaps that is the best way to see Ezekiel's vision fulfilled because otherwise it does not fit into the other prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel sees God dwelling in the midst of all twelve tribes of Israel not just Judah and Benjamin. Remember by Ezekiel's day the ten northern tribes which formed the nation of Israel had been scattered in exile and had lost their tribal identities for 150 years. Ezekiel wrote down his temple vision in 572; Samaria had been destroyed by Sargon II of Assyria in 721. By Ezekiel's day only Judah, Benjamin and Levi had any tribal identity. This is a total remaking and restoration of God's ancient people. The dry bones live! Therefore the 10 northern tribes are not lost to God. They are only lost to history! One day Israel will be one reunited people again. God will see to it and he will dwell in the midst of his people forever!